

Tokyo Disneyland: A Japanese Twist On An Old Favorite

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

For as long as I can remember, it's been my ambition to visit every Disney theme park in the world. It's something that I thought would take many more years than it did, after we were able to squeeze in a trip to Hong Kong Disneyland much earlier than I'd originally anticipated. That left Tokyo Disney as the final destination for us. We headed there this spring.

It is home to two theme parks, Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo DisneySea. Of the two, Tokyo Disneyland is the original park, dating from 1983, so we were lucky enough to be there for the tail end of their 25th anniversary celebrations.

Essentially, Tokyo Disneyland park is a version of the Magic Kingdom. The pattern is that the first theme park to be built at any new location will be based on the Magic Kingdom -- or should I say the original Disneyland park in Anaheim -- as in Tokyo's case, that's very the model they used. For example, anyone familiar with the very first Disney park in the world will instantly be at home here, when you see sights such as Snow White's Grotto, featuring statues of Snow White and each of the seven dwarves around a water feature. Equally, the sight of New Orleans Square and Critter Country as two of the park's themed lands is something that will instantly remind you of California, while the theming of their Toontown is equally very similar to what you'd find in California's Disneyland park.

Equally, huge parts of the park will be very familiar to any Disney fan -- and perhaps one of the biggest surprises is the fact that all the signs and the names of the various buildings, restaurants and shops are all written in English. The only places you'll see any Japanese characters are on restaurant menus or perhaps inside the shops themselves and, even then, it will be alongside an English translation.

I'm guessing the reason that you don't see any Japanese around each of the lands is because of Disney's complete dedication to getting the theming of their parks right. For example, Frontierland remains a Wild West-style town from the days of the American frontier, as the name suggests. The idea of spying Japanese in here would be ridiculous, and it's the same everywhere else you go.

Having said that, don't imagine that Tokyo Disneyland is just a clone of the other parks around the world. Every version of the Magic Kingdom

is very different, offering mainly the same old favorites you find at each park, but also a selection of unique and very different rides. That difference actually starts the minute you enter the park. After passing through the security checks and the initial floral displays, which celebrated the resort's 25th anniversary when we were there, you enter Main Street -- undercover! It's a brilliant idea, as it does tend to rain a lot in Japan throughout the year, although finding this section of the park under a roof does take some getting used to and is a bit of a shock when you first see it.

There are no different lands in this park, but there are some anomalies when it comes to the location of some of the various attractions. Here, the Haunted Mansion is located in Fantasyland and it's a very surreal experience to see it looming behind Dumbo the Flying Elephant! I'm not sure it worked for me personally, but it was certainly a unique sight to behold!

Talking of unique sights, I was keen to visit some of those attractions that you won't find anywhere else in the world. One of those was one of the newer attractions, a twist on the familiar Enchanted Tiki Room. This one still features the birds that you know and love from the original version, but it now also stars an animatronic Stitch, who's exceptionally popular in Japan. He's a great addition and breathes new life into this old favorite without destroying the original show too much.

It was here that we came across a great Japanese invention, handheld translator devices, which were an immense help in understanding the show. As the name suggests, they translate everything from Japanese to English and you just hold to them. They were absolutely invaluable every time they were offered to us.

Sadly, one of the other unique attractions here, Pooh's Hunny Hunt, which attracts massive lines from opening until closing, was shut for rehab during our stay, but I do know from my reading that it's meant to be head and shoulders above either of the Pooh rides in the American parks. We also weren't able to sample the new Monsters Inc. ride, which I assume will be similar to the one at the California Adventure, as that opened shortly after we left.

However, we were lucky enough to be one of the last to see the Mickey Mouse Revue, which came here from Walt Disney World when the park opened in 1983. It's now closed for good to make way for Mickey's PhilharMagic, but it was a lot of fun. When it opened, it had the most Audio Animatronic characters ever for a Disney attraction. After a short tour through Mickey's history in Japan, you get to see the Revue itself, a musical show with all the numbers in Japanese -- and when that

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includes Bibbidi Bobbidi Boo, that can be a very surreal experience!

Something else that's very different to any other Disney park -- and definitely merits a mention - are the wild flavors of popcorn they have here. Although I'd read about this in the guidebooks, the first time we saw curry popcorn, my eyes nearly popped out of my head. However, we quickly learned not to knock this uniquely Japanese fancy, as chocolate and strawberry popcorn became real winners with us!

It's not just the food that's different here. The characters come out unannounced and just mingle with the crowds. It's only in Japan with their culture of waiting patiently that this approach could ever work, and it was a delight to see. One of the biggest delights was the characters you don't see anywhere else in the world and when we saw all seven dwarves out on parade, I think we had the biggest smiles you've ever seen!

Although Tokyo Disneyland, like so many of the Disney parks around the world, is based on exactly the same concept, it's still got plenty to commend it and it's a park that I'm very glad we got the chance to see. But, as you'll discover in a future newsletter, there was more to come when we headed to the resort's other theme park: [Tokyo DisneySea!](#)

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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