

Organizing a Disneyland, California vacation is completely different to planning a trip to Disney World, Florida. At Disney World, you're most likely staying at a resort owned by Disney, making your dining reservations six months in advance, and reserving FastPasses two months before your arrival. The resorts in Florida also provide free transportation both to and from the parks *and* the Orlando Intl. Airport!

At Disneyland, things are a little different. Unless you have a flexible budget, you will most likely stay at an off-property resort, which means you will have to find your own means of transportation to and from the airport and parks. Meanwhile, dining reservations *don't* get snatched up six months beforehand and FastPasses can only be booked while you're visiting the parks. However, hotels (and pretty much everything else) are a lot cheaper in Florida than California. Let's just say the sticker price can be a bit of a shock for Disneyland first-timers!

Speaking of accommodation, there are only three Disney-owned hotels on Disneyland property: Paradise Pier, Grand Californian, and The Disneyland Hotel. This is in comparison to Disney World's whopping 25 onsite hotels!

For those who want the complete 'Disney experience,' plus the convenience of staying extremely close to the park's entrance and access to Extra Magic Hours at California Adventure, choosing a Disneyland hotel is a fantastic choice.

But here's the deal: you'll most likely stay at a Disney Good Neighbor Hotel, which means you get the 'fun' of researching 50 hotels near the Disneyland area. Don't be scared! The great thing about having so many options is that there will surely be *something* that fits your needs and I'm going to guide you through the process.

### **What are 'Disney Good Neighbor Hotels'?**

Disney Good Neighbor Hotels are independent hotels and chains that have partnerships with the company. While they're not owned by Disney, they allow you to book ticket or hotel packages *through* Disney. Most hotels provide a Disney Desk, which is a ticketing service staffed by Disney Cast Members. Just be aware that even though Disney trusts the hotels in terms of quality, this doesn't mean they reach Disney's level when it comes to service. This is merely a business partnership, after all.

There are also many other hotels in the Disneyland area that aren't deemed 'Good Neighbor Hotels', but that doesn't mean they are worse than those that are. I recently stayed at [Eden Roc Inn & Suites](#), located very close to the Convention Center and in

view of California Adventure. While the pool was shabby, the rooms were recently renovated and quite nice for a value hotel. Unless you somehow snag a killer discount, you will have to prioritize your options when choosing a hotel.

Ask yourself: what's most important to me? Is it the distance from my hotel to the parks? Do I want a nice pool for relaxing or an onsite lounge to grab drinks?

Or maybe you're just looking for an inexpensive place to pass out after a long day in the parks. Chances are, you won't find a hotel that's across the street from Disneyland with a beautiful pool on a super tight budget. You'll either have to stretch your budget or look for something a little farther away.

## **Good Neighbor Hotel Recommendations**

With over 50 Disney Good Neighbor Hotels to choose from, it's sometimes easier to start with a solid recommendation. The following hotels, categorized by budget, are Good Neighbor Hotels that I trust due to their quality of service or value.

### *Value*

- [Anaheim Portofino Inn & Suites](#): This is an affordable hotel with a decent pool and clean rooms. It's also fairly close to the park entrance so the commute from your hotel to the park entrance is shorter than other value resorts. Portofino also has free parking and suites available, which makes it more affordable for large travel groups.
- [Motel 6 Anaheim](#): This is a very budget-friendly hotel with minimal accommodations and amenities. It's a good crash pad if you don't intend to spend a lot of time in your hotel. It doesn't give off a 'roach motel' vibe though, because it was recently renovated with freshly painted rooms, hardwood flooring, and some modern furniture. This hotel comes with free parking too!
- [Clarion Hotel](#): This would be my