

# Disneyland Park: From the Perspective of the Walt Disney World Veteran

by Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I've had the privilege of visiting both the Disneyland Resort and the Walt Disney World (WDW) Resort many times in my life. As a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel, I'm sometimes asked if guests should visit Disneyland if they've already been to WDW or which resort is better. Personally, I believe that every WDW veteran should visit Disneyland at least once in order to form his or her own opinion. I absolutely love visiting Disneyland and WDW and can never get enough of either!

Just like when visiting WDW, guests have the option of staying on or off Disneyland property. In my opinion, however, it is not as important to stay on property in Anaheim as it is at WDW. At Disneyland, there are a lot of independent hotels across the street or just one or two blocks away. Thus having transportation to get around the resort is not critical like at WDW. The Disneyland Resort is made up of Disneyland Park, Disney California Adventure, and Downtown Disney. The entrances to Disneyland Park and Disney California Adventure face each other across a pedestrian plaza called the Esplanade. You can literally walk from park to park or to Downtown Disney, and some off-site hotels are closer to the parks than the Disneyland Hotel or Disney's Paradise Pier Hotel. However, one reason to stay in an official Disneyland hotel is if you want the Disney experience of staying on property or you want to take advantage of one of the pluses, such as getting into one of the parks an hour early on select days (Magic Mornings). Of course, if you want the ultimate Disneyland on-site hotel experience, then stay at the Grand Californian. It's the closest of the three hotels to the theme parks, and literally backs up right against Disney California Adventure, with its own entrance to that park.

In this article, I'm only going to focus on Disneyland Park and not Disney California Adventure. Disneyland Park is very similar to the Magic Kingdom at WDW, though it is smaller and more intimate. Pedestrian walkways are much narrower, and the lands are scaled down, with the exception perhaps of Fantasyland which currently has more attractions than are available in Florida. Disneyland Park also has the personal touch of Walt Disney; be sure to look for the lamp that is kept on at all times in the front window of his apartment over the firehouse on Main Street.

When visiting, be sure to enjoy the attractions that only exist at

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Disneyland Park, such as the Indiana Jones Adventure. While that attraction uses the same ride vehicle as Dinosaur in Disney's Animal Kingdom at WDW, the experience is a lot different and definitely should not be missed; it's absolutely fabulous! Other unique attractions at Disneyland Park include the Matterhorn, Alice in Wonderland, Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin, and the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage. That's right - they still have submarines in Anaheim! Disneyland Park even has Mr. Toad's Wild Ride for those of you who miss that attraction after it was replaced at the Magic Kingdom. Even if attractions sound the same in both parks, such as the Haunted Mansion and Peter Pan's Flight, be sure to experience the Disneyland version. Some attractions are better at the Magic Kingdom, while others are much better in Disneyland Park, such as Pirates of the Caribbean and Space Mountain.

During certain times of the year, some of the attractions at Disneyland have holiday overlays, such as "it's a small world" and the Haunted Mansion's "Nightmare Before Christmas." Some of the overlays take a very long time to install and to remove, so be sure to check the schedule before going to make sure that attractions are open when you plan to go. Also be aware of the schedule for the overlays if it's important to you to experience the attraction in its "classic" form.

Be sure to enjoy some of the spectacular dining, such as the Blue Bayou restaurant in New Orleans Square. At the Blue Bayou, guests sit inside the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction in an outdoor setting "at night" surrounded by fireflies and the sounds of the bayou, while boats filled with guests enjoying the attraction drift past. The restaurant's specialty is Cajun and Creole-style food. Another personal favorite is to dine at an outdoor table at Cafe Orleans. For those of you familiar with how hard it is to get into some of the most popular restaurants at Walt Disney World, you can relax! You don't need to book advanced dining reservations 180 days in advance like at WDW. In fact, you can't make reservations that far in advance at Disneyland. While there aren't as many Table Service restaurant choices at Disneyland, it's much easier to get into them. I've routinely called a week before a trip and generally have gotten what I've wanted. However, I don't recommend doing that if it's your one and only trip to Disneyland.

Another difference, in my opinion, is there's a lot more live entertainment in Disneyland Park than at the Magic Kingdom. That includes live music, including swing and jazz bands. Be sure to see Billy Hill and the Hillbillies at the Golden Horseshoe Saloon. It is a bluegrass band entirely composed of brothers named Billy! You can even order food at the counter inside the saloon and eat while enjoying the show (the way things used to be at WDW's Diamond Horseshoe Saloon)! Another good band, one that I believe children especially enjoy, is the

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roving band of pirate musicians that can be found on Tom Sawyer Island or in New Orleans Square.

Even if you have seen Fantasmic! many times before at WDW, it's absolutely worth experiencing at Disneyland. It's amazing and is performed right on the Rivers of America. It's slightly different than the version in Disney's Hollywood Studios at WDW and really should not be missed, especially the dragon. However, because it is so popular and there is no general seating for it like at WDW, you might want to consider signing up for the Fantasmic! Dessert experience! It's expensive, but you will be provided with a reserved seat with a great view and a box of desserts to enjoy while watching the show. You can make a reservation a month in advance. Finally, it's important to know that Fantasmic! is only performed on certain nights and sometimes not for many weeks during the less busy times of the year, so plan ahead. It is possible to watch the fireworks (if there are any the day you visit) from the Rivers of America, though they're more spectacular from the castle hub; it's especially important to watch the fireworks show "Magical" from the hub or Main Street in order to get a good view of Dumbo flying.

Finally, if you can, I recommend visiting Disneyland Park on a weekday instead of a weekend, especially during the non-summer months. I strongly believe that Disneyland Park's crowds are impacted much more by locals compared to the parks at WDW. Over the years, I have found Thursdays to be particularly good days to visit during the non-summer months (and non-holiday weeks). I recommend three whole days for the entire Disneyland Resort for a family visit. However, the most important thing is to go, even if only for a few hours! Especially if you have visited Walt Disney World many times and have always wondered what a trip to Disneyland would be like. In a nutshell it's wonderful and something every Disney fan should experience!

*About The Author: Bernie Edwards lives in Maryland with his wife and two children. He is an engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel. He is looking forward to bringing his family to Disneyland this summer.*

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