

Holiday Time at Disneyland: A Backstage Tour Review

by Heather Macdonald, *PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)*

This year I made the decision to go to Disneyland instead of Walt Disney World (WDW) ;in December.

I remember being a little bit sad that I was going to miss the Candlelight Processional and the Seasonal Storytellers at Epcot, that I wasn't going to see the tribute to Jennings Osbourne at the Spectacle of Dancing Lights, and that there would be no Holiday Wishes fireworks for me this year. In all likelihood I'll miss them next year as well, because I'll be cruising right before Christmas. I still had some regrets, even as I was checking into my Disneyland Resort (DLR) hotel, but all of that would soon disappear.

I have to say that I made a good decision, and now I need to see all of Disney's parks and resorts at Christmas. I suppose I'll be doing some international travel in the years to come!

□ It was an amazing experience to be in the park that Walt built, at Christmastime. Disneyland is different from the Magic Kingdom at WDW, everything is on a much smaller scale, but the decorations are just as lovely and the entire park is decked-out to the nines. Each land has its own decorative theme that blends in with the surroundings. Walking through New Orleans Square almost felt like being at home for the holidays, except much, much cleaner.

□ In order to learn a little bit more about the decorations at Disneyland, we took the Holiday Time at Disneyland Tour. A mere \$59 per person bought about 3 hours of time with our tour guide. She walked us through the various lands and provided some history of the importance of the holidays at DLR. We learned that DLR switched to synthetic, fire retardant trees after an accident caused a blaze! DLR has it's own Candlelight Processional, a tradition that began the very first year the park was open. However, in Anaheim the show is only performed twice, rather than daily, typically the first weekend in December. We, unfortunately, missed out on that experience. The tour included a stop in Toontown for a gingerbread treat and hot chocolate served in a collectable, refillable holiday mug, backdoor access to Haunted Mansion Holiday and its a Small World Holiday, as well as VIP seating for the Christmas parade.

Let's talk about the special attractions first! Haunted Mansion is one of my favorite rides at Walt Disney World and I was excited to finally see it

all done up in a Nightmare Before Christmas theme, something that only happens at Disneyland. The tour allowed us to skip the absolutely enormous line. I wasn't sure what to expect, but now I can tell you what to expect: Haunted Mansion Holiday isn't a decorative overlay. It's transformed into a completely new ride. While the path through the mansion follows the same track in the same Doombuggies, the ride itself is so visually different from the regular version that they could put them side by side and have lines for both all the time. Even the Ghost Host and the music in the mansion are Nightmare-themed, and it is wonderful. It was one of the few things at Disneyland that I took the time to ride more than once! Sometimes you can also find Jack Skellington and Sally outside for a special, seasonal character meet and greet.

□ The second attraction that gets the Christmas treatment at Disneyland is Its a Small World. I know, now you are going to blame me for having the theme song stuck in your head for the rest of the day. The familiar tune gets a holiday overlay, as does every single room in the ride. Ariel even sings Jingle Shells! The attraction stands apart from the rest of Fantasyland at DLR and this allows them to decorate the outside of the building with tons of Christmas lights. The color theme changes every year. This year's bulbs were mostly red and pink. I have high hopes that we'll see some dancing lights in this area in years to come.

□ Over in Frontierland you can find Santa's Reindeer Roundup. We walked past this area, but didn't hear much about it on the tour. Some solo morning exploration provided us with photos of real live reindeer, all named as they were in 'Twas the Night Before Christmas. Also on hand for photos, in a little cottage, was Santa Claus himself!

□ The last part of our tour included reserved seats for the last major part of the holidays at Disneyland, the Christmas Parade! I was glad to have a seat. It was a little chilly once the sun went down and the parade itself is rather long. 2011 was the 50th anniversary of Babes in Toyland and this year's Christmas parade paid tribute. I cannot figure out how those wooden toy drummers march and play wearing that absolutely awkward costume! The parade features all your favorite Disney characters in holiday vignettes, along with what must be hundreds of dancers and other performers. It is not to be missed! The music that plays along with the parade is looped and that is the only let down. I think this takes second place as my favorite Disney parade behind Boo To You!

□ This is where the tour ended, and we were also given a special surprise. I'm not going to ruin the surprise for you, but if you've ever been on a Disney tour you probably already know what it is.

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□ One of the most magical parts of celebrating the holidays at the Disneyland Resort is the way the areas around the hub and Main Street look at night. Just like at WDW, the Castle receives the icicle lights treatment and Main Street U.S.A. is hung with lighted garlands and wreaths. Looking down the street, with the castle at your back, at the enormous Christmas tree all lit up, brings tears to my eyes in California, just as it does in Florida.

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□ Happy Planning for next Holiday Season!

About The Author: Heather is a PassPorter Message Board Guide (moderator). She lives in New Orleans and works for a major hotel chain as a bartender. Heather visited Walt Disney World as a child and after surviving Hurrican Katrina, thought it would be the perfect escape vacation! She loved it so much that she has been 10 times in the last five years.

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