

Epcot's World Showcase: Pavilions vs. The "Real" World

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

We're very fortunate to have traveled to many of the countries that make up Epcot's World Showcase. Out of the eleven, the only ones we've yet to make it to are Japan, Mexico, and Canada, and I'm sure we'll get to all of them one day, especially as we'll knock Japan off that list shortly.

With some countries, the areas we've visited have borne little or no relation to what's represented in World Showcase, and that applies in Morocco, Germany, and China. After all, each country is huge and Epcot can only highlight tiny elements of them. Having said that, from my visits to each, I can instantly see that the architecture is reflective of what you're likely to find in each of those countries, even though I may not have seen the specific buildings in the flesh. Morocco immediately made me think of a family trip to the country almost 20 years earlier and, although my memories of that visit are exceptionally faded, as I walk through the pavilion, images of similar structures that we had seen out there do come back to my mind.

But there are others that we can say we've seen the real thing, as well as the Disney version -- so how does Epcot compare? As a generalization, exceptionally well, and that's probably what you'd expect, knowing the Imagineers' reputation for ensuring accuracy in everything they do.

That was definitely the case when we visited Venice. Italy in Epcot is very much based on this romantic city, albeit with a lack of canals, although of course there are some gondolas to be seen nearby on World Showcase Lagoon. As we approached the tourist center of Venice, St. Mark's Square, I couldn't help but exclaim "it's just like Epcot," and foolish although that now sounds, that's exactly how I felt at that moment. You could instantly tell how much detail had gone into recreating the Doge's Palace and the neighboring Campanile and both are stunning recreations, particularly when you consider how much intricate detail there is on these buildings.

We had a very similar experience when we visited Akershus Castle in Oslo, as it has a very famous cousin in Orlando that's home to dining with the princesses. Once again, one look at it and you could see that the Imagineers had recreated it beautifully, although it obviously didn't require the same amount of detail as you can see in Italy.

The same can't necessarily be said of the American Adventure, as the

main building there is more of a composite of colonial architecture from the northeast of the country. Having spent some time in Philadelphia and Boston, traces of Independence Hall and the Old State House in Boston can be seen clearly here and it's very easy to be transported back in time a couple of hundred years to the days of the early settlers.

Two other countries that include elements of various buildings from periods of their history are France and the United Kingdom. Obviously, the most well known landmark in France is the Eiffel Tower, although the forced perspective used here has just never worked for me. Having said that, the rest of the pavilion does hark back to some of the grandiose buildings that Paris is so well known for and always remind me of a cruise along the River Seine, where just this type of building can be seen.

Perhaps because of its extensive history, the United Kingdom has perhaps the biggest mixture of architecture of any of the pavilions. The buildings take you through hundreds of years of heritage, with perhaps my favorite being the traditional Shakespearean cottage, complete with thatched roof. However, there is just something about this United Kingdom that doesn't ring quite true. It's too clean and too modern, and we've always said that. More than any other country in the World Showcase, you're representing buildings that are hundreds of years old, and these just don't look it.

Perhaps that's the one criticism of the World Showcase countries. It's Disney, so of course you do get an idealized version of the actual thing. You certainly won't find the graffiti that often greets us in Paris, or the lovely aroma of the canals that is present at some times of the year in Venice, and of course the American Adventure is devoid of traffic rushing past skyscrapers, as you'll find right next to the Boston Old State House. Even in the United Kingdom, the pub should by rights have a banner outside it declaring which football (OK, soccer to the American market) matches are being shown live on TV that night.

In a way, it's a very similar issue to the many restaurants that litter the World Showcase. Just as the pavilions are ideal versions, these are very much tuned to what Disney believes will be its visitors' tastes. We've found on our tours of the real countries that the dishes may be the same, but they taste very different and usually that's because you tend to get a blander, less tasty version served up for you in Epcot.

One thing has become very apparent from our travels around the real World Showcase countries. They're very appropriately named, because in reality, all that Epcot can do is showcase small elements from each of the eleven destinations around the world. To find out more about these

countries, you really do have to visit them for yourself and that's something I'd encourage anyone to do, as I doubt you'll be disappointed by any of them. We certainly haven't been to all, and I look forward to the day that I can happily declare that I've visited the real version of all eleven.

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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