

Tokyo Disneyland: Businessman's Dream

Interview with Jack Myers,
director of marketing,
Walt Disney Productions Japan. Ltd.,
by Susan L. Scully

Like a mirage it rises, its festooned towers and turrets brightening up an otherwise bleak strip of land lining the eastern shores of Tokyo Bay. Unlike a mirage, however, which is a fantasy of a reality, this is a reality of fantasy.

This is Tokyo Disneyland, Disney's first overseas theme park, built at a cost of \$600 million, not including land or the salaries and living expenses of the estimated 200-250 American employees dispatched from U.S. headquarters at any given time since construction began in the spring of 1981.

Opened to the public on April 15, Tokyo Disneyland is divided into five different "theme lands"—the World Bazaar, Adventureland, Westernland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland—where guests can choose from some 32 attractions, 27 eating facilities and 40 shops. Covering 114 acres, the park itself is about one and a half times the size of the original Disneyland in California and contains four entirely new attractions—Meet the World, the Eternal Sea, Pinocchio's Daring Journey and the Mickey Mouse Review.

Tokyo Disneyland, in the once-sleepy fishing village of Urayasu, some six miles from the capital, is owned and operated by Oriental Land Co., Ltd., whose major shareholders are the Mitsui Real Estate Development Co., Ltd. and Keisei Electric Railway Co., Ltd. Negotiations between Oriental Land and Walt Disney Productions started in 1974, and the final contract was signed five years later. According to the agreement, Disney did not have to invest a penny. Oriental Land, aided by an undisclosed amount of borrowed capital, financed the entire project, including the at-cost purchase of technology from Disney for



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a rumored \$100 million. In turn, although officials will not verify this, Disney is said to be receiving 10% of the proceeds from the gate and attractions and 5% from food and merchandise sales, an arrangement that will reportedly continue for 45 years. With some 10 million visitors expected in the first year of operation, estimates as to what will be added to Disney's coffers by next April range as high as \$40 million.

Below, in an interview with Jack Myers, director of marketing, Walt Disney Productions Japan, Ltd., some more facts and figures about this "place made of dreams."

*A line from the Tokyo Disneyland theme song.

Q: Why was Japan and, in particular, Urayasu, chosen as the site for Disney's first overseas theme park?

A: We get offers all the time to build Magic Kingdoms throughout the world. But there are a number of reasons why we picked Japan. First was the fact that the Japanese public is growing as far as their leisure time and also as far as their per capita spending are concerned. So they're becoming more leisure-oriented and more interested in this type of facility. And then the second point is that we worked out a deal that we felt was advantageous to Walt Disney Productions.

As for the choice of Urayasu, that was primarily the decision of Oriental Land. For our part, we looked at it from the standpoint of whether or not this was a good population base to put a theme park in. When we started negotiations, we thought it would be very advantageous. Highways were being expanded, and the Japanese National Railways had plans to put in a railway system before we opened that had the ability to drop 100,000 people an hour right at our front gate, if we wanted it. We still have never done 100,000 a day anywhere, and this was 100,000 an hour. This plan, however, has been held back for a number of reasons, but it is expected to materialize in 1986 or 1987. On the other hand, however, it should be pointed out that some 30 million Japanese, a population roughly equivalent to that of the State of California, live within a 30-mile radius of the site.

Q: Why hadn't Disney gone into such an overseas venture prior to this one?

A: Well, I think the biggest thing was that we were building Walt Disney World in Florida, and our next major expansion project was to develop Walt's dream of EPCOT Center. EPCOT is an acronym for Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. In any case, when Walt decided to move to Florida, we bought

27,000 acres there, not only to build a Magic Kingdom and hotels and so forth, but also for this futuristic area, which we just opened.

Q: *In other words, you had other priorities.*

A: Right. As you know, Disney is very aggressive as far as marketing is concerned, but, on the other hand, a new venture like this takes a lot of planning. As it turned out, though, we built Tokyo Disneyland and EPCOT Center at the same time.

