

Left: Check out the spectacular fireworks on show above Disneyland every night over summer. Right: The Paradise Pier. One of many

# play centre

Disneyland will always be a treat for youngsters – but follow our tips and the whole family will enjoy the magic.





exhilarating rides. There are attractions suitable for every family member, no matter the age.

S tarry-eyed children approach Disneyland with wonder and excitement: dressed in princess (or *Star Wars*) costumes, shrieking over Mickey Mouse sightings on Main Street, U.S.A., giggling through Space Mountain, and begging parents to wait in wretched lines for candy floss and souvenirs. Parents on the other hand, debate how to survive the unimaginably hot days without a cocktail, and contemplate the meltdowns of their brood. Thankfully, though, with a little know-how, the entire clan can experience the magic of the happiest place on earth.

Frankly, it is impossible to fully explore Disneyland – and her sister amusement park, Disney's California Adventure – in one day, especially with young children in tow. Strewn across 40 hectares of former orange grove in the sunniest part of California, the Magic Kingdom features more than 60 attractions, including black-and-white Mickey Mouse films, nightly fireworks, a parade starring just about every Disney character imaginable, roller-coasters, 800 different plant species, and a host of themed rides based on popular films. Throw

in the interactive shows and exhilarating attractions at California Adventure, plus all the shops, restaurants, and bars at the adjacent Downtown Disney and you begin to see why in-the-know families check-in to hotels that are walking-distance to the parks and purchase a three-day Park Hopper pass.

Breaking up your day helps you and your children to avoid those thought-to-be-inevitable meltdowns and to enjoy the madness that is Disneyland. Consider getting into the park as early as possible in the morning, and hitting up the big-ticket attractions before the masses arrive. One trick is to hop on the Disneyland Train early in the morning and head towards the farthest stretch of the park (the French Quarter) to ride the popular Splash Mountain, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Thunder Mountain Railroad with virtually no wait. Arrange another morning visit to Fantasyland, or Tomorrowland, making sure to secure a Fast Pass for popular rides like Space Mountain. Just before the pre-lunch tantrums break out, hop on the monorail to Downtown Disney and grab

“Breaking up your day helps your children, and you, to avoid those thought-to-be-inevitable meltdowns and **enjoy** the madness.”



Clockwise from left: Mickey and Minnie Mouse greet visitors to Disneyland; the beautiful architecture of the Walt Disney Concert Hall; One of

tacos at Tortilla Jo's, or a burger at the ESPN Zone. Plan to decompress afterwards with a nap and a swim to escape the midday heat – your family will appreciate the downtime.

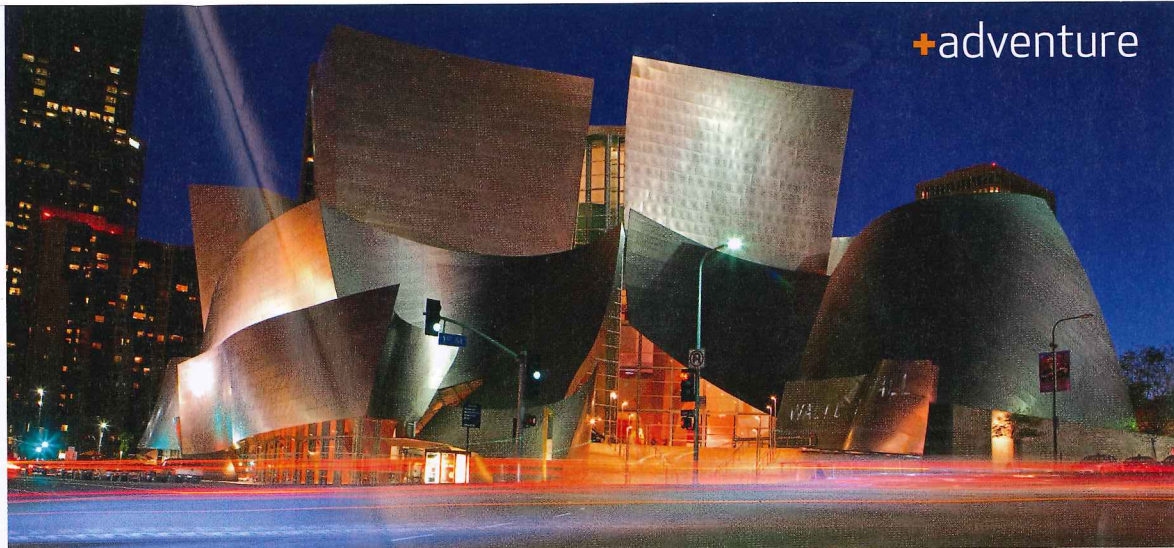
Depending on the ages and energy levels of your kids, schedule an early dinner at a Downtown Disney hotspot like Ralph Brennan's Jazz Kitchen; families with younger kids may opt for dinner at California Adventure's food court to maximise park time. After dark, split your evenings between the parks – just remember: California Adventure basically shuts down around 9pm for the stunning World of Color show.

