

Pirates at Disney Parks Worldwide: Discover Your Inner Pirate

by Heather Macdonald, *PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)*

I'll admit it, I have a Pirate Problem.

I love that I live in a city famous for its pirate shenanigans. I can walk down Pirate's Alley and have a drink at Tony Seville's Pirate's Alley Bar. I can stop in at Jean Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop to listen to the piano player. We even have Pirate Week here in New Orleans. Those are right in my backyard, but my other "problem" has greatly increased my access to all things pirate. I'm speaking, of course, of my Mouse Problem. Most recently, Disney has nourished my interest in pirates with the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. I love those films--Captain Jack Sparrow and his crew visit my living room in a regular rotation, but my biggest attraction is to the attraction of the same name that inspired the films. And while there are four Pirates of the Caribbean attractions in Disney's world-wide empire, the closest to my heart is in Adventureland at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom, which was a regular part of my life as I grew up.

You pass by the Torre del Sol (Tower of the Sun), which casts its shadow across the plaza outside the attraction, and enter the dimly-lit Castillo del Morro, which is based on Castillo de San Felipe del Morro, the historic fortress in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Once inside, you wind your way through and past the different chambers of the fort. The highlight for me has always been the dungeon room hosting two chess-playing skeletons who will forever be locked in a stalemate. This scene was created by legendary Disney imagineer Marc Davis. The positions of the pieces on the chess board he created was nearly lost during the last rehabilitation of the ride, but an imagineer located Davis's original notes and managed to recreate the chess game. After walking through the creepy, dungeon-like fort, you board a boat for your cruise through the pirates' world. And while the attraction inspired the movies, the movies have now inspired the ride--characters from the movies have been added in to the original attraction, so you get to see Captains Jack Sparrow and Barbossa along the way.

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□At Walt Disney World there are several other ways to find your inner pirate. Outside the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, Jack Sparrow and a helpful crewmember can be found hunting for recruits, several times a day. Children can volunteer to join up and participate in on-stage antics with Captain Jack. Grown ups are of course welcome to watch and audience participation is encouraged if not commanded. This is a great

photo opportunity and lots of fun.

☐ While you are waiting to join the Captain's Crew you can have lunch at a pirate-themed restaurant, Tortuga Tavern, which is named after the island of ill repute that appears in the movie. The menu is decidedly Tex-Mex and you can grab a burrito or some nachos to keep up your pirate strength. Tortuga Tavern replaced El Pirata y El Perico last year, though mostly it was the name that changed.

Finally, if you really want to find your inner pirate at Walt Disney World, for the small fee of \$29.95 you can sign up to become a member of the Pirate's League. Budding pirates can choose from six different makeup designs, including one for lady pirates, and leave their everyday identities behind. Pirates-in-training are renamed with a special pirate name that is based on their birthday. Next their choice of makeup is applied, the new pirate takes the Pirate Oath, and is welcomed by all of the pirates in the League. Lots of pirate goodies, including an eye patch, bandana, sword, and pirate necklace are gifted to the new pirate. Finally, the new pirate gets to visit the Treasure Room. I would tell you what's inside, but I'd be breaking my pirate oath if I did! This experience is offered to both adults and children above the age of three. They also have the option of purchasing their pirate photo for \$14.95. The new pirates are invited to a special Adventureland Pirate Parade at 4:00 pm every day, departing from the Pirate's League.

☐ Over on the West Coast at Disneyland Park, the pirate experience is a little bit different. The Pirates of the Caribbean ride is located in New Orleans Square. This is the original version of the ride, and for my money is far superior to the version at Walt Disney World. The attraction begins in Lafitte's Landing, named for famed pirate/privateer Jean Lafitte, who I've already mentioned is near and dear to the soul of New Orleans residents. As you board your boat and the ride begins, those who are familiar with the Walt Disney World version will be in an entirely new experience, drifting past wooden houseboats, fire flies, and an overall ambiance reminiscent of the Louisiana bayous at dusk. The two versions then have many scenes in common, but there is a whole section that was not included in the Disney World version of the ride. On a recent visit I rode over and over, just to photograph the scenes that are different.

☐ Disneyland also boasts a sit-down restaurant that will help you get in the mood to be a New Orleans pirate. Blue Bayou stands on the very edge of the Pirates of the Caribbean bayou, and you can watch the ride boats (and their passengers) floating along before they plunge deeper into the attraction. The Blue Bayou menu is based on the food of Southeast Louisiana, and every meal comes with a cup of gumbo (unless

you'd prefer a salad). Also on offer are specialties like jambalaya and macque choux. The ambience resembles what you'd find sitting on someone's porch at dusk, out on a Louisiana bayou.

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□Also at Disneyland you will find that Tom Sawyer's Island has gained some pirate influence. The fort on the island has become the Pirate's Lair. You'll find some familiar names here as well; Smuggler's Cove, Dead Man's Grotto, and Will Turner's Blacksmith Shop. There's a shipwreck to explore, and once again Jean Lafitte is referenced, this time in Lafitte's Tavern, where the Bootstrappers might be performing pirate tunes.

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□Outside of the United States you can find nearly identical copies of Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland Paris. The Paris ride doesn't (yet) include the characters from the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. If you'd like to see what the ride looked like before Jack Sparrow invaded, you can head to France for a spin on the original ride! Also in Paris you can journey to Adventure Isle to discover Captain Hook's ship and Skull Island. Adventure Isle merges the pirate cultures of Peter Pan, Treasure Island, and Pirates of the Caribbean. I can't wait to get across the pond to visit this area!

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□Pirates of the Caribbean has long been rumored to be joining the list of attractions at Hong Kong Disneyland, but with all of the new construction going on over there, I believe it's been put on the back burner. There have been pirate celebrations at Hong Kong Disneyland, but none exist at this time.

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□If you are looking for pirates at the Disney parks, there are plenty of places to find them. I'm getting ready to plan an entire morning around the pirate offerings at Walt Disney World. Have you found your inner pirate?

About The Author: Heather is a PassPorter Message Board Guide (moderator). She lives in New Orleans and works for a major hotel chain as a bartender. Heather visited Walt Disney World as a child and after surviving Hurrican Katrina, thought it would be the perfect escape vacation! She loved it so much that she has been 10 times in the last five years.

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