

‘I took the kids to Disneyland Paris and walked 20,000 steps a day’

It's a physical and emotional work out...

BY [AMANDA STATHAM](#) PUBLISHED: 22 APRIL 2024



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I was raised by (lovely) parents who spent holidays hiking the Pembrokeshire coast path while staying in an off-grid cottage way before

a digital detox was even a thing, so a trip to somewhere like Disneyland was never on the cards growing up.

Fast-forward to my own parenting years (two sons aged 8 and 12) and I have a more open outlook when it comes to family travel, in that I'll go pretty much anywhere with them - the best being a trip to Petra in Jordan, the worst being a choppy ferry journey to Ireland during which they vomited on me so I arrived on the Emerald Isle covered in sick. Happy days.

So when the kids said their dream holiday was Disneyland, it wasn't an initial 'no way', though Orlando was instantly ruled out due to cost. But Disneyland Paris? The French capital's cheaper and easier to reach in a weekend and, after some excellent campaigning from the kids outlining the charms of its exciting rides, restaurants styled like *Ratatouille* and Sleeping Beauty's iconic pink castle (ok the last one was me), I booked.

How do you get there?

One word: Eurostar. Quick, easy, efficient. We arrived at St Pancras International at noon and strolled through passport control and security in minutes, even the kids were impressed. There are only a few food options on the other side though, so eat in the station beforehand if you want a seated meal ([Searcys](#) is great).

The journey was equally as efficient, particularly the meal served at our table, aeroplane-style, with a hostess serving a choice of two meals from a trolley - I opted for beetroot salad and a glass of wine. How civilised.



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Sleeping Beauty's iconic castle

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A couple of hours later we glided into Gard du Nord in the heart of Paris, from where we took a 30-minute transfer to *Hotel L'Elysée Val d'Europe*, our base for two nights and just a (free) ten-minute shuttle ride from Disneyland Paris.

First impressions of the parks?



PATRÍCIA FERREIRA

First surprise? it's two parks: Disneyland Paris and the smaller (though size doesn't matter, right?) Walt Disney Studios Park. Second surprise? It's SO. BIG.

The moment you step through the gates (there are two sets, security and then each park has its own entrance), you're transported to another world, one where you can chat to Cinderella, have an Avenger's burger for lunch and get lost in an Alice in Wonderland's labyrinth.



HÔTEL L'ÉLYSÉE VAL D'EUROPE

Captain Hook at the carnival

Everywhere you look people of all ages are wearing Mickey and Minnie headbands – we even saw some excited punters dressed in head-to-toe Disney merch (yes, they were adults). When we arrived a parade along Main Street USA had just started, so we were instantly immersed in a carnival atmosphere complete with colourful floats carrying characters from *Frozen*, *Peter Pan* etc.

Okay tell me about the rides...

I'm starting with the rides my sons BOTH voted the best. Number one – the shiny new *Spider-Man W.E.B Adventure* in the Marvel-themed Avengers Campus (Walt Disney Studios), where we climbed aboard a W.E.B slinger vehicle and shot spider-bots with web from OUR HANDS *Spidey web hands gesture*. It's fast, furious and, even though I caught the least bots, I get why this one was such a hit.

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Spiderman training

The rest of the Avengers Campus went down a storm, including *Flight Force* (warning, this twisty, turney coaster isn't for the faint-hearted). Meeting Spider-Man in the Hero Training Centre was a great photo opp, though we left feeling like we probably didn't have enough training to rid

a city of criminals. Sadly, I couldn't drag them into the *Pixar Musical Adventure*, 'a journey through *Toy Story*, *Monsters* and *Finding Nemo*' (too babyish, apparently),

Over in Disneyland Paris, the kids' favourite ride was *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue* found in the Discoveryland area. We put on a pair of 3D specs, stepped aboard a Starspeeder 1000 and sped through a galaxy far, far away, with thrilling glimpses of the Death Star, C-3PO and underwater realms. It's incredibly realistic and everyone wanted to go on it again (me included!).



THOMAS EVRAERT

We gave *Stars Wars Hyperspace Mountain* a swerve, though it did look thrilling, and headed instead for another white-knuckle coaster: *Temple of Peril*, a slightly terrifying Indiana Jones-style coaster where putting your hands in the air and screaming is obligatory. You can get more adrenaline rushes on *Big Thunder Mountain* plus *Crush's Coaster* and *The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror* in Walt Disney Studios.

Rides aside, the shows are not to be missed. *Frozen* fans will want to make a beeline for Elsa and crew at *Frozen: A Musical Invitation* (Walt

Disney Studios) where you can belt out *Let It Go*. *The Lion King's* equally enticing and apparently *Alice in Wonderland* is due to take the stage in Walt Disney Studios this spring.

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Adventure Land

All three of us thought Adventureland was excellent, a lush land of towering bamboo, spooky caves, wobbly rope bridges, an enormous (fake) tree housing the *Swiss Family Robinson's* cabin, souks from *Aladdin* and a massive pirate galleon. Think the best play park you've been to on steroids.

