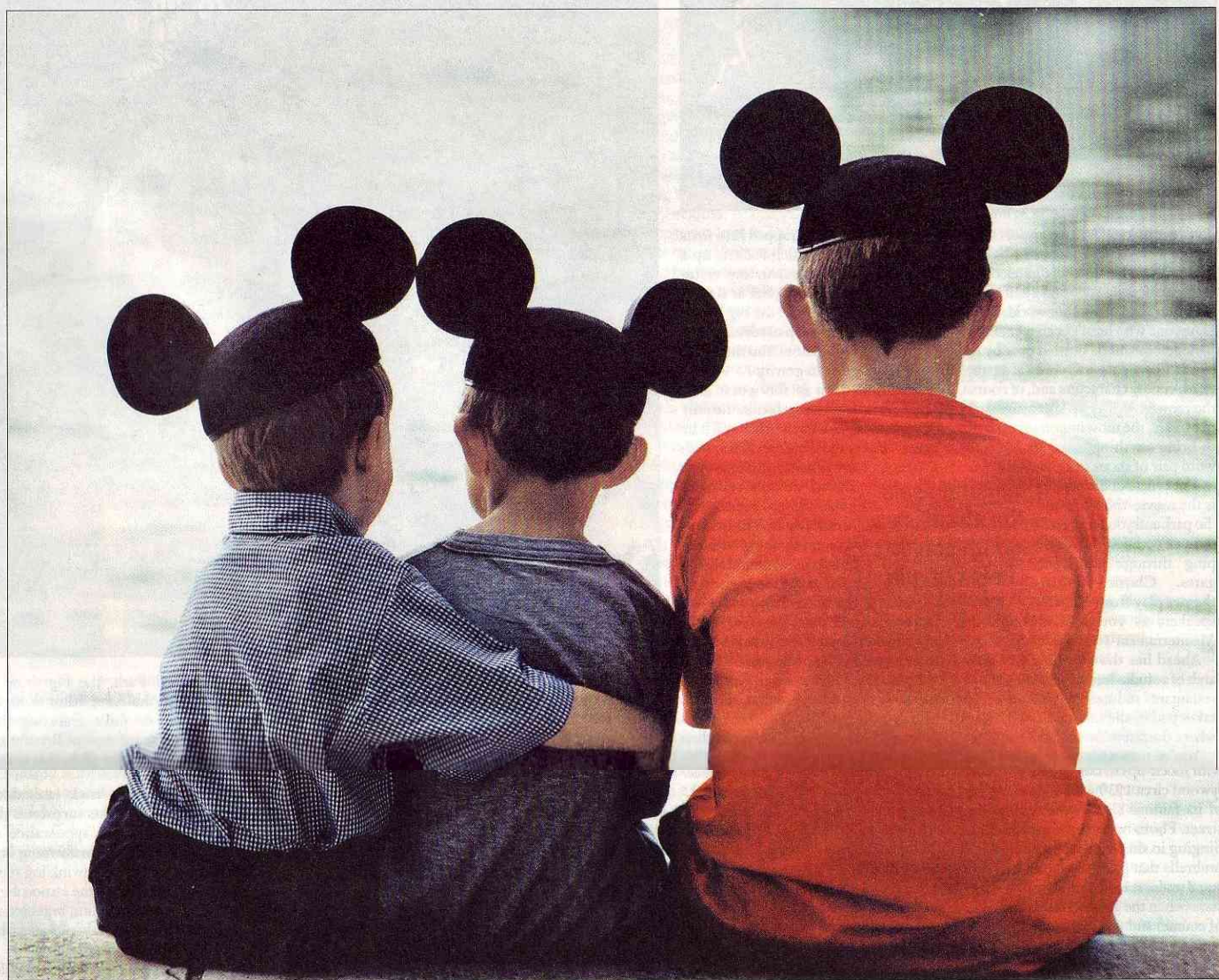


Travel & Outdoors



Themed to perfection

At the new Disneyland Paris, the magic starts before you step through the gates

BY CHRISTIAN SYLT

THE EXPERIENCE IS QUITE surreal. The 30 degree sun is beating down on my shoulders, I've just finished a well-stacked burger for lunch and am now weaving around wayward children beaming as they rush to ride Dumbo the flying elephant. Me, I'm on my way to ride Pirates of the Caribbean and could have sworn I was in Florida. In fact I'm in Disneyland Paris but the similarities have never been greater.