Q: *Did Walt Disney Productions have any misgivings about this, its first overseas venture?*

A: There's always the fact that you're taking a Disneyland and putting it into a whole different type of culture. And, in this case, it was a culture that's pretty far away from the American type of culture. So, if anything, it was a question of whether the Japanese public would accept a Disneyland in Japan.

Q: *Well, the projections look fairly optimistic—10 million visitors during the first year. How do you break that down by Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and weekdays?*

A: I don't really have that figure right off the top of my head, but I guess the safest thing to say is that we expect a higher attendance on weekends and holidays than on regular weekdays.

Q: *You'll probably have a lot of students and young people and families on the weekends and holidays, but what sort of guests do you expect on the weekdays?*

A: There will be students on weekdays, too, coming on school field trips. We really feel that Tokyo Disneyland is a tremendous educational activity and experience for schoolchildren. At Walt Disney World, we have a number of different school programs—on energy, on environment, on design, on architecture, on art, on entertainment. And most of the schools in the United States have allowed the students to leave for three days just to come and experience these programs. We are trying to establish that same thing for Tokyo Disneyland. Our school programs are not yet fully developed here, but today, for example, we have more than 500 schoolchildren in the park, and that will just keep building. As far as other people on weekdays, it will be housewives and retired people. And then we will also have younger management, who have a certain number of holidays that they can take off, and college students. But you're right. The traditional family will probably not come on weekdays.

Q: *The rain and relatively cold weather here have been cited as a problematical factor for Tokyo Disneyland. How do you think this will affect your business?*

A: Well, what we've done here is really designed the park for the weather. Main Street in the World Bazaar is totally glass-enclosed. And then the attractions are also constructed with this in mind. There are only four of them that are directly affected if it rains. And one thing that I have found just amazing and that I think will really help us is that the Japanese are

so used to adverse weather that even those four attractions don't seem to bother them. Dumbo is one where you're out in the weather. And on Sunday, when I was walking around in the park, there were people waiting in line with their umbrellas. When they got on Dumbo, they just took down their umbrellas. And then there's Grand Prix. They usually go on that in pairs; one holds the umbrella and the other drives the car. They even go on the canoes in the rain.

Q: *What about traffic congestion? Have you had a problem with that so far?*

A: Right now, it's not a big problem for us. We're being able to handle it. Of course, if there's an accident or something like that, then it's a problem. But this is one of the major reasons that we introduced the reservation system to regulate the number of guests on any given day. We look at our guests' experience as really starting when they leave home and lasting until they arrive back home. So we wanted to make sure that they weren't caught up in a crowd of 150,000 people with the expressway all backed up.

Q: *Recently, some other amusement facilities in Japan have run into financial difficulties. How does that reflect on Tokyo Disneyland's future?*

A: We have every reason to expect Tokyo Disneyland to be very, very successful. And I think the reason that we'll be successful over and above what any other attraction or anything else would be is the fact that, first of all, we appeal to the entire family. So the father and the mother and the children can have a great experience. That's one of the things I find most rewarding about watching the Japanese public come into the park. They react the same way as Americans. If anything, they react even better, and the whole family seems to be enjoying themselves.

The second thing is that it's impossible to see Tokyo Disneyland in a day or two days or three days. The attractions are so designed that you just can't see everything at once. I've been on Pirates of the Caribbean I'd say 20 or 30 times, and every time I see something I didn't see before.

I think that another thing is the way we've designed the park. Actually, we've overdesigned the park, so that you can't possibly comprehend or absorb everything. Every time, it's a new experience. And we have a master plan, too, to increase attractions periodically to increase return visits—to give people a new reason to come back.

In addition, there really isn't anything like it in Japan. My experience here is limited, but from what I hear, Japan is rather like California in the 1950s. Most of the amusement parks at that time were designed for throw rides for the children and really weren't something that the whole family could enjoy. Walt went with



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In just over a month, Tokyo Disneyland hit the one-million-visitor mark.

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his daughters to these amusement parks and was impressed by the fact that there wasn't anything much for the adults. So what he wanted to do was to let the motion picture jump out so that people could have an on-hand experience as a family. And that's what Disneyland was. Disneyland took the amusement park industry and just completely elevated it into a whole different theme type of experience. We've had a lot of copies since then in the United States, but they still aren't a Disneyland because they don't have the technology that we put into a park.

