

Walt Disney's Love of Trains Lives On at Walt Disney World Resort

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. – Walt Disney was always fascinated by the railroad. His uncle Mike was a train engineer, and as a teen, Walt sold gum, cigars and soda pop to passengers as the train made its daily stops at the railroad depot in Walt's boyhood home, Marceline, Mo.

When Walt grew older and moved to California, he built a half-mile scale model railway in his backyard. Guests young and old were invited aboard his Carolwood Pacific Railroad. In fact, Walt could often be seen straddling one of the one-eighth scale cars as it chugged along the sprawling track layout.

Later, when he began his grandest project — Disneyland — a railroad was one of the first attractions he placed in his new theme park.

"Walt built his larger model train at home, and it turned out to be one of the catalysts that got him thinking about Disneyland," says Dave Smith, director of Archives for The Walt Disney Co. "He had wanted a place where parents and children could have fun together, and this was happening in his backyard as he gave rides to his daughters and their friends."

When Walt began the design for what he called the "Florida Project" — now known as Walt Disney World Resort — he once again wanted the train station placed near the entrance to the park.

More than 30 years later, Walt's fascination with trains and the railroad is still reflected throughout Walt Disney World Resort.

Here are a few train-inspired attractions and locations at the Florida Vacation Kingdom:

- **Walt Disney World Railroad, Magic Kingdom:** Vintage steam-powered trains have transported guests around Magic Kingdom since the theme park's opening day in 1971. Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia originally built the brightly painted locomotives in the 1910s and 1920s. They were purchased from United Railways of Yucatan, disassembled and shipped to a Tampa, Fla., ship repair dock where they were renovated, bolt by bolt. The passenger cars were fabricated from scratch in the same warehouse where the locomotives were renovated. Originally wood burners, the locomotives were converted and currently are oil burners. The shiny steam engines take guests on a leisurely, 1.5-mile grand-circle tour around Magic Kingdom with stops at three stations — Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland and Mickey's Toontown Fair.
- **Expedition Everest, Disney's Animal Kingdom:** The newest train adventure at Walt Disney World Resort, Expedition Everest features a runaway train that combines coaster thrills with an encounter with the enormous creature that fiercely guards the route to Mount Everest. The fun involves out-of-control railcars that race forward and backward, sending guests swooping into the unknown to brave twists, turns and drops inside and outside a mighty mountain. It all leads to an unforgettable encounter with the yeti. Expedition Everest at Disney's Animal Kingdom is one of the attractions featuring Disney's FASTPASS.
- **"The Magic Behind Our Steam Trains Tour," Magic Kingdom:** Walt's passion for steam trains comes alive during a behind-the-scenes peek at the Walt Disney World Railroad. The three-hour tour takes place at Magic Kingdom where guests observe cast members preparing for the daily operation of the Walt Disney World Railroad. Cost of the tour is \$40 per person, and theme park admission is required. For schedules and more information, guests may call 407/WDW-TOUR (939-8687).
- **Wildlife Express, Disney's Animal Kingdom:** For most of Disney's Animal Kingdom guests, Wildlife Express is a novel way to travel by train in the newest Walt Disney World theme park. The train runs from the African village of Harambe to Rafiki's Planet Watch, an interactive center focusing on animals worldwide. But for railroad buffs, the

puffing steam engines and their open-air carriages provide a nostalgic adventure extending the legends of British railroading in the mountains and jungles of far-off colonies.

Three engines and two sets of cars were built in 1997 only a few miles from William Shakespeare's cottage in Stratford-on-Avon by the model-railroad firm of Severn Lamb, Ltd. The company has made trains for parks throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, including one for Disneyland Paris. Each five-car train at Disney's Animal Kingdom seats 250 passengers on contoured benches facing sideways. The Express travels a 1.2-mile circle-tour route built in narrow-gauge (3.3-foot rail width) to fit the scale of its Disney's Animal Kingdom surroundings.

- **Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Magic Kingdom:** One of Magic Kingdom's most popular attractions, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad is a mine train adventure with plenty of twists and turns. This E-Ticket favorite in Frontierland has been thrilling guests since 1980 and is one of the attractions that offers Disney's FASTPASS service. Led by a runaway mine train engine, guests ride in converted ore cars around Big Thunder Mountain — through gorges, redstone slopes, dry river beds and mysterious caverns.
- **The Walt E. Disney Suite, Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa:** One of the newest luxury guest suites at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa is devoted to the life and times of Walt Disney. The suite, which features two bedrooms, two and one-half bathrooms, a living room and an entry hall, is adorned with vintage photographs of Walt Disney and his wife Lillian enjoying many of their favorite pastimes. Walt's passion for trains is represented in the suite's entry hall by a replica of his Carolwood Pacific Railway locomotive in an enclosed presentation case. The centerpiece of the living room is a large painting featuring the trains at Disneyland.
- **The Carolwood Pacific Room, The Villas at Disney's Wilderness Lodge:** Disney Vacation Club, Disney's vacation ownership program, arranged with the Disney family for the loan of two of Walt's original backyard railway cars and a piece of the actual track, for display in The Carolwood Pacific Room, a living room-style area in The Villas at Disney's Wilderness Lodge. Surrounding the display are vintage photographs of Walt with his prized train. In addition to The Carolwood Pacific Room, each of the resort's Deluxe Villas tells the tales of the people who built and stayed in turn-of-the-20th-century railroad hotels in the national parks region of the Old West.