Walt Disney World Resort World History Digest

MILESTONES

Early 1960s

After Disneyland opens in 1955, Walt Disney is approached many times to build another park. Offers of free land come from inside and outside the United States. Disney begins developing attractions for the 1964 New York World's Fair: General Electric's "Carousel of Progress," Ford's Magic Skyway," Pepsi-Cola's "It's a Small World" and the state of Illinois' "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln." Walt is absorbed with the technological achievements of his Imagineers and considers ways to expand.

1963-65

A team assigned by Walt begins searching for a location where he can build his dream park. When Walt flies over the initial 20,000-acre Central Florida site with its pristine wetlands and forests, his mind is made up. Secret purchases of the acreage and adjoining property continue for more than a year with the average price per acre at $185. In the end, the Disney company paid about $5 million for 27,000 acres (about 43 square miles) in Orange and Osceola counties ("Walt Disney, An American Original" by Bob Thomas, 1976, Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.)

November 15, 1965

Walt and his fiscally astute brother, Roy O. Disney, announce the Florida Project at an Orlando press conference with Florida Gov. Hayden Burns. "Believe me, it's the most exciting and challenging assignment we have ever tackled at Walt Disney Productions," Walt said. ("The Quotable Walt Disney," compiled by Dave Smith, Archivist, 2001 Disney Enterprises, Inc.) Walt says the project, estimated at $100 million, will comprise a Disneyland-type entertainment park, recreation areas and two cities – one traditional and one futuristic.

1966

Ideas based on Walt's dream crystallize as Imagineers prepare plans for EPCOT – an Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow designed as a showplace for technologies of the world. State legislation creates municipalities of Lake Buena Vista and Bay Lake and the Reedy Creek Improvement District, which allow Disney to pay for major services without depending on its Central Florida neighbors. Walt dies in December 1966 before construction starts.

Fall 1967

Site preparation begins

Spring 1969

Construction is underway on Magic Kingdom, the Polynesian and Contemporary resorts. More than 50 miles of water-control channels are built to wind through the natural landscape, and more than 8,000 acres are set aside as a permanent conservation area. The resort builds its own energy plants, maintenance shops, food and laundry centers.

Early 1970

It takes 18 months to complete Cinderella Castle and 9,000-plus workers at a cost of more than $400 million to finish the iconic Magic Kingdom park, Seven Seas Lagoon, Palm and Magnolia golf courses and the first two resort hotels.

October 1, 1971

Walt Disney World Vacation Kingdom opens with fewer than 10,000 guests

October 23-25, 1971

A star-studded Grand Opening celebration takes place with celebrities that include Bob Hope, Julie Andrews, Glenn Campbell, Buddy Hackett and Jonathan Winters. Boston Pops maestro Arthur Fiedler conducts the 60-nation World Symphony Orchestra concert. Roy O. Disney, reads the dedication plaque: *Walt Disney World is a tribute to the philosophy and life of Walter Elias Disney . . . and to the talents, the dedication and the loyalty of the entire Disney organization that made Walt Disney's dream come true. May Walt Disney World bring Joy and Inspiration and New Knowledge to all who come to this happy place . . . a Magic Kingdom where the young at heart of all ages can laugh and play and learn – together.* The plaque rests below the Town Square flagpole on Main Street, U.S.A.

December 1971

Inaugural Walt Disney World Golf Classic

April 1974

Treasure Island (originally called Blackbeard's Island and renamed Discovery Island in 1977) opens as a nature retreat

March 1975

Walt Disney Village (now Downtown Disney Marketplace) opens

June 1976

River Country water adventure park opens

October 1, 1982

Epcot Center grand opening (now Epcot)

May 1, 1989

Disney-MGM Studios opens (now Disney's Hollywood Studios)

June 1, 1989

Typhoon Lagoon water adventure park and Pleasure Island nighttime entertainment complex open

January 1994

Inaugural Walt Disney World Marathon

April 1, 1995

Blizzard Beach water adventure park opens

June 1995

Michael Eisner announces Disney's Animal Kingdom plans

July 1995

Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings pavilion opens

January 1996

Inaugural Indy 200 at Walt Disney World Resort

January 1997

Walt Disney World Resort celebrates 25 years

September 1997

Downtown Disney is the new name given to the entertainment, shopping and dining district comprising the new West Side and existing Pleasure Island, Marketplace

March 1997

Disney's Wide World of Sports opens

April 22, 1998

Disney's Animal Kingdom opens

June 1998

DisneyQuest indoor virtual interactive theme park opens at Downtown Disney West Side

