

## Disneyland's California Adventure: Take Another Look!

by Patty Winter, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Being a stepchild is tough. Just ask [Disney's California Adventure](#), the little brother to the most famous theme park in the world. Indeed, probably the most frequent comment about California Adventure is, "It sure isn't Disneyland."

No, it isn't, and it never will be. Many people who visited the park early on formed a negative impression of the park partly because of its actual deficiencies, but also because of the inevitable comparison to Disneyland. In my opinion, many criticisms of California Adventure's theming (or lack of it) are justified. But I also believe that the park has now come into its own and offers unique charms and pleasures. My heart will always belong to Disneyland, but I'm finding myself spending more and more time at Disney's California Adventure, and I don't think I'm the only one.

If you've visited California Adventure before and been disappointed, it's time to take another look. If you've bypassed it on previous trips to Anaheim, give it a try next time. Here's a guide to some of the best that the park has to offer.

As with other Disney theme parks, the entertainment at California Adventure is first-rate. The 45-minute show, "Disney's Aladdin--A Musical Spectacular" brings a Broadway-quality production to the Hyperion Theater. Kids love the high-energy parade featuring Disney-Pixar characters, "Block Party Bash, and the "High School Musical 2" street show. Little ones will want to see the Playhouse Disney stage show. The famous Electrical Parade wends its way through the park on many evenings. And if you haven't seen "Turtle Talk with Crush" at Walt Disney World, take time to check out this delightful interactive show.

California Adventure also has excellent street entertainment. The Miner 49ers put on a foot-stompin' show along Highway 49. (C'mon, you know you want to hear a bluegrass version of "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!") They often invite kids to join in by playing simple instruments or participating in a game of "Squatters' Rights" (musical chairs). Over in the Pacific Wharf area, the six-woman Mariachi Divas band holds forth with strings, brass, and vocals. And PUSH the Talking Trashcan, formerly a resident of Tomorrowland, now roams the Grizzly Peak Recreation Area. Look for him in front of the

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water mill or exploring the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail.

Few people come to Disneyland just for the entertainment, so let's talk rides! California Adventure offers attractions suitable for everyone from toddlers to teenagers to grownups.

I've lost count of how many times I've been on Soarin' Over California, but it still takes my breath away when I'm swept into the sky above the Golden Gate Bridge for a hang-gliding tour of the Golden State.

The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror originated in Florida, but go on it again at California Adventure to enjoy the somewhat different theming and ride patterns.

You can't miss the park's big coaster, California Screamin'. Its huge loop--complete with Mickey head--is easily visible across Paradise Bay (an especially beautiful view at night). You'll accelerate to 55 mph in four seconds as you're launched into 6,000 feet of twists and turns.

California Adventure is short on the dark rides that add so much to Disneyland's atmosphere, but there is the charming Monsters Inc. ride in the Hollywood Pictures Backlot area. It relives the plot of the movie, as the denizens of Monstropolis search for a human girl who has accidentally entered their city.

Even if you don't have little ones, take a stroll through the park's toddler area, Flick's Fun Fair. The delightful theming shrinks you to bug size as you look up at towering stalks of clover. (Can you find the four-leafed clover?) Another great area for kids is the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail. Again, this is worth a visit even for adults, to take in the beautiful redwood trees and the detailed theming of the lookout towers.

Incidentally, this park is where you'll find Disneyland Resort's newest guided tour, "Cruzin' Disney's California Adventure." The three-hour tour puts you on a Segway Personal Transporter for a unique exploration of the park. I've taken this tour myself, and it's great fun.

Getting hungry after all those rides? As at Disneyland, California Adventure offers counter service, sit-down restaurants, and snack and beverage stands. But in sharp contrast to Disneyland, some places here serve alcoholic beverages. Even though I knew that, I must admit that I did a double-take the first time I saw shelves of hard liquor on the patio at Ariel's Grotto! Pacific Wharf has a beer wagon and a margarita shack. Beer is also available at Taste Pilots' Grill in Condor Flats and Pizza Oom Mow Mow in the Paradise Pier area. Two Italian restaurants inhabit the Golden Vine Winery building, and of course, both have wine lists.

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As for food itself, the Vineyard Room at the Golden Vine Winery is the signature restaurant at Disney's California Adventure. From its second-floor patio, you can enjoy sweeping views of the park while dining on seafood, poultry, or meat dishes. Downstairs is the less formal Wine Country Trattoria, which features salads, Italian sandwiches, and lasagnas.

Other food choices include seafood (at the Vineyard Room and Ariel's Grotto), Mexican specialties (at Cucina Cucamonga), and the usual burgers, hot dogs, and sandwiches. You'll find entree-sized salads at the sit-down restaurants and the Pacific Wharf Cafe. The latter also has delicious soups served in sourdough bread bowls baked right there at the Boudin Bakery. (You can even pick up a Mickey-shaped sourdough loaf to take home with you.)

Don't forget that from Highway 49, you're just a few steps away from the Grand Californian hotel, which has three excellent restaurants: Whitewater Snacks for grilled foods and cold sandwiches; Storytellers Cafe, which offers both menu selections and a buffet; and the award-winning Napa Rose, the most highly rated restaurant at the entire Disneyland Resort.

By the way, California Adventure is also home to the Disneyland Resort's Food and Wine Weekends, which are held in the spring. See the official website for more information.

Your day at California Adventure is probably getting pretty full by now, but as I mentioned earlier, there's some great theming at this park. Enjoy the beautiful views of California Screamin' and the Sun Wheel across Paradise Bay. Stroll along Highway 49 to see the redwoods and the flowering columbine. Detour behind Grizzly River Run on Grizzly Peak Pass Road, where you'll find old gold-mining equipment and the thundering Frog Jump Falls. Pay close attention to the business names in the windows on Hollywood Boulevard and along the street behind Golden Dreams. Look for the "Enter" and "Exit" lizards in the queue lines at Cucina Cucamonga. Remember, this is Disney territory--attention to your surroundings will be amply rewarded with impressive details.

What does the future hold for Disney's California Adventure? I think the prospects are exciting. The Disney folks--especially new Imagineering head honcho John Lasseter--are working on how they can strengthen the theming and overall atmosphere. I don't know whether all of the traditional seaside attractions in Paradise Pier will eventually be replaced by unique Disney rides, but some of the arcade games are already gone to make room for Toy Story Mania (which will open in 2008). But there's no reason to wait years to see what happens:

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Disney's California Adventure is ready to amaze and delight you right now.

*About The Author: Patty Winter is a freelance marketing writer in Silicon Valley. Her favorite part of California Adventure is along Highway 49 and Grizzly Peak Pass Road, with their beautiful redwood trees, mountain flowers, and waterfalls.*

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