

# Top 5 Lessons Learned on a 1-Day Trip to Tokyo Disneyland: A Tokyo Disneyland Planning Article

by Amy Moreno, PassPorter Guest Contributor

As a Disney fan, I'm a little embarrassed to say that my family lived in Japan for nine months before we finally made our way to Tokyo Disneyland.

We travel a good bit, but my husband's job prevents a lot of advanced planning. Despite our slapdash approach to travel, I'm still a planner at heart. This time I really had no time. I wanted to hit Tokyo Disneyland cold and with an open mind. I could hear Jennifer and Sara's voices in my head from many episodes of the PassPorter Moms Podcast, "Do less, enjoy more". But that doesn't translate to "you don't need a plan."

No matter what, I think it's always important to manage expectations. It's something my husband and I are always telling our kids. Our one day at Tokyo Disneyland ended up being more of a learning experience than purely magical. Here's what we learned. ☐

☐1. Even a last minute trip requires planning and research. The crowd calendar I looked at predicted a level of 34 out of 100 for the day we were going (my one bit of research). We thought, "We'll practically have the park to ourselves!" Unfortunately, many elementary aged kids in Japan were off that day. It also happened to be school trip season for junior high and high school students (May). If I could remember which crowd calendar I looked at, I would know which one to avoid next time. We didn't see the infamous crazy crowd levels we've heard about before. But this isn't a large park, and it still felt very crowded to us. ☐

☐The only plan we had was to hit our favorite attractions and others our kids had never ridden on before. But we failed to research which rides had Fast Passes. We have a rule in our family never to wait in line longer than 30 minutes. Occasionally we'll push that up to 45. We wasted a lot of time looking for Fast Passes and/or short lines. Some waits were as long as 240 minutes. Because we didn't plan our Fast Passes, we sadly missed our chance to ride Splash Mountain. By the time we made our way there (still early in the day), Fast Passes were gone and the lines never dwindled before the ride closed. Even though there's no FASTPASS+ system, the park map is available online indicating Fast Pass rides. No excuses. Lesson learned.

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Tip: If possible, as with U.S. Disney parks, avoid weekends and times when Japanese school children are on break. The school year ends in March and begins again in early April with a two week break in between. Winter break is around the time U.S. schools are off for Christmas. And children are off for six weeks in summer from around the third week in July to the end of August. There are also many one day Japanese national holidays throughout the year (easy to search online, even in English).

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02. There's no need to be intimidated by the language barrier. Even though we don't speak Japanese, as in our every day life here, we managed just fine at the park. Many signs include English. Google Translate is a good resource, but it's not perfect. When all else fails, we just point out a translation or image on our phones.

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Tip: If you can remember "sumimasen" (soo-mee-mah-sen), "excuse me", that's enough to get someone's attention. People are very friendly in Japan and willing to help.

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03. This is a Japanese park. A tiny part of our motivation for going was to see a little piece of America. We love living in Japan, but we miss home, too. Make no mistake, this park was built for the Japanese. We loved the different flavors of popcorn: chocolate, caramel, soy sauce and butter, and curry. And it was fun trying the green melon soda flavored churros (a popular soda flavor here...our kids love it). You won't find that at Disneyland. But most of the American type food missed the mark for us. We had hoped we'd find Dole Whip and found only "mango and milk" soft serve. Dole is an American brand, of course. I'm not sure what we were thinking. For lunch we ordered what looked to be burgers. They were really chopped steak (Salisbury steak) on a bun. For a snack we tried filled crepes that came to us very cold and not like any crepe we had ever had before. By dinner time we decided to try the food we usually enjoy in Japan. We ordered Mickey shaped meat filled steamed buns (nikuman) and ramen. Perfect.

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Tip: American foods here are made for Japanese palates. Unless you have a picky eater in your group, try the Japanese foods.

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04. Grumpy is the only grump allowed here. Anyone who has spent any time at a Disney park in the U.S. has seen a child meltdown or a bickering couple (...guilty here!). We spent 13 hours in a fairly crowded park on a warm day. We saw only one crying child and not one bickering couple. We certainly aren't experts on Japanese culture, but we get out and about a lot. People here are quiet in public spaces. They patiently queue for everything. We had to remind our kids to keep it to themselves if they were annoyed with one another. I had to remind

myself the same thing.

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□Tip: Be prepared to negotiate your way around people holding parasols on a sunny day (VERY common in Japan).

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□5. Different is OK and sometimes FUN. We experienced many things at Tokyo Disneyland we've come to expect at a Disney park: friendly cast members, great theming, cleanliness, fun attractions, and Mickey shaped foods. There are plenty of differences as well. The gift shops are filled with items that make sense for Japan: chopsticks, rice bowls, and small hand cloths (very commonly carried in Japan for drying hands or mopping sweat). Gift items are very similar to what we find at gift shops elsewhere in Japan such as rice crackers and Japanese style sweets. It was like a game trying to note the differences on rides such as The Haunted Mansion and The Jungle Cruise. We still enjoyed ourselves even though we couldn't understand the jokes. We didn't even scratch the surface on the differences (perhaps an idea for a future article!).

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□Tip: Just stay open minded and enjoy the differences...vive la difference (pardon my French, but I don't know the equivalent in Japanese)!

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□Our crash course at Tokyo Disneyland was overall a great time. We will definitely visit again and explore Disney Sea as well. Our advice to anyone would be to do your research, manage expectations and be open minded.

*About The Author: Amy currently lives in Japan with her husband and three kids. They travel as often as work, funds & current geographic location permit. They most recently traveled to Nepal and Mexico and continue to explore Japan. She became hooked on Disney travel during her family's first trip together to Walt Disney World in 2009 when, stepping into the Magic Kingdom for the first time, her oldest exclaimed, "this is the best night of my life!". Since then they have had three more trips to Walt Disney World and two to the Disneyland Resort in California.*

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