

IllumiNations Reflections of Earth: Epcot's Evening Fireworks Extravaganza

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

"What's your favorite attraction?" It's the question that I'm sure many Disney visitors dread, because it's so hard to answer. After all, with four theme parks all providing at least a day's entertainment each, there are so many to pick from. How on earth could anyone choose?

It's something I've thought about for a long time. At different times, I've chosen the Kilimanjaro Safaris in Disney's Animal Kingdom (after all, the only other way to enjoy an experience like that is to visit Africa for a real safari), Spaceship Earth and Test Track in Epcot. But somehow, with each of those choices, I didn't feel 100% convinced that they were actually my favorites -- and surely your favorite shouldn't change?

I guess it was probably two or three years ago that I finally realized that my favorite attraction at Disney wasn't actually a ride, it was a show. But it is hands down my favorite and it's something that's always been dear to my heart: IllumiNations Reflections of Earth at Epcot!

IllumiNations: Reflections of Earth is held nightly at Epcot and usually marks the closing of the park, except on nights when it's hosting evening Extra Magic Hours. It's a superb ending to the day's activities and, to us, IllumiNations is not only "not to be missed" it's something that we try and catch as many times as we can while we're in Disney.

I think my appreciation of this nightly show on the World Showcase Lagoon has grown with my understanding of it. At first, like many people, I just enjoyed IllumiNations for its display. I mean, you're not going to find fireworks like that in very many places around the world. The first few times you watch IllumiNations, your jaw just drops at how many big bangs and explosions are included and you can't help but wonder how much it costs Disney to put this extravaganza on every night.

Then, after a few viewings, a sudden realization -- there are images on that globe in the middle of the lake. Hmm … knowing Disney, those images probably mean something. That means there's got to be a storyline in there that explains and links together all those big bangs and explosions. And of course there is.

The introduction before IllumiNations begins every evening gives you a

good idea of what it's all about, inviting us to gather around the fire "as people of all lands have gathered for thousands and thousands of years before us, to share the light and to share a story, an amazing story, as old as time itself, but still being written." That gives you the first clue that, over the next 12 or so minutes, you'll be taken on a journey through the earth's progress over the last few thousand years.

All those huge explosions at the beginning of IllumiNations that you thought were just there because we all like to enjoy amazing fireworks are actually representing the chaos as the earth was formed all that time ago. Suddenly the music reaches a crescendo and then it all goes quiet. Your eyes adjust to the darkness, following all the light from the amazing fireworks you've just seen and, before long, four sets of fountains spring to life and suddenly you notice there's something making its way out on to the middle of the lagoon -- the globe with images of mankind's progression through the years beamed on to it. If you've never seen those images before, try watching this section of Illuminations through a video camera, camera or even a pair of binoculars and zoom right up on it and you'll be able to pick it all out. It's something well worth doing.

Then, before you know it, you're heading for the finale of IllumiNations and the globe opens up to reveal its secret -- an additional torch burning bright. For ages, we had never fully understood the significance of this, until it was explained to us. Look carefully around World Showcase Lagoon and you'll see twenty of these flames burning in the various different countries. The one that opens before your eyes is the 21st, welcoming you to the new century. Appropriate, as IllumiNations originally started in its current form for the Millennium celebrations.

Finally, it all ends and the usual way Illuminations finishes for me is with tears in my eyes. There is just something about the way that all the different elements of the show -- the music, the fireworks, the fountains, the lasers, the globe and the flaming torches all come together so beautifully through the storyline that just moves me every time.

These days, having seen IllumiNations so many times, we don't necessarily feel the need to stake out a spot hours beforehand, as much of the show can easily be seen even when the crowds are three or four deep -- trust me, we've been there and done that! The bits you will miss if you don't have a clear view across the lagoon are the globe and the fountains, so if you do want to see the whole thing, it is worth getting a place at least half an hour or so before the show starts or maybe an hour or so when the parks are busy.

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We've got a number of IllumiNations viewing spots that we enjoy. Obviously the bridge between the UK and France is a popular one, as is the garden just below on the French side, but we also love the perspective of watching this show from Italy, as you can get photos with the gondola poles in shot and, on occasions, we've even been lucky enough to glimpse the nightly showing of Wishes from the Magic Kingdom from this spot.

A couple of things we always double check now when seeking out a spot to watch IllumiNations is whether there are any trees is the way that will block our view of the show and also which way the wind is blowing. This is an important consideration, especially if it is a windy day, as Illuminations can generate a lot of firework debris and smoke and you don't want to be in its path. We've learned from experience that it's not a pleasant way to end your evening at Epcot.

There is another wonderful way to experience IllumiNations and that's on a [Disney specialty fireworks cruise, which I've covered in a previous article](#).

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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