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Making Your Way by Ferry to the Magic in Disneyland Paris: Getting There and Back

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Of all the Disney theme parks in the world, perhaps the one with the most methods of transportation to and from, is Disneyland Paris.

In America, you can drive or fly to your Disney destination, whereas you're likely to be flying into either Japan or Hong Kong, and then probably taking the train to the park. If you're brave, you might drive, but it's not something I'd personally do.

When it comes to Disneyland Paris, because of its location, you have so many more choices. If you're from outside of Europe, unless there happens to be a repositioning cruise from the States with Disney, then you'll have no choice but to fly into the continent. However, once you're here, then there are so many ways to finish the journey off.

A lot of that has to do with the fact that Disneyland Paris is located so close to the British market, and draws in a huge number of British visitors, so there are a multitude of relatively easy ways to get from London out to the park. One route that we hadn't tried for many years was to take the ferry, usually favoring either the Eurotunnel, which transports both cars and trucks through the Channel Tunnel in special trains, or the Eurostar, the train service running from the UK to continental Europe.

The ferries depart from the Port of Dover, one of the world's busiest passenger ferry terminals, and as you arrive, you can see that. It's a huge place, which seems to sprawl forever. You certainly have to drive far enough once you arrive before you even check-in for your boat. We were very impressed to pull up at the check-in booth, and be greeted by name. Now that's almost like Disney service before you get to a theme park!

Like the Eurotunnel, and Eurostar, you have to be at the port at least 30 minutes before your ship is due to sail, otherwise you won't be on board. To be honest, once you're lined up, ready to board, the time goes by relatively quickly, and before you know it, you're driving on. The crews are very experienced at handling loading and unloading, with the spaces not too tight.

Once you're parked, you have to remember to take absolutely

everything you need with you, as you won't be seeing your car again until the ship arrives in Calais, France in around an hour and a half. As you leave your car, just like parking at Disney, make a note of where you've parked. Fortunately there are no row numbers or characters to remember here, just a color, which makes life a lot easier.

There are elevators to take you up to the passenger decks, but with so many people swarming on board at one time, there tends to be a long wait for them, and taking the stairs, if it's an option, will be much quicker. Every ferry differs slightly, as we found out during our recent couple of trips. We were lucky enough to be on one of the brand new P&O ferries, Spirit of France, and this really is a new generation of traveling.

We were blown away by the images of Paris in glass, and the sleek appearance of the ship. In truth, the facilities on this ship were very similar to those on the earlier ships, but it just felt much more new, and had a fresh look to it. It's a bit like when you get a new ride at Disney, and suddenly the others around it look that little bit older.

Each ship comes with a food court-style restaurant that doesn't serve bad-quality food, although like any space with a captive audience, you're going to be paying theme park prices for it. There's also a more upscale restaurant, although with a "buy one, get one free" offer on breakfast in the food court, we couldn't be persuaded away from that. By the time of our return trip in the evening, we were already pretty stuffed from the amazing food we'd sampled in France and Belgium earlier in the day.

Of course, there's also a bar, and a family bar area, which is a nice touch for those with children. Along with some basic amenities, such as a currency exchange and a cafe, there's the obligatory duty-free shop. In days gone by, before duty-free limits were abolished within Europe, the British were well known for their one-day booze cruises across to France to stock up on cheap wine, and that's still very much part of the day.

The other lovely part of our sailings that we really enjoyed were the views. It's only around 25 miles from Dover to Calais, and on a good day, you can see from one side of the English Channel to the other. The famous White Cliffs of Dover are an amazing sight to be seen from the water, and one you just have to photograph. Sadly, and this is not intended to be an anti-French comment at all, despite the British's well known love of our neighbors, the vista that greets you as you arrive in Calais just can't compare.

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The ferry crossing is a lot of fun, and it's a pleasant break for anyone who has to drive a long distance at either end of the crossing. However, nice as it is, if you're not great sailors like us, you may need to pick your dates carefully. We were very lucky, and ended up with near-millpond conditions, but in more of a swell, I'm not sure I'd have been so keen to be on that ferry.

The other issue is the time that the crossing takes, particularly on the way over, as you're already losing an hour when you move from the UK to Europe, which is ahead of Greenwich Mean Time by an hour. On our first trip, we were on one of the first sailings of the day, but despite that early start, we still weren't on French soil until after 10:00 am local time, which felt like we'd already lost a lot of the morning. With a three-hour drive to Disneyland Paris still to come, time is very precious.

So would I use the ferry to head to Disneyland Paris in the future? I'm not sure if I would. As enjoyable as it was, I don't know that I want such a slow crossing, and to take the risk of being sick on the way over. I think I'll probably end up being a coward, and opting for the tunnel for our next foray to the magic, but for a more relaxing way to cross the channel, I have to admit, you can't beat the ferry.

Note: If you are interested in learning more about going to Disneyland Paris, check out our 204-page e-book, *PassPorter's Disneyland Paris* by Sabine Rautenberg.

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: 07-05-2012

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