

Undiscovered Future World: A Backstage Tour at Walt Disney World

by Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Are you interested in learning more about Epcot? Want to see some of the backstage area? If so, then I suggest taking the Undiscovered Future World Tour, which takes you behind the scenes at Epcot's Future World. The tour is a little over four hours long and I enjoyed every minute of it!

My tour last year started in the morning outside Epcot Guest Relations in Future World. The Cast Member leading the tour talked about Walt Disney's original vision for Epcot and how it was originally going to be a city with people living and working there - an Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Obviously the Epcot of today does not fulfill the original vision. Our tour guide discussed how the vision morphed over time; he also stated that during a Cast Member "meet and greet" with Walt Disney Imagineering legend (and a true "Disney Legend") Marty Sklar during the 25th anniversary of the park, the original vision of Epcot came up, and Marty stated that, "Only Walt Disney had the leadership and connections in industry and state and local governments to make such a dream come true." Our tour guide then provided a quick history of the Walt Disney Company in general. Afterwards, we walked over to the Fountain of Nations where our guide described the ceremony that occurred there on Epcot's opening day and the rededication that occurred there for Epcot's 25th anniversary.

We then walked a few feet to Spaceship Earth, where our tour guide told us some of the secrets behind its construction. He also passed around a sample of the material that makes up the tiles so that we could examine it closely. From Spaceship Earth, we went over to Innoventions. There our guide talked about the original Tomorrowland in Disneyland focusing on the "House of Tomorrow." He then provided a short history of Epcot, trying to show a connection between Future World and the original Disneyland attraction.

Afterwards we went to the Seas with Nemo and Friends; there we were led to a private entrance near the Coral Reef restaurant and taken to the private VIP lounge inside the pavilion. The lounge was very nicely decorated and had large windows looking into the huge fish tank at the pavilion. There was also a piano with transparent sides and several dining tables there; the whole lounge is on top of the Coral Reef restaurant. Today the lounge is used for such things as weddings and private parties.

Our next stop was the Land Pavilion. Our guide explained the murals on the outside of the pavilion and then gave us a 15 minute break inside. Afterwards we were led onto Soarin' and then went backstage. I was hoping we would see more of Soarin' from backstage, but we were simply led over to the backstage area of Journey into Imagination inside the Imagination Pavilion. There we saw the maintenance area for the attraction, a few ride vehicles undergoing maintenance, and a machine that washes all of the 3-D glasses in use throughout Walt Disney World.

We were then led to the Universe of Energy of Pavilion. Outside the pavilion, our guide talked about the ride vehicles and explained how they work. He also explained how the landscape of the east and west sides of Future World mimic the left and right division of the brain. Energy, Mission Space, and Test Track sit on one side where there are a lot of straight-lined walkways and paths; i.e. the logical side of the brain. The Seas with Nemo and Friends, the Land, and the Imagination Pavilion sit on the other side where there a lot of meandering walkways and paths and water; i.e. the creative side of the brain.

Our final stop on stage was Mission Space. Our tour stopped at Planetary Plaza next to the FASTPASS machines. There our guide talked about the "Man in Space" Disney TV show and about the various space-related attractions at both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. We then visited the control room for the attraction. The Mission Control area that you can see from the queue does actually control the attraction. There are consoles on the far side that guests can not see from the queue. After this we went backstage and continued through the Test Track backstage area.

We then went to the Cast Services Building where we saw the costume checkout area and learned how Cast Members pick up new costumes and drop off costumes for cleaning. We also visited a break area, a learning center, and a library. I really enjoyed visiting what some Cast Members refer to as "Pride Hall," which is a hallway with large murals painted by different teams at Epcot. I especially enjoyed the mural created by a maintenance team that had a lot of "magic," in the form of electronics, embedded in it, and the murals painted by various international Cast Members. Afterwards, we went into a trailer outside the Cast Services Building where we were given a bottle of water and popcorn. There we had the opportunity to talk to a Cast Member from France who was part of the International Program. This particular Cast Member worked with Guest Relations at Disneyland Paris and at Disneyland in Anaheim before coming to Epcot; it was fascinating hearing his stories of how Disney customer service, while still excellent, is slightly different in his opinion at the various parks.

Afterwards we went further backstage and saw the maintenance area for the "Friendship" boats and where the "Earth-ball" that is used in IllumiNations is kept. We could get very close to the ball and, as an engineer, I was fascinated with its construction. Our guide talked about IllumiNations for some time, explaining how the show is divided into 3 acts: "Chaos" showcases the creation of Earth, "Order" shows bringing the planet under control and the development of civilization, and "Celebration" showcases human diversity and the unified spirit of mankind.

Our tour ended at the China Pavilion in World Showcase. Our guide told us that we could get 20% off for lunch at Nine Dragons and that no ADR was needed; we simply needed to show our name tag from the tour. Everybody on the tour was also invited to watch IllumiNations that night from a roped-off area by the water in front of the Italian Pavilion. Overall, I learned a lot on the tour and had a great time. If you are interested in this or any other tour at Walt Disney World, then I suggest making a reservation as far in advance as you can (up to 180 days); reservations can be made at (407) WDW-TOUR. When you call, be sure to ask about discounts. Generally, there are discounts available for Annual Passholders, Disney Vacation Club members, American Automobile Association members, and Disney Visa Cardholders. All guests for this particular tour have to be at least 16 years old, and Epcot theme park admission is required and not included in the price of the tour.

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