For the past few years, the Mouse has been radically revamping its Parisian house but faced a home-grown obstacle as it didn't have enough in its arsenal to tempt tourists away

from the Florida fortnight at its bigger brother. Now the tide is turning and last year 14.5 million guests tripped through the turnstiles at Disneyland Paris – more visitors than there were at three of Disney's four parks in Orlando – making it the fifth most visited theme park in the world. The famous Disney magic has worked its wonder and now it starts doing its stuff before you even begin your journey.

One of the most sedate ways to travel to the park is on the train and it takes two journeys to get there from Edinburgh. The first takes you to London's St Pancras where a music hall-style brass band plays classic Disney ditties in the Eurostar departure terminal. You

Three mousketeers take a break from the fun



don't get that in Orlando airport when visiting Florida. The train from St Pancras pulls right up to the gates of the theme park in just two and a half hours. It's a short trip to another world.

Anyone who hasn't been to a Disney park before will be bowled over by the psychedelic colours, colossal attractions, cuddly characters and, of course, the crowds. With two sprawling parks to explore, the most important tip is not to bring anything other than a well-worn pair of shoes.

The centre of the action is the movie-themed studio park and you feel a real sense of occasion just stepping through its iron gates. Classic movie themes play from hidden speakers as you walk through the Mediterranean-style courtyard.

Ahead lies the sweeping Art Deco arch of a studio building housing shops, restaurants and street entertainers. This takes you to the main hub of the park where the attention to detail is superb.

You're met with a boulevard lined with mock-ups of buildings from Hollywood circa 1930 with a giant replica of its famous sign at the end of the street. Photo opportunities abound. A Singing in the Rain-style ornamental umbrella that gets rained on when you stand under it is a huge hit with youngsters (when the adults aren't hogging it, of course) and you can hardly miss the park's centrepiece.

In the past year, the number of attractions in the studio's park has doubled and, looming ominously over the hub, is the flagship – the Tower of Terror. This ride is not for the faint hearted as it preys on pretty much all common phobias. It's certainly not one to go on if you're claustrophobic, afraid of heights or the dark and definitely don't ride if you've just eaten.

It is a full-scale mock-up of a faded Grande Dame hotel which, according to the spooky video at the beginning of the attraction, has been uninhabited since a lightning bolt struck it in the 1930s. It's a full-size building and you enter through the cobweb-covered lobby complete with luggage still standing in reception.

You're soon queuing in the boiler

room before being strapped into seats in a cage-like lift which rockets up a shaft in pitch darkness. An impressive effect then makes it appear as if stars surround the lift before the big shock: giant windows open up to reveal a view of the park down below. You then hurtle down faster than gravity.

The first drop is the worst and, although it lasted just seconds, the only thought in my head was "when will it be over?". But as the lift hit the floor, with

my stomach still in the sky above, the lift rocketed back up to repeat the ordeal. By that time I was screaming along with the kids around me and almost used to the experience. As the third drop began I was lapping it up in a strange state where my brain was saying "be afraid" but my mouth couldn't help but grin.

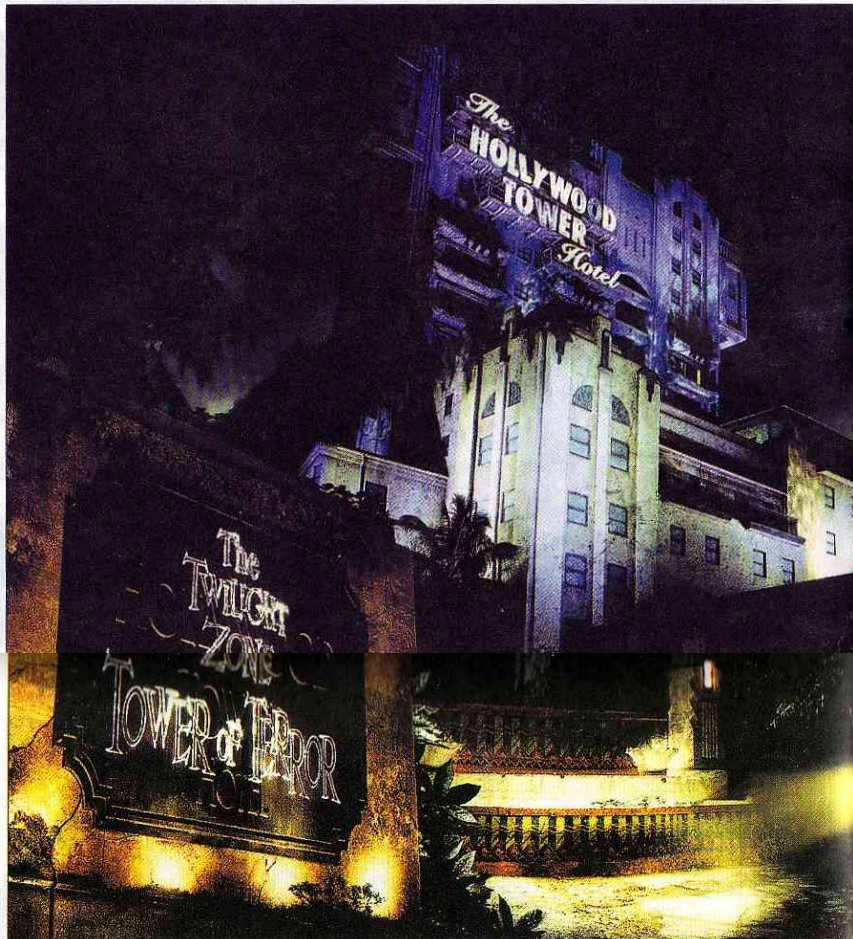
If you feel brave enough to take on the Tower a good suggestion is, before riding, pick up a Fastpass for the park's other top draw, Crush's Coaster, as then you won't have to wait for both.

