

Disney Springs Progress Report: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Before our most recent spring trip to Walt Disney World, I knew that we'd be seeing a lot of construction work.

Major expansions are underway at both Disney's Animal Kingdom and Downtown Disney, as well as a number of rides closed down at the Studios and the construction of a new hub outside the castle at the Magic Kingdom. Out of all of them, I was dreading visiting Downtown Disney, having heard horror stories about how much work is underway there as the Imagineers turn it into Disney Springs.

So what is Disney doing as part of this project? The official press release, issued in March 2013, said they would be introducing more shopping, dining and entertainment, doubling the size of the complex by 2016. There will be four outdoor neighborhoods; the Town Center (built on former parking lots), the Landing (the former Pleasure Island area), the Marketplace, and West Side, and in addition to this, two massive parking garages with 6,000 spaces combined, are being added at each end of Disney Springs.

□ That construction work is obvious as you approach, either by bus or by car, with work taking place all along the roads leading into Downtown Disney, as eventually there will be an exit ramp from the I4 which leads directly into one of the parking garages. No doubt this will ease traffic congestion when it's completed, but right now, it's causing chaos all around, and you do have to keep your wits about you as you approach the area, and keep an eye out for signage explaining where you need to go.

□ One of the parking garages is now open, although when we visited in late February, the lines to get into them at peak times, such as a Saturday night, were pretty horrendous. Even at quiet times, we were amazed by how many cars were waiting to get in. Disney is telling guests to allow additional time for their journey, and we could see why.

We opted to pay \$20 for valet parking, located by Cirque du Soleil, and felt it was a worthwhile investment, given the line to get into the parking garage. I dread to think how long we'd have sat in that queue. There are still some surface parking lots, but they're not exactly conveniently located. We visited early that Saturday morning, too, and headed for Lot Q, behind Cirque du Soleil, but later in the day, you could pretty much guarantee all the spots in here would have been taken, too.

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□ There have been a lot of other infrastructure changes since our last visit in late 2013. A pedestrian bridge is now in place between the Rainforest Cafe and T-Rex, and it was a pleasure to wander across it. I must admit, given the forthcoming renaming of Downtown Disney to Disney Springs, I was surprised to still see so much use of the existing name. I was expecting everything to already say Disney Springs, but I guess that's something still to come as part of the remaining work. At least on the bridge, there was evidence of the new name, with what appears to be its catchphrase "the source of inspiration." I immediately liked the look of these plaques, as they felt classy, as if attempting to elevate the area into something very stylish and sophisticated.

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□ That feeling continued for me as we made our way over to The Landing. Much of the former Pleasure Island is now gone, and in its place are new, generally high-scale retail outlets. Chapel Hats, as the name suggests, is a speciality hat retailer, offering some very nice, high quality items, a big change from the traditional Mickey ears! Next door is Erin McKenna's Bakery NYC, and further along, opposite Paradiso 37, APEX by Sunglass Hut, Sound Lion, Sanuk, and the Art of Shaving were already open for business, along with some much needed restrooms.

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□ Also in this area is the new Boathouse restaurant, recently opened. This is where you can see the symmetry between the new Disney Springs, and Saratoga Springs opposite, with much of the building reflecting the Disney Vacation Club resort architecture. It feels as if it all suddenly fits together, in a way that Downtown Disney's Pleasure Island, much as I loved the place, never did.

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□ Beyond the new stores, at the time of our visit the construction work was continuing in earnest around Planet Hollywood. It was here that, particularly at busy times, it did feel claustrophobic, with temporary walls up everywhere, and limited space on the walkways. If you are heading from one end of Downtown Disney to the other, and crowds are a concern for you, you may be best getting the boats that run between the West Side and the Marketplace. We took one, and really enjoyed being able to see the construction from the water.

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□ Not much had changed in the West Side since our last visit, when Splitsville had recently opened for business. However, there was a new addition to the landscaping here, with the arrival of new elevated highline structures. We hadn't heard anything about these before our trip, so I was curious to know what they'd be for. According to [WDW Magic](#), it will provide "shade, seating, and a performance area for live music." We were disappointed that it wouldn't be home to an overhead tram, much like the DisneySea Electric Railway in Tokyo DisneySea, as

that would have been fun.

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□ The food trucks located nearby are an interesting addition, showcasing food from each of the theme parks, and I can see them being popular at peak periods, when the restaurants are packed.

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□ Is it still worth visiting Downtown Disney with so much construction going on? Undoubtedly yes, as any Disney fan will be fascinated to see what's already been achieved, but it is important to be aware of how disruptive the work is to life there. If you go in with expectations that it will impact on your experience, as we did, you'll be fine, and you may be pleasantly surprised by how much is already completed. You do need to plan your visit carefully, allowing lots of extra time to get there, particularly if you're going to drive. Disney advises you to take the buses, but my advice would be to either visit at quiet times of the day or to pay for valet parking.

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□ One thing's for sure, given all the amazing concept art we saw on the construction walls during our visit, and the sections that are already finished, the chaos everyone's experiencing now will be worth it in the end. I can't wait to return to the renamed Disney Springs in 2016 to see the completed product, as I have no doubt that it will be a superb addition to Walt Disney 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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