Q: *What seem to be the more popular attractions in Japan, and how does this differ from the pattern in the United States?*

A: Well, there's very little education as far as everything we have here before the guests come in. So what we're finding is that our Japanese guests are gravitating toward the things they know best, and the things they know best are the cartoon characters. So they go right for the Fantasyland attractions. The other attraction that they go for very heavily is the Mark Twain Riverboat in Westernland because all our promotion was based around the riverboat. Space Mountain is another very popular one—very visual. So right now, we're finding that some of the attractions that we thought would be most popular and are most popular in America are not receiving as much attention as we expected.

Q: *In Tokyo Disneyland, you have introduced a number of ideas that are rather new to Japan, one of them being a ban on bringing your own food into the park. A box lunch is an old Japanese tradition that may die hard. How is this rule going over?*

A: We're not finding very many people

who are upset. We have picnic grounds outside the gates if they want to bring their own food. They can put it in a locker, then get it out, go to the picnic area and come back later at no extra charge. All they have to do is get a stamp on their hand.

The reason behind this regulation is that we wanted to keep the atmosphere of the park intact, and we thought that people lounging around on benches and that kind of thing eating from their own lunch boxes really took people back to the reality of a normal experience. When you walk through the main gate and get on the World Bazaar, we want you to forget about reality and your everyday life and just completely lose yourself in the Disney experience. So that's the main reason. Another factor is that we think our food is very good and competitively priced to make sure that you're getting good value for the money you're paying for it.

Q: *What were your marketing strategies prior to the opening of Tokyo Disneyland?*

A: Our marketing has been primarily designed to inform the public that the real Disneyland is coming to Japan. We've taken surveys, of course, and we've found that the respect of the Japanese public for the name Disneyland is very, very strong. It's a lot like Mickey Mouse. And there's a growing awareness.

The other philosophy was not to over-build that image too early so that we kind of burned out the story before it existed. So what we did is that we had press events. We had the castle-topping ceremony and we had an opening date announcement ceremony. Then we had a costume fashion show, an entertainment show, a food show and a merchandise show. So we brought the press out for specific in-

stances to show them one of the aspects of the Tokyo Disneyland experience. In this way, the momentum kept building and the awareness kept building. The advertising we did was mainly to kick off the reservation system. Everything else was primarily publicity. And working through that, awareness just kept growing. Last fall, the awareness of Disneyland in the Tokyo area was 50%; then it reached 70%, and, right now, it's about 95%. So I think it's worked. At the moment, we're advertising, but the major reason for that is that there have been incorrect reports saying that we're totally booked out for reservations for the first six months. That simply isn't true. We still have plenty of availability on weekdays and we still have availability on holidays, too. So we want to get that misconception out of the way.

Q: *How about for the next six months or so?*

A: Our biggest emphasis right now is to motivate as many people as possible to come on weekdays because that's really our best experience. We have a Passport Ticket sold on those days giving guests unlimited access to the attractions, and it's less congested. So we want to make sure that our potential guests realize that. And then, as we get into the fall, we'll start creating special events, new reasons to return or reasons to come out for specific dates. So we're developing our market plan right now.

Q: *Tokyo Disneyland has been criticized as being a "clone" of the California version. Do you have any comment on that?*

A: I really don't feel it is. Tokyo Disneyland has a whole different personality from Walt Disney World and Disneyland. In Tokyo Disneyland, the designers have had their third chance at building a theme park. And what they've done is taken the best aspects of Walt Disney World and Disneyland as well as the technology that we've developed with EPCOT Center and brought them together here. In my opinion, and in the opinion of all the corporate executives who have been here, this is the most beautiful of the three parks. It's also designed to handle crowds better—there are no bottlenecks in it. The attractions have so much more detail and the merchandise and food locations are much better constructed inside. So I think that each of our Magic Kingdoms has a different atmosphere and that the third time has been the best time. ●

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