

Disney California Adventure: A Perspective from a Walt Disney World Veteran

by Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Previously, I wrote about visiting Disneyland Park from the perspective of a Walt Disney World veteran. This article will cover Disney California Adventure, previously known as Disney's California Adventure Park, which is the second theme park at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California.

Disney California Adventure is a unique park that doesn't exist at Walt Disney World, though it has some of the same attractions (usually with slight variations) that exist in Florida. The main entrance to the park faces Disneyland Park across a pedestrian plaza called the Esplanade, but there is a back entrance via the Grand Californian Hotel as well. The park currently sits on 55 acres and consists of 5 themed lands: Sunshine Plaza, A Bug's Land, The Golden State, Paradise Pier, and the Hollywood Pictures Backlot. Each area is supposed to remind guests of some aspect of the real state of California.

Sunshine Plaza serves as the main entrance to the park and doesn't have any attractions, but be sure to stop and look at the California Zephyr train. Walt Disney Imagineering did a great job with it, and it offers several delicious treats within. A Bug's Land is a uniquely themed land that has the 3D attraction It's Tough to be a Bug and several small attractions designed for very young guests; Heimlich's Chew Chew Train is especially enjoyable for the young and young at heart.

The Golden State area can be subdivided into smaller areas: Condor Flats, Grizzly Peak Reaction Area, Golden Vine Winery, and the Pacific Wharf. "Must do" attractions in this land include Grizzly River Run and Soarin' Over California. Grizzly River Run is similar to Kali River Rapids in Disney's Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World, but much longer and more thrilling. You will definitely get wet! If you want to get cooled off but not soaked, then stand underneath the Space Shuttle engine at Soarin' Over California and wait for a surprise! While the queue is different, the attraction itself is the same as the one in Epcot. Most young children also enjoy the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail, a two-acre play area that has a rock climbing wall, suspension bridges, slides, and other activities that children love.

The Paradise Pier area of the park evokes memories of old boardwalk-based amusement parks and carnivals that could be found

up and down the coast of California. Attractions that should not be missed in Paradise Pier include California Screamin' and Toy Story Midway Mania. California Screamin' is a state-of-the-art steel roller coaster designed to look like a wooden coaster. If you're travelling solo to the park, be sure to take advantage of the Single Rider queue, as the attraction is very popular, especially with teenagers!

When in Hollywood Studios Backlot, be sure to experience the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, Monsters Inc. Mike and Sully to the Rescue, Muppet*Vision 3D, and the Disney Animation building. If you have young children, they may also really enjoy Playhouse Disney -- Live on Stage. Tower of Terror, in my opinion is not as good as its counterpart in Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World, because it is missing the disorienting part where the elevator moves down the hallway; however, it's still worth experiencing. Monsters, Inc. is one of the best dark rides developed in recent years and should not be missed.

Without a doubt, be sure not to miss Disney's Aladdin -- A Musical Spectacular, a 40-minute Broadway-quality stage show in the Hyperion Theater in the Hollywood Backlot area. In my opinion, it is the absolute best stage show out of all of the shows at Disneyland, Walt Disney World, and on the Disney Cruise Line. The theater is huge and has orchestra, mezzanine, and balcony seating; be sure to get in the correct line outside the theater for the type of seating you want. The Genie is fabulous! Even if you didn't love the movie, you should still see this show!

If you are a fan of Pixar movies, be sure to watch the Pixar Play Parade. It is about 20 minutes long and features characters from most of the Pixar films. This is not the same as Block Party Bash at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Walt Disney World, which originally came from this theme park; Block Party Bash has some elements of a street party in it, while this is a pure parade. The parade starts off with Lightning McQueen and Mater, and I especially love seeing the characters from The Incredibles and the Little Green Aliens from the Toy Story movies! I personally prefer the parade in California over Block Party Bash.

There are two table service restaurants in the park: Ariel's Grotto and Wine Country Trattoria. Of the two, Wine Country Trattoria is my favorite. It's located in the Golden Vine Winery area of Golden State, and serves Italian dishes. If you would rather dine with Disney Princesses then you should consider a character dining experience at Ariel's Grotto. Recently, both restaurants have also started offering World of Color prix-fixe meals; after dinner you are provided a Preferred Reserved Viewing ticket for Paradise Park for the spectacular nighttime show. I previously wrote an article on World of Color and don't have

much to add here, except that it is an absolute "must do."

A special event that should not be missed is the California-themed Food and Wine Festival that is generally held for several weeks in the spring. It's not as large as Epcot's Food and Wine Festival at Walt Disney World, but it is still a lot of fun and spring is a great time to visit the Disneyland Resort. Most of the festival action takes place in Disney California Adventure. Besides booths set up to support beer and wine tastings, most of the counter service locations will have special festival offerings on their menu. I've also enjoyed many free and delicious demonstrations from celebrity chefs at the Chef Showcase Stage installed in Sunshine Plaza.

Disney is in the process of transforming this theme park. Some lands and attractions are being re-themed, including the main entrance which is being transformed into Buena Vista Street, designed to capture the feel of Los Angeles in the 1920s. Games of the Boardwalk at Paradise Pier was re-themed last year. The World of Color show just started being shown in June. Scheduled to open in 2011 is the Little Mermaid dark ride attraction, followed by Cars Land in 2012 on approximately 12 new acres for the park. To get the full story, be sure to visit Walt Disney Imagineering's Blue Sky Cellar preview center in the park!

Just like when visiting Disneyland Park, I recommend visiting Disney California Adventure on a weekday instead of on the weekend, especially during the non-summer months. Over the years, I have found Thursdays to be particularly good days to visit during the non-summer months (and non-holiday weeks). Keep in mind that generally Disney California Adventure opens later than Disneyland Park and closes earlier each day. If travelling with family, I recommend planning on spending at least one whole day at Disney California Adventure, and three whole days for the entire Disneyland Resort.

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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