

Specialty Cruises: Wishes and IllumiNations

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are many magical ways to spend your time in Walt Disney World, but perhaps one of the most magical also has to be one of the hardest to snag.

We're not talking about breakfast at Cinderella's Royal Table here, although admittedly that's a magical experience and can be difficult to get into. We're talking about the speciality cruises, as Disney calls them, private trips in small boats that head out every night to showcase the fireworks of Epcot and the Magic Kingdom to a select number of guests.

They're called speciality cruises and not firework cruises by Disney for a very good reason. It's just in case, for any reason, the fireworks have to be cancelled, the cruise may still go on as scheduled. Now before you panic, you can rest assured that only happens on very, very rare occasions. It takes a lot to cancel the majestic displays you see being put on at both parks, but it's something worth keeping in mind.

But never mind that - you're probably thinking that this sounds like an amazing experience and, for those of you lucky enough to have done an IllumiNations or Wishes cruise before, you know that it is. If you've taken one of these cruises before, then you probably also know just how hard it is to get one. There are only a limited number of boats available for each show each night, usually around six, and they go quickly.

So what's the trick to getting one? They say practice makes perfect and that's definitely the case here. Bookings are made exactly 90 days out by phoning 407-WDW-PLAY. The phone line opens at 7:00 a.m. Eastern Time and it's not unusual for the cruises to be sold out just a few minutes later. Usually, when I'm trying to snag one, I call up the day before, so that I know exactly what the different messages sound like, as they change as soon as it opens in the morning. That way, you also know exactly which number to press next, without having to listen to the message, which can give you a good advantage over other people, who are sitting there, figuring out which option they need.

As soon as you're connected to someone, it's a case of stating what you want as quickly as possible. I usually just say "Hi" and follow it up quickly by telling them I'm after a specialty IllumiNations (or Wishes) cruise for a particular date. Usually you know immediately whether you've got one or not - and if you do, then that's the time to make polite

conversation. It's also usually the point at which you'll be thanking the Cast Member profusely for having managed to obtain one of these elusive cruises for you.

The time difference from living in the UK as I do means I can only ever try for one of these cruises on weekends, as strangely, my bosses don't take kindly to me making international calls at work! Having said that, it works in our favor, as we've been lucky on a number of occasions. I'm sure a lot of that is down to people in the States not being up early on a weekend (for me, it's Noon). In our experience, it is worth setting that alarm clock early, as you probably stand a better chance if you call on a Saturday or Sunday. Another way of increasing your chances is to have more than one person calling. If we know that fellow PassPorters are going to be at Disney at the same time as us, we suggest the idea of sharing a cruise to them and, if they agree, we both try calling, doubling our chances.

So what can you expect from your experience? The cruises for IllumiNations usually leave from the Yacht Club Marina. You're asked to be there about an hour before IllumiNations is due to start. It's a similar process with Wishes cruises for the Magic Kingdom, in that you're asked to be at the Contemporary, Wilderness Lodge, Polynesian, or Grand Floridian Marina a similar amount of time before that show commences (departing from the Contemporary seems to be most common).

Once you get there, any children in the party will be fitted with life jackets, you'll meet your driver for the night, and then you'll be off. If you're viewing IllumiNations, you'll cruise over to the Disney Hollywood Studios first of all - and if you're lucky, you may even see some of the fireworks from Fantasmic! on the way. Then it's back past the Swan, Dolphin, BoardWalk, and Yacht and Beach Club, before lining up underneath the bridge between the United Kingdom and France on the edge of World Showcase Lagoon to watch IllumiNations from a prime viewing spot. When it's all over and done with, your driver will take you straight back to the Yacht Club Marina, allowing you to get ahead of all the crowds exiting the park.

With Wishes, it's very similar, although you'll be taken out on a tour around Seven Seas Lagoon, perhaps heading towards Fort Wilderness and Wilderness Lodge first, before taking up a prime position right in front of the Magic Kingdom. The music will be piped into the boat, so you won't miss a thing. As an added bonus, you'll either get to watch the Electric Water Pageant either before or after Wishes has taken place.

With either cruise, your driver will also act as a tour guide, telling you

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about the things you're seeing and perhaps asking Disney trivia questions. You'll also get snacks and non-alcoholic drinks while on board and, when you leave the boat, you're free to take any goodies that are left, because in the words of our drivers in the past, "You've already paid for it!"

It's not a cheap experience. Specialty cruises to see either IllumiNations or Wishes cost \$275 plus tax, and the pontoon boats can take up to 10 people. You can also reserve Breathless, the beautiful wooden reproduction boat housed at the Yacht Club marina, but remember that it can only take up to six people. Tips for the drivers are not included in this price. While it may sound like a lot of money, it's a great way to spend an evening and is a real treat for any Disney fan.

Don't forget that, if you're lucky enough to reserve one, you can always post the details on the [PassPorter message boards](#) to see if anyone wants to share the boat with you. It's a great way to meet fellow Disney fans and cut the cost of the evening.

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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