Got younger kids? There's loads for little ones, particularly in Fantasyland, where we saw *Peter Pan's flight* (you get to fly through a virtual Never Land) and tots can spin around in the Mad Hatter's Tea Cups, fly in Dumbo and ride on the gentle *Le Petit Train Du Cirque*.

And is the food any good?

It's a good job you easily walk more than five miles exploring the parks, because the restaurant offering at Disney's off the scale. Seriously, I'd be happy to just do a food tour. If your main aim is to meet Disney characters, you're going to want to book a table at fancy French restaurant Auberge de Cendrillon in Disneyland Park, where Cinderella, Elsa and co make an appearance. Or Plaza Gardens pavilion for a chance to meet Mickey over the all you can eat buffet.



DISNEYLAND PARIS

Bistro Chez Remy

For an authentic *Ratatouille* vibe, it has to be Bistrot Chez Rémy – think over-sized cocktail umbrellas, cookbooks and cutlery. While Marvel fans will want to refuel at Pym Kitchen in the Avenger Camp for the novelty value – the food, zapped by Pym particles (see *Ant-Man and the Wasp*) is fun-sized, from mini burgers to massive pretzels.



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A refuel after all that walking

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For snacks/pit stops, March Hare in Fantasyland is very sweet (literally, it sells lots of ice cream), and we couldn't resist a round of Nutella-loaded waffles from one of the many food trucks. See more dining options [here](#).

Where's the best place to stay?

We slept 10 mins (by complimentary shuttle bus) from the parks at super four-star [Hotel L'Elysée Val d'Europe](#). If you're not a die-hard Disney fan, believe me you'll appreciate arriving back in the real world after 10 hours of fantasy.



HOTEL L'ELYSÉE VAL D'EUROPE

Hotel L'Elysée Val d'Europe

Our spotless family room had two enormous squishy double beds, WiFi faster than a Disney 'coaster and a tub, the perfect place to wallow in bubbles (the foamy kind) and ease tired legs. If there are more than four in your clan, book an XL Family Room which can fit up to eight people.



L'ELYSÉE VAL D'EUROPE

Although the food at Disneyland Paris is great, our favourite meal of the weekend was at Le George, the hotel's swish restaurant. Starters of light tuna tempura and duck, followed by succulent steak frites (the kids menu is simply smaller portions of the adults, so French). Even the wine, a glass (ok two) of recommended Cote-Rotie (€12), was superb.



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'The Jungle'

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The boys left the table between courses to explore 'the jungle', a mini Kew-like double-storey glass room filled with trees, tropical ferns, banana

plants and flowers. There's a long dining table in the middle of all the foliage which you can book if you're in a bigger party.

↳Diplomat Bar's a cosy spot for a post-Disney cocktail - it looked like that's exactly what many of guests were doing, though *most* had removed their Minnie ears - and it also serves a rich hot chocolate for kids.

Try and carve out a little free time to visit huge shopping centre Val d'Europe opposite the hotel, which is like adult Disneyland – upstairs dedicated to fashion and beauty and a lower floor full of French food. I picked up a tube of French beauty editors' must-have secret potion A313 Pommade from the pharmacy and a pair of black ankle boots, not bad for a 25-minute dash.

Want to stay in-park? Disneyland Hotel (themed around Disney royalty) has just reopened its doors (after a two-year, multi-million pound reno) and it's gone down a storm with reviewers. The upsides? Reception resembling Sleeping Beauty's castle, getting to eat breakfast with Disney characters, pillow menus, five-star Clarins spa and a private entrance to the park. The downside? It's £1,501 per night in April, though this is for a family of four and does include two-day park passes.

TOP TIPS

Download the Disneyland Paris app: BEFORE you go. Seriously, everything you could possibly ever need is on the app, from interactive maps, to opening times and the ability to book lunch. And take a phone charger, because if your phone shuts down, the magic will too.

Don't try and cram in too much: These parks are BIG. Better to go for two days and spread it out, if you can.

Pack like you're going on a hike: You'll walk for miles (I'm talking 20,000 steps a day), so it's important to be prepared. Trainers, tick. Comfy clothes, tick. Waterbottles (there are plenty of drinking fountains), tick. Snacks, tick.

Beat the queues for rides with Disney Premier Access Ultimate: If you're not prepared to wait for up to 45 mins to get on some of the more popular rides and attractions, you can snap up premier access on the app (around €90pp per day for up to 16 rides low seasons, up to €190pp per day in peak) then simply scan the QR code at the entrance to the ride and, *voilà*, you're in the fast lane.

Arrive early, but not too early: The parks open at 9.30am and the queues were pretty lengthy even in low season (Feb), however by 10.30am they appeared to have eased off a little.

Take rain gear: You're in FRANCE not FLORIDA. Rain happens, and you don't want to spend extra money on see-through ponchos you'll never wear again.

GO THERE!

Rooms at [Hotel L'Elysée Val d'Europe](#) start from £89pn (including complimentary shuttle to and from Disneyland Paris) [BOOK NOW](#).

[Eurostar](#) return tickets to Paris from £78. [Disneyland Paris park tickets](#) start from £75.58pp per day or £145.32pp for two days.

More family holiday ideas...

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