July 1998

Disney Cruise Line launches first ship, the *Disney Magic*

December 1998

Cirque du Soleil *La Nouba* opens at Downtown Disney West Side

March 1999

Asia opens as new land in Disney's Animal Kingdom

July 1999

Disney's FASTPASS launches

August 1999

Disney Cruise Line's new ship, *Disney Wonder,* sails on maiden voyage

October 1, 2001

100 Years of Magic celebration begins and continues through 2002

October 9, 2003

Launch of Magical Gatherings program for Disney gatherings of 8 or more

January 2005

Launch of “Magic Your Way” ticket pricing

May 5, 2005

“Happiest Celebration on Earth” begins, celebrating 50 years of Disney parks

January 1, 2008

Disney-MGM Studios is renamed Disney’s Hollywood Studios

January 2011

Disney Dream, Disney Cruise Line’s biggest, most innovative ship sets sail

NEW ATTRACTION OPENINGS

1971:

26 Magic Kingdom attractions: Jungle Cruise; Swiss Family Treehouse; Sunshine Pavilion (Enchanted Tiki Birds); Cinderella’s Golden Carrousel (now Prince Charming Regal Carrousel); Dumbo, the Flying Elephant; Mad Tea Party; Mickey Mouse Revue; Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride; “it’s a small world”; Snow White’s Adventures; Diamond Horseshoe Revue; Frontier Shooting Gallery; Country Bear Jamboree; Mike Fink Keel Boats; Hall of Presidents; Haunted Mansion; Main Street horseless carriage, Jitney, fire truck, horse-drawn streetcar and omnibus; Main Street Cinema; Walt Disney World Railroad; Skyway; Tomorrowland Speedway; 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

1972:

If You Had Wings

1973:

Pirates of the Caribbean; Walt Disney Story; Swan Boats; Tom Sawyer Island

1974:

StarJets (now Astro Orbiter); “Magic Carpet ‘Round the World” film

1975:

Space Mountain; Carousel of Progress; WEDway PeopleMover (now Tomorrowland Transit Authority); Davy Crockett’s Explorer Canoes

1980:

Big Thunder Mountain Railroad

1982:

Five Future World & nine World Showcase pavilions at Epcot: Spaceship Earth; The Land; Journey Into Imagination; Universe of Energy; World of Motion; Canada; United Kingdom; France; Mexico; Germany; Italy; China; Japan; American Adventure

1983:

Horizons (Epcot)

1984:

Morocco pavilion (Epcot); “American Journeys” film (Magic Kingdom)

1986:

The Living Seas (now The Seas with Nemo & Friends) and “Captain EO” (Epcot)

1988:

Mickey’s Birthdayland (after birthday celebration it became Mickey’s Starland/Magic Kingdom); Norway pavilion (Epcot); Disney-MGM Studios (now Hollywood Studios) production facilities

1989:

Dreamflight (Magic Kingdom); Wonders of Life (Epcot); original Disney’s Hollywood Studios attractions: The Great Movie Ride; Studios Backlot Tour; Magic of Disney Animation; “Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!”; Behind the Scenes Special Effects walking tour; Superstar Television; Monster Sound Show

1990:

Star Tours; “Here Come the Muppets” show; “Honey, I Shrunk the Kids” Movie Set Adventure

1991:

“Jim Henson’s Muppet*Vision 3D” (Hollywood Studios)

1992:

Splash Mountain (Magic Kingdom); “Voyage of the Little Mermaid” (Hollywood Studios)

1993:

Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATLAS) Hall of Fame plaza (Hollywood Studios)

1994:

Innoventions (Epcot); The Twilight Zone™ Tower of Terror (Studios); “Legend of The Lion King” (Magic Kingdom); “Honey, I Shrunk the Audience” (Epcot); The Timekeeper (Magic Kingdom); Theater of the Stars (Studios)

1995:

New Tomorrowland (Magic Kingdom) including The ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter

1996:

Mickey’s Toontown Fair replaces Mickey’s Starland (Magic Kingdom); Universe of Energy debuts Ellen’s Energy Adventure with Ellen DeGeneres and Bill Nye the Science Guy (Epcot)

1997:

Richard Petty Driving Experience

1998:

Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin (Magic Kingdom); “The Enchanted Tiki Room-Under New Management” (Magic Kingdom); original Animal Kingdom attractions: The Boneyard; Countdown to Extinction; Cretaceous Trail; Kilimanjaro Safaris; Gorilla Falls Exploration Trail; Wildlife Express; Conservation Station; Flights of Wonder; Tree of Life “It’s Tough to be a Bug”

1999:

