

The Monorails of Disney's Wonderful World of Theme Parks: A Closer Look

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Most Disney fans will be aware of Walt's intense fascination with trains. They've found their way into many of the Disney parks around the world, but perhaps the most enduring image of Walt's love of trains is the futuristic monorail system

Monorails now run in four of the five Disney Resorts in California, Florida, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, with Disneyland Paris the only one not to boast its own system. And, in each park, they're very different, although they're also undeniably Disney.

The monorail system I grew up with was the one at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. Somehow, I think probably because the monorail expanded to serve Epcot when that park opened in 1982, I always assumed that the system would grow as more theme parks arrived on the scene. Sadly, that wasn't the case, as there's nothing I'd have loved more than to travel between all the parks via monorail. I guess though, at a reported investment of \$1 million per mile of track, it would be a steep price to pay, just to put a smile on my face!

Having said that, what we've got now is superb and covers something like 14 miles around the resort, running from the Magic Kingdom to Epcot, with three separate lines in operation. My favorite has always been the line that takes you into Epcot, simply because it allows you to glide over Future World, offering tantalising glimpses of the delights inside my favorite park. That's something that is replicated over at Disneyland in California, where one of the monorail stations is actually inside the park, in Tomorrowland.

The first time we used the Disneyland monorail, it was only partially operating, due to all the work being undertaken on Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage at the time. Immediately, one of the reasons I added to my list of why I wanted to go back to Disneyland was to experience the full monorail route. When we did, I will admit to being a bit disappointed. I was expecting something along the lines of the Epcot line, where you get some superb views of the park below you, but to be honest, the monorail was zooming along too quickly to see much, which was a shame. I did love the way that it winds its way through the Grand Californian Hotel and I couldn't help but think that they should have added a monorail stop into this resort.

Despite all the monorail systems around the world, the only place with

monorail stops at the resorts is still Walt Disney World in Florida and, let's be honest, you can't beat being able to board a monorail from the hotel you're staying at. I think most of us would agree to still having a sense of wonder every time the monorail glides through the concourse of the Contemporary Resort. I know it's a sight I'll never get tired of seeing.

As for the monorails themselves, these do all vary tremendously between the different parks. I think it's fair to say that those at Walt Disney World are now the least attractive to me, having seen the new Mark VII trains in operation in Disneyland in California. True, we've only seen the red and blue trains, with an orange one now added since our last visit, but they are radically different to what you're used to. Gone is the white monorail with a colour band running through it -- these are literally made up of bright colours and are quite a contrast. It takes some getting used to.

But these aren't my favourites either. To my mind, they're still a bit of a shock to the system, being very modern, and it will take me a long time to get used to them. Now having seen the monorails at both Hong Kong and Tokyo, I can't help but have a pang of sadness that they didn't introduce this style of train into Disneyland. So what's so special about these? Well, the first things to say are that both systems are very different than the American ones. For starters, both charge a fee, although if you're a guest at one of the Tokyo Disney hotels, you will be able to ride the monorail for free. Seeing ticket machines at the stations really does take some getting used to.

But when you step onto the platform and get your first glimpse of the monorail trains, you begin to see what you're paying for, with the Mickey-shaped windows greeting you. When you step aboard, the grab handles hanging down from the top of the carriage are all Mickey-shaped as well. The feeling inside the monorail carriage is very much one of space, with the whole train just one long carriage and seats along some of the sides of the train. There is plenty of standing room and space for strollers and wheelchairs, understandably, as these, like all the Disney monorail systems, can get exceptionally crowded at peak times.

Perhaps of the two, my personal favorite was the Hong Kong system, as the carriages are littered with Disney memorabilia, with miniature statues of some of the main characters, such as Mickey, Donald, Chip and Dale, and Goofy, along with photos of Walt, illustrating his love of trains. It brought a tear to my eye and I can safely say that's the first time just seeing the inside of a Disney monorail train has had that effect!

At Hong Kong, the monorail is literally just a shuttle service from the main subway system to the Disneyland station, while at Tokyo, the system runs on a circular system, not dissimilar to Walt Disney World, with stops at each of the two theme parks, another one for the nearby official hotels and the final stop for Ikipiari, the shopping and entertainment complex that is also the place to catch the main train system into Tokyo from Maihama station.

Sadly, this loop suffers from the same problem as Disneyland in California, with poor views as you travel along. It's one of the main disappointments I had with Tokyo Disney generally. The monorail seems to be very much a mode of transport here, rather than an attraction in its own right and a lot of what you can see is "backstage" areas with little theming. Having said that, it does offer some great opportunity for neat shots from within the parks, particularly Tokyo DisneySea and some of the official hotels, such as the Sheraton, where we spent one night.

Whether or not you have to pay to use the various Disney monorail systems around the world, each is very unique and their continued appearance at the different parks shows the importance of the monorails -- and trains in general -- in Disney's continuing legacy.

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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