Even after three days of exploring the parks, you will not see or do it all. And to be honest, your children won't care. Between eating breakfast with Goofy, or riding through the psychedelic décor of It's a Small World, or marvelling at the gorgeous cinematography of Soarin' Over California, your kids will crash out at the end of the day with giant smiles on their faces. And by easing up on your itinerary, you can thoroughly enjoy both yourselves and each other.

## NOT-TO-MISS RIDES AND ATTRACTIONS

Even with plenty of know-how, planning your day can feel overwhelming at first, especially for the jet-lagged. Decide which rides you really want to experience before heading out. Favorites include Space Mountain, the Haunted Mansion, Pirates of the Caribbean, Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Indiana Jones, and It's a Small World. The afternoon parade, nightly fireworks, and the Fantasmic show are also well worth your time.

At Disney's California Adventure, visitors simply must experience Soarin' Over California – a flight simulator ride that allows you to fly over (and smell! and hear!) California's most stunning attractions – it'll have you wanting to extend your trip to explore the entire state. Other favourites include Tower of Terror, California Screamin', and the brand new Cars Land (which just opened in June). Before dinner, grab a Fast Pass to experience the impressive World of Color light and water show when you've finished eating.



the most popular attractions is It's a Small World.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

The best deal to get into Disneyland and California Adventure has to be the three-day Park Hopper pass. It allows you to leave and enter the two parks as many times as you want throughout the day and can be used over 14 days.

With a Fast Pass you receive an appointment window of an hour to return to a popular ride, so that you can skip the long line. And even if your scheduled appointment has expired, you can return at any time that day. The only drawback is that you cannot get a Fast Pass for a different attraction until you use the previous pass, or the time on it expires. It is best to know which rides you want to experience in advance and get the passes early.

Disneyland's Rider Swap card allows both parents travelling with a small child to enjoy the ride. Here's the scoop: Dad queues up for Star Tours, say, with older brother, and then asks a staff member for a Rider Swap card. After Dad rides, Mum hands him the kid, grabs the card, skips the line, and gets to ride too.

## DISNEYLAND HOTELS

With dozens of hotels surrounding the parks, choosing where to lay your head can be a bit challenging. For first time visitors, I suggest the Disney hotels, which include plenty of perks for guests, including early access to the parks, character breakfasts, exhilarating pools, and package deals for tickets and lodging.

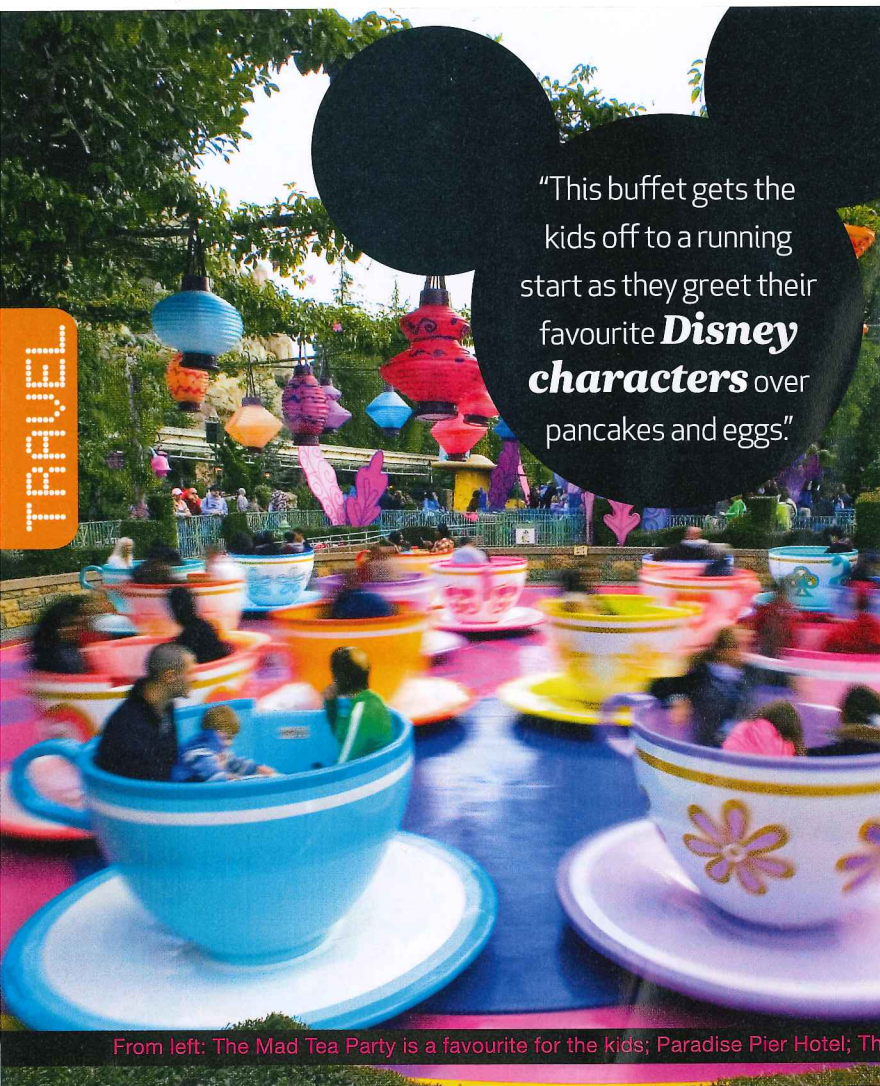
The magical Disneyland Hotel caters to families wanting that classic Disney aesthetic: Snow White mirrors, Magic Castle headboards, and hidden Mickeys on the wallpaper. The more casual, and less expensive, beach-themed Paradise Pier Hotel, gives guests stellar views of the evening's fireworks.

