

Yuletide Magic: The Holidays at Walt Disney World

by Lee Ellen King, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Walt Disney World is a magical place all year long. Christmas time, however, at Walt Disney World, is the most magical time of all.

□ Could it be that extra sprinkling of Pixie Dust that turns magical into magically enchanting and whimsical? Christmastime at Walt Disney World makes you feel young again. Each park is festooned with decorations everywhere, beginning at the entrance, where a giant Christmas tree bids you welcome. Millions of lights twinkle, the air smells like gingerbread, there are miles of garland, and Christmas music is heard throughout the parks. Mickey and Santa together, a perfect combination. Christmas shines at Walt Disney World!

Main Street in the Magic Kingdom has been transformed into a Christmas wonderland straight out of a Currier and Ives painting, complete with falling snow. Cinderella Castle stands in the center of this wonderland, glistening, frozen with shimmering icicles, thanks to 300,000 twinkling lights. I call it the "Frozen Castle" and never get tired of looking at it.

□ On select nights there is Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party, featuring Mickey's Once Upon a Christmastime Parade. The parade features dancing gingerbread men, marching wooden toy soldiers, and prancing reindeer wearing jingle bells. The floats are aglow with twinkling lights. One of my favorite floats looks like a toy train made of gingerbread and peppermint candies and at the top of the train, Goofy is riding a bicycle. Behind him is a giant gumball machine, and when he pedals, the gumballs dance. Mickey and Minnie, wearing their most festive holiday finery, wave from their float adorned with a giant Christmas tree. Clarabell Cow is in her kitchen baking all kinds of Christmas goodies. As her float goes by you can actually smell the gingerbread. Chip and Dale are at a ski lodge and delight in throwing snowballs at the parade viewers. Cinderella and her Prince are in her glass carriage, which is pulled by six miniature white ponies. The grand finale of the parade is Santa in his sleigh, carrying the largest toy sack imaginable. As you watch the special holiday fireworks, snowflakes are projected onto Cinderella Castle. And what would a party be without hot chocolate and sugar cookies? You can find them everywhere in the Magic Kingdom during this extraordinary and fun Christmas party.

□ Epcot is especially gala at Christmas. At the front entrance you are greeted by Mickey and Minnie topiaries wearing Christmas hats. While

wandering around Epcot, I always linger at the Fountain of Nations. I love this fountain. The water soars high into the air and dances to heart-quickenning classical music. At this time of year the music changes to Christmas melodies and becomes even more exciting. One of the most beloved, heartwarming, and truly inspirational holiday traditions at Epcot is the Candlelight Processional. Accompanied by a mass choir and a 50-piece orchestra, a celebrity narrator tells the story of the birth of Christ, according to the Gospel of Luke. The Candlelight Processional lets you feel the true meaning of the holidays. As you visit the pavilions of the World Showcase, storytellers from eleven nations tell how the season is celebrated in each of their countries. Among the storytellers are Le Befana in Italy, Julenissen in Norway, and Father Christmas in Great Britain.

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□ In Disney's Hollywood Studios the Osborne Family Spectacle of Lights should not be missed. It is indeed a spectacle, as every inch of building space for at least two blocks is covered with Christmas lights that dance and play in time to the beat of high-energy Christmas music. This amazing display uses over 5,000,000 lights! With snow falling and angels dancing, you can't help but to be in the most festive of moods.

At Disney's Animal Kingdom there is Mickey's Jingle Jungle Parade, with all the Disney characters at their festive best. This parade is just plain fun! Highlighting it are huge, puppet-like moving sculptures portraying exotic animals. These puppets are fun to watch, as they interact with the viewers. There are also stilt walkers dressed as animals, and when Minnie passes by you can smell cinnamon candy and cookies.

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□ A visit to Walt Disney World at Christmas is not complete without a visit to the resort hotels. They also glow with Christmas Spirit. Each resort is decorated according to the theme of the resort, beginning with a huge Christmas tree in its lobby that reaches almost to the ceiling. For example, the tree and decorations at Animal Kingdom Lodge have an African motif. At Coronado Springs Resort, the tree and decorations have a southwestern theme, and the Polynesian Resort has tropical island decorations throughout.

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□ Several of the resorts should especially not be missed. In the lobby of the Grand Floridian stands a giant sixteen-foot tall gingerbread house, that you can actually walk into. The whole lobby smells like gingerbread and grandmother's kitchen. There is a sign outside the house that reports that it takes 1,050 pounds of honey, 600 pounds of powdered sugar, 800 pounds of flour, 140 pints of egg whites, 35 pounds of spices and 180 pounds of apricot glaze to make this amazing, old-time Victorian gingerbread house. In the lobby of the Beach Club Resort

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there is an edible rotating carousel with ponies made of sugar, and candy cane poles. It takes one entire week to decorate each pony. The sign here claims there are 10 Hidden Mickeys on the carousel!

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□The Yacht Club has a train that travels around a giant mountain and a snowy village made of gingerbread. In the lobby of the Contemporary Resort is an all-edible Gepetto's Toy Shop made from 120 pints of eggs, 13 pounds of assorted spices, 150 pounds of royal icing, and 75 pounds of chocolate, among other ingredients. Also on the list of ingredients is lots of Pixie Dust.

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□A tour of the resorts should also include a visit to Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground, where you can enjoy a horse-drawn sleigh ride, complete with jingling sleigh bells, reminiscent of an idyllic New England Christmas card.

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□We all have special memories and "warm fuzzies" associated with Christmases from our childhoods. A Christmas at Walt Disney World will let you relive all these cherished holidays while you make new memories that will last a lifetime. Does it snow in Florida? It does at Walt Disney World during the Christmas holidays. After all, it's a magical place!

About The Author: Lee Ellen is a Travel Consultant for MouseEarVacations.com. She has visited Walt Disney World and Disneyland over 60 times, has been on two Disney Cruises and one Adventures by Disney.

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