

The Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco: A Disney Attraction Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When it transpired we'd be returning to San Francisco, I knew immediately that it would be worth spending some time in the city, for one main reason -- to visit the Walt Disney Family Museum.

The last time we visited San Francisco was all the way back in 2006, and the Walt Disney Family Museum wasn't open in those days. I didn't think I'd ever get a chance to visit it, as San Francisco wasn't on my list of places to return to. It was a city where I felt I'd been there, done that, and pretty much seen everything, and had no great desire to return. It must have been fate when I found a flight out there, rather than Vancouver or Los Angeles, for our Alaskan cruise.

The first challenge we had was finding the Walt Disney Family Museum. It's located in the Presidio, a former military barracks at the San Francisco end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Although it's a beautiful place, complete with a number of historic buildings, and a large amount of parkland, we also found it very difficult to find the museum using our GPS. We had the address, but it didn't seem to like it, so ironically, having driven past the museum earlier in the day, we struggled to find it. I cannot tell you how relieved we were to finally get back there. In fairness, we later discovered the problem. There are two Montgomery Streets in San Francisco, and you need to ensure you select the right one. We should have just used the zip code, and I think we'd have been fine.

□ We were visiting on a Sunday, and knowing that we literally only had the one day in San Francisco, we booked our tickets in advance through the [museum website](#). The museum is open daily, except Tuesdays, and January 1, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day, from 10:00 am until 6:00 pm, although the last entry is 4:45 pm. We had our pick of entry times, and like any good Disney planner, I went for the opening time. Even though it was August, and peak season, we didn't need to have pre-booked, as there were literally only about four or five others entering at the time we did, but better safe than sorry.

Whatever you do, if you're fortunate enough to visit the Walt Disney Family Museum, be sure to explore every single part. The restrooms, and left luggage facilities, for example, are downstairs, and although it's a small thing, I was personally delighted to find Mickey ears mirrors in the restrooms! Dotted around on the walls down here were a variety of

photos and posters, many relating to Disneyland, and I happily browsed them for some time. There is also additional seating, which I would imagine could be used for food and drink, if the seating on the upper level is full.

There's also a small room in this floor, which is sometimes home to temporary exhibitions. When we visited, it was all about the creation of the original Tomorrowland, all the way back in the 1950s. We found it absolutely fascinating to walk around, particularly the archive footage from the park, which really did transport you back in time to when Disneyland was still newly opened.

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□The museum is laid out in a very straight forward way, telling the story of Walt's life. The only bit that's out of sequence is at the beginning, which is where you'll see some of the many awards Walt received during his lifetime, including that famous seven dwarves Oscar. I was delighted to discover you could take photos in here, as I remember from a friend's visit a few years ago that photography then wasn't allowed. I'm so glad they've changed that rule, as there is so much to see here, and any Disney fan will want a photographic memory of everything they see here.

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□Also in this area is a recreation of Walt's apartment in Disneyland, and there's a neat photo to show just what a great job they've done with it. You literally look up from the photo to the scene in front of you, and the only thing missing is Walt and his family.

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□The first room you enter tells you about Walt's early life, and you're greeted with a collection of family photos. That's the first overwhelming impression you get from this museum that, exactly as its name suggests, it's all about Walt, but it's also all about family, and that feeling continues the whole way around. Here you learn about how Walt signed up to drive an ambulance in France in World War One, despite being underage. But for me, by far the most amazing items in there were some of his earliest sketches. One look at them immediately tells you just how much skill and talent he had, even at such a young age.

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□You then move forward to learn how Walt first got into the animation business, and the focus here is very much on videos of Walt's earliest creations. After this room, you take an elevator to the upper floor, and this is a real treat when you step inside it. I won't say anymore than that, as I want to leave some surprises, but I loved what they did with it.

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□When you step out again, you emerge into a completely different world, and that's definitely intentional, as now you're in Hollywood. Once again, it's packed with memorabilia, and I spent some time reading

the letter Walt wrote to Ub Iwerks in 1924, inviting him to join the studio staff. I felt genuinely honored to be able to read Walt's words in his own writing, and his personality shone through. I could almost hear Walt reading it out loud to be in that familiar voice of his.

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□ In the next part of this series of articles, I'll continue the tour of the Walt Disney Family Museum, following Walt's life, through his most successful period, and some of his toughest times.

[Walt Disney Family Museum](#)

Address: 104 Montgomery St, San Francisco, CA 94129

Hours: Open daily 10 am-6 pm, except Tuesdays, January 1, Thanksgiving Day, and December 25

Opened: October 1, 2009

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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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