

Enjoying the Japan Pavilion at Epcot: A World Showcase Favorite

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

For many people, the Magic Kingdom is the park they most look forward to seeing whenever they go to Walt Disney World, and that's perfectly understandable. After all, it's got the fairy tale castle as you walk in, along with huge doses of magic.

But despite all that, my heart lies with Epcot, and perhaps it's got something to do with the fact that I love my travels that take me around the world. Of all the countries represented in Epcot's World Showcase, Japan is by far my favorite for many reasons.

Firstly, the Japan pavilion home to some of the most unusual entertainers that the park has to offer. Even before you enter Epcot, if you're staying at the Yacht and Beach Club or BoardWalk, step outside on to your balcony and the chances are that you'll be able to hear one of those entertainers.

[Matsuriza](#) are a group of Japanese drummers that can be heard for literally miles around. As soon as they start to perform, they attract a huge crowd, enchanted by what they're seeing and hearing. You can only stand and marvel at the power that must be required to beat out rhythms with drums that huge.

But, for me, the real star attraction in Japan is someone who's a lot quieter, and perhaps that's how we managed to miss her for so many of our previous visits. We kept hearing that there was a [candy artist](#) that we should see in Japan and had even seen some of her creations that had been given to the children of friends of ours, but still we had never managed to catch Miyuki. With our last visit, that changed and it became a priority to make sure that we saw her in action.

Candy artist Miyuki at work, creating another beautiful candy animal in the Japan Pavilion at Epcot

Hailing from Tokyo, Miyuki is a unique entertainer in every sense of the word. She's the first and only woman to become a candy artist, a tradition that dates back over 250 years to the Edo era of Japanese history. The craft started as a way to entertain people at local festivals or on street corners and, when you see Miyuki in action, it's no surprise that the craft has survived this long. Candy artists use soft rice dough to

make their creations, and their only tools are their skilled hands, a small pair of what appears to be delicate pliers, and a paintbrush, perhaps for adding on animal markings, depending on what will be created. That is entirely down to the crowd that gathers for each show - and those crowds tend to gather early, in the hope of being chosen by Miyuki to receive one of the candy animals.

There's an amazing list of creations available -- almost every animal you can think of -- and that includes dragons, porcupines, unicorns, and tigers. Some you can picture before Miyuki starts work, but others, you have to wonder how on earth she's going to create them. And, like any good artist, they slowly start to take shape in front of your eyes, as the different elements are carefully shaped and pulled into position while Miyuki describes what she's doing (and makes it look so easy). It's easy to miss Miyuki, as our experience over the years shows. We'd been to Epcot at least seven times and hadn't caught any of her shows, but now we'll definitely be heading back there in the future.

Perhaps that's the beauty of the Japan pavilion. It's very easy to miss things and to get the best out of this Epcot country, you need to do some exploring. For example, most people will head to Mitsukoshi, a branch of a department store that dates from the 17th century, and will enjoy browsing their collections of kimonos, fans, and even Pokemon cards, but how many of those shoppers get to the back of the pavilion to visit the Bijutsu-kan Gallery? It's hidden away, towards the back end of Mitsukoshi, but it's well worth a visit to see the current exhibition of tin toys, as the variety that have been produce in Japan over the years is quite amazing.

Looking through the Japanese Torii gate towards Spaceship Earth

Another area that's worth spending some time is the [hill garden](#). Too many people just look at it from the bottom of the hill, but if you walk through it, you'll find some lovely quiet areas, a fine exhibit of bonsai trees, and can admire how creating the perfect garden is a great passtime in Japan, with time devoted to the placing of every single item to ensure that it is as beautiful as it's possible to make it.

Don't forget to look upwards as well. You'll see the entrance to Teppan Edo and Tokyo Dining on your right as you enter the pavilion and you can't fail to miss the Goju-no-to pagoda on the left, but sadly that's all many people see. At the back of the pavilion, you'll see representations of a beautiful Japanese castle. I'm almost ashamed to admit that the first time I noticed it was a couple of years ago and the only reason was that it was being rehabbed at the time and was surrounded by scaffolding.

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Even though Japan may not have traditional attractions or rides, there's still plenty to enjoy here and it's well worth slowing down sometimes to ensure that you can take in all that this beautiful pavilion has to offer. It's inspired me to visit the real country for myself and I can't wait to see the beauty of Japan when we visit it next year. But that will be a tale for another time.

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!](#)

Article last updated: 2/24/2011

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