Crush tends to have a winding queue topping an hour by mid-morning. Putting up with this requires a basic commodity that children tend to lack – patience. However, Fastpass addresses the problem by giving a time to return to a fast-track queue to guests who insert their entry ticket into a box at each attraction. It works well for those who have a strict schedule but isn't so good if you prefer ambling.

Don't be fooled by Crush's cute theme. The ride puts you in the role (literally, as the cars look like giant turtle shells) of Finding Nemo's clownfish star and does a damn good job of representing ocean currents.

It spins riders round a roller-coaster track in the dark as models of sharks and jellyfish suddenly appear.

My brain said 'be afraid', my mouth couldn't help but grin



Clockwise from top left: The Legend of the Lion King show; Twilight Zone Tower of Terror; Sleeping Beauty's Castle; Crush's Coaster; Mickey and Minnie Mouse, below

High-tech projections make the cartoon characters appear to float alongside the track but you'll have to ride a few times to spot them since you'll initially struggle just to work out which direction you're going in.

If dropping in darkness, spinning on rails and being deluged isn't your cup of tea, it's worth remembering the Disney parks are not for children and thrill-seekers alone. While kids go ga-ga over the rides, there are shows to astound their mums and dads.

The studio's star show is its stunt display which is like watching a live-action movie. It's a fabulous display of cars, bikes and jet skis choreographed and played out live in a giant amphitheatre. Cars chase after motorbikes, turning like ballet dancers en pointe, pirouetting perfectly in formation and seemingly missing each other by millimetres. There's a giant jump across the set culminating with a car flying through the air backwards and landing on a truck. Film history buffs will go weak at the knees to know that Herbie, star of Disney's Love Bug movies, even makes an appearance.

Over at the storybook-inspired

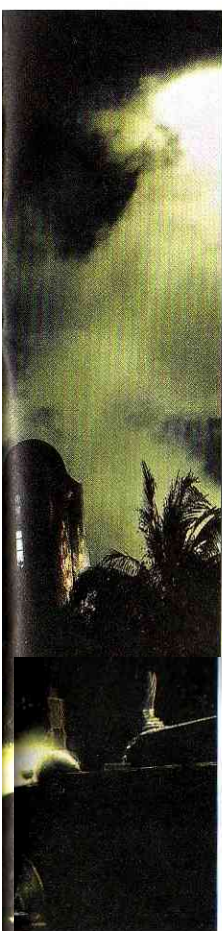
Disneyland Park, the big draw is Legend of the Lion King, a high-tech, tour de force featuring live singing from a troupe of Broadway-calibre stars. It's the gloss that makes it memorable.

Mock savannah rock embedded with fibre-optic lights surrounds the stage to create the appearance of molten lava before transforming into a desert sky scene with twinkling stars. Smoke effects add to the atmosphere and scenes from the film, ingeniously projected on to a curtain of water, play in synch to the on-stage action.

Keeping the kids enthralled are life-size animatronics of the cartoon characters from the film which act alongside the singers. The quality of the singing is the highlight for the adults in the audience though, and you can't help but clap along to the classic tunes. It's not uncommon to see adults sitting slack-jawed after the show ends, as the kids jump out of their seats making a beeline for the next attraction.

Even waiting in line is made easier on the eye at Disney as its trademark theming extends to the queues so guests get to peer into Indiana Jones' tent while waiting to ride the roller-coaster or listen to Buzz Lightyear explaining what to look out for on the attraction named after him.