Test Track (replaces World of Motion-Epcot); Disney's Winter Summerland miniature golf course; Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith (Studios); The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (Magic Kingdom); Millennium Village, Leave a Legacy, Imagination! presented by Kodak (Epcot); "Sounds Dangerous Starring Drew Carey" (Studios); "Bear in the Big Blue House" (Studios)

2000:

DisneyQuest's interactive Pirates of the Caribbean adventure (Downtown Disney West Side)

2001:

The Magic Carpets of Aladdin (Magic Kingdom); "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire-Play It!" (Studios); "Walt Disney: One Man's Dream" (Studios); Chester and Hester's Dino-Rama! TriceraTop Spin (Animal Kingdom); "Playhouse Disney-Live on Stage!" (Studios)

2002:

Chester and Hester's Dino-Rama! Primeval Whirl (Animal Kingdom)

2003:

Mission: SPACE (replaces Horizons-Epcot); "Mickey's PhilharMagic" (Magic Kingdom)

2004:

Stitch's Great Escape! (Magic Kingdom); "Turtle Talk With Crush" (Epcot)

2005:

Crush 'n' Gusher (Typhoon Lagoon); Soarin' (Epcot); "Lights, Motors, Action! Extreme Stunt Show" (Studios); Lucky the Dinosaur (Animal Kingdom)

2006:

Expedition Everest (Animal Kingdom); Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique (Downtown Disney Marketplace)

2007:

"The Seas with Nemo & Friends" (Epcot) "Finding Nemo-The Musical" (Animal Kingdom); "Monster's, Inc. Laugh Floor," Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique and Pixie Hollow (Magic Kingdom)

2008:

Toy Story Mania! (Studios); Journey into Narnia: Prince Caspian (Studios)

2009:

"The American Idol Experience" (Studios); Disney's Kim Possible World Showcase Adventure (Epcot); Characters in Flight (Downtown Disney West Side); The Pirates League (Magic Kingdom)

RESORT OPENINGS

1971:

Disney’s Contemporary Resort; Disney’s Polynesian Resort; Disney’s Fort Wilderness Resort and Campground

1972:

Disney’s Village Resort (Treehouse & Vacation Villas)

1973:

Shades of Green (Disney Inn 1986-1993, Golf Resort 1973-1986)

1974:

Discovery Island; Pioneer Hall

1975:

Disney Village Marketplace; Fairway Villas

1977:

Empress Lilly Riverboat

1978:

Disney’s Polynesian Resort expansion

1980:

Walt Disney World Conference Center; Club Lake Villas

1988:

Disney’s Grand Floridian Beach Resort; Disney’s Caribbean Beach Resort

1990:

Disney’s Yacht Club Resort; Disney’s Beach Club Resort; Walt Disney World Swan; Walt Disney World Dolphin

1991:

Disney’s Port Orleans Resort

1992:

Disney’s Dixie Landings Resort; Disney’s Old Key West Resort (Disney Vacation Club-DVC); Bonnet Creek Golf Club

1994:

Disney’s All-Star Sports Resort; Disney’s Wilderness Lodge

1995:

Disney’s All-Star Music Resort

1996:

Disney Institute; Disney’s BoardWalk; Disney’s BoardWalk Villas (DVC)

1997:

Disney’s Coronado Springs Resort

1999:

Disney’s All-Star Movies Resort

2000:

The Villas at Wilderness Lodge (DVC)

2001:

Disney’s Animal Kingdom Lodge

2002:

Disney’s Beach Club Villas (DVC)

2003:

Disney’s Pop Century Resort

2004

Disney’s Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa (DVC)

2006:

Disney’s All Star Music Family Suites

2009:

Bay Lake Towers at Disney’s Contemporary Resort (DVC); Treehouse Villas at Disney’s Saratoga Springs Resort & Spa (DVC); Disney’s Animal Kingdom Villas opens (DVC)

ENTERTAINMENT HIGHLIGHTS

1971:

Televised opening with 1,076 piece marching band, 60-nation World Symphony Orchestra, Bob Hope, Julie Andrews, Glen Campbell; All-American College Band program debuts; Candlelight Processional debuts

1972:

First Easter parade and Grad Nites

1974:

Donald Duck’s 40th birthday; “Hoop-Dee-Doo Musical Revue” debuts

1975:

“Fantasy in the Sky” begins as a Disney-designed fireworks show

1975-76:

“America on Parade” bicentennial salute

1977:

“Main Street Electrical Light Parade” debuts

1978:

Mickey Mouse 50th birthday parade and first Christmas at Walt Disney World television special

