



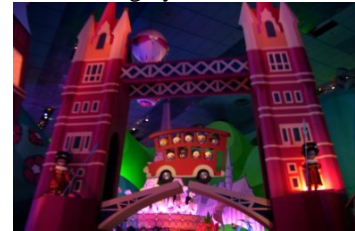
Disneyland Paris Review

By Joan Finder

It's a Magical Morning and I am walking down Main Street USA! Yes, there is City Hall and the Emporium, but why does the hat shop say Chapeaux? Oh well, straight ahead, there it is.... The castle! But somehow it seems a brighter pink and a bit taller. . And now the counter service cast member is handing me.... a croque monsieur and café au lait? This IS Disneyland, isn't it? Yes, it must be—because there he is: Mickey Mouse himself with his wide grin, saying ... “Bon Jour”?! Is this a dream? No, it's a dream-come-true! I am an American in Paris—Disneyland Paris!

I never thought it was possible that a park could be even more beautiful than Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, or Walt's original Disneyland CA, but Disneyland Paris achieves it. The details and the colors are just breathtaking, especially the pinks and blues reminiscent of the Impressionist Art for which Paris is known. Walking up MainStreet USA, which feels comfortably familiar and yet teasingly strange at the same time, the castle doesn't appear much different than the Walt Disney World castle, until you walk around to the side and see the huge hill, boxed trees, waterfalls and lawns leading up to it. Plus, it even has a sleeping dragon in the cave below who wakes and breathes smoke! And if you go up the stairs, you can read the story of La Belle Au Bois Dormant, in French, of course, or just follow the tale of the Sleeping Beauty through a series of shining stained glass windows and elegant tapestries.

Although the decor of the park surpasses its American originals, the rides and attractions are largely the same, including Dumbo, Peter Pan, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, but most feature a few differences in theming or effects. Space Mountain Mission 2 still shoots through the dark, but only after a steam inducing rocket-powered blast-off and a few inversions. “It's a Small World” or “Que le Monde est Petite”, celebrates the children of the world, but you will float by a Canadian Mountie and moose, a Midwest farm boy and his wagon, and a big Hollywood sign. Phantom Manor bewails the saga of a Wild West widowed bride, and even the TeaCups have a lovely cupola suspended overhead. While there is no Splash Mountain, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom is an original multi-looping coaster adventure ride, and attractions such as Le Passage Enchante d'Aladdin, Alice's Curious Labyrinth and Les Mysteres du Nautilus offer a new, if somewhat calmer, experience.



Just across a small plaza is the Walt Disney Studios Park, very much based upon the park in Florida which inspired it. If you missed the famous “Partners” sculpture at the hub of Disneyland park, you'll find it here, as the park is a tribute to Walt and his creations, featuring such familiar attractions as the Art of Disney Animation, a Studio Tram Ride, the Moteurs...Action! Stunt Show Spectacular, Tower of Terror, and Rock' n' Roller Coaster. A fun live/film combination called CineMagique and a character show, “Animagique” contribute to the theme. The longest line in either park is for the brand new

Crush's Coaster. The two-hour wait kept us from riding the spinning cars, but rumor says that there will be a fast-pass ticket for this attraction in the near future.

One of our few disappointments was in the caliber of entertainment, which was somewhat less than we enjoy in the states. There were only two short DL shows, but the major show, Lion King, does not perform on Monday and Tuesday, the days of our visit. The “afternoon” parade, at 7:15 p.m., entitled “Once Upon a Dream” is based on the parade currently running in California, while the 10:35 p.m. evening parade, “Fantillusion”, is reminiscent of

SpectroMagic. The floats themselves are gorgeous, with brilliant color schemes and overflowing with waving characters. Both parades stop for special effects performances, though unfortunately we found ourselves staring at empty pavement during these times, so I would caution any newcomer to ask a cast member for recommendations on where to watch.

Language is not at all a problem as everything is in both English and French, with many announcements in German, Spanish and Italian as well. I felt as if I was at Epcot. But it was fun hearing Mickey and Minnie speaking French! And of course, there are plenty of opportunities to try out your newly expanded language skills with almost any character you might wish to meet and greet.

Just as at home, the early admission given to hotel guests was worth every penny of the hotel stay, as the park was almost empty during these two hours but quickly became very crowded upon official opening. Both parks are much smaller than their American counterparts, so we had no problem feeling as if we had seen what we wanted to see in our short visit: a day and a half was fully adequate, since we didn't feel a need to ride the more familiar rides like Tower of



Terror and Rock N Roller Coaster. However, if we were not veterans of dozens of trips to both CA and FL, or if we really wanted to experience all the rides, at least two full days, if not three, depending on the time of year, would be recommended. Another important difference between the US parks and Paris is that the fireworks are only presented from mid-July through early September, which is high season. Just as the hours vary seasonally here, we were able to take advantage of longer hours with the park open until 11 p.m., which helped offset the longer lines.

Food is somewhat more expensive than in the US, as is generally the case in Europe, especially given the weak dollar. However, there were still a range of typical theme park dining options from burgers to character buffets to accommodate all budgets and appetites. A typical counter service meal (sandwich with fries or salad; pizza; or pasta, with drink) ran about 9-12 Euros or approximately \$13 - \$18. And yes, you can get a coke, with ice. We especially liked Bella Notte in Fantasyland for its Lady and the Tramp décor, as well as for the good value pasta meals. We ate lunch at Walt's American Restaurant, one of the upscale restaurants. It is somewhat expensive but elegant, Victorian in style, with photos of Walt and his family scattered about. We had read that the meal, in typical European fashion, would take a full two to three hours, but an advertised forty minute express lunch special drew us in, and we were indeed in and out in about an hour. The House Cafe Au Lait is not to be missed, as it arrives with a plate of small French pastries. Bon Appetite!

We had chosen to spend a few days in Paris before moving to a Disney hotel, and were happy with that decision, since the park is actually about an hour outside of Paris, although it is easily accessible by commuter train. In fact, Disneyland is the end of the line, and the station literally delivers you to Disney's doorstep. Our lodging, Hotel Santa Fe, was very much a "value hotel", with rooms about the size of the All Stars. The lack of an elevator made the third floor a bit of a trek with luggage, but the rooms were clean and perfectly adequate for our short stay. The bus service was dependably every fifteen minutes, but there is also a pretty path along the river, for a fifteen or twenty minute walk to the park. The continental breakfast was plentiful (yogurt, cheese, fruit salad, cereal, ham, rolls and our favorite--chocolate croissants.) However, you have to select your dining time when you check in, and it seemed strange to decide on Monday what time I might want breakfast on Wednesday!



We walked past and briefly into the other hotels, which from the outside and lobbies, are much like the Deluxe hotels at Disney World, especially Newport Bay, which looks almost identical to the Beach/Yacht Club, but appears much larger, reputedly the biggest hotel in France! These hotels surround a lake, and have a little shuttle to take you to the parks, even though they are just a five-minute walk from the entrances. The Disneyland Hotel is awesome--it sits literally immediately in front of the Disneyland entrance; in fact everyone has to walk through an archway under it to enter the park--and looks very much like the Grand Floridian. If I ever win the lottery, I will celebrate by staying

there.

All dreams eventually end, but as we were checking out of our hotel our final morning, who should appear in our hotel lobby but Mickey Mouse himself, surrounded by children whose belief in magic does not require French, English, or any language but laughter. As the parade's song echoes, "just like we dreamed it."

Interested in a Disneyland Paris trip? We can help plan and book your Disneyland Paris trip just like we did for Joan. Contact us at info@familytravelgurus.com (Larison Travel)