Disney days get a suitably grand send-off with a parade featuring stroboscopes and giant floats which transform from classic villains into dragons and snakes. A fireworks finale is synchronised with feel-good music and projections to make the centrepiece castle look like a storybook drawing.

With all the hotfooting around the parks, you'll be thankful the hotels are

within striking distance. You can stay in a Disney hotel, themed to regions of America, or opt for a slightly cheaper chain hotel a short bus ride away. The best of the bunch is the Radisson, with its airy lobby and well-manicured grounds overlooking rolling hills. It's refreshingly un-themed. Disneyland may be an escapist heaven but at some time you have to come home. **SM**

FACTFILE DISNEYLAND PARIS

HOW TO GET THERE

■ Virgin (08457 222 333, www.virgintrains.co.uk) offers tickets from Edinburgh Waverley to St Pancras International from £15.70 each way in September. Eurostar from St Pancras to Disneyland Paris costs from £121 return through Airmiles (0844 493 3399, www.airmiles.co.uk).

WHERE TO STAY

■ Three nights at Disney's Sequoia Lodge including breakfast and four-day park passes for up to two adults and two children under seven starts from £564 in September. Alternatively, three nights in the Radisson at Disneyland Paris including breakfast for two adults and two children under 12 (park passes additional) is £390. Book through Airmiles



(0844 493 3399, www.airmiles.co.uk).

AND THERE'S MORE

■ Scotsman Reader Holidays has a four-day trip to Disneyland Paris departing 30 December 2008. Adults from £239, children from £165. Visit www.holidays.scotsman.com and click on "Newmarket".

SHOOTING & FISHING

Go with the Flo

Wake up and smell the doggy

BY ALASTAIR ROBERTSON

WE HAVE HAD THE ANNUAL SPORTING invasion of the rellies. This year there were so many small children and stray belongings that we were beginning to look and feel like a refugee camp – the forlorn single wellie boot abandoned in the road, the child wailing for its mother, the incessant feeding of hungry mouths.

Happily we were in no immediate danger except from asphyxiation by Flo, my brother's old, suppurating black lab who smells like an over-ripe gorgonzola and slobbers. Even worse, the smell rubbed off on both Mango, our golden retriever, and Crumpet, the cocker spaniel puppy.

I am happy to say that my brother's family is not enough educated not to be mortally offended when it is suggested their dog stinks. But you live dangerously when you criticise a person's dog. It is almost as bad as criticising their children or their driving. To suggest a dog smells – unless it has clearly rolled in fox or badger – is akin to questioning the owner's personal hygiene.

It has taken us three years to convince the family that Flo stinks. They sort of know this but have become so used to it (their people carrier will be quite unsellable) that they treat it all as a bit of a joke and rather think you are making a fuss about nothing.

Within two minutes of the whole shebang disembarking from their foetid transport, Flo had plonked herself down in the kitchen on her travelling basket, dragged in with the suitcases, and settled in for a good reek. We did not actually want to say: "Put her in the car – now." So we started up a series of jovial observations along the lines of: "Gosh, what's that awful smell, you don't think it could be Flo do you?" And: "Have you had her ears checked?" And: "One of ours once had a boil on its bottom that smelt a bit like Flo."

Helpful hints. As if smelling isn't enough, Flo's other trick is to slobber all over the dog water bowl and leave a minor flood in her wake. For the first 24 hours our delicately barbed remarks about hygiene fell largely on deaf ears.

But I am afraid that when I spotted Crumpet the puppy snuggling up to Flo and licking a line of slobber off her chops during supper, it all became too much. It was actually so bad that one nephew, having had the phenomenon gleefully pointed out by his siblings, abandoned his mince and tatties and went off to be sick.

You live dangerously when you criticise a person's dog

Flo was banished from the house and had to sleep in the car. No one seemed remotely bothered. Not even Flo, who would occasionally attempt entry if a door was left open, which happened quite a lot as by now we had 12 extra people in the house, six of whom were children. Flo would wander in and just stand there unconcernedly radiating pong until shoo-ed out.

We knew the message had got through when an attempt was made to shampoo her, but to no obvious avail. To give Flo her due, she didn't piddle on the carpet, which is a common trait among visiting bitches. We have since had thank you

letters from all the children each humbly apologising for Flo, and a telephone call from a less enthusiastic sister-in-law to say she had taken Flo to the vet who poked about her anal glands, pronounced her fit and well, if smelly, but offered no explanation and sent in a bill for £43 plus vat.

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■ Log on to www.thescotsman.co.uk/shootingfishing/ for the best sporting holidays and kit in Scotland

