

D23 Expo Recap, Part 2: Announcements Galore: A Disney Parks Planning Article

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

In the [first of this series of articles](#) looking at the news that emerged from D23 earlier this month, we focused on the biggest news of all, that both Disneyland and Walt Disney World be getting their own Star Wars Land.

With news that big, the other announcements from the weekend did pale into insignificance a little, certainly in terms of massive media outlets. However, there was still plenty of excitement for Disney fans, especially in terms of the east coast…

The first announcement of D23 was something that had only started to circulate as a rumour a few weeks beforehand, that the Magic Kingdom would be getting a Jungle Cruise style restaurant. The Jungle Navigation Co., Ltd. Skipper Canteen is due to open in Adventureland before 2015 ends. The official Disney announcement also told us there would be different, uniquely themed dining rooms, including a crew mess hall, and a once-hidden secret meeting room of the famed Society of Explorers and Adventurers, and best of all, it will be staffed by the famed Jungle Cruise skippers. Can you imagine how much fun that will be, corny jokes and all?!

☐ Personally, I cannot wait for this to open, as I love sampling the varied dining options at Walt Disney World, and this sounds like it will be a very unique and fun addition. If we're being honest, the Magic Kingdom has never felt as if it's been endowed by a plethora of wonderful places to eat, but with the opening of Be Our Guest, and now this, that does finally seem to be changing.

☐ I'm looking forward to finding out more about what will be on the menu, and whether it will be table or quick service, as we much prefer table service. Rumours suggest it's likely to be quick service at lunch, and table service at dinner and, if that's true, it's a nice mix, and should appeal to a wider section of people, as I know many prefer quick service. And hopefully it won't be long before we have all the details we all want, given how soon it's due to open for business.

Something I'd been hoping to hear for some time was news about the planned expansion to Soarin'. We already knew it would be increasing its capacity, and about time, given how popular this Epcot attraction is

10 years after it first opened for business. However, at the time I heard that, I was disappointed not to hear details of a new film. Don't get me wrong, the California film is great, but it has been there for a decade in Florida, and even longer at Disneyland. It's now showing its age in terms of the quality of the film, and every time we watch Soarin', I find myself wishing that they'd do a film of perhaps Florida, or maybe even the other countries which have Disney parks? Well D23 confirmed the expansion would lead to a new film called Soarin' Around the World that will debut on both coasts. About time! I really cannot wait for this.

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□I wish I could say I had such enthusiasm for the next announcement, which related to Disney's Hollywood Studios. While I'm sure many people were delighted to hear that Toy Story Land would be debuting in the park, I was less than happy at the prospect. My perspective is probably tainted by the fact that Disneyland Paris now has its own Toy Story Playland in the Walt Disney Studios Park, and quite frankly, it hasn't wowed me. I desperately hope what's planned for Florida is much better, but the initial news didn't inspire me.

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□There was talk of a family-friendly roller coaster based on Slinky Dog, and while I wouldn't necessarily call what's in place in Paris a coaster, it certainly is a Slinky Dog. Admittedly, the track does look a bit longer in Florida than the one in Paris, so I'm hoping it's got a bit more to it than its French cousin. It doesn't help that the artists' rendering released at D23 didn't give much away. It was an aerial shot, giving you an idea of the whole land, but personally I'd have preferred some much more detailed concept art, along the lines of that released to promote the arrival of Star Wars land.

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□Now having said that, the idea of the alien saucers attraction does sound intriguing, and there's nothing like that in Disneyland Paris, so hopefully that will be fun, although I have a horrible feeling from the descriptions that this will be a simple circle ride, along the lines of Dumbo the Flying Elephant. Don't get me wrong, I adore that elephant, and it's a fun, and simplistic ride, but equally, it's a fun and simplistic ride, and Disney now has a number of such things, and I'd like to see something a little more different, and adventurous.

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□Of course, the insanely popular Toy Story Midway Mania! will remain the E-ticket attraction in this new land, and like Soarin', it's being expanded, which should help to reduce the insane wait times that guests often encounter here.

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□The final announcements all related to the work at Animal Kingdom. Pandora -- The World of AVATAR will take you into the world of that famous movie, and now we know the name of the new major attraction

there, AVATAR Flight of Passage, which will give guests a bird's eye view over the land of Pandora. Sadly, there's still a while to wait before any of us can enjoy it, with the projected completion date of this land still looking to be 2017.

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□ At least in the meantime, there will be some other new additions to the park, which I'm sure many will welcome, given the disruption that visitors there have recently experienced. Rivers of Light is expected to open in spring 2016, and I can't wait to see this. Of course, given the presence of animals in this park, it's had to be carefully designed to ensure it doesn't affect them, meaning it will combine water screens, animal imagery, floating lanterns and live music. Again, the artists' impressions, complete with such stunning images of animals really caught my attention. From the descriptions I'd read of it, I've been waiting to see this, and what I saw over D23 only served to whet my appetite even more.

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□ I've said for a long time that I wanted to see Animal Kingdom becoming more of an evening park, as we have very fond memories of night-time visits from the early 2000s, when Disney did a special night-time version of Kilimanjaro Safaris. Well guess what? Things have come full circle, and as part of the expansion, there will indeed be night-time adventures on the savannah again, also starting from spring 2016. I cannot wait to try this out, although I have to confess I am worried it may not measure up to my memories of what they did all those years ago, as I have such fond recollections of it. I'm hoping I'm wrong, as I'm sure there are lots more things Disney can do now that they couldn't back then, and the news of two new species for the safari, African wild dogs and hyenas, was very exciting to read about.

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□ One thing was very clear from the D23 announcements -- there's a heck of a lot to look forward to at Walt Disney World over the next couple of years. I have the oddest feeling that what is essentially a very familiar place to us is going to look and feel very different by the time we next make it back there in fall 2016.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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