

Pirates, Pirates Everywhere!: Disney Around The World Feature

by Jo Vagos, PassPorter Guest Contributor

What's the first thing you think of when you hear "Disney"? Is it Mickey Mouse? Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty Castle? Rides and attractions? Beautiful resorts? Princesses? How about Pirates? Yes, you read correctly -- pirates. Admittedly, it's not the first (or even tenth) on my list of Disney images, but it's certainly making its way up the list!

The success of Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean has its roots in the ride that first opened in Disneyland decades ago. These animatronics have provided countless visitors with a "Disney-fied" view of pirateering in the 1700's. In 2003, the first of three planned movies based on this ride was released. Audiences loved "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl," and its success left audiences anxiously awaiting the second installment.

Months before the release of the second movie, Disney announced it would close down the beloved Pirates of the Caribbean rides in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. The reason? Disney would be refurbishing the ride, and adding some new characters, including the beloved Captain Jack Sparrow, wonderfully portrayed by Johnny Depp in the movies. Even before the second movie was released, a full section of The World of Disney Store in Orlando's Downtown Disney was completely dedicated to pirate-themed paraphernalia.

The opening weekend of "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest" was second only to "Titanic" in terms of box office intake. The opening of the movie coincided with the reopening of the ride in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World in early July 2006. In my recent visit to the Magic Kingdom, I was among a throng of people waiting for Adventureland to open so we could all make our way to the "new" Pirates ride. Captain Jack looks incredibly life-like (approved by Depp himself!), and he appears three times during the ride. Captains Barbossa and Davy Jones also make appearances, but Captain Jack steals the show. Needless to say, the store just outside the ride was packed full of shoppers.

A few months ago, if you had told me that I would be buying pirate wear, eye patches and hats, I would not have believed you. But I was getting ready for my Disney cruise, so I knew I had to be prepared. I learned that nowhere else can you experience the Pirates of the Caribbean more than on the Disney Cruise Line. On my recent 3-night Bahamian

cruise, I was immersed in the Disney pirate theme, and loved every minute of it!

The first hint of "pirate" could be found in the ship's movie theater. Despite still being in the theaters on land, "Dead Man's Chest" was being played at least twice a day every day in the Buena Vista Theatre. Pretty impressive, considering it's a first-run movie. No other cruise line can do this, because no one else owns the rights to these movies!

The Pirates in the Caribbean Deck Party was another great highlight of the cruise. This is held on the same night as the tropical/pirate dress-up night, so you are surrounded by pirates everywhere you turn. Has your wardrobe not caught up with the new pirate craze? Not to worry -- Disney offers every person a free pirate bandana to start you on your way (I wish someone had told me this before I purchased my pirate gear)! The onboard stores (Mickey's Mates and Treasure Ketch) also offer an array of pirate-themed gear, including shirts, hats, and eye patches, pins, costumes, and jewelry. Pretty much anything and everything pirate-related can be found here.

The party itself is very festive and entertaining -- complete with a pirate "mutiny" -- led by another famous pirate, Captain Hook. This celebration comes complete with a fireworks display and a long dessert buffet table. By now, even the most oblivious cruisers know Disney has gone to the pirates. And not once did I see anyone complain about the pirate craze.

The next big surprise for me was meeting Captain Jack himself! The line for photographs extended longer than the lines for Cinderella and Mickey Mouse. The cruisers on line came from all walks of life -- young and old, men, women and children. One lady behind me was insisting that her husband and son let her take a photograph with Captain Jack all by herself. She wanted to put the photo on her desk to make all her female co-workers jealous! The cast member portraying Captain Jack was surprisingly good. He had Captain Jack's mannerisms and looks, and sounded a lot like Depp. If asked, he will tell you that he is the real Captain Jack, and Johnny Depp did a pretty good job of portraying him in the movies!

Another photo op can be found on Disney's private island, Castaway Cay. Here, Captain Jack will pose with cruisers on the walkway leading to the beaches. Fans will quickly recognize Captain Davy Jones' ghostly ship, The Flying Dutchman from "Dead Man's Chest". It is anchored here in Castaway Cay. This is the actual ship used in filming the movie, and it is scheduled to be here at least until the third movie is released sometime next year. From the Disney ship, you can see the port (left) side of the Dutchman, which was never completed. It has step ladders

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leading up from the water, but no one is allowed to approach or board the ship. From the land, you will see the complete starboard (right) side of the Dutchman -- very scary-looking indeed! Time your day right, and you can take a photo with Captain Jack with the Dutchman in the background.

As surprising as it may seem, Captain Jack has become a most unexpected and beloved Disney "hero". Despite his odd mannerisms and questionable hygiene, Disney has created a character with incredible appeal. Men want to be him, women want to be with him, and everyone loves his sense of humor. And the best news is that boys finally have a new Disney hero! There's no telling how long this pirate craze will last, but I don't think it will end anytime soon. With the third installment of the trilogy due to be released next year, Disney is sure to build up the pirate hype well into 2007 and beyond.

About The Author: Jo is a member of the MouseEarVacations.com Team and co-editor of DisBuzz.com. She visits Walt Disney World at least once a month, and is looking forward to her next Disney Cruise in October 2007!

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