

## Vive la Difference: Disneyland Paris

by Elizabeth Shannon, PassPorter Guest Contributor

It's been seven long years since I was in Walt Disney World. Living in southern England though, I have been able to keep my magic levels topped up with frequent visits to Disneyland Paris.

The question most Walt Disney World veterans have about the parks in Paris is "What is the difference?" So I thought I'd give you a flavor of all things French.

Where do I start? In Paris they have two parks; Disneyland Park, which is similar in layout to Magic Kingdom, and the Walt Disney Studios. Note the first difference -- no "MGM" here! There is also a small area of shops and restaurants called Disney Village and a range of Disney-owned resorts on site.

The main difference you notice is that this is a dual language resort -- French and English. It means that many of your favorite rides are dubbed into French. It's a bit disconcerting the first time you hear a French Pirate of the Caribbean or a French C3PO!

They actually do the language thing pretty well. You can play 'identify the ride' from the French name...so who can guess "Cherie, j'ai retreci le public"? (In case your French is as bad as mine it's 'Honey, I Shrunk the Audience.)

The next thing many people notice is the castle. It's not Cinderella Castle, but Sleeping Beauty's Castle (Chateau de la Belle au Bois Dormant). It is smaller than the Magic Kingdom's castle; a pink confection of towers and turrets much loved by little girls and those of us who are a tad older.

There is no restaurant in the castle, but in the dungeons beneath you find a most impressive, enormous and very realistic Audio-Animatronics dragon. From time to time he awakes, roars, and blows steam from his nostrils. Lying in a pool in the cavernous dungeon, he is scary enough to frighten many a young guest.

Have I mentioned the weather yet? Well I'm not sure if the Disney executives knew when they chose Paris for their European park, but it has a higher rainfall than Glasgow in Scotland! Unlike the torrential but brief downpours in Florida, the rain can go on all day and is often accompanied by COLD weather.

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However, Disney has been most clever in designing the park. There are covered walkways behind both sides of the shops that line Main Street, and these continue on into Adventureland, Frontierland, and Fantasyland with hardly a gap.

And let me tell you of some of my favorite cold weather days. There is the time it snowed -- Main Street has never looked so pretty -- though riding Thunder Mountain was akin to having high speed dermabrasion! Nor is there anything better than warming your hands on a cup of hot chocolate and eating a delicious French pastry from the Main Street Bakehouse. Then was the time when we came out in the evening and it was really misty. We rode on the Thunder Mesa Riverboat and the park, twinkling out of the haze, looked so romantic and magical I could have cried.

Now did I mention my favorite ride, Thunder Mountain? It's called Thunder Mesa in Disneyland Paris, and ... I have to break it to you ... this ride is much better than the Florida version, in my opinion. The ride is located in the middle of a lake and you go under the water on the outbound and return journeys at a terrific speed. I draw the line at Space Mountain but my husband Mike rides it. They fire you out of a huge canon on the side of the ride and he says the start is very similar to the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster take off -- once again it exceeds its Orlando counterpart in our opinion.

Other than the languages, many of the rides are just the same as in Florida, but Walt Disney Studios Paris does boast a couple of unique theatre shows. In CineMagique a member of the audience, who is being berated by a cast member for using his cell phone, ends up going through the screen and appearing in the film! The film shows the history of cinema by having him interact with the on-screen characters first in a silent movie (where he realizes he can't speak and is in black and white), and then with the same leading lady he travels through different genres of film until they reach a happy ending.

Now for a whirlwind trip around some more differences ... hold on tight!

- \* Tomorrowland is transformed into Discoveryland and is decorated with Jules Verne-style theming.

- \* The entrance to Walt Disney Studios is a huge undercover area that looks like Hollywood by starlight.

- \* Sad to say but the French just don't wear ears -- if you see anyone in Mickey Ears they are almost certainly British or American!

- \* In the parks you can hold unlimited FASTPASSES, so first thing the most speedy runners rush around and collect handfuls of them.

- \* The cast members do their best but struggle to get the ethos; no-one

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does Disney like a keen American cast member!

\* There are no room-only reservations at the resorts; in common with most European hotels, all serve an inclusive and delicious Continental buffet breakfast.

\* The Disneyland Paris premier resort is the Disneyland Hotel, which is right part of the park gates and looks at the railway and down Main Street beyond. At this resort characters come to breakfast every morning -- that's right, a free character breakfast!

\* And last of all, Disneyland Park is the only 'Magic Kingdom' park worldwide that serves alcohol. (The French will not eat a meal without wine, and who can blame them?)

And on that subject, I have to finish with a quick restaurant review! The most beautiful place to eat in Disneyland Paris is undoubtedly the Blue Lagoon Restaurant. The diners sit in a Caribbean nighttime scene that overlooks the river at the start of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride. In some ways like the San Angel Inn at Epcot [Ed: but even more like the Blue Bayou Restaurant at California's Disneyland], the boats drift by, fireflies flicker, and the sounds and smells of a Caribbean evening surround you. The food is good but the ambiance is better! Nothing beats coming in from a cold Paris evening, peeling off layers of coats, hats, scarves, and sweaters and sitting down to enjoy a tropical evening.

So which would I choose to visit? Well for me nothing beats Walt Disney World. It is big, beautiful and full of the Disney spirit...but I must admit, Disneyland Paris does have a magic all its own.

*About The Author: Erin is an Executive Assistant and long time Disney enthusiast. She is looking forward to her next visit and first stay at Pop Century in October 2007 before returning to the Wilderness Lodge for the holiday season in December 2008.*

Article last updated: 7/19/2007

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