1981:

Yearlong Tencennial Celebration

1982:

Epcot opens featuring entertainment from big bands and international folk groups

1983:

First live telecast of Christmas parade; “Mickey’s ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas” show (Magic Kingdom); “Holiday Splendor” show (Epcot)

1984:

Donald Duck’s 50th birthday parade (Magic Kingdom); WorldFest & “Laserphonic Fantasy” (Epcot)

1985:

“Skyleidoscope” and President Reagan reviews the Inaugural Bands (Epcot); Easter telecast; first Goofy Games ceremonies; Tinkerbell flies above Cinderella Castle for the first time (July 4)

1986:

15th anniversary kickoff; 15th birthday parades

1987:

“All America” parade (Magic Kingdom); “Daredevil Circus Spectacular” (Epcot)

1988:

Mickey’s 60th birthday parade; “IllumiNations” premiere (Epcot)

1990:

Pleasure Island nightly New Year’s celebration begins; “Dick Tracy” film world premiere at Pleasure Island; “Here Come the Muppets,” Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and “Sorcery in the Sky” (Studios)

1991:

20th anniversary with new shows and parades to celebrate: “Surprise Celebration” parade and “SpectroMagic” nighttime parade (Magic Kingdom); “Surprise in the Skies” show (Epcot); “Hollywood’s Pretty Women,” “Muppets on Location” shows, “Dinosaurs Live!” parade and “Beauty and the Beast-Live on Stage” show (Studios); Moulin Rouge (Epcot); Points of Light ceremony with President Bush (Epcot); Academy of Television Arts & Sciences awards

(Studios)

1992:

“Voyage of the Little Mermaid” show and “Aladdin’s Royal Caravan” parade (Studios)

1993:

Sword in the Stone (Magic Kingdom); “SPLASHTACULAR!” and “The Magical World of Barbie” show (Epcot)

1994:

First Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival, “Holiday IllumiNations,” and Candlelight Processional moves to Epcot and extends series (Epcot)

1995:

First Epcot International Food & Wine Festival (Epcot); “Toy Story Parade” (Studios)

1996:

“25th Anniversary Parade” and celebration, Mickey’s Not-So-Scary Halloween Party (Magic Kingdom); “IllumiNations 25? (Epcot); ABC Super Soap Weekend and “The Hunchback of Notre Dame-A Musical Adventure” show (Studios)

1997:

Spectacle of Lights with the Osborne Family Light Display (Studios); Holidays Around the World and Candlelight Processional (Epcot); “Mickey’s Very Merry Christmas Party” (Magic Kingdom)

1998:

“Fantasmic!” show and “Mulan” parade (Studios); “Festival of the Lion King,” “Pocahontas and Her Forest Friends,” and “Journey into Jungle Book” shows (Animal Kingdom)

1999:

“Main Street Electrical Parade” (Magic Kingdom); “Tarzan Rocks!” show (Animal Kingdom); Walt Disney World yearlong Millennium Celebration featuring new entertainment such as “IllumiNations 2000: Reflections of Earth” and “Tapestry of Nations” parade, also “Lord of the Dance” (Epcot)

2001:

100 Years of Magic celebrating Walt Disney’s 100th birthday and his legacy of creativity and spirit of adventure; new parades in all four theme parks – “Share a Dream Come True” and “Cinderella’s Surprise Celebration” (Magic Kingdom), “Tapestry of Dreams” (Epcot), “Disney Stars and Motor Cars” (Studios), “Mickey’s Jammin’ Jungle” (Animal Kingdom)

2002:

100 Years of Magic celebration continues throughout the year; SHOCKWAVE show (Epcot)

2003:

“Disney’s Spirit of Aloha Dinner Show”; “Wishes” fireworks show (Magic Kingdom)

2006:

“Dream Along with Mickey” and “Captain Jack Sparrow’s Pirate Tutorial” (Magic Kingdom); “High School Musical” Pep Rally (Studios); “The Year of a Million Dreams” launches in October

2007:

Jedi Training Academy immersive experience (Studios)

2008:

“The Year of a Million Dreams” continues; “Block Party Bash” (Studios); Disney’s Wide World of Sports rebranded as “ESPN Wide World of Sports”

2009:

“Celebrate a Dream Come True” parade, “Move It! Shake It! Celebrate It!” and “Stitch’s Supersonic Celebration” (Magic Kingdom)

2010:

“Disney’s Honorary VoluntEARS Cavalcade” (Magic Kingdom)

2011

“Let the Memories Begin” fireworks and show “The Magic, The Memories, and You” (Magic Kingdom)

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