

# Star Wars Weekends: Feel the Force at Disney's Hollywood Studios

by Mary Kraemer, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The appeal of the Star Wars saga has endured since the mid 1970s and has captivated generations of fans in the imaginative world created by George Lucas. Among some of the most passionate fans in this -- or any other -- world, Star Wars fans love the opportunity to get together.

So, isn't Disney's Hollywood Studios a perfect place to showcase Star Wars? With its detailed ATAT walker, Forest of Endor, and village from Tatooine, it seems a logical choice as a multi-weekend home for Star Wars fans and characters alike. You don't have to go to a galaxy far, far away; you only have to go to Walt Disney World!

I had the chance to be at Disney's Hollywood Studios for the Star Wars Weekends opening weekend, and it was lots of fun, especially for fans! The excitement starts just outside the gate with a large Star Wars billboard; this year's logo features Yoda and Mickey with light sabers.

Inside the park, there are special Star Wars Weekend fliers that are almost identical to the usual park maps, except that they describe all the excitement planned for that weekend, such as celebrity hosts and a list of actors who will be appearing in the park. These actors are from the live-action movies as well as the animated movie and TV series.

The park map on the fliers has specific Star Wars weekend locations noted by icon. The Rebel Alliance icon shows the locations of activities such as the Jedi Training Academy (which, while offered year round, takes on much more significance and is highly popular during this weekend), Padawan Mind Challenge, Hyperspace Hoopla, as well as rebel character encounters, autograph locations, and FastPass distribution locations. The Imperial logos show the location of Imperial character encounters, including Darth Vader, and celebrity speeches and talk shows focusing on their Star Wars involvement. Certainly, you can't go away from an event like this empty-handed. So the Imperial logo also shows the location of Wicket's Warehouse, a treasure-trove of Star Wars merchandise, where you can find a variety of shirts, costumes, pins, plush figures, light sabers (shh, don't tell my son about that), and limited edition merchandise such as the limited edition watch, pins, and this year's Star Wars Big Figs (large figurines). My favorite was the figure of Donald impressed on a metal door much like Han Solo. Star Wars-themed backdrops are also available for great action shots!

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One of the big events of the day is the special Star Wars parade, a great opportunity for the crowds of fans to see their favorite characters as well as a few Disney characters that are in the spirit and have dressed up Star Wars-style. The actors ride in convertibles along the parade route, waving to the folks on the packed parade route. There are troops of Imperial Storm Troopers marching along, as well as other characters such as Tusken Raiders, who are sure to excite the true Star Wars fan as they pass by. There was even a speeder bike built into the costume of a scout trooper! Darth Vader makes an imposing figure as he sweeps down the parade route, cape flying behind him.

Fans know all these characters, but to see them in person, without the special effects of the movies, it's really magical. Many fans turned out dressed in costume, some painstakingly elaborate. I don't know how many hours it took Minnie Mouse to get her hair to look just like Princess Leia's, but it was perfect. During the day, I frequently saw characters, such as storm troopers, walking around the park, adding more atmosphere to the occasion.

Disney, which knows how to handle crowds in an efficient manner, puts its efficiency into use for these weekends by using the FastPass system for the autograph sessions. Without it, the lines would be terribly long and unpleasant for the fans and barely manageable for crowd control. FastPass tickets are limited for each actor's autograph and are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. Unlike the regular FastPass distribution, each guest must be present to receive their FastPass ticket; you cannot send one person to get FastPasses for your entire party. After the FastPass tickets are distributed, there are "stand-by" tickets available, but those tickets will not guarantee getting an autograph.

The actors give autographs at specific times. Having the FastPasses on a timed basis eliminates standing in lines for hours, so fans can enjoy more of their day at the Studios. Unlike regular FastPasses, which are distributed by machines near park attractions, these passes are distributed outside the park's main entrance, and, depending on demand, can be distributed even before the park opens to help avoid congestion.

For the true Star Wars fan, this event is extremely fun and puts them in touch with The Force. If you aren't a fan, then it might be a good idea to make plans to visit the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, or Animal Kingdom instead!

For fans who can't travel to the Star Wars weekend, the Studios has the much-loved Star Tours ride, where you fly with Captain Rex, and there's

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the Jedi Training Academy, which is always a favorite with young aspiring warriors ready to strike a blow with light sabers against the evil empire.

*About The Author:* Mary Kraemer, a travel consultant with [CruisingCo/MouseEarVacations](#), loves to travel with her husband and four children. She is an avid Disney fan who visits Disneyland several times a year and just returned from a trip to Walt Disney World and the Disney Cruise Line!

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