



# DISNEYLAND PARIS IS NOT DISNEY WORLD

And That's Why You Need a Different Plan

A planning guide for families, first-timers, and  
Disney pros

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If you've been to Walt Disney World or Disneyland in California, you might be thinking... "How different can Disneyland Paris really be?" That's exactly what most people assume. And the truth is it's similar in many ways but it's also different in some fun ways. And those differences change how you should plan.

For example: transportation decisions are varied. The Studios park is almost done with a major transformation. Show access works differently, and you are not guaranteed to meet characters. Dining expectations are different. Even the pace of the park feels more European.

And depending on whether you're:

- Day-tripping from Paris
  - Staying on property
  - Traveling with little kids
  - Visiting before or after the 2026 expansion
  - Expecting a baby
  - Using points and miles
  - Or weaving Disney into a larger Europe itinerary
- ...your strategy should look different.

This guide is here to help you understand the landscape so you don't waste time, money, or energy figuring it out. And if after reading this you're thinking, "Okay, but what would we do specifically?"

I'm happy to personalize your Disneyland Paris plan and optimize it for your exact trip. Just reach out and tell me your dates and priorities. Email me at [jordanashley@fantasticalvacations.com](mailto:jordanashley@fantasticalvacations.com)

Now let's get into what actually makes Disneyland Paris different and how to plan it well.

### **Disneyland Paris Has Two Parks But One Is Changing**

- Disneyland Park (castle park)
- Walt Disney Studios Park (transitioning into Disney Adventure World beginning March 2026): The Studios park is expanding into immersive "Worlds," including the highly anticipated World of Frozen.

If you visit before transformation Studios often feels like a half-day park but after expansion, it may require a full-day strategy shift.

Let me know if you would like personalized advice on ticket length, hotel selection, daily pacing and ride prioritization.



## Transportation Is a Real Strategy Decision

This is not “grab a Minnie Van and go.”

From CDG (Charles de Gaulle Airport), you have several options:

**Magical Shuttle (Red Bus) potentially the easiest. This is what we used.**

- About 60 minutes
- Direct to Disney area
- Bookable through Disney packages or separately
- Best for families and luggage
- If you want zero train juggling after a long-haul flight, this is the calm option.

### TGV High-Speed Train

- ~10–12 minutes from CDG
- Limited departures
- Requires luggage navigation

### Private Transfer

- Most flexible, most expensive.

### From Central Paris

- RER A train is about 40 minutes to Marne-la-Vallée/Chessy.
- Affordable and efficient. Ideal for day trips.



# SHOWS

My Opinion: shows are not optional they are the highlight

## We personally watched:

- The Lion King
- Mickey and the Magician
- Alice & the Queen of Hearts
- Stitch Live
- The parade
- Nighttime spectacular

The Lion King and Mickey and the Magician feel like mini Broadway-level.

## Important: Seating is limited.

You can:

- Arrive early (30–45 minutes recommended)
- Purchase Guaranteed Access through the app for select shows

## Strategy tip:

Choose one must-see show per day. Build your ride schedule around it.



## Dining at Disneyland Paris

I expected to find culinary wonders everywhere in France (even slightly outside Paris in Disneyland), but what we experienced was just ok. Most of the dining option in the park are quick service or require reservations (very early) Here are some of the most popular spots to eat:

- Bistrot Chez Rémy
- Captain Jack's
- Auberge de Cendrillon
- Walt's
- Manhattan Restaurant
- Agrabah Café

We ate at the Golden Nugget and it was pretty good but the quick service at the Hyperion Cafe was just ok.

### Some things to note:

- Certain dining options are only available if you are staying at the Disneyland Paris Hotel.
- If you are looking for a typical Paris foodie experience, consider spending some time in Paris before or after your trip or booking select dining experiences as soon as they are available.
- Many of the Hotels do not have quick service dining so if you do not have a reservation for meals at their sit down restaurant you will need to go to Disney Village

### Strategy tip:

If food is important to your family, reserve one intentional meal. If it's not, prioritize efficiency and keep momentum moving.



# Characters

These are the main ones that have been rolled into **Virtual Queue**:

Princess Pavilion

Meet Mickey Mouse

Olaf

Starport: A Star Wars Encounter (often a Star Wars character like Darth Vader)

Hero Training Center (Avengers Campus Marvel hero training/photo encounter)

Stitch at Videopolis (this one was tied to the Disney Music Festival rollout, so it can be seasonal)

## Virtual Queue strategy

- Link tickets/hotel package in the app before your trip.
- You can only book after you've scanned into a park that day.
- You can hold only one booking at a time, but can do up to 5 meet-and-greets/day (availability permitting).
- Book immediately after park entry (don't "wait until later" for Princess Pavilion / Olaf / Starport). That's when return times disappear fastest.
- Build your day around the return time (treat it like a Lightning Lane return window).

Characters that truly can be **booked ahead** of time (pre-trip). These aren't park meet lines, they're experiences tied to hotels/dining.

