

One Disney Park, Two Languages?: Touring Disney Theme Parks Around the Globe

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

For most people who visit a Disney theme park, the idea of their visit involving a second language is, well, pretty foreign to them! If you go to the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida or Disneyland in California, everything's in English, as you'd expect. However, venture outside of those two theme parks to some of the other Disney destinations around the world and you'll soon discover that language can be a real issue, but it's one that the Imagineers have come up with some truly creative ways of dealing with.

There are three other sets of Disney parks outside America, the Tokyo Disney Resort in Japan, Hong Kong Disneyland in China and Disneyland Resort Paris in France. With two of these, Paris and Hong Kong, they are very much bilingual parks. In France, all Cast Members are pretty much expected to speak at least fairly fluent English and French. In Hong Kong, it's very much the norm for everyone to fluently speak English, as well as Cantonese, as it was a British colony until 1997, when it returned to Chinese sovereignty. In fact, both Chinese and English are official languages in the former colony.

Both parks obviously presented a challenge, as how on earth do you provide rides, attractions and shows that can suit two completely different audiences? There are a range of ways in which Disney achieved this. For some of the shows, it's simply about having narration in both languages. The Lights, Moteurs, Action show in the Walt Disney Studios Park in Paris is a prime example of this, with all those who take part in the show speaking in both French and English. Where perhaps someone is only a French speaker, there will then be someone else to translate into English for the audience. Although it does obviously take longer, it's been carefully done to ensure that no-one gets too bored, waiting for their translation to begin.

Another example of this is the Golden Mickeys at Disney's Storybook Theater in Hong Kong Disneyland. Anyone who's been on a Disney cruise will be familiar with their Golden Mickeys show and this is very similar, although of course when you're on board, everything's in just the one language. Once again here, they ensure that any significant sections are translated, although we did find this a little harder to follow. Many of the songs were in English, but much of the speaking was in Chinese and suddenly hearing Mickey talking in Cantonese was

rather a startling experience and one that we really weren't prepared for. It's something that parents taking children to any of these parks might want to explain in advance, as even for adults, it can take some getting used to.

Perhaps one of the most inventive ways of dealing with shows is to have two separate ones, for each language. We first saw this in Hong Kong Disneyland, with Stitch Live, where they offered one show in Cantonese, followed by the next in English. You simply lined up for the show that you wanted. This obviously proved to be a huge success, as Stitch Live was exported across to Disneyland Paris shortly after our visit to Hong Kong Disneyland, with shows again running continuously, with one in French, followed by the next in English.

However, in Paris, they even took it a step further. Right next door to Stitch Live is Playhouse Disney, which was offering shows in Spanish, French and English. It's an interesting way of doing things and the first time we'd seen a third language offered.

Another way of dealing with the language barrier is to offer headsets to those guests who don't speak the native language and again, there are examples of this in Paris. The Art of Disney Animation allows you to pick from a range of different languages, if you're not a French speaker, when you get to the section with the animator. However, sadly, like other attractions in this park, the French can be very loud and still be heard over your headphones.

Of course, there are a lot of attractions where there's little you can do about the language. Seeing Phantom Manor, France's version of the Haunted Mansion, with some French inside the attraction, is certainly a unique experience, as is sampling the Jungle Cruise with a Japanese skipper at Tokyo Disneyland. Let's just say that they get much more into their roles than any American skipper we've ever seen!

The Jungle Cruise in Hong Kong Disneyland is an interesting one, once again offering voyages in either Chinese or English. There are again two separate areas to line up in and we were fascinated by this approach, highlighting the country's two official languages.

The Tokyo Disney Resort has only one official language and that's Japanese. Having said that, most Cast Members can at least speak some English and, if they can't, rest assured, they'll quickly find someone who can help you. The customer service there is second to none and way better than any other country we've ever visited.

As a result though, nearly every attraction is purely in Japanese, but

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despite that, there are ways of still understanding what's going on. Although still very limited, they do have handheld translation devices at a couple of attractions in the parks, which translate for you into English what's going on. We loved having them and just wished they were more widely available throughout the parks. Without them, we would no doubt have enjoyed the Enchanted Tiki Room: Stitch Presents "Aloha E Kome Mai!" much less, as following the storyline would have been almost impossible without these handy helpers.

For those attractions with no translation at Tokyo, like their very unique version of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, a little bit of research beforehand usually gives you the plot line and helps you to understand what's going on.

If you are looking to explore any of these further flung Disney theme parks, you'll be pleased to know that there are comprehensive websites in English for all three of them: [Disneyland Resort Paris](#), [Hong Kong Disneyland](#) and the [Tokyo Disney Resort](#). It certainly gives you a good idea of what to expect when you get there, as you can certainly successfully negotiate all three, without really needing to speak a word of the native tongue.

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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