

Changes In Store for Disney California Adventure: Updates on Disney California Adventure Expansion

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Things never stay the same at a Disney theme park, and that's probably part of the attraction for those of us who return year after year -- there's always something new to enjoy.

However, sometimes the changes step up a gear and that's definitely been the case at Disney California Adventure at Disneyland Resort over the last couple of years.

We last visited the resort in autumn 2008 and it was almost three years later than we were next able to make a return visit. In 2008, the changes that lay ahead for the park were very much just getting underway. The Golden Dreams show was closing so work could start on the much-heralded Little Mermaid - Ariel's Undersea Adventure. Now the attraction was open, and despite the horrendous tales of three-hour waits during the attraction's opening weekend, it was one of the things that I was most desperate to see. It's frightening how quickly things can change--just a couple of months later this attraction had only a short wait.

□ It's a mark of Disney's longstanding skill at creating slow-moving attractions based their most famous films that we came off the ride thinking that it was very good, but nothing out of the ordinary. I think we've become accustomed to the Imagineers creating rides like this, and take the quality for granted. It was only when we visited Walt Disney Imagineering Blue Sky Cellar, which previews future developments in the park, and we saw a video about the work that went into the Little Mermaid attraction, that we realized the sheer brilliance of it. One of the highlights is undoubtedly Ursula's appearance in Audio-Animatronic form, and I loved the effect of Ariel swimming above us at the start of the ride. It's a perfect ride for the whole family, and I'm sure it will quickly become a favorite at Walt Disney World, too, when it opens as part of the current Fantasyland expansion.

□ The other major new attraction at the park for us was not a ride, but the nightly show, World of Color, of which I'd heard mixed reviews. "Wow," is about all I can say about it! It was staggering, and something that really shouldn't be missed here. It's about time that Disney California Adventure acquired a decent night-time show to help keep crowds in the park, and that's exactly what World of Color delivers. It's

certainly a worthy addition to the line-up here, and something you miss at your peril.

A lot of the changes to the park are found in Paradise Pier, the first area to undergo its update. I will be honest here and say that, on our 2008 visit, we really were not at all sure of some of the proposed changes. We couldn't see the point of modifying some existing rides and renaming them for famous Disney movies. For example, Orange Stinger became Silly Symphony Swings, although intrinsically, the ride remains pretty much the same.

It's the same for the former Sun Wheel, which has become Mickey's Fun Wheel. The ride remains the same, though the cosmetic changes are huge. The stylized sun at the wheel's hub is gone, replaced by Mickey's giant, smiling face. When we saw the original concept drawings, we thought it would look pretty cheesy, but now that the work in the whole area is complete, it does fit well, and looks absolutely stunning at night.

The other updated attraction here is Goofy's Sky School, a re-working of Mulholland Madness, a wild mouse-style coaster. This is not our sort of thing at all, so we didn't sample it, but it looked like those who did ride were having a ball. Our room at the Grand Californian Hotel overlooked this area of the park, albeit from the ground floor, and we often heard delighted screams coming from this ride.

As you walk around from Goofy's Sky School towards Mickey's Fun Wheel, there's a wonderful new addition to the edge of this park. The best description I can give is it's a new covered boardwalk, which finally pulls the Paradise Pier Hotel behind it into the theming of the park. It's a small touch, but it does make a huge difference.

Saving the new for last, Paradise Pier is also home to Toy Story Mania, at its heart the same attraction we love so well at Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World, though the facade here is consistent with the Victorian carnival midway style that's found inside.

Elsewhere in the park, further massive changes are coming, the biggest of those the addition of a whole new land set to open later in 2012, dedicated to the Disney-Pixar hit, Cars. I had originally heard rumors that, to make way for this, Pacific Wharf would be biting the dust. I was delighted to discover that wasn't the case, as I would have missed Pacific Wharf's relaxing atmosphere. I was intrigued to see how Cars Land would fit into the rest of the park, and from what we could see of the construction, it's going to fit in wonderfully. The mountains at the back of the new land form a great backdrop and a

whole new focal point for this part of the park. I'm not sure about some of the attractions here and how much interest they'll hold for us, although I can't wait to ride Radiator Springs Racers!

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□The other part of Disney California Adventure experiencing huge changes while we were there was the entrance. The big letters forming CALIFORNIA, and the Golden Gate Bridge, have sadly gone, and this is the only part that did disappoint. The park entrance now looks exactly the same as the entrance to Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World, and personally I don't like it when they duplicate something from one park to another.

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□The area inside the park gates is morphing into Buena Vista Street, evoking Los Angeles of the late 1920s, and huge construction fences were up everywhere, as they worked on the tracks for the Red Car Trolleys that will run along Buena Vista Street and through the Hollywood Pictures Backlot. I look forward to seeing those when they come online, as it'll provide a fun way of getting to see bits of the park.

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□All in all, I loved what I saw of the changes to the park, much more than I thought I would. The Disney Imagineers have once again triumphed with the updates they've done to this park. I can't wait to see the whole finished product though, with no more construction screens up. I'm sure, once it's completed, this great park will be even more amazing.

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: 01-20-2012

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