

Princess Merida Play & Greet: A Disneyland Character Meet

by Randy Crane, PassPorter Guest Contributor

There's a new Princess meeting fans at Disneyland Park and Walt Disney World, but this isn't your run-of-the-mill Disney character meet-and-greet.

Meet Merida, star of the newly-released film Brave!

Walk with me through Disneyland, past Sleeping Beauty Castle and the Matterhorn. Past Alice in Wonderland and the Storybook Land Canal Boats. Back to the area called "Small World Mall," the terraced area in front of it's a small world. A whole new play-and-greet experience has been set up on the righthand side .

□ What makes this different? Well, to start with, the Cast Members are in kilts, and there is Scottish-sounding music playing -- which provides an interesting contrast with the "it's a small world" music playing quite audibly nearby. And that's just the start of the fun! When you get to the entrance to the area, you have two choices. Go to the left and get in line to meet Merida, or go to the right and enter the Games & Crafts area. I, of course, chose to go right.

□ In the Games & Crafts section are four activities. First, spin the wheel for the chance to "change your fate" and find out what Scottish clan you're from. Actually, the Cast Member spins for you, because it's a large wheel and spins easily. One good tug and it could spin for several minutes! It turns out I'm from the same clan as Merida!

From here, guests move into a two-part coloring area. In the first, there are four stones, corresponding to the four clan possibilities on the Wheel of Fate. Here, you can do a rubbing of a character from the movie. For Merida's clan, the image is of her father (I did mine in purple). A little bit past the stones is a coloring area where younger guests can color pictures of characters from the movie.

□ If the wait is long enough, or you're of a mind to keep playing games, beyond the coloring station is a bean bag toss game. I know what you're thinking, though ... what about Merida!? After participating in the first two activities, I decided it was time to meet the lady of the hour.

□ I have to be honest, the line for Merida moves rather slowly. That can be frustrating when you're farther back in the line, but as you get closer the reason becomes apparent, and when it's finally your turn, the wait is

appreciated. Merida spends quite a bit of time with each guest, regardless of their age. When my wife and I were there, we talked to her for a couple of minutes about what part of Scotland she's from, the mischievousness of her bear cub friends (more on that in a moment), and even her being a redhead. It was wonderful to get that kind of personal interaction!

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□The photo area has several props and decorations that set the scene, including a bow and archery target, but it is the three bear cubs behind her that really steal the show. I don't want to spoil too much of the surprise, but I will say that they move and make sounds. They pose for the pictures, and interact -- in a somewhat limited way -- with Merida and the guests. I could easily stand there and watch the bear cubs for an hour, they are so entertaining.

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□So, you've got your picture with the character, and now you're done, right? Not so fast! A few yards past the photo area is an archery range, staffed by helpful Cast Members and, of course, a second PhotoPass photographer. Guests are given a bow, and an arrow with a large, soft (probably foam) tip, and a little bit of instruction. You then shoot the arrow and try to get it in the bullseye -- an open area in the center of the target. I don't know if you get anything for making it in, because neither of us did! My arrow hit the top and bounced away, and my wife's hit the inside and bounced out ... apparently we shot the arrows too hard.

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□In total, we spent a little over 30 minutes in the entire play-and-greet area. As frequent Disneyland visitors, it was worth the time and we'll probably go back and do it again.

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□If you don't have the luxury of spending a lot of time in this experience, here are a few tips to help you get the most out of meeting Merida, without eating up a good part of your morning or afternoon.

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□1) Check the Times Guide for when Merida will be out, and then go early! The Cast Members won't rush you through the Games & Crafts area, so you can take your time there if you choose to, but going early before it gets busy means the amount of time you spend is your choice. Of course, if you just want to meet Merida (and the bear cubs), bypass the play area entirely.

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□2) If you have smaller children that might have difficulty waiting in a longer/slower line, consider having one adult wait in the greeting line while another one takes the child over to the Craft & Game area. Just be sure to keep an eye on each other so you can reconnect before it's time to meet the Princess!

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□3) The rubbing of the clan image as well as the coloring pages are free, so make use of them if you're inclined to at all. It's not often you get a free souvenir at Disney, right?

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□Merida is an excellent addition to the lineup of character greetings, and this one is more interactive and engaging than many, so I strongly suggest making it a point to come meet Merida…or at least watch the bear cubs!

About The Author: Randy Crane is a Travel Consultant affiliated with CruisingCo. & [MouseEarVacations.com](http://www.MouseEarVacations.com), and lives with his wife in Southern California. To call him a "Disneyland regular" or a "Disney fan" is a considerable understatement.

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