

## Disneyland Paris: A Disney Fan's Perspective

by Tamra Francis, PassPorter Guest Contributor

My dream has always been to visit Paris, and this year that finally became a reality. Being a Disney fan, I convinced my husband to spend a couple of extra days at Disneyland Paris.

When you land in Paris after a night of flying, you are bound to be disoriented. You get to stand in numerous lines to have your passport checked and stamped. Once you make it through, you have several options to get to Disneyland. After researching the options of taxi, RER train, and bus, we decided to use the Disney bus. As we exited the terminal, we found a door leading to a bus stop. When a transit bus displaying "Disneyland" on the top arrived, we jumped on. This bus took us to the Disney bus area. We entered another terminal feeling rather confused. We went directly across the terminal and out the other side. The bright red Disney bus is obvious. Unlike Walt Disney World's Magical Express, you collect your own luggage, and you pay as you board the bus. It helps to have some Euros, but you can pay with a credit card. The drive allows for a short nap, which we took advantage of. (If you are not coming from the airport but from Paris proper, the RER is the way to go. We used it to return to Paris and found the trip very easy. There is an RER station outside of Disney Village. Disney Village and both theme parks are easy walking distance from one another. The attendant at the RER information desk is very helpful. They recommend you purchase RER tickets one day in advance.)

When we arrived at the Disneyland Hotel, my jaw dropped. It is beautiful. We chose the Disneyland Hotel because of its proximity to the parks. Everything is within walking distance. I made reservations with AAA, but you can easily make them online through Disney's website or through your preferred travel planner. Our room was not ready, but the concierge service was wonderful. They stowed our luggage, and we went to the park.

Disneyland Park is more like the California version than Walt Disney World. It is amazing to walk a few feet from our hotel and enter the park. Of course, right after you enter, you have to take a map. Maps at Disneyland Paris are printed in numerous languages. Watch when picking one up to make sure you get an English version; you will usually see a British Flag.

Two exhibits are near the front of the park on Main Street. Realistic gas lamps light both Discovery Arcade and Liberty Arcade (my favorite).

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Liberty Arcade tells you all about the Statue of Liberty and should not be missed.

The pink castle at the end of Main Street catches your eye. Here, it is Sleeping Beauty's Castle. There are beautiful stained glass windows inside. And make sure to visit the dragon underneath. You find him both by going down some stairs in front or by using the access from the back of the castle. He mostly sleeps, but wakes up every so often to roar. Discoveryland was our first stop, and we got Fastpasses for Space Mountain: Mission 2. The Fastpass system works fairly well in Disneyland Paris; it is similar to Walt Disney World, although available for fewer rides. One special treat is that because we are staying at the Disneyland Hotel, we get one Fastpass per person per day to use at any of the Fastpass rides (at the Concierge level you get unlimited FASTPASSES).

One key to a successful trip is to check the holiday schedule when you are visiting. I had not done that, and it turned out we were visiting during a French holiday. The crowds were massive; more than Walt Disney World on New Year's Day. Whoever said that Disneyland Paris is not popular has not visited lately.

Many of the rides are bilingual, as the British are the second-largest tourist group at Disneyland Paris, but some characters only speaking in French. C3PO in French is hilarious, as well. The best ride, I think, is Thunder Mountain Railroad. We went under the water and out to an island on the coaster. Phantom Manor (Paris' Haunted Mansion) is fun, but again, with so much in French, we missed some of the story. Indiana Jones and the Temple of Peril is similar to the Indiana Jones ride at California's Disneyland. But Pirates of the Caribbean stands out. The external theme of the ship on the water and Skull Rock is superb. The ride is laid out in a different order. You still have the dog with the keys and Tortuga, but even with riding it twice, I did not see Captain Jack Sparrow. There is a restaurant in the ride, and dining there is an option. Not to be missed is the always popular "it's a small world." The Disneyland Paris version looks like the original Disneyland version.

France is in the midst of changing smoking policies. While Disneyland Paris has designated smoking areas, most people smoke where they want, even in line. If you suffer from allergies or asthma like I do, you will want to be prepared.

Park hours are shorter for Disneyland Paris. The latest the Park is open is 9:00 pm. And the Studios park closes at 7:00 pm every night. Disneyland Paris does offer extra magic hours in the morning at the Disneyland Park only. If you are staying at a Disneyland Paris resort or

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selected other hotels, you can enter the park two hours before it opens to the general public. Only a few rides are open during this time, but it is a wonderful time to visit. Fireworks are only displayed during summer months when the parks do stay open later. I am amazed at how early things close at Disneyland Paris.

In addition to the park map, pick up a Programme, which shows the performance times. Performances and times change weekly. You can download the Programme online before you leave. Character meets, shows, and parades will delight you and any children you have. The characters seem to be even more prevalent than at Walt Disney World. The parade floats are marvelous.

Then, when the park closed at 8:00 pm, we were ready to go to bed, jet lag and all. The concierge had delivered our luggage to our room. We checked back in at the desk, got our room key, and were amazed. The turn-down service and chocolates ensured sweet dreams.

*About The Author: Tamra Francis hails from Dayton, Ohio, where she and her husband Jerry run a small Mystery Theatre company called Mayhem & Mystery. Tamra's love of travel has been inspired by her husband who grew up traveling. Together they have visited numerous places in the United States, including Mount Rushmore, Walt Disney World, and Disneyland. She is looking forward to her next trip, sailing in New York in 2010.*

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