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## Having a Magical Trip -- No Matter How Crowded It Is

By Kate Abbott

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*Donald and Mickey perform in the daily morning 50th Anniversary Rededication Ceremony on Main Street. Arrive earlier to go on rides or collect FastPasses before you watch the ceremony.*

You're going to Disneyland! That's great. You're going in the summer? Or on a holiday weekend? Well, that can be great, too. Any trip to Disneyland can be fantastic, no matter when you are able to go. Even if you go in the more-crowded summer months, you'll still be able to enjoy yourself, go on choice rides, have time to relax, and rest in the shade. Here are my strategies for fun in the summertime—I hope they'll help you make the most of your trip, too.

### **Become an Early Riser (Just for the Day)**

It's common theme park wisdom, but it can seem awfully tempting to sleep in on summer vacation, even if you're headed to Disneyland. But when it's going to be packed—any time in the summer—taking advantage of the early morning hours (from park opening to mid-morning) will boost your fun quota for the day. I'm usually a snooze-button pusher, but the thought of standing in a long line in the mid-afternoon sun will propel me out of bed at six-thirty.

If you are going to park at the gigantic Disney parking structure, leave extra time for your first lines of the day: getting into the lot, and waiting for a shuttle to the park. The shuttles usually run every few minutes on busy days, but you never know—in my recent July visit, we arrived at the parking structure at the park's opening time, but the shuttles weren't running continuously that morning, so we

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were delayed about 10-15 minutes. Also keep in mind that, unlike at Walt Disney World, you cannot bypass the bag inspection lines, whether you have a bag or not. Consider these your practice lines for the day, and plan ahead for them.

**Eat, Drink, and Be Merry***Breakfast in Bed*

During the off-season, and even in the summer if my family has at least a couple of days to enjoy the park, we like to share cinnamon buns on Main Street for breakfast. But, if going on rides is a priority for the day, eat a quick breakfast in your room and you'll be ready to speed-walk to more rides in the precious hours before the park fills up. Then take a mid-morning coffee or snack break when the Mint Julep Bar opens up in New Orleans Square.

*Break for Lunch*

After you've had a couple of hours of big-time attraction fun, the park will be filling up with all those people who couldn't get themselves out of bed earlier. Lines will be longer, Disneyland's narrow streets will be congested, and people—even your usually enthusiastic party—might be cranky. This is the perfect time to relax at lunch, in or out of the park. Whether you eat in or out, go back to your hotel for naps, swimming, or reading. Then you can return refreshed around dinnertime, when the temperatures have cooled. You'll be rested enough to stay late into the night. After the fireworks, the lines are lighter and you can go on rides you missed in the early morning.

If it's really packed, opt for a lunch outside the berm before heading back to the hotel. If you want to maximize your Disneyland time, though, you can still eat inside the park and not have too much of a wait. The sight of attraction-worthy lines at all the counter-service restaurants might look daunting, but there are still options. The Blue Ribbon Bakery on Main Street (home of the cinnamon buns in the morning) also serves well-stacked sandwiches at lunchtime. Because most people just think they serve breakfast goodies, even on the most crowded summer day, I have never encountered a line of more than a couple savvy visitors inside the bakery at lunchtime. They have a selection of several sandwiches, including ham, turkey, tuna, and vegetarian.

If you want more choices, head for the Pizza Port in Tomorrowland. Although it's usually bustling, you can cut your wait time here by skipping ahead to the food area that you want. For example, if you want the Count-Down Chicken Fusilli, you can grab a tray (OK, you do have to wait in a line for those) and then go directly to the pasta station, bypassing the salad area that precedes it. Even when it's packed, there's usually a seat to be found out the sliding doors toward the back, at a covered area by the Space Mountain entrance.

If you want to eat at one of the three full-service restaurants in Disneyland (Carnation Café, the newly redone Café Orleans, or the Blue Bayou; yes, there's Club 33, but that doesn't count for us mere mortals), call ahead before your trip (714-781-DINE, up to 60 days in advance) and make priority seating arrangements. Because there are only these three full-service options, Disneyland for lunch and dinner, on busy days the choice times are usually full if you try to make priority seating arrangements on the same day. You can also arrange for priority seating at the Plaza Inn's character breakfast (the Plaza Inn is not a full-service restaurant for lunch or dinner).

