

London Olympics 2012: The Olympic Spirit Brings a Touch of Disney to London

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

So finally, the most eagerly anticipated Olympics in recent history in the United Kingdom are upon us.

□ And for the first time ever, London has become the only city to play host to this prestigious sporting event three times in modern times.

I'm a huge Olympics fan. From the day that it was announced in July 2005 that London had been successful in its bid to host the event, I knew that I had to get tickets, and that's exactly what I did. It wasn't easy, but I eventually ended up bagging three morning sessions of the athletics in the main Olympics stadium (so sadly no finals or victory ceremonies), one session of tennis on Wimbledon's Centre Court, and one session of the men's gymnastics.

□ My Olympics experience started on the opening weekend, with the gymnastics and tennis sessions. Both were at very different venues, one in southeast London, and the other in southwest London. It was at this point I realized the similarities between attending an Olympics event and visiting a Disney park. First, you're in for long days if you want to see and do everything. For us, travelling to the venues was a bit like staying off-property when visiting Walt Disney World -- you know that you're not going to get back to your resort during the day, so you need to take everything with you.

□ As we walked from the rail station over to the All England Lawn and Tennis Club, home to the Wimbledon championships and the tennis competition for London 2012, we immediately saw another similarity to Disney. All along the walking route there were volunteers behaving much like Disney cast members, all with huge smiles on their faces, and all desperate to do whatever they could to make the day even more special for everyone attending an Olympic event.

□ The Disney feeling is also to be seen in the crowds that are visiting. At any Disney park you'll find the majority of visitors are from the hosting country, and that's the same at London 2012, with many thousands of Brits everywhere. But equally there are nationalities from all around the world. The Swiss were out in force at Wimbledon, the Dutch and South Koreans were at gymnastics, while sitting just near us at the athletics

were Norwegians and Kenyans. Where else, apart from Disney, do you get such a mix of people from around the world?

□ But it's once you get inside the Olympic Park in Stratford, East London, that you really start to get the Disney feeling. In a way, it's almost spooky how much it's like one of our favorite theme parks. For starters, it's absolutely massive! Just like Walt Disney World, you can look at the map all you like, and think, "That might be fairly big," but it's only once you set foot in the park that you realize just how big the whole thing is. The distances we'd already seen on the map of Olympic Park didn't look too bad, but how many times have newcomers thought that when they've looked at all the countries scattered around World Showcase Lagoon?

□ In truth, it's more than a mile from one end of the park to the other. And just like some of the landmarks in the Disney parks, where you think, "That doesn't look that far away" (Expedition Everest springs to mind here!), despite the fact that the Olympic Stadium looms over the Stratford entrance to the park, it's a good 10-15 minute walk over there.

□ At the other end of the park is the stunning Velodrome, home to so much British cycling success already (sorry -- I couldn't resist!). Just like any good Disney attraction, as well as having a function, it's also been beautifully designed, with stunning red cedar wood on its exterior, making it a real feature of the park, and well worth seeing.

□ There's already one bona fide visitor attraction within the Olympic Park, the Orbit, a viewing platform offering stunning views across the park and over to the London skyline. We were lucky enough to secure tickets to go up this amazing structure, and were very impressed by the views from there. Sure, the price is steep at £15 each, and whether it remains that price when it officially opens after the Games in 2013, remains to be seen, but it's certainly worth seeing.

□ And just like a Disney park, if you take the time to explore the Olympic Park, there's so much more to see than most visitors will notice, as they rush to get to their sporting stadium. With two walks through the park, and art scattered throughout, wherever you walk, you'll be able to find something unexpected. The only problem is there's too much to see in one visit (sound familiar to Disney parks again there?) so you really need more than one day to see and do it all. Thank goodness, we're going back again to pick up on all the things we weren't able to fit in on day one.

□ One final thing that the London 2012 organisers have adopted from good practice, and may well have looked to Disney for an example, is

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the lines to get into things -- and I'm not talking sporting venues here either! They had waiting areas snaking around in front of the London 2012 Megastore, and boy did they have to put it into use when we were there! I reckon the wait to get in there by the afternoon was probably 20-30 minutes... you could get on some Disney rides quicker than that!

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□ And what of the future of the Olympic Park,? Will people be able to visit it in the future to explore its charms? That's the beauty of London 2012, which has the slogan of "Inspire a Generation," and that's very true of the park. Although the future use of the Olympic Stadium is still to be confirmed, it will host the World Athletics Championship in 2017, and will remain. The Aquatics Centre will stay, as will the Velodrome, which is complemented by a one-mile road cycle circuit, a BMX course, and six kilometers of mountain bike trails. There will also be a multi-use arena, hockey stadium, and 10 tennis courts--four indoor, and six outdoor.

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□ As well as being the place to go for top sporting facilities, I have no doubt Olympic Park will be a huge visitor draw over the next few years. Having been lucky enough to experience it during London 2012 itself, I can certainly recommend it to anyone heading to the British capital in the next few years. This is one park that will have an unusual theme to it, and one that I know all Disney fans will enjoy, and see some definite similarities to our happiest place in the world.

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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