- Disneyland Hotel "Disney Royal Encounter" (Princess meet at the hotel)
  - This is the one that feels like a pre-reservation character meet. Disneyland Hotel info explicitly mentions you can schedule your Disney Royal Encounter in the app.
- Character Dining (definitely book ahead)
  - Disney notes character dining is popular and can be booked up to 2 months ahead in the app (or earlier for Disney Hotel guests depending on the booking type).

Characters you can often see **without a reservation**: you can still meet lots of characters without Virtual Queue, but it's more "right place/right time," and it changes day to day.

You may see them:

- Roaming / pop-up characters outdoors (varies by season/day; check the app map + times)
- Disney Hotel lobby characters (if you're staying at a Disney Hotel; not at Davy Crockett Ranch)
- Parades and shows (not a meet-and-greet, but guaranteed character "sightings" and great photos)



## Disneyland Paris vs. Walt Disney World

If you've visited Walt Disney World in Florida, Disneyland Paris will feel familiar but it operates differently in several key ways. Here's a straightforward breakdown to help you plan well.

### 1. Resort Size & Layout

- Walt Disney World (Florida)
  - 4 theme park
  - 2 water parks
  - 25+ resort hotels
  - Massive property requiring buses, Skyliner, boats, monorails, or cars
- Disneyland Paris (France)
  - 2 theme parks
  - 1 entertainment district (Disney Village)
  - 7 on-site Disney hotels
  - Compact layout: all Disney hotels are walkable or short shuttle rides

#### Planning Impact:

At Disneyland Paris, you can stay on property and walk to the parks. At Walt Disney World, transportation planning is a significant part of your trip and can impact the planning process greatly.

### 2. Park Structure

- Walt Disney World: Magic Kingdom, EPCOT, Hollywood Studios, Animal Kingdom
- Disneyland Paris: Disneyland Park, Walt Disney Studios Park (currently undergoing expansion into Disney Adventure World)

#### Planning Impact:

A typical Disneyland Paris visit is 2-4 days but can be considerably longer if paired with other European destinations (email me if you would like recommendations). Walt Disney World typically requires 4-7+ days.

### 3. Castle Differences

- Cinderella Castle (Florida): Built over an underground utilidor system, iconic central hub layout, has a castle suite open to select guests and a princess character dining inside.
- Sleeping Beauty Castle (Paris): Features a dragon animatronic beneath the castle, upper-level walkthrough experience, designed with more detailed exterior landscaping

#### Planning Impact:

The castle experience in Paris includes walk-through elements not available in Florida.



#### 4. Attractions That Differ

Some rides exist in both locations but have different layouts or story elements. Examples:

- Pirates of the Caribbean (Paris version has a different sequence and layout)
- Phantom Manor (Paris interpretation of Haunted Mansion)
- Big Thunder Mountain (Paris version located on an island)
- It's a Small World (different finale and regional elements)
- Ratatouille (exists in Paris and EPCOT, originally built in Paris)
- Hyperspace Mountain (Space Mountain but with inversions)

And then there are some rides/attractions that are at Disneyland Paris but not Disney World, here are our favorites:

- Alice's Curious Labyrinth
- Adventure Isle
- Les Mystères du Nautilus
- Crush's Coaster

5. Show & Parade Culture: Disneyland Paris places heavy emphasis on stage shows, live performers, acrobatics, multi-language productions which means they are in high demand. Shows often require early arrival, a long standby queue or Premier Access (paid option). Reach out if you have questions about whether this is worth it for your trip.

6. Dining Structure: Disneyland Paris has fewer table-service options, character dining is available but more limited, complimentary tap water is not widely offered, and they have fewer snack stands compared to U.S. parks

Planning Impact:

Dining reservations are necessary in advance if you would like to dining at a table-service or a character dining experience. Come prepared with water and don't miss the chance to fill up your water bottle when you see a rare water fountain. If you do not have a reservation at your resort be prepared to get food before you go back to it in the evenings. If you would like a reservation at La Table de Lumière be sure you are staying at the correct hotel.



## Ready to Plan Your Disneyland Paris Adventure?

If you've made it this far, you're not just casually curious, you want to do this well. We think Disneyland Paris is incredible but it is also different from the U.S. parks in big ways (transportation, show access, dining, etc). And when you layer it into a larger Europe trip, the details matter. That's where I come in.

### How I Help (At No Cost to You)

As a family-focused travel planner who's been there and specializes in Disney travel, I help you:

- Choose the right Disneyland Paris resort
- Decide how many park days you truly need
- Build a realistic park strategy
- Plan transportation from CDG or central Paris
- Integrate Disneyland Paris into a larger Europe itinerary
- Stay current with expansion updates and show access strategies

My planning services are complimentary when you book through me which means you get personalized support without extra fees. If you'd like help optimizing your trip, fill out the travel interest form at [ourtogetherfamily.com](https://ourtogetherfamily.com) or send me an [email](#). I'll help you think through what fits your family best.

### Want More Planning Tools?

Inside our Free Resource Library, you'll find a growing library of checklists, strategy guides, and Europe itinerary templates with more updates coming as the parks expand.

Be sure you're subscribed so you don't miss future resources. I'm here to help you travel more... together.

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