

D23 Expo Recap, Part 1: Announcements Galore: A Disney Parks Planning Article

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

Big changes are afoot at Walt Disney World and Disneyland!

From August 14-16, Disney fans once again descended on Disneyland for the latest D23 event. We all knew it would mean big announcements, and we weren't disappointed with the news coming thick and fast across the three days. I will say here that I felt very glad that I was watching the news come out on the [Disney Parks Blog](#) and [AllEars.Net](#), as I saw some photos that friends posted from the D23 Expo, and let's just say the lines for the various events were not pretty!

I'm only going to focus on the announcements for Walt Disney World, although the one I'm going to focus on in this article does also take in Disneyland. I'm aware there was other news relating to Disney parks elsewhere, but equally, Walt Disney World is probably the theme park that most of you reading this are most familiar with. Something else that's worth noting is if you're an avid reader of any Walt Disney World fan site and keep an eye on the rumors that circulate, nothing that was announced would have come as a surprise to you, but equally it was lovely to have some of those rumors finally confirmed.

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□ The biggest and most anticipated news of the whole weekend was that both Walt Disney World and Disneyland would be getting new Star Wars-themed lands. The news was so big that it made the BBC national news website in the UK, and even my mother mentioned to me that she'd read about it in another national paper over here. Now that's impressive to garner that much coverage, although Disney did partially achieve that by having the cast of the new film, the Force Awakens on hand, including a surprise appearance by Harrison Ford.

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□ I think everyone who's a big Disney fan had long suspected that a Star Wars land would be added to Disney's Hollywood Studios, given how many attractions have closed at that park in reasonably close proximity to each other, over the last few months. However, I have to be honest, what I wasn't necessarily expecting was the announcement that a Star Wars land would also be coming to Disneyland. It had been rumored, in fairness, but the rumors were nowhere near as strong as they had been for Orlando.

Some of you may have already seen the artists' impressions of this

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amazing new land, and while I was excited at the prospect before D23, I was pretty much jumping up and down with joy at the images that were released. It all looked so wonderfully alien, and full of glorious detail that you usually get from Disney. Then again, at 14 acres each, they do have a fair bit of land to play with to create their new planet and trading port.

□ The only other things the official Disney announcement told us was there would be two signature attractions, including the opportunity to take the controls of the famous Millennium Falcon, and an epic Star Wars adventure where you're in the middle of a battle. There's no more information, but I couldn't help but wonder whether the Millennium Falcon attraction will be a bit like Mission: Space in Epcot. That's pure speculation on my part, but having teased people in this way, surely you've got to ensure everyone has the chance to actually take the controls, as promised. I'd hate to think, after this initial hype, that it's actually something that only a couple of people in a group get to do, and I'm sure that can't be what Disney has in mind. I guess time will tell.

□ I personally hope both these signature attractions are actually ones that we can ride, as we're not huge fans of either coasters or thrill rides. The Seven Dwarfs Mine Train was fine for us, and Big Thunder Mountain Railway is OK, but if you start talking the level of intensity of some of the rides at Universal, then we're most definitely out. Hopefully, given that Disney and Star Wars are family friendly, both will be things that most people can enjoy.

□ What I did like about the announcement was you could then glean more from "shopping around" on various Disney sites. My faithful All Ears Net had some more details about what else would be coming in the intervening time, given that there's no timescale on when Star Wars land will open. In the meantime, Star Tours will add in locations and characters from the forthcoming Star Wars film *The Force Awakens*, which is hitting cinemas just before Christmas. The Star Wars Launch Bay will also tide fans over, offering special exhibits and peeks behind the scenes of the new movie at both Walt Disney World and Disneyland.

□ As well as that, you'll be able to meet characters from the films, which I think sounds wonderful. We've only ever been in Walt Disney World once for Star Wars Weekends, as it's held at a time of the year that's just too hot for us, and we never got the chance to meet any of the stars, although we did see the parade they put on. It's always been a secret dream of mine to get my photo with R2-D2 (I was very jealous of some friends at D23 who managed to do that!), so this sounds perfect. I love the way Disney has thought about the best way to maximize interest in Star Wars from the release date of the new film onwards, ahead of the final opening of the Star Wars land, although as someone who works in

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communications, that is only common sense marketing!

□ More intriguing information came out with details of Season of the Force, which apparently starts in early 2016, with the experience coming to both Walt Disney World and Disneyland. Details are sketchy right now, but I'm thinking it's probably Star Wars Weekends on steroids. I'm guessing it will be a similar time of the year, as Disney will want to draw crowds into the parks year round, and certainly in Orlando, they've already got all the holiday additions, the Food and Wine Festival and Halloween celebrations, and the Flower and Garden Festival in Epcot in the early spring.

□ It seems as if there will be special entertainment, and themed food locations (see why I think it's an extension of Star Wars Weekends? Both of those sound remarkably familiar…) along with a new fireworks display, set to the musical score of Star Wars. Wow, now that's something I would like to see! On the West coast, Disneyland gets something a little different, with the events including a re-imagining of Space Mountain, so it becomes Hyperspace Mountain. Apparently those brave enough to ride, which I can assure you won't be us, will get to join an X-wing Starfighter battle. Fun!

□ In the second and final part of this series of articles next week, I'll round up the rest of the news coming out of D23 in relation 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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