

Visiting Disneyland Paris with a Pre-Schooler: A Disneyland Paris Planning Article

by Carolyn Brooke-Millward, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Last September, one of my work colleagues was encouraged by my obsession with all things Disney to think about a trip to Disneyland Paris with her son, who was 4 years old at the time.

□ Her husband was working away for a week in the middle of November, so she talked to him about taking their little one away on her own. He was a bit concerned about this, as none of them had ever visited a Disney park before and he was worried that their little one would get lost very easily! Luckily, she felt confident enough to go ahead with her plans, despite her husband's worries.

So in return for her buying me lunch one day, I gave my work colleague an hour of my time, and drew her up a list of good things to know about, plans to make, things to book/check, etc. I told her all the usual Disney tips that regulars would know about, such as deciding on exact dates, choices of accommodation to stay in, tickets needed, and travel details including transfer from airport to resort. I then guided her as to the best place to book all her requirements, and we drafted out a rough itinerary for her 5 day trip, bearing in mind that this would be guided more by her son's needs and requirements during each day -- little ones get tired very easily! I had to ensure that she didn't set her expectations too high and try to experience EVERYTHING there in just 5 days. (Although to be fair, Disneyland Paris is much smaller than Walt Disney World, with both parks within walking distance of each other, just like Disneyland in Anaheim.)

□ On my advice, my colleague downloaded park maps and I then talked her through them, showing her how to identify where the nearest restrooms and food places are, and the distances between the hotel and the parks/Disney Village. There are complimentary bus shuttles from the resorts to the parks, but by the time you have waited for them, it is quite often quicker to take a leisurely stroll past the lake and through the Disney Village to either Disneyland Park or the Walt Disney Studios.

□ In order to ensure her son was familiar with all the characters he would be likely to encounter, they watched a few Disney movies together, and then bought an autograph book and pen for him to collect signatures from his favourite characters.

As both her husband and herself were still concerned about keeping track of an active 4 year old while she was there on her own with him, she bought a tracker disc which she attached to the laces on his trainers, and then downloaded an App to her phone that tracked the disc, which I thought was a brilliant idea. I had already reassured her that it would be almost impossible for her son to leave a Disney park on his own, unless he tagged onto another family, and that if they did accidentally get parted there, then Cast Members would be extremely helpful and efficient at tracking him down again. However, the tracker disc was a very good back-up idea!

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□ They had opted not to purchase any kind of dining plan, because dining with a toddler can be a bit unpredictable anyway, and she knew that her son wouldn't enjoy a formal table-service dinner. However, she was very keen on having breakfast with Mickey and friends one day, so I recommended she go to Cafe Mickey in the Disney Village, where they would encounter Mickey and a whole host of other characters. As they were going at a quiet time of year, I told them they didn't need to book this in advance.

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□ So, how did it go? Well, from the picture I received from them at the Cafe Mickey one breakfast time, it looked like they were having a lot of fun! And the chat that we had afterwards proved that pre-planning is definitely the way forward when taking a pre-schooler for the first time to a Disney park. My colleague said that all the planning had really helped -- her son was very excited by the hotel and the Village, amazed by the parks, but a bit wary of the characters to start with, despite their familiarisation attempts before they went. However, once he got over his shyness and realised that Mickey, Minnie and friends were not as scary as he first thought, he happily interacted with them over the next few days! They both thoroughly enjoyed exploring and discovering exciting new things in both parks, and he really loved the rides they went on -- a particular favourite of theirs was the new Ratatouille: L'Aventure Totalement Toquée de Remy, which is a 3D ride unlike anything they had ever encountered before!

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□ She also said that one of the best things they did was to return to the resort for a couple of hours each afternoon, but that they did this quite early in the day, because the time of year that they were visiting meant that the Disneyland park tended to close in the early evening.

Therefore, they got up early, had breakfast in the hotel, (apart from the one day at Cafe Mickey, which her little one absolutely LOVED!), visited either of the parks for about 3 hours, took a 2 hour break, and then went back to whichever park they fancied most for the rest of the day.

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□ Spreading out their touring like this meant that they both made the

most of their time at Disneyland Paris, without being so exhausted after a couple of days that the rest of their time there was spoilt.

□ Once she saw how safe and secure the whole park and resort area was, my colleague stopped worrying so much about losing her son, too! They definitely returned from this short break tired but very happy, and with the beginnings of plans to visit Walt Disney World in Florida in the next couple of years! They also know that I would be more than happy to help with the planning of this next holiday for them!

About The Author: Carolyn is a life-long Disney fan from the UK, having made many visits to the parks in Paris, Florida, and California. Later this year will see her first visit to Disneyland in Tokyo and Hong Kong!

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