If Disneyland's full-service restaurants are just too crowded, but you're not ready to leave the park area just yet, you can also make priority seating arrangements for restaurants in California Adventure (for Ariel's Grotto, or the Wine Country Trattoria and the Vineyard Room in the Golden Vine Winery), or for Downtown Disney and the hotels' restaurants (except for the Rainforest Café, which has its own reservations number: 714-772-0413).

## Rides and Attractions

Whether you like the system or not, using FastPass will save you time standing in lines when it's packed. (Get an overview of the FastPass system at <http://www.themouseforless.com/tripplanning/dlparks/fastpass.shtml>). Remember that Roger Rabbit's Car-Toon Spin is not connected to the FastPass system, so you can get a FastPass for that ride even if you currently have a FastPass for another attraction. Since you can also use a FastPass ticket after the "expiration" time on the same day, send a strong-legged member of your party out to get FastPasses for everyone for a popular ride early in the day (make sure that your chosen runner has everyone's park tickets to get the FastPasses).

I think there are a couple of attractions that are even better when it's hot and crowded in the park. Both the Enchanted Tiki Room and the *Mark Twain* let you sit down and bask in your cool spots, while feeling sorry for everyone else thronging by.

### *A Dole Whip on a Hot Day: Enchanting*



*The Enchanted Tiki Garden early in the morning.*

A garden with shady seats, an air-conditioned sit-down show, and cold and tasty Dole Whips—what more could you want on a summer day? The Tiki Room is my favorite attraction, but even if singing birds aren't your thing (but really, who doesn't like singing birds and foliage?) it's the perfect place to recharge your feet and senses on a stifling day. You will emerge refreshed, especially if you have a Dole Whip float to sip during the show.

The shows begin every 20 minutes, but don't worry if you come when there's a wait until the next show starts. You get to wait for the next show in the Enchanted Tiki Garden. Order yourself a pineapple treat from *inside* the garden area; the line is almost always longer on the outside. Plop onto a bench, eat your cold treat, and watch the tiki god entertainment until it's time to go inside.

The Tiki Room has sometimes unpredictable hours, and doesn't always open or close with the park. Plan on taking a mid-day break there, when the tiki birds are ready to put on the show.

### *Calm Waters*





*The Mark Twain, before it welcomes the first guests of the day. See those seats up front? With a little planning, they're yours to enjoy.*

Head onto the Rivers of America's *Mark Twain* to escape the crowds. Wait in the shade at the riverboat landing for a new boat. If you're one of the first few onboard, you have a couple of fun options—both sure to reinvigorate you.

If you've got kids, or are feeling adventurous yourself, ask a non-busy Cast Member on the dock if you may visit the wheelhouse. (I've never been turned down, but I always think it helps to wear mouse ears and/or a giant smile.) Getting to "steer" the *Mark Twain*, ding the bell, and pull the steam whistle, while gaining a captain's-eye view of the throngs down in New Orleans Square, is an experience to treasure. The captain might even make it easier to remember your trip by giving you a riverboat captain certificate.

I wouldn't like to wear out my welcome in the wheelhouse, though, so I almost always head straight for the cute wrought-iron chairs up front or the life-preserver storage bins that function as handy benches on the lowest level. Either way, you peacefully glide along the water and forget your sore feet.

Uncrowded House



*Everyone's in a hurry to be someplace else, leaving Tarzan's Treehouse all to you.*

When there's little legroom on the ground, do some legwork and head up. Tarzan's Treehouse in Adventureland might have a lot of stairs, but it doesn't have the crowds you'll find on ground level. The climb yields great views, and another top-down view of the traffic.

### **Places to Go**

#### *New Orleans Square's Quiet Crannies*

Many days the Disney Gallery's door to the balcony above Pirates of the Caribbean will be open. Here you'll find the perfect place to gaze at the crowds below and be glad you're not among them. Admire Walt's and Roy's initials placed in the wrought iron, and enjoy the same view Walt would have loved to see from his intended apartment. Even if the balcony isn't open, you can duck out to the courtyard in the back and study the glorious container plantings.



*The Courtyard of the Angels: The perfect spot to relax.*

The Courtyard of the Angels, behind L' Ornement Magique, is sometimes quiet, and at other times mobbed with people taking pictures on the staircase. It's handy to pop in and see for yourself. When it's empty, it's one of the most relaxing places in the park. Even if families do wander through, you might want to have fun and offer to play photographer for a group shot of them all together.

