

Keys To The Kingdom: A Behind The Scenes Tour

by Laura Clarkson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

(Warning! This article discusses activities that take place "Backstage" at Walt Disney World. If you think this will spoil your enjoyment or that of your children, please DO NOT read!)

On our most recent trip to the World, my husband and I decided to take the Keys to the Kingdom tour. I was very interested to see the backstage areas of the Magic Kingdom, some of the hidden magic that not many guests get the opportunity to see.

Our tour was booked for 9:30 a.m., and we were told to arrive at least 15 minutes before the tour start time. When we went to check in we were given name badges with Mickey and Minnie on them, guest passes and ear pieces. We were also shown menus for the Columbia Harbour House and asked to choose what we would like for lunch. We were then told to meet back up at 9:30 a.m. There were complimentary drinks of coffee and bottles of water available for guests on the tour.

When everyone had arrived for the tour, we met our guide, Abby, who was very friendly and informative. We had to introduce ourselves to the group by telling them our name, where we were from and our favorite character which was a nice ice breaker.

After introductions had been made and ear pieces fiddled with, we set off, stopping first to look at windows and buildings on Main Street. Abby told us a little about who the windows were named after and why. We then moved up to the central hub to look at the Partners statue. We were told that Disney has a "Partners in Excellence" award which is given to the most exceptional Disney Cast Members and the award is shaped like this statue.

As we stood at the hub, Abby pointed out that the pathway leading off to the left was smaller and the one on the right wider, the reasoning being that as more people are right handed than left, they are more likely to choose the path on the right.

Next we head over to Adventureland and sit in the shade while Abby tells us about Walt's life and the company's history. Even though we knew some of the background, it was lovely to listen to these stories being told.

We walked over to Frontierland and were told the Disney legend of how

the McDonald's cart ended up where it did. It was then time to go "backstage". I was jumping up and down excited by this point!

We were shown the yellow line on the ground behind which Cast Members cannot be seen by guests, and then went properly backstage. We saw Woody and Bulls-eye getting into their costumes for the Woody's Roundup show, and some other Cast Members dressed up for the show. They were very patient with us all trooping past.

We got to see the Spectromagic floats and the ones for the daytime parade. There are three classes of float, and they are checked every day for defective lamps. Abby told us how float drivers are required to have been characters previously so that they understand the constraints these people are under. She also told us the height requirements of characters, and I was very disappointed to hear that I wasn't tall enough to be a princess. I was somewhat cheered to hear that I was exactly Winnie the Pooh height though!

We were shown the water tanks for Splash Mountain and the trash compactor that is used for non-recyclable waste. There was an odd smell; a lot like cider, in the backstage area which we were told was the smell of the trash.

We went back "on stage" and had a look at the Liberty Bell, and were told that it is an exact replica of the original bell. We also had a look round the Hall of Presidents, and Abby told us how the man who makes the busts is 75 years old and still working for the company.

We went for our lunch at the Columbia Harbour House next and inside the place name cards found our very special Keys which are only given to people on this tour.

After lunch, we went on the Haunted Mansion through the back entrance, and I thought it was very exciting to see the Cast Member only area.

After disembarking our Doom Buggies, we headed back to Main Street, and went backstage again through the Emporium shop. It was now time for the highlight of the tour, the Utilidors! It was so exciting to see really backstage and watch the Cast Members going about their daily work, and all the posters on the walls of work related advice -- but featuring Disney characters! We were shown how the tunnels are color coordinated, so Cast Members know whereabouts they are under the park.

This was the end of the tour, so we stepped blinking back into the

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sunshine, having experienced a glimpse of where magic truly is made every day. The tour costs \$74 per person (price includes lunch) with a 15% discount for Annual Passholders and AAA members. DVC owners receive a 20% discount. The minimum age for taking the tour is 16 and photo ID is required. Tours run three times a day at 8:30 am, 9:00 am & 9:30 am. The tour lasts approximately 5 hours.

About The Author: Laura Clarkson lives in England and has been visiting Walt Disney World since 2002 with her husband, Andy. They are currently looking forward to their next trip to the World in September.

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