

Disney's California Adventure: Unexpected Delights

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

We all know it's rare for everyone to agree and, of course, different people like different things. The same is certainly true when it comes to Disney theme parks. We argue which is the best park in Walt Disney World or whether we prefer the Magic Kingdom or Disneyland.

Before we headed out to America's west coast earlier this year, one thing that most people seemed to agree on was that they had no time for Disney's California Adventure. The advice I'd heard was to allow no more than a day for touring this park, as there was nothing much worth seeing here, while others alleged it wasn't really representative of California and lacked theming. But I was delighted to discover that none of these comments applied to Disney's California Adventure -- at least as far as we were concerned.

My last trip to California was nearly 20 years ago, and I remember only a limited amount from that visit with my parents in 1987. Armed with those older memories and fresh impressions from our current visit, I was looking out for different elements of the Golden State in the park, especially as we had just come from San Diego and were heading to San Francisco next. And I felt that we found those elements, from the beauty of the High Sierras around Grizzly River Run to the parade of shops from there through to Paradise Pier, with their in-jokes in the windows about life in San Francisco.

There's the opportunity to step into Tinsel Town in the Hollywood Pictures Backlot. One of California's other most famous industries -- agriculture -- is represented everywhere from the beautiful theming of Bountiful Valley Farm in "a bug's land" to the feeling of being in a fishing town in the Pacific Wharf area of the park. There are even some attractions that offer food samples, like the Terrace Wine Tasting, the Boudin Bakery Tour and the Mission Tortilla Factory. In a way, it's a shame that we were staying in the concierge level of the Disneyland Hotel. The food available in the concierge lounge was too good to resist, and sadly left us too full to sample any of these wonderful places, but they'll still be waiting for us on a return visit when we won't be sampling the delights of concierge service!

Even Paradise Pier, definitely the brightest and most colorful part of the park, and the area that seems to attract the most criticism, is beautifully laid out around Paradise Bay and immediately transports you back

towards the turn of the 20th century. I couldn't help but look at the view out towards California Screamin' with its distinctive not-so-hidden Mickey and the stunning design of the Sun Wheel and think of the Boardwalk at Walt Disney World.

This part of the park really comes into its element after dark, and it's well worth making your day's adventure last that little bit longer just to see it all lit up at night. I defy anyone, even the most vocal critics of Disney's California Adventure, to see that view of Paradise Pier all lit up at night, and not be impressed. It certainly makes for some superb night-time photos and must rank as one of the most striking after dark sights in any Disney park.

As for the claim that there isn't much to do here, at first glance that may seem to be pretty near to the mark. There are certainly many names here that will be familiar to Walt Disney World veterans, such as the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, It's Tough To Be A Bug, Muppet Vision 3D, Playhouse Disney -- Live on Stage and of course, even Soarin' Over California. (Although in fairness, the last did start life here, before being added to the mix in Florida.) So what else does this park have to offer?

Aside from those well-known names, there are still a number of other unique attractions here and, despite the screams you'll hear coming from the Paradise Pier area, many of them can be enjoyed by all members of the family. Paradise Pier itself is aimed mainly at thrill seekers, but there's lots for youngsters as well, with "a bug's land" really set up especially for little ones and some superb play opportunities at the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail.

The newest addition to the line-up here is Monsters, Inc.: Mike and Sulley to the Rescue. This is the latest in a long line of classic Disney rides based on friendly faces -- and not so friendly ones -- from the big screen. Think of Peter Pan's Flight, Pirates of the Caribbean and then step it up another level and you've got some idea of what to expect here. Cars take you through the streets of Monstropolis while you relive scenes from the film, including the wonderful sequence from the "door warehouse." I wouldn't be surprised to see this attraction being cloned in the future in another Disney park, in the same way Soarin' was.

Grizzly River Run is another highlight and allows you to explore the bear-headed mountain that you can see from most parts of the park at closer quarters - if you're not being drenched by water at the time! It's worth heading here early on warmer days, as we discovered that lines for the River Run can easily exceed an hour or more when the sun comes out.

One of the highlights of our visit here was our spin around the Sun Wheel, the huge Ferris wheel at Paradise Pier. Having carefully watched how some of the swinging gondolas moved around, we opted for one of the fixed-position gondolas, and if you're prone to motion sickness, this is the way to go! This offers a superb view of the park laid out beneath you.

Disney's California Adventure also boasts the honor of being home to one of Disney's most fondly remembered parades, the Electrical Parade. Making its way through from Sunshine Plaza at the park's entrance through to Paradise Pier, it's another reason to ensure that a day spent at this park lasts through to the evening.

So what is there to love about this park? In short, it's a place to linger, take your time and enjoy the theming in the true tradition of all Disney theme parks. Still in its infancy, there's no doubt the California Adventure will see more attractions added to its line-up as time goes on. In the meantime, if you've got a trip to the Disneyland Resort coming up, then be sure to set aside plenty of time to explore this park and make your own mind up about whether it's a good addition to the Disney line-up. Having now sampled it for myself, add me to the list of people who believe that it is!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 9/7/2006

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