

Grand Californian: A Guide to Activities

by Terry Dagdagan, PassPorter Guest Contributor

A month before we left for our most recent visit to the Disneyland Resort in California (Disneyland Resort) a friend of mine asked, "What on earth do you do at Disneyland for five days?" My immediate response was "Enjoy the resort!"

We usually go for five nights and stay at Disney's Grand Californian Hotel and Spa (Grand Californian). My family and I are fortunate to be Disney Vacation Club members and are able to use our Vacation Points when staying at the Grand Californian. Being only a four-hour drive from Disneyland as opposed to a five-hour plane ride (multiplied by four air fares) from Walt Disney World, we spend more time on the west coast than the east coast.

Now if your plan of attack when visiting the Disneyland Resort is to go for two or three days, enter the parks the moment they open and stay until cast members gently guide you out at night, off-site hotels would be my recommendation. After all, why pay more for a room that you will only sleep in? If your preference is a longer stay with relaxation interspersed with park rides, then I suggest staying at the Grand Californian.

One of the more obvious reasons is the amazing pool area. Yet there is so much more! Each evening during turn down service, the housekeeping staff leaves a copy of daily "Grand Adventures." Of course, my family notices the chocolates left with this newsletter first. It lists various activities that are available exclusively to guests of the Grand Californian.

Some activities are offered more frequently during each week. One that is offered almost daily is The Grand Quest, which lasts for one hour in the late afternoon. This is a great family event that is recommended for those with children ages 3-12 years old. Basically, it is a scavenger hunt with riddles that lead you throughout the hotel getting answers at various locations. It ends with a sweet treat from the final destination.

Two other activities that alternate each day are Tales from the Hearth and Songs from the Hearth. These are offered twice each evening at the giant hearth area in the Great Hall (lobby). Both feature storytelling and one adds songs to the mix. It is a nice way to wind down the evening if you are calling it an early night.

If you prefer a bedtime story from the comfort of your own room, then

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tune into Bedtime Tales. This can be viewed on a designated television channel from 8:00-10:00 pm. You will see a Classic Disney Animation as well as be told a bedtime story by one of the Disney Princesses.

The morning activities are my family's favorites. They change each day, so you need to take advantage of them when given the opportunity. My personal favorite was offered two mornings of our most recent stay. It is the "Get Up and Go" Power Walk. This is a 45-minute brisk walk (with the emphasis on brisk) through Disney's California Adventure Park before it opens to the public. This walk takes you through the whole park and the distance covered is about two miles. It is just amazing to be in the park without any other guests!

The minimum age to participate is 14 years old. They seem to strictly enforce this as one couple was not permitted to bring their infant along in a stroller due to insurance requirements. Everyone is also asked to sign a waiver before participating on the walk. Always being a company that listens to its guests, our leader did mention that they are developing a fitness trail for parents with strollers and little ones. It would be within the hotel and not in the park due to the same insurance reasons.

Two mornings the hotel offered Rise and Stretch with Pilates. This is a class designed for beginners, so don't shy away if you've never tried Pilates before. While I did not have a chance to try this activity for myself, one of my fellow power walkers said that she had never done Pilates before and enjoyed the class a lot. It is offered outside on the wedding lawn. Guests 14 and older may participate; however, those 14-17 must be accompanied by a guardian.

The Art of the Craft Tour happens most afternoons from 1:00-2:00 pm. This tour is recommended for those 12 years and older. My daughter (who was 11 at the time) joined my husband and me on this tour last summer, and we all enjoyed hearing about the art and architectural work of the hotel. Being in the middle of the day it was a nice break from the parks.

Now that all of the "big kids" have heard about their activities, there are still more for the little ones. A big favorite with my girls is Washcloth Creations. We met up with representatives from the housekeeping staff who taught us to make a heart, a bunny, and a folded shirt (especially for Father's Day), out of washcloths. Everyone gets to keep the creations they make.

Learn to Draw is another morning activity offered occasionally. This is your young one's chance to be an animator and learn how to draw

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Mickey Mouse. When my children participated in this class about five years ago, the instructor actually collected the drawings and took them to Mickey for signing. Since we were leaving the next morning, she was kind enough to mail our treasured drawings directly to our home.

One activity that my girls are looking forward to participating in on our next visit is the Build-A-Bear Workshop. All of the above activities are free; however, this one does come with a fee. Basically, this is an opportunity to create a new cuddly friend at the Build-A-Bear Workshop in Downtown Disney before it is open to the public. The minimum cost for a bear is \$10 and it goes up from there depending on the size and accessories you choose.

A final activity that we saw offered was the Beauty Basics at Sephora. We did not participate in this one, though it seemed like a fun mother-daughter activity if you have older girls, or even for Mom to indulge in by herself. The cost is \$35, which you receive back in the form of a Sephora gift card. It takes place at Sephora in Downtown Disney and is lead by trained professionals at the store before it opens for the day. They teach you about skin care basics and make-up.

With all of these activities to chose from, it seems like everyone can find their niche at the hotel. Any times listed were from our visit in June, so if you are planning to stay at the Grand Californian, be sure to verify times and days with them. All activities require you to sign up in advance with Guest Services, which is only a phone call away from your room. Since there are limits on the number of participants for most activities, it is always best to call early.

The only real dilemma left for a few of the morning activities is that they overlap with the Disneyland Park Magic Morning. This would be when guests of all three hotels at the Disneyland Resort in California are permitted to enter into Disneyland Park an hour before other guests. So now it is time to decide -walk on to Space Mountain with little to no waiting or Power Walk through a virtually empty California Adventure Park (you know, there is always FASTPASS).

About The Author: Terry and her husband Gene live in Las Vegas with their two daughters. They have been Disney Vacation Club members since 2000 and are looking forward to another stay at Disney's Grand Californian later this summer.

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