

Christmas in California: Celebrating the Holidays at Disneyland

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Christmas is a special time for many people, and for us, whenever possible, it means one thing -- Disney

Until last year, more specifically it meant Walt Disney World. However, I always welcome a change, and when the opportunity arose for us to spend our first ever Christmas at Disneyland, I went for it, as I really wanted to see what the west coast had to offer during the festive season.

The first thing that's worth knowing is that Disneyland doesn't have the same level of events at Christmas as Walt Disney World, but then again, that's not a huge surprise, given there are only two theme parks, as opposed to four. I will say here that we missed one of those special events, which was the Believe... in Holiday Magic fireworks at the Disneyland Park, as every night we were there, we had other plans. In fairness, we saw Believe a few years earlier, and we weren't overly wowed by it, much preferring the more stunning fireworks displays at Walt Disney World.

□ One thing I was determined to see was the Christmas Fantasy parade. I knew it would be popular, because Christmas parades always are, and of course the parks were likely to be packed as we were visiting over Christmas itself (we arrived on Saturday, December 22nd), so I opted to book the Holiday Time at Disneyland tour, which shows you how they celebrate Christmas across both parks, with the finale being special front row seating at the parade. This is obviously a perk that people love, as we met a lot of locals on this tour who had taken it a number of times before, and were literally there for the parade seating. As soon as the parade started, I could see why, as we were in a perfect position.

□ So how did the Christmas parade compare to Walt Disney World? In terms of length, it reminded me of how the WDW parade was a few years ago. I may be wrong, but I swear that in Florida, it's got shorter in recent years. Outside of that, it was completely different, in terms of the floats they used, the famous names who appeared in it, and even the characters in between the floats, like the reindeer, bore no similarity to each other.

Something else that would be familiar to any Walt Disney World veteran was the wonderful ice effects on the castle, which were just as stunning here. I'm really glad they brought it over to the East Coast, as it's one of

my favorite things to see in Orlando, and a great addition to the parks.

☐ Outside of these things, the events taking place in the park were decidedly low key, and nothing to compare to say, the Osborne Lights. The Jingle Jangle Jamboree at the Big Thunder Ranch had various things to see, and do, including the opportunity to meet Santa, Mrs. Claus and some other Disney favorites in their Christmas gear (when I went there, I found Pluto doing meets and greets), play games, and meet various animals. I have to confess to being a bit disappointed when I made it over there, as I couldn't find the "goats of Christmas present" (seriously!) as I was looking forward to seeing those.

☐ Disney California Adventure had its own Christmas event, the Mad T Party at Hollywood Pictures, which was essentially a dance party featuring holiday songs. Although I thought it sounded interesting, with the Mad Hatter and Alice on vocals, and other Alice in Wonderland characters playing instruments, we were put off getting too close to it, as every time we walked past it, the music didn't appeal at all. I think we must be getting old, as I never thought I'd say that!

☐ Something that we did absolutely adore was Buena Vista Street's Very First Christmas, with the new addition to the park decked out with vintage decorations and a stunning 50-foot Christmas tree. It was just lovely to walk along here, both during the day and at night, and it was beautifully themed.

☐ Although it wasn't promoted on Disneyland's website beforehand, I thought one of the highlights of the festive season was the amazing theming in Cars Land. It was as if the Imagineers had been given a green light to be as creative and fun as they could be, combining all sorts of fun cars things into the Christmas decorations, with tire Christmas trees, a snow Mater, and a big Christmas tree outside the town hall made up with hub cabs. It was a joy to just wander around and see what they had come up with.

☐ The World of Color, the night-time spectacular at Disney California Adventure, is not to be missed at any time of the year, but especially so at Christmas, with an extra holiday segment added on to it, which was a lot of fun to see.

☐ However, as with any good Disney attraction, I've saved the best until last. The reason I really wanted to see Disneyland at Christmas was to be able to enjoy the holiday versions of two of the park's most popular attractions. One, Haunted Mansion Holiday, we'd experienced on a previous visit, as it's a combination of Halloween and Christmas, featuring Jack Skellington let loose in the mansion, with the thematic

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overlay in place for both seasons. We were blown away the first time we saw this, as it's almost not an overlay. For us, it felt like a completely new ride, with so much to enjoy and take in. We were still amazed by the detail in it this trip, and I think we could go on this many times before we see everything that they add in for the holidays.

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□ There's another attraction that undergoes a makeover just for Christmas, and that's "it's a small world." I knew that to create the holiday overlay, the ride is closed for a number of weeks, so I was aware it would be a fairly substantial change, but just like the Haunted Mansion, when I saw it for the first time, I was blown away by how different the ride was. Everywhere throughout the ride were holiday references, and I was sad we only got the chance to ride it once, as I would've loved to have experienced it again, as I'm sure there were some things we missed the first time around.

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□ Something that's worth knowing if you do plan on visiting Disneyland at Christmas, particularly around Christmas itself, is that both Haunted Mansion Holiday and It's A Small World attract huge lines. I don't think we've ever seen It's A Small World with a 60-minute wait, but we did on this trip! If you want to enjoy both rides (and they are not to be missed!), then make sure to hit them early in the morning if you can.

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□ So, all in all, how was Disneyland at Christmas? It was absolutely wonderful, and I wouldn't hesitate to go back again for a future festive season. It's very different, with some of the biggest attractions being holiday versions of two of the park's most popular rides, something Walt Disney World has shied away from in recent years. In turn, there are fewer major events, but despite this, there's still plenty to see at Disneyland, and if you get the chance to visit during the festive season, definitely take it!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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