

New Fantasyland at the Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney World Theme Park Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

As most of you are probably aware, Walt Disney World has recently experienced what's been called the biggest expansion in the history of the Magic Kingdom, with Fantasyland doubling in size.

Like many of you, I was exceptionally excited to see the Fantasyland expansion for myself on our most recent vacation.

I'll start by saying here that I'd already seen photos of the Storybook Circus area, the Be Our Guest restaurant, and the new Ariel ride, which had helped to heighten my excitement considerably. They all looked superb. However, what I hadn't seen in any photos prior to our trip was what's in the middle of these two new elements of Fantasyland, and I think it's worth covering that before I go any further.

□ Essentially, as you approach the far end of Fantasyland, where the expansion is centered, you'll see a crane. It's not a huge surprise, as work is still ongoing on the new Seven Dwarves Mine Train, that my PassPorter tells me is due to open in 2013-14. However, what did come as a nasty shock to me is the location of that ride. For some reason, I had assumed that it was at the back of the expansion work, meaning that everything that had opened would be immediately obvious, with the building work taking place behind it. Completely wrong!

□ The Mine Train is located right between the two new elements. As far as I can see, it will almost be the glue that holds the whole thing together once it's completed. Unfortunately, that means that while work is ongoing, you have a massive building site slap in the middle of the newly expanded Fantasyland. It's not what I expect from Disney, as usually any work they're doing is carefully hidden away. Here, you can't miss it, and the Imagineers have even tried to make a focal point of it by providing viewing areas, so you can see what's happening on site. Despite this, I found that it had the effect of detracting from everything else that's already been completed, as I struggled to truly immerse myself in the theming of either area.

Now I'll try and put that to one side as I look at the expansion. Let's start in the Storybook Circus section. It's certainly vibrant, and fun, as you'd expect from anything that's got a circus theme to it. The first thing you see as you enter are the "double Dumbos" to the right. It's about time

that Disney added more capacity to this exceptionally popular ride. I wish I'd had a chance to try it in its new location, but sadly the times we passed by it, it was later in the day, and pretty busy.

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□ I have to be honest, the other big attraction here, the Barnstormer, re-themed to include the Great Goofini, while nice to see, did nothing for me. A real coaster wimp, I've been on it once, and that was enough for me! How this is a children's coaster is beyond me, as I found it pretty intense.

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□ Something I wasn't prepared for was the Casey Jr. Splash 'N' Soak Station. It's a water play area right next door, and with all the focus on the big rides, I had no idea that this would be here. It was a delight to see, and I'm sure a delight for kids to play in as well. They certainly seemed to be having fun when we visited!

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□ It was also nice to see a brand new Fantasyland Station for the Walt Disney World Railroad, as the previous Toontown version was looking very shabby, and desperately in need of a rehab. The area is also home to a character meet and greet, and there's a separate area where you can get your FASTPASSES for both Dumbo and the Barnstormer. I'm assuming this area will, when Fantasyland is finished, link through to the other side, but at the moment it's a frustrating dead end, forcing you to retrace your steps back into the old Fantasyland.

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□ Once you pass by the Mine Train work, you enter Belle's Village. Here, the first attraction is Enchanted Tales with Belle, allowing you to explore Maurice's cottage and workshop. I so wanted to do this, but I wasn't prepared to stand in line for the 75-minute wait posted there, and yes, you did read that right! It seemed as if Disney had underestimated the huge draw of this attraction, as it seemed to be consistently mobbed. If you want to see it, definitely make a beeline for it first thing in the morning. We didn't make it until 9:15 am one morning, and 15 minutes after park opening the wait was unbelievable.

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□ Something else which had unbelievable waits while we were there was Be Our Guest, the latest addition to dining at the Magic Kingdom. I've heard mixed reviews of this place, and despite my repeated attempts, I couldn't score a dinner reservation there, so I was hoping to get a look inside during our trip. Sadly, we were told in no uncertain terms by the cast members that we couldn't go in to get photos unless we were planning to buy some food in there. We could've done that, but every time we thought about it, the line extended far beyond the bridge to the castle. Like Enchanted Tales with Belle, that will have to wait for our next trip.

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□Something we did get to sample was Ariel's Undersea Adventure, although again, we did witness some insane waits for it. I think 115 minutes was the winner during our visit! We got FASTPASSES for this ride, and part of me almost regrets that, as I know there's much more rich detail in the standby line, but even in the FASTPASS line, there's plenty to see. This was by far the closest I came to being immersed in the theming here. If only the Disney California Adventure version could have a line like this!

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□Speaking of which, the attraction is the same as its California counterpart, but for those who haven't seen it, this is classic Disney at its best, a ride through one of its famous movies, and personally I like it when Disney goes back to its roots like this, rather than planning more coasters (me being that coaster wimp!).

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□So all in all, what did I make of the Fantasyland expansion? I find it very hard to judge, as you really are looking at something that's not yet complete. I'm sure once it's done, it will hold much more appeal, as the whole theming will be apparent. I also know that had we been able to sample both Enchanted Tales with Belle and Be Our Guest, I'd have appreciated it so much more. I'm looking forward to our next visit, and trying both out when (hopefully!) they're less mobbed.

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□Right now, what I would say if you're heading to Disney for the first time since this opened is to be prepared. You're not getting the finished product, and I really didn't have that set in my head, so I went in with the wrong mind set. If you go in knowing that, you'll probably have a much better appreciation of the new Fantasyland expansion than I did at first visit. I can't wait to see the finished product, as I'm sure that really will be amazing, and something well worth seeing.

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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