

THREE ON 3

A trio of stories to enlighten, inform and entertain

1. News makers
2. Extraordinary
3. Oddly enough

QUOTE
OF THE DAY
"There are two great rules of life ... The (general rule) that everyone can, in the end, get what he wants if he only tries. ... The particular rule is that every individual is more or less an exception to the general rule."
Samuel Butler, English author (1835-1902)

In Hong Kong, Disney mixes magic, feng shui

By Laura Holson
New York Times News Service

When building the new entrance to Hong Kong Disneyland, Walt Disney executives decided to shift the angle of the front gate by 12 degrees.



They did so after consulting a feng shui specialist, who said the change would ensure prosperity for the park. Disney also put a bend in the walkway from the train station to the gate, to make sure the flow of positive energy, or chi, did not slip past the entrance and out to the China Sea.

Heeding the advice of a feng shui consultant is one of many steps Disney executives have taken at the park to reflect the local culture — and to make sure they do not repeat some mistakes of the past.

When Disney opened Disneyland Paris in a former sugar beet field outside Paris in 1992, the company was roundly criticized for being culturally insensitive to its European guests. Now Disney burns incense ritually as each building is finished in Hong Kong, and has picked a lucky day (Sept. 12) for the opening.

The financial stakes are high: International growth is a critical part of Disney's expansion efforts. In Asia, Mickey Mouse, Buzz Lightyear and Winnie the Pooh are hardly household names, and Disney wants to change that.

Mainland China is expected to become one of the world's largest tourist destinations in the next 15 years, according to the World Tourism Organization, an international group that oversees policy issues. That trend bodes well for Disney, as Hong Kong itself is already

in the top 15.

"It used to be Disney was exported on its own terms," said Robert Thompson, a professor of popular culture at Syracuse University, "but in the late 20th and early 21st century, America's cultural imperialism was tested. Now, instead of being the ugly Americans, which some foreigners used to find charming, we have to take off our shoes or belch after a meal."

Plans for Hong Kong Disneyland, Disney's 11th theme park and a replica of the original Disneyland, began in 1999 for the undeveloped Lantau Island, a 30-minute train ride from downtown Hong Kong. Built on Penny's Bay and flanked by mountains, the park is a venture with the Hong Kong government and the first of the parks that Disney wants to build in China, including one in

Shanghai. Disney invested \$316 million for a 43 percent equity stake in Hong Kong Disneyland; the rest is owned by the Hong Kong government, which contributed \$419 million.

Some of the dazzling visual effects and nods to cultural differences at Hong Kong Disneyland may seem like so much marketing. One of the park's main ballrooms measures 888 square meters, because 8 is thought to be a number of fortune, said Wing Chao, who is the master planner of architecture and design at Walt Disney Imagineering. In Chinese, the number four is considered bad luck so there are no fourth-floor buttons in the elevators at hotels in the park.

Cash registers are close to corners or along walls, where such placement is believed to increase prosperity. And in the

park's upscale restaurant, Crystal Lotus, Disney installed a virtual koi pond where computer-animated fish dart away from guests who walk on a glass screen. The pond is one of five feng shui elements in the restaurant; the others are wood, earth, metal and fire, which glows on a screen behind bottles in the bar. "We could not have real fire because of the fire code," said Chao.

After the mishaps at Euro Disney and problems with attendance at its California Adventure park in Anaheim, it's easy to understand why the company would take such pains. "I don't know anything about fire and kitchens and where fire belongs and what doesn't," said Jay Rasulo, president of Disney's theme parks and resorts division, "but I certainly have learned that you need to respect people."