

# Tokyo DisneySea: A Review

by Donna and Roger Sauer, PassPorter Guest Contributors

*PassPorter Guest Contributors Donna and Roger Sauer recently traveled to Tokyo DisneySea and share with us some of their impressions:*

First, some general orientation issues. Like its Hong Kong counterpart, Tokyo's Disneyland Resort is built on a landfill in what used to be a large bay. Space, being what it is in Japan, is valuable and there was no extra space when the park was designed 25 years ago. As it is, the area that is now adjacent to train tracks, highways, and a busy bay tries its best to show its separation from the Tokyo metropolis. A train from downtown takes about 15 minutes and costs about \$1.50. From the airport, one can take a shuttle for about \$25.00 (about \$45.00 round trip).

The Maihama rail station is the entrance to the park and features a three level shopping mall, Ikspiari, as well as a suitcase-shaped Disney shop featuring (as do all Tokyo Disney shopping venues) a plethora of what we found to be too "cute" selections of character items, snack foods, and toys. Forget pin trading -- pins were few and far between, and a sign in one shop stated the resort does not participate in pin trading.

The largest structure at the entrance to Tokyo Disneyland is the new Disneyland Hotel. This is a massive hotel in the French style and looks like the Las Vegas Paris resort; blue mansard roofs and gold-toned masonry. It will be open later this year.

The resort monorail runs around the entire resort servicing each of the two parks -- Tokyo Disneyland Park and Tokyo DisneySea Park, two (soon to be three) Disney hotels, and the seven non-Disney hotels. We stayed at the Sheraton Grand Tokyo Bay Hotel. Transportation is either by the monorail (cost is about \$2.00 per ride but passes are available) or by Disney Resort Cruisers, very retro silver buses with large Mickey ear windows and other features inside. These buses are free to Disney area hotel guests.

First of all, when we visited the parks, it was very cold -- a high of 47 and, in the shade, it was about 35 degrees Fahrenheit. Sunday is a big park day and the initial crowds were huge, but once they were absorbed into the park things eased up a bit. It is not unusual for parks to be filled and then closed for periods of time, and patrons cannot easily move from one park to the other as there are no park-hopping privileges.

A few observations and comparisons about Tokyo Disneyland park,

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before we move on to DisneySea: The covered Main Street area is nicely planned and even allows for easier access to areas left and right of the castle. The crowds are not forced to the end of the street to disperse into other areas.

The open area in front of the castle is very large and allows for large gardens and staging of events. (Cinderellabration was being featured during our visit.) Interestingly, unlike the other parks, this park runs north to south, so it was surprising not to see the morning sun hit the front of the castle.

Space Mountain's interior and ride effects beat out Disneyland (Anaheim) and Walt Disney World's versions, but not Disneyland Paris. FastPasses are available.

Pirates of the Caribbean and Jungle Cruise rides are about the same as in the U.S., but we had the fastest talking cruise pilot on the planet.

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and Haunted Mansion were closed, and there was a lot of refurbishment going on.

The set up for Star Tours is much more dramatic as there is a hanger type building where one can see the vehicle from the outside.

We never made it to Toontown as the crowds in the area were large. This is a very child-centered park- the toys, character greetings, and shows really appeal to the local visitors who tend to celebrate small children.

Food is basically Japanese or Chinese with huge lines for the curry popcorn. Prices are steep for food and merchandise, but park admission is reasonable at about \$50 per day. One day would not be enough for this park on a busier (and warmer) day.

We visited Tokyo DisneySea Park on a Monday, so the crowds (and number of small children) were smaller, despite a large number of high school-aged children. All day I kept asking myself as I walked around Tokyo DisneySea, "Why can't we have a park like this in the U.S.?"

Comparing this park to its US counterparts isn't fair as the original models are too iconic to permit objectivity. But something within me says in big letters, "THIS MAY BE THE BEST DISNEY PARK." The scale, theming, and attention to detail are phenomenal. Mysterious Island, the land that hosts E-ticket rides Journey to the Center of the Earth and 20,000 Leagues is so massive and such a great park hub that it deserves a place somewhere in the U.S.

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Journey to the Center of the Earth is a great ride that moves from a land rover-type vehicle to roller coaster in seconds. The vehicles seem to be modified Test Track cars with more decoration, a la Jules Verne. 20,000 Leagues is reminiscent of the Walt Disney World ride except the only water is in the windows of your mini subs that move beneath a track suspended above the roadway (seaway?). The new Tower of Terror (in the American Waterfront) lacks some of the elevator car lateral movement we know from Walt Disney World, but the theming is great -- all about a curse on the hotel owner and explorer Harrison Hightower who (spoiler alert) looks remarkably like Senior Imagineer Joe Rohde in a phony white beard! It can't be a coincidence. Apparently, the Japanese audience would not understand the Twilight Zone references but would be savvy about rapacious American capitalists. In Lost River Delta, Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Crystal Skull and its neighboring Raging Spirits coaster are like rides in Disneyland (Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Forbidden Eye) and Disneyland Paris (Indiana Jones et le Temple du Peril) respectively.

The Arabian Coast has a show we did not see (Magic Lamp Theater, a 3-D film featuring Genie), but Sinbad's Storybook Village was cute -- think Small World with a plot and better animatronics. We did not get over to the rides or shows in Mermaid Lagoon but the exteriors were colorful and fit well against the backside of Mount Prometheus.

The Legend of Mythica water show out in the lake between the hotel and Mount Prometheus was fun to watch despite the cold. I am not sure about the story, but the watercraft, large floats, and fireworks in the daytime and music were impressive. Mt. Prometheus exploded with fire every few minutes in the evening. Due to the cold there were no fireworks or evening water show. We hope this cursory view of these parks and its environs will be helpful.

*About The Author: Natives of Oregon, Donna and Roger Sauer are retired from the banking industry and school administration respectively. Since retiring they have traveled to Europe for Paris Disneyland, China, and Tibet, and, most recently, Japan. They have been members of Disney Vacation Club since 1993 and have traveled to Florida once or twice a year since joining. They have three children and five grandchildren. Their next trip to the World will be in December.*

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