

## Characters in Flight: A Downtown Disney Attraction Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There's one thing I've learned over the years, it's that people are very divided when it comes to heights.

It seems to me that you either love heights, or hate heights.

Fortunately, I fall into the former category, and something I love is being able to get up as high as I can in any city I visit to look down at it from below. The London Eye, Empire State Building, Chicago's Willis Tower -- been there, seen the view from all of them over the years, and as soon as I heard about Disney's Characters in Flight balloon at Downtown Disney, I wanted to be there as well!

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□The idea of going up in a balloon at a Disney park isn't new. Disneyland Paris has had its Panoramagique since 2005, residing at Lake Disney, which has the Disney Village (their version of Downtown Disney) at one end, and some of the resort hotels surrounding it. Sadly, whenever we've been at Disneyland Paris, the thing's never been flying, always stubbornly anchored to the ground.

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□I was worried that would be the same story with Characters in Flight at Downtown Disney, and so it proved to be during our first trip to Walt Disney World after the balloon's debut. Every time we tried, we were told that the wind was just too strong, and I did begin to wonder if our luck would ever change, but fortunately it did. Perhaps timing it early in the morning helped? I don't know, but it certainly helped to ensure that we had a very empty balloon for our flight.

We paid the fee (\$18/adults, and \$12/children aged 3-9, with kids under the age of three flying for free), and headed along the walkway to the Characters in Flight balloon. We were joined by just one other couple, which was absolutely perfect, so if you want a quiet flight, then be prepared to get up early would be my advice! Like everything else at Downtown Disney, it will only get busier as the day goes on. I'd really hate to go up in Characters in Flight on a day when it was crowded, as I can imagine that moving around from one side to another may be quite a challenge.

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□Once we were in the balloon, we took off, ascending at a reasonable speed, but not too much. I certainly enjoyed the sensation of lift-off, and didn't feel as if we were going too fast. Even though it was a still day, I could feel the wind gently moving us around, and it was bumpier

than I expected, despite the fact we were tethered. Suddenly I could understand why these balloons sometimes don't fly, even if there doesn't seem to be much wind around.

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□The first thing to know before you go on Characters in Flight is that it's not a long experience. I was expecting it to be a bit longer, but in total, it's no more than about 10 minutes, and in truth the vast majority of that time is spent either ascending or descending back to the ground. We had only a couple of minutes right at the top, although it didn't matter than much, as you get superb views almost as soon as you take off.

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□I wasn't sure what to expect in terms of views, but they were amazing. Of course, you'd expect to see all across Downtown Disney, with Saratoga Springs on the shores opposite, but I had no idea how much more would be visible.

□If you want to go up in Characters in Flight, I would suggest checking the weather forecast carefully, not just to see how windy it will be, but also to see whether there'll be any mist around. We've had our share of foggy mornings, where we could barely see the Tower of Terror from the intersection that leads to the Yacht and Beach Club, BoardWalk, and Swan and Dolphin, and if you get one of those days, it will affect what you can see from above.

□We lucked out completely on the weather, and I suspect we had almost full visibility, which stretched right across Disney property. As we lifted up, I could see Old Key West sprawling beneath us, then I started to see parts of both Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios. Suddenly, I realized that in the distance there were some more familiar sights to be seen. I spotted the Contemporary, and its neighboring resorts, and then I could make out the spires of Cinderella Castle. As I made my way around the balloon, taking in the sights beneath us, I could put more names to the buildings beneath, including the water parks, and a number of the resorts. The Caribbean Beach Resort was there, along with Pop Century. It was fascinating to put it all in perspective from up there. Although I think we all know how big Walt Disney World is, it's only when you actually fly over it that you can actually take in the scale of the property.

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□All too soon, we were on the way back down. I did feel that the journey was over too soon, and that I could have happily spent another five or even ten minutes up there, just soaking in the sights.

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□If heights don't bother you, this is something I'd highly recommend to any Disney fan. I found it to be a very pleasant experience, and although the admission price is perhaps a little high for the amount of time you have in the air, Characters in Flight is still a wonderful addition

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to the line-up of things to do at Downtown Disney.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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