

## D23 Expo Report: Disney's Official Fan Expo

by Sara Varney, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

Comic-Con with Mickey Ears is one of my favorite descriptions of the D23 Expo, recently held August 19 -- 21, 2011 at the Anaheim Convention Center. (Mickey-Con was another favorite.)

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□It's an apt description! A Disney fan's dream, the D23 Expo is Disney's Official Fan Expo.

I have been lucky enough to attend both the Inaugural Expo in 2009 and the most recent Expo earlier this month. And while my experience was from the perspective of an Exhibitor and not a Fan, the Expo is one of my favorite events to attend even though I spend a vast majority of my time in a booth in the Collector's Forum.

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□Here are some of the highlight as well as lessons learned from this year's Expo:

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□- Disney's Carousel of Projects Exhibit. This interactive exhibit from Walt Disney Parks & Resorts featured an intro film leading into an exhibit area with tons of goodies to ooh and ahh over. Ride vehicles from the forthcoming Cars Land attractions, a prototype of the Seven Dwarves Mine Train car, models of the Fantasyland Expansion and Disney Cruise Line Fantasy and more! But the pinnacle for me was turning around to see John Lasseter a few feet away, surrounded by execs. As I began to approach, a girl of about 10 dressed as Sleeping Beauty got there first with microphone in hand and Father/Videographer in tow. She was adorable and John Lasseter very sweetly gave her a 5-minute interview explaining all the attractions in Cars Land to her! He was very nice and so kind to a young would-be journalist. (I never got my picture but that was ok. He did give me a smile and a thank you when I backed off to let the cute kid go instead!)

- The Walt Disney Studios Presentation. I was lucky enough to attend the Walt Disney Studios Presentation on Saturday morning. John Lasseter presented first looks at upcoming Pixar films including Planes (featuring Jon Cryer as the Voice of the Dusty the Crop Duster), Brave (my personal favorite as it features Pixar's first female lead character, with lots of red curly hair and big blue eyes. Needless to say I will be buying lots of Brave merchandise&hellip;), Monsters University complete with appearance by Billy Crystal, S wreck It Ralph, and two as-yet-untitled projects -- one about Dinosaurs and one about what happens inside our minds. Pixar wrapped up their presentation with

cupcakes to celebrate their 25th anniversary! Yum! The live action branch was up next with sneak peeks at films such as John Carter, The Odd Life of Timothy Green (a real tear jerker based on the clips shown!), Chimpanzees and the most anticipated Marvel project -- The Avengers, complete with an appearance by most of the cast! Or in my case, Robert Downey, Jr., as he is the only one I had eyes for. (Although one of my male co-workers was quick to chide me for not mentioning Scarlett Johansson's appearance sooner!)

☐- The fans! The D23 Expo provides spectacular people-watching opportunities! I was really impressed with the quality of the fan costumes. Everything from the full range of Princesses to multiple Tinker Bells to, my personal favorite; the flying carpet from Aladdin (!) was walking the floor of the Expo. But more than anything, it was so much fun to be hanging out with people who all "get it." No one in that building would ever ask, "You're going to Disney AGAIN?"

☐- The Celebrity Sightings. In addition to the celebrity sightings on stage, there were quite a few to be spotted around the Expo floor. I crossed paths with David Arquette (there to promote Jake and the Neverland Pirates on Disney Junior), Constantine Maroulis (Rock Star Mickey), and newly-inducted Disney Legend, Archivist Dave Smith. (Mr. Smith is the only one I asked for a picture!) In 2009, I was lucky enough to meet John Tartaglia (Disney Channel's 'Johnny & the Sprites,' Broadway's 'Beauty & the Beast' and 'Shrek the Musical'), who was attending the Expo as a fan!

☐- The goodies! Everywhere you looked, there was Disney stuff to covet. From the inexpensive to the extravagant, if it had Mickey on it, it could be purchased at the D23 Expo. T-shirts? Check. Plush Disney characters? Of course! \$7500 replica of the Haunted Mansion? Huh?! But yes, this too was available and, in fact, bore a "Sold" sign! There was a fair amount of free swag available as well, so much that many an extra piece of luggage was purchased. Need to ship something home? United States Postal Service had a huge booth for exactly this purpose!

☐- Crowd Control. One lesson that the organizers of the Expo did not learn between 2009 and 2011 was how to manage the lines for the uber-popular Arena presentations. Many people who lined up early, or even paid extra for Premier or Sorcerers packages which were supposed to guarantee access, were shut out of presentations. This led to frustration and even the occasional scuffle in line. This was perplexing to me, as everyone knows Disney is the master of queue control! Then I learned that many of the employees in charge of crowd control were not, in fact, Disney Cast Members, but rather employees of the Anaheim Convention Center. This explained some of the less-than-magical attitudes that were observed, although this is no excuse.

☐- Food and Beverage. Lines were long, the food was mediocre, and prices were high. Soda machines were empty by Saturday afternoon!

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The food court at the Hilton was often the best bet for decent food, featuring Baja Fresh, Sbarro, and other options.

☐- Disneyland! The D23 Expo is responsible for both of my trips to Disneyland. Crowd levels are definitely higher than usual the weekend of the Expo, particularly in the evenings. If you can, plan a few days before or after the Expo to take time to really enjoy Disneyland.

☐The D23 Expo is a must for any die-hard Disney fan and a fantastic excuse to visit Disneyland. I am already counting the days until 2013!

*About The Author:* Sara Varney is the Editor of [PassPorter News](#), the Co-Host of the [PassPorter Moms Podcast](#) and a Travel Planner affiliated with [MEI & Mouse Fan Travel](#). More importantly, she is a proud wife and mom.

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