

Longwood Gardens, Pennsylvania: A Longwood Gardens Christmas

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are many wonderful places all over the world to visit during the holiday season, all special for many different reasons. Disney theme parks fall into that category and I'm sure you can think of many attractions near you that you can say the same of.

Perhaps the one that's had the most impact on me in recent years, outside of Disney of course, is one that I'd never heard of, until a friend introduced us to it a few years ago. Last Christmas we then carried the tradition on, introducing our friends, who lived only a couple of hours' drive away, to it as well.

The place is Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, about 30 miles outside of Philadelphia. It has a fascinating history and one that you can explore in the exhibits in the Gardens, but it's a story worth knowing a bit about before you go. It was really the result of one man's dream (sound at all familiar?!) and that man was industrialist Pierre du Pont, who was also a conservationist, designer, and farmer, skills he brought together at Longwood Gardens. He purchased the estate in the early part of the 20th century to save the trees in the existing Pierce Arboretum.

Mr. du Pont was also a keen traveler and evidence of that can be seen everywhere in the gardens. I was fascinated to learn that, in just one trip to Europe, he visited 50 different French chateaux. We managed to tour two or three on a recent visit to the Loire Valley, so I can start to imagine how breathtaking that journey through the various chateaux must have been.

Although the estate is open to the public year round, and you can visit attractions like the Pierce-du Pont House, which looks at the history of the site, the real attraction at this time of year are the outdoor lights. Now, we're not exactly talking the Osborne Spectacle of Lights here, but what we are talking about is something very magical.

From almost the second you pass through the entrance, you can see trees in the distance, all decorated in twinkling lights. Of course, at that time of the year it gets dark early and both times we've visited, we've either arrived in the darkness or just as it was becoming dark, when the lights come into their own. In total, there are approximately half a million lights and, in the main, each tree tends to be decorated in just one colour, be it red, blue, green, silver or gold, which makes for a more

striking picture postcard view. The lights may not dance for you, but they do immediately bring the magic of Christmas to life in front of your eyes.

The starring role of any Longwood Garden Christmas, for us, is the huge Conservatory, with its stunning indoor displays. Each year, these change just a little bit, but you can always guarantee that the perennial Christmas flower favourites, the poinsettia, will take center stage in the displays here. Having recently come from Walt Disney World and been disappointed by how few poinsettias they had, I was delighted to see so many here. There are many other floral delights in the Conservatory as well, with lilies, orchids, and beautiful amaryllis just some of those that come to mind.

As if the sight when you first walk into the Orangery of the Conservatory isn't breathtaking enough, they always save the best for the Exhibition Hall, at the back of the building, where their huge Christmas tree is located. In 2009, it was a floral carpet, made up almost entirely of red or white poinsettias, drawing out a diamond design, surrounded by trees with gleaming white lights on them, completing the scene perfectly. A few years earlier, when we had visited, there had similarly been poinsettias, but in a very different display, based around water.

From here, you can enjoy two recently renovated rooms, neither of which were accessible on our first visit. The Music Room was built in 1923 for private entertaining by the du Ponts and is complete with walnut and silk panelled walls, grand fireplace, and some amazing moldings. The room was set out as if for a banquet, with wreathes and Christmas trees dotted around.

Next door, the ballroom was being put to good use, with a concert of Christmas carol favorites, using the magnificent pipe organ.

Although we didn't get to enjoy them on our most recent trip, another definite highlight are the dancing fountains, which have a more magical appeal during the holiday season. You can even purchase tickets for ice skating shows, although there is an additional charge for these.

Our evening at Longwood Gardens was perfectly rounded off by a superb dinner at their restaurant, the 1906, which we were all very impressed with. It's on a par with the signature restaurants at Walt Disney World, both in terms of the quality of the food and the prices, and is well worth a visit.

A Longwood Gardens Christmas runs this year from November 25, 2010

.....

until January 9, 2011. During that time, admission into the park is by timed tickets to ensure that it doesn't become overcrowded. They're sold in half-hour intervals throughout the day and evening, although once you enter, you can stay as long as you like. We've tended to opt for late afternoon entry on our visits, as you do need to allow a good couple of hours to get the best out of Longwood Gardens.

Of course, the only downside with timed tickets is that you have to decide on the date and time you're visiting in advance and this time around, the weather wasn't at all kind to us, with almost continuous heavy rain during our visit. The quieter times to visit are weekdays and before December 24, although we found December 26 to be a perfect time to visit, with some of the booked crowds no doubt put off by the appalling weather.

During the holiday season, the gardens are open from 9:00 am until 9:00 pm, remaining open for an hour later on Saturdays and from December 26 to 31. For more information, visit www.longwoodgardens.org

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: 09-23-2010

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/longwood-gardens-pennsylvania.html>

Copyright by Cheryl Pendry. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>

.....