Disneyland RESORT News

“it’s a small world” 50th Anniversary History & Fun Facts Around the World

Around the world, Disney is celebrating the 50th anniversary of “it’s a small world,” which debuted at the 1964 New York World’s Fair as an exhibit to salute UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund). Since UNICEF is dedicated to the welfare of children all over the world, the theme for “it’s a small world” became an international voyage celebrating the happy spirit of children everywhere.

Now considered a quintessential Disney theme park experience, “it’s a small world” can be found at five Disney parks on three continents. The parks and attraction opening dates are: Disneyland Park in California (May 28, 1966), the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida (Oct. 1, 1971), Tokyo Disneyland (April 15, 1983), Disneyland Paris (April 12, 1992) and Hong Kong Disneyland (April 28, 2008).

The design of the iconic “it’s a small world” dolls – bold yet childlike – was created by Walt Disney Imagineering art director Mary Blair, who was honored as a “Disney Legend” posthumously in 1991. Blair also created artwork for such classic Disney films as “Cinderella,” “Peter Pan” and “Alice in Wonderland.” Her sense of design and use of color and shapes enhance the storytelling for “it’s a small world” and have influenced every version of the attraction since the 1964 original.

By the Numbers, Around the World

• Around the world, hundreds of millions of riders have experienced “it’s a small world” and many have walked away singing the catchy little song … for days!

• During a 16-hour operating day in the parks, the “It’s a Small World” song is played, on average, 1,200 times.

• Although specific numbers vary, each version of “it’s a small world” worldwide features at least 240 Audio-Animatronics figures representing children around the world. In addition, each version of the attraction features dozens of props and toys.

• A 30-foot-high clock tower is the centerpiece of the entrance to “it’s a small world” at Disneyland in California, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland. Each clock marks every quarter hour with a parade of colorful international “characters,” along with animated props and music.

Fun Facts about “it’s a small world” at Disneyland Resort

• After two hit seasons at the New York World’s Fair in 1964 and ’65, “it’s a small world” moved to Disneyland in California, where it was expanded and then reopened as a major attraction in 1966. Shipping stickers with 1965 dates can still be found on the back of some set pieces.

• Guest research has found that one in four Disneyland guests – families with children and those who grew up riding the attraction – consider “it’s a small world” a tradition. They plan a voyage whenever they visit the park.

• At Disneyland, the attraction has a specific doll that is a nod to Mary Blair, the Disney Imagineer who designed the dolls. Blair appears as a little blonde with glasses, flying from a balloon over the Eiffel Tower in the Paris scene.

• Disneyland Resort Horticulture creates and maintains a widely admired menagerie of animal-shaped topiary plants outside “it’s a small world.” It often takes five years before a topiary figure is ready for its onstage debut.

• A new “it’s a small world” tradition began on November 27, 1997, with the debut of “it’s a small world” Holiday at Disneyland in California. Each holiday season, the attraction undergoes a festive holiday redressing with new decorations, soundtracks, costumes, props and effects. The show depicts children of the world celebrating the joys of the season, and the “It’s a Small World” tune becomes part of a medley featuring “Jingle Bells” and “Deck the Halls.” The “it’s a small world” Holiday also exists now at Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland Paris.

Fun Facts about “it’s a small world” at Walt Disney World Resort

• The façade of “it’s a small world” in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World is incorporated architecturally into Fantasyland integrated with the facades of other attractions rather than set apart. The inside queue area, however, features an intricate three-dimensional white-and-gold façade similar to the outside façades at the other attractions worldwide.

• The Pinocchio Village Haus restaurant at Walt Disney World has a window that overlooks the queue area. Guests in the restaurant’s seating area can wave to riders as they start their voyage.

• During extensive refurbishments in 2004-2005, the clown piloting a hot air balloon in the “it’s a small world” Finale at Walt Disney World changed his demeanor. He now smiles and carries a balloon in his hand. Formerly, he frowned and carried a sign saying, “Help.”

Fun Facts about “it’s a small world” at Tokyo Disneyland

• The “it’s a small world” attraction at Tokyo Disneyland features the largest Japan section of any version.

• Although the façade is modeled on “it’s a small world” at Disneyland in California, the Tokyo Disneyland façade is done in a greater variety of colors rather than the white, blue and gold palette of California.

• As in Florida, the Tokyo Disneyland “it’s a small world” has an indoor boarding area. The boarding area features a unique 360-degree mural in the Mary Blair style, depicting landmarks (the Eiffel Tower, Tower of Pisa) and landscapes of locations around the world.

