

Tokyo DisneySea: Around The World Feature

by Sharon Lin, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Less than a week after my visit to the newly-opened Disneyland in steamy Hong Kong, I am standing outside Tokyo DisneySea as the early April breezes blow in from the ocean.

Tickets and Getting There:

Tokyo Disneyland Resort (DisneySea and Disneyland are separate parks) offers an After Six ticket for only ¥2900 (~\$26USD.) It costs about ¥410 (~\$4USD) to get to DisneySea from the central Tokyo Station, so for a night's entertainment in Japan it's not a bad deal. Tokyo Disney ticket centre, a little slice of Disney in downtown Tokyo with familiar music and princess paraphernalia, is located in the Hibiya area. The friendly Cast Members there tell me that After Six tickets go on sale after 5:00 pm at both the centre and the parks. I take an English map and walk to Ginza, take an MTR (one of Tokyo's sleek high-speed trains) to Tokyo Station, a Keiyo train to Maihama, and the Disneyland Resort rail to the park gates. As I felt in Hong Kong, I think Walt Disney would be so pleased to see the lovely high-speed trains going to his parks.

At 5:48PM, we are herded into double-file lines by a cast member named Kondo, who clearly has the Disney spirit even though I don't understand much of what he says. He has everyone else in stitches and when a little girl laughs at him, he comes back to shake her hand and plays around with her and others some more. The security check is efficient because they come to you with a flashlight; it's not done at a table.

After only twenty minutes inside the gates of Tokyo DisneySea, I already think that it's the most detailed, themed park of them all. It's gorgeous at night, but I bet it's beautiful in the daylight. The central feature is Mysterious Island, a volcanic peak rising beside the sparkling Mediterranean Harbor, with its water and light shows. The park has sections devoted to various seaports -- the American Waterfront (a big steamship and shops), Lost River Delta (exotic thrill rides), futuristic Port Discovery, Arabian Coast (think Epcot's Morocco but bigger and even more oasis-like), and Mermaid Lagoon (tamer children's rides.)

Warning: Ride Spoilers ahead!

For my first ride I jump in the single rider line at Raging Spirits, which

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cuts a 50-minute standby wait to just five minutes - for a two minute ride. Probably the park's most extreme ride, it has three medium drops and one loop through mist, but otherwise it's just a faster Space Mountain. Tokyo DisneySea is on the water, and the wind is really starting to kick up. I'm wishing that I had my scarf. I have a 50-minute, warm, indoor wait for Indiana Jones Adventure: Temple of the Crystal Skull, which is well worth the wait. The track is similar to Dinosaur at Animal Kingdom but the vine-covered temple theming is incredible, especially the sound effects. The ride is very dark, with lots of skulls, snakes, and screaming. Of course, I don't understand what Animatronic Indy says, but that is OK. I just don't know what to expect, which can be fun.

Next up is Mysterious Island -- 20,000 Leagues Submarines, one of my late, lamented Walt Disney World favorites, is great and different here, with a sea alien storyline at the end. I figure out that it's just a "sitting and looking at things ride" with bubbles between the double-paned windows. There are controls like in Mission:Space (I am position #9), but just for show. The design of this attraction is just so amazing that the Walt Disney World classic is almost weak in comparison.

The highlight of the night is Journey to the Center of the Earth, one of the best rides EVER. It starts out with a queue similar to Tower of Terror, and for a brief moment in the elevator I think it's a standing-up version of Tower of Terror, and wonder where the safety restraints are. But it's just an "elevator" (like the former "hydrolators" at The Living Seas in Epcot) to the loading area. The ride vehicles are like Indy or Dinosaur, but very stylized. I get a front seat. It starts off innocently enough, riding through scenes from the Jules Verne story such as the Mushroom Forest, but it soon turns rough. (I think that it's notable that in Japan, there are only safety warnings, nothing about dark or scary situations. At least not in English or Chinese. I guess for a population that's faced Godzilla and Mothra so many times, there's not much left to be scared of!) There are more chambers, then a big roaring monster. At least I think that's the big thing sticking out at the end à la Dinosaur (my eyes were sort of closed.) But it doesn't end there! The drop is HUGE, plunging into complete darkness. There are some other sizable drops before and after but the big one feels as long and steep as Splash Mountain -- except dry. I don't know how they do that in this vehicle. The drop goes OUTSIDE and around Mysterious Island mountain. It's an awesome ride.

Shaking with glee, I head to the jewel-like Arabian Coast and do Sindbad's Seven Voyages, which is like a technologically-advanced, non-politically-correct It's a Small World. Then I do Flounder's Coasters, a roller coaster for kids similar to Goofy's Barnstormer. I can't find the

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Jumpin' Jellyfish ride, and although I would love to do Journey to the Center of the Earth again, in the interest of research and variety, I head to gleaming Port Discovery.

By now it is quite windy, appropriate for StormRiders, a motion simulation ride with water effects. The story is typical Disney -- a renegade American captain disobeys higher-ups, takes guests on an unauthorized mission, and disaster threatens but is averted. At least that's what I gathered from the shouting and my limited grasp of Japanese. I get pretty soaked because there's a constant drizzle after the audience flies into the storm. StormRiders ends up being my last attraction because by the time I exit, Journey to the Center of the Earth is on FastPass-only and I want to end on a high note.

Looking back at the map of that park, it seems like an amalgam of Walt Disney World in Orlando and the original Anaheim Disneyland, with an extensive Fantasyland, Critter Country, and a World Bazaar instead of Main Street. Tokyo DisneySea is not a very "Disney" park in that I didn't see any character meet-and-greets or Hidden Mickeys like I found in Hong Kong Disneyland, but it maintains a very Disney (and very Japanese) atmosphere of incredible theming and fine service.

In short, Tokyo DisneySea is an amazing Disney property that any fan should try to see at least once. I know that when I visit Japan again, I may try to see Disneyland as well, but I will definitely go back to this Disney gem by the sea.

About The Author: Sharon Lin has been to Walt Disney World 10 times and is looking forward to her next trip in October 2006.

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