

Hong Kong Disneyland Celebrates: A New Year In A New Disney Park

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

The start of a new year is always something worth celebrating, wherever you are in the world -- and let's be honest, Disney parks do usually tend to see the New Year in with a flourish.

We've only been at Walt Disney World once to see the New Year in and the version of IllumiNations that led up to midnight and the dawn of a new 12 months was quite something to see. It more than made up for the fact that Mother Nature had decided to play a cruel trick that New Year's Eve, with torrential rain for the previous five or six hours that had emptied the whole of Epcot out, with just a few foolish souls, like ourselves, left watching the celebrations. Fortunately, things were very different when we visited Hong Kong Disneyland during the Chinese New Year celebrations.

I think it's important to point out here that we weren't actually there for the moment when the New Year began, but that really didn't matter, as the celebrations go on for a number of weeks. The Year of the Rat had started on February 7, 2008 and we headed for the park just over a week later. As there's no mouse in the Chinese calendar, a rat was going to be about as close to Mickey as Disney would get, so unsurprisingly, they'd gone to town over the link.

The second we approached the park entrance, we could see the decorations everywhere. That's not out of keeping with the rest of Hong Kong, with lanterns and decorations displayed in many shops and homes while we were there. What was out of place was the number of rats we saw on display, although entertainingly, they had been created so that you could clearly see a resemblance to another famous rodent!

Celebrating Chinese New Year with a dragon procession down Main Street. I had already seen on the website that the main characters, such as Minnie, Mickey, Donald, Goofy, and Chip and Dale would be out in special Chinese New Year costumes, and that's exactly the sight that greeted us in Main Street. The costumes were all as beautiful and colorful as you'd expect and made for some wonderful keepsake photos. Mickey and Minnie were all dressed in red, a very traditional color, as the Chinese believe that it wards off bad fortune. It's also tradition for

people to wear new clothes to symbolize the New Year and, although I've no way of knowing for sure, I would imagine that this probably was a new addition to both Mickey's and Minnie's wardrobe.

Chinese New Year has many traditions and one of those is the presence of a lion dance troupe, which is a symbolic ritual for evicting bad spirits from the home and welcoming in the forthcoming year. Of course, Disney also had one parading around Main Street, ensuring that the only spirits present were good ones. Another lovely touch was the decorations on the tree, with lots of red packets. At first, we weren't sure what they were, but we soon discovered that younger members of the family often receive these packets, containing cash, for Chinese New Year.

Our tour took us next to the hub in front of the castle, where mini Mickey statuettes had been added, with each representing the signs of good fortune, such as health, love, and prosperity that you want to usher in at this time of year.

With it being the Year of the Rat, Mickey certainly took center stage in these celebrations and even a version of his house from Toontown in Walt Disney World had arrived just for these few weeks. Walking through it, it was hard to believe that this was only a temporary addition to the park, but it is, although it does make appearances other times of the year, with the most recent one being as Mickey's Christmas House.

A Chinese New Year storyteller was also wandering around the Main Street area, spreading tales of joy, but one thing that wasn't specific to the New Year was the afternoon parade. I was surprised by that, given how Walt Disney World has its own special parade for Christmas, probably America's biggest celebration. The Chinese New Year is probably the biggest celebration in Hong Kong, so it was interesting to see them continue with their usual performance in the afternoon. Having said that, it was still unique, with a wonderfully Oriental feel to it, so we didn't feel deprived at all.

One of the main signs at the entrance to Hong Kong Disneyland

Chinese New Year turned out to be a wonderful time to visit Hong Kong Disneyland. The temperatures were lovely, with some beautiful weather while we were there and the added bonus of so many extras that really made the park stand out. As it's still the baby of the Disney theme parks, in all honesty, it is lacking in attractions, but what it lacks there, it more than makes up for in additional entertainment when the New Year arrives.

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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!](#)

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