The deluxe Grand Californian Hotel, located in the heart of Downtown Disney, pays tribute to a Yosemite lodge with a stone fireplace in the lobby, and decadent bedding in the guest quarters.

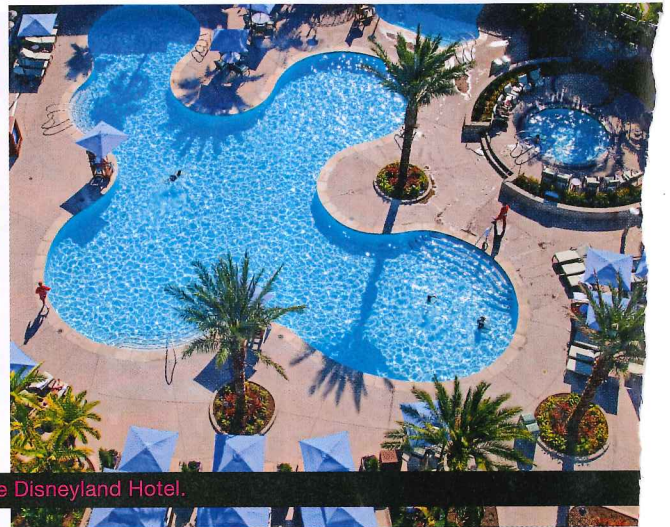
## RESTAURANTS

Food in and around the parks can be a bit pricey. In

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"This buffet gets the kids off to a running start as they greet their favourite **Disney characters** over pancakes and eggs."



From left: The Mad Tea Party is a favourite for the kids; Paradise Pier Hotel; The Disneyland Hotel.

Disneyland, the best places to eat are Café Orleans and the fanciful Blue Bayou, both in the French Quarter. Disneyland doesn't serve alcohol, so many adults prefer to dine in Disney's California Adventure where Mondavi wine flows at the Golden Vine Winery.

Alternatively, Downtown Disney has become a gathering place for locals and tourists – especially after

dark. Popular spots include La Brea Bakery (for egg sandwiches and lattes), Ralph Brennan's Jazz Kitchen (for New Orleans-inspired cuisine like gumbo, sweet cornbread, catfish, and a decadent chocolate bread pudding), and Napolini (for insanely huge pizzas). You'll also find nightclubs like House of Blues, and a whole range of clothing and toyshops (including a newly remodelled Lego store).

Another noteworthy dining experience is a character breakfast. This buffet gets the kids off to a running start as they greet their favourite Disney characters over pancakes and eggs. Breakfasts occur at the three Disneyland hotels and at the Plaza Inn. Reservations are highly recommended.

### OTHER DISNEY EXPERIENCES IN LOS ANGELES

Grown-ups will appreciate the stunning Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, which hosts celebrity musicians as well as the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Tickets required.

For a more family-centered experience, head to Hollywood's El Capitan Theatre to watch films, often paired with live character performances, in an historic museum-grade theatre.

STORY MICHELE BIGLEY

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