Fun Facts about “it’s a small world” at Disneyland Paris

• The holiday version of “it’s a small world” at Disneyland Paris includes scenes celebrating Diwali in India, Saint Lucia’s Day (Italy and Scandinavia) and Ded Moroz, the Russian equivalent of Father Christmas.

• For Disneyland Paris, a new arrangement of the theme song was orchestrated by Emmy Award-winning composer John Debney and performed by the London Chamber Orchestra in conjunction with 60 of the finest studio musicians in London.

• A team of 18 seamstresses, tailors and milliners worked for two years in the Creative Costuming shop at Disney’s Hollywood Studios in Walt Disney World to create the dolls’ traditional costumes for Paris. Authentic materials were used for each region, including silks for the Indian saris and fine wool for the Scottish bagpiper.

• The attraction stands out as the largest in Fantasyland and is dressed up in 150 different colors of paint.

Fun Facts about “it’s a small world” at Hong Kong Disneyland

• The compass rose in the forecourt of “it’s a small world” at Hong Kong Disneyland has arrows pointing in the direction of eight major cities, along with the distances from Hong Kong. The cities include Bangkok, Nairobi, Mumbai, Paris, Beijing, Seoul, New York and Manila.

• The score for “it’s a small world” at Hong Kong Disneyland features Chinese instruments: the Xiao, the Guzheng, the Pipa and the Erhu.

• “it’s a small world” at Hong Kong Disneyland adds four new languages to the song: Cantonese, Putonghua, Korean and Tagalog.

• The Cantonese lyrics were originally written more than 30 years ago by lyricist James Wong for a Disney musical in Hong Kong. They are still sung by Hong Kong children today!

How “it’s a small world” is Similar Around the Globe

• Each “it’s a small world” attraction worldwide continues the theme of children of the world, represented by Audio-Animatronics dolls who sing the “it’s a small world” anthem in the language and costumes of their respective regions.

• At Disneyland in California, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland the façade of “it’s a small world” is a vast, whimsically stylized interpretation of world-famous architectural landmarks, such as Big Ben, the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower and the Tower of Pisa.

• At Disneyland in California, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland, dolls appear every quarter hour from the clock tower, in a procession highlighting cultures around the world. Guests may see a boy from Italy rowing a gondola, a kimono-clad girl from Japan with a parasol, a girl from Africa carrying a pot on her head, a boy from Mexico doing the traditional hat dance with maracas, a boy from Australia throwing a boomerang and a girl from Egypt posed as an ancient Cleopatra wall painting.

• Disneyland in California, Disneyland Paris and Tokyo Disneyland all have a holiday version of the attraction.

• Disneyland in California and Hong Kong Disneyland include “it’s a small world” dolls dressed as classic Disney Characters, including Ariel and Flounder (“The Little Mermaid”) in the Pacific Island scene; Mulan and Mushu (“Mulan”) in Asia; Aladdin and Jasmine (“Aladdin”) in the Middle East; and Donald Duck, Panchito and Jose Carioca (“The Three Caballeros”) in Latin America.

The Iconic Song

• The “It’s a Small World” song was composed by Richard M. and Robert S. Sherman, the Academy Award®-winning composers of “Mary Poppins,” at the request of Walt Disney. Arranged and orchestrated with instruments from all over the world – bagpipes in the attraction’s Scotland scene, Peruvian reed flutes, Tahitian drums, etc. – the music not only provides accents to each scene, it underscores the attraction’s theme of unity.

• The original concept for the attraction featured the dolls singing the national anthems of the various countries. The result was, in Richard Sherman’s words, “a cacophony.” The Sherman Brothers composed a simple song that could be translated into many languages and sung consistently throughout the attraction.

• With the 1992 opening of “it’s a small world” at Disneyland Paris, the cheerful “it’s a small world” anthem may be heard somewhere on the planet every hour of the day.

• “It’s a Small World (After All)” Lyrics

It’s a world of laughter
A world of tears;
It’s a world of hopes
And a world of fears.
There’s so much that we share
That it’s time we’re aware

It’s a small world after all.
It’s a small world after all,
It’s a small world after all,
It’s a small world after all,
It’s a small, small world.

There is just one moon
And one golden sun
And a smile means
Friendship to ev’ry one.
Though the mountains divide
And the oceans are wide,
It’s a small world after all.