#### *Frontierland Fun*



*Your own near-private island.*



*One of the calming sights from the island.*

After watching the tiki birds and sitting on the *Mark Twain*, you might be up for a stroll on Tom Sawyer's Island. Although most people might think of it as a place for kids to run around and use up their energy—which it is—it also offers many shady, near-empty nooks where you can relax.

After you're recharged, set your sights on hitting all of the targets at Frontierland's Shootin' Exposition. Plus, it's on your way to Main Street, where you can experience...

*Cartoons and Comedy*



*Check out the cinema—you'll be one of the few who do on crowded days.*





*The Opera House has plenty of room and Disneyland nostalgia inside.*

Stop in at the Main Street Cinema to view classic cartoons on six screens. It's the perfect place to remember that it was "all started by a mouse." The special 50th anniversary exhibit in the Opera House, Disneyland: The First 50 Magical Years, is another excellent option for Disney nostalgia. It features a film in honor of Disneyland's history, hosted by Donald Duck and former Main Street Magic Shop cast member Steve Martin. The Opera House is freshly painted and lovely outside, air-conditioned inside, and has classic Disneyland displays in the lobby. (Mr. Lincoln will supposedly return to the stage 2007.)

#### *Critter Country Charm*

Critter Country's Hungry Bear Restaurant offers great views of river traffic and the local water life. Hide out in the shade and enjoy your own personal duck pond.

#### *The Grand Finale of the Day, but the Start of the Rest of Your Night*



*Madame Leota, projected onto It's a Small World during the fireworks.*

When you come back to Disneyland at night, you'll definitely want to see the 50th anniversary fireworks show, Remember: Dreams Come True. Viewing the fireworks from Main Street, in front of the castle, is a must at least once—the projections and special castle effects are awe-inspiring. Unfortunately, the crowds usually are awesome, too. Try viewing the show from the much less crowded Small World area. The vintage Disneyland footage projected onto It's a Small World is fun, at times psychedelic, a little weird, but totally enjoyable. It's less scary-crowded, and easier to maneuver to other lands afterward than battling against the tide on Main Street.

#### **Outward Bound**

##### *Hotels*

The Grand Californian Hotel and the Disneyland Hotel both offer non-crowded wanderings. Admire the Grand Californian's Arts-and-Crafts-style architecture,

and head to the impressive lobby to see the pottery and sculptures on display. Check out the Disneyland Hotel's displays of classic memorabilia and historic park photographs, then stroll through the garden and watch the koi.

### *Disney's California Adventure*



*My husband, Brad, has this part of California Adventure all to himself.*

You should also experience California Adventure. However, it is not usually nearly as crowded as Disneyland, and doesn't require the amount of strategizing to maximize the experience. I do think it has its own set of tips, though:

- If it's possible (you have a multi-day Park Hopper ticket, for example), go to California Adventure when it's cooler—in the evening. It always seems to me to be several degrees hotter over there in the daytime (there is a noticeable lack of full-grown shade trees in this young park), and it doesn't offer any of the transportation systems Disneyland has to get you around (no trains or vehicles). Plus, you'll be there for the Electrical Parade.



*Hang back and enjoy the fireworks from California Adventure, rather than rushing toward them.*

- Stay in California Adventure to watch Disneyland's fireworks. There's always a mad rush after the Electrical Parade to see the fireworks from Disneyland. You'll get a nice view of them from California Adventure's Sunshine Plaza



area. Plan on viewing Disneyland fireworks in-park on another night. You'll be fighting with the crowds if you try to do both on the same evening.

- If Disneyland's Pizza Port was too crowded earlier, try Pizza Oom-Mow-Mow in the Paradise Pier section of the park. You'll find practically the same menu, without the lines.
- For anyone who wants to be soaked, keep in mind that Grizzly River Run is not connected to the FastPass system (just like the Roger Rabbit ride in Disneyland).

Your Disneyland trip can be fun, eventful, and even relaxing—no matter how crowded it is. Dealing with throngs is less than magical, but having a good time among them is. With a cold treat in one hand and a FastPass ticket in the other, you're ready to make some magic of your own.

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Binnie Betten, Founder

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