

## Updates to Disney California Adventure Park: A Disneyland Theme Park Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Back in the mists of time (well, 2001 actually), a second park opened at Disneyland, known appropriately enough (at the time) as Disney's California Adventure.

Disney's new theme park didn't exactly receive universal praise, shall we say?

We first Disney's California Adventure in spring 2006, and we enjoyed it well enough, although we could see why people raised concerns about the place. It did feel as if it was missing something. By the time we returned in fall 2008, Imagineers had obviously realized that as well, with massive expansion plans in the works. Our next visit in summer 2011 saw them midway through those plans, and by the time we visited over Christmas 2012, they were finally done. We were staggered with what they'd done to the place in just over a year!

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□The first difference you immediately notice is before you even enter the park. Now I'll confess, even when I saw this at the planning stage, I wasn't sure about this, as the new entrance is just like the art deco design of Disney's Hollywood Studios in Walt Disney World. I personally like my Disney parks around the world to be different, and not replicas of each other. I also loved the life-size letters, spelling out California in front of the entrance, that used to be there. To me, that was a neat photo opportunity, and I'm sad they're gone.

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□Fortunately, despite my initial fears, this was the only one of the many changes at Disney California Adventure that I didn't like. New to us this time around was the whole first "land" that you enter, otherwise known as Buena Vista Street. It aims to take you back to the Hollywood that Walt Disney would've experienced back in the 1920s and 1930s. A lot of this area is taken up by shop facades, but despite that, it's got a pleasant look to it. I have to be honest, I never realized Hollywood could be so welcoming, and perhaps that's a fair comment, as these buildings aren't reproductions but "reimagined versions of an ideal Southern California that never was" according to the Disneyland website.

The highlight here is the Elias and Co. department store. I loved the Art Deco look to its exterior, and while it's got a wide selection of items inside it, sadly not the Mickey-shaped corn on the cob holders that we

got on our previous visit.

☐ Another highlight of Buena Vista Street is the Red Car Trolley that now runs from the entrance all the way over to the Hollywood Tower of Terror. This is a lot of fun, and is a bit like the Main Street Vehicles you'll find in the neighboring Disneyland Park. Be warned though, they are very authentic, and there's no padding on the seats. As a result, we got quite a shock when we first took a ride on these!

☐ As you get to the end of Buena Vista Street, you reach a new "square" with the Carthay Circle Restaurant opposite. The centerpiece is a beautiful new fountain, which I absolutely loved. I obviously wasn't the only one, as there were often lots of people around it, getting photos. I managed to get a PhotoPass shot of us here on one day of our visit, but I really wish the PhotoPass photographers would spend more time here, as it's a beautiful spot in the park.

☐ All in all, I felt the new entrance to Disney California Adventure Park was much better than I'd expected. I loved the whole feel to it, and it's a nice introduction to the rest of the park.

☐ Of course, the other new addition to the park since our previous visit was the major one that everyone wants to see -- Cars Land! I really cannot gush enough about this area, it is just stunning. If you have any way to get to Disneyland, you need to, as Cars Land is a definite must-see.

☐ There are three new attractions in here, and the massive one, definitely an E-ticket (or possibly an F-ticket) ride, is Radiator Springs Racers. Located at the back of the area, encouraging guests to wander through it on their way there, it's essentially Test Track on steroids! The technology is the same, as far as I could see, as are the cars, with two rows of three seats. You're taken on a ride through some of Ornament Valley, then Radiator Springs, before you can open up the throttle, and race against the car next to you. It's an exhilarating ride, and worth all the hype, although be warned, when we were there they were still working out the kinks, and the ride was down on a number of occasions during our visit.

☐ Although I'd heard all about Radiator Springs Racers, and much as I loved it, my favorite was Luigi's Flying Tires nearby. You float along on a cushion of air on a supersize tire, and while it may not sound like much fun, we absolutely loved this. I think I ended up on this ride about five or six times in the end. If Radiator Springs Racers has a crazy wait (we saw it with three-hour waits!), then definitely give this a try.

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□ The final new attraction is Mater's Junkyard Jamboree, where you're in a trailer pulled by the loveable tow truck from the Cars movies. All the Maters are different, and I loved the attention to detail on them, something to admire while you're waiting in line. I will warn you however, that tame as this looks, this ride does spin you round quite a lot, and may be one to avoid if you're prone to motion sickness. We made it through OK, but we weren't going to rush back for a second ride!

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□ Even though there are only three new rides here, there is so much more to Cars Land to explore. The second you enter, you're completely immersed in Radiator Springs, with beautiful theming everywhere. Be sure to visit at night, as with all the neon lights, it's just as stunning in the dark as during the daytime. The shops here also have some superb merchandise. We were spoiled for choice for our Cars-mad nephew. Then of course there are the character meets, with Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater out throughout the day, and we also saw Red the fire truck out a couple of times during our visit.

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□ All in all, Disney California Adventure Park is a not-to-be-missed experience, and I think it says something that we ended up here nearly every day of our visit. We just couldn't stay away, and loved the atmosphere here. Both Cars Land and Buena Vista Street are superb additions to Disney California Adventure Park. Now it feels like the complete package, and I can't wait to go back, and experience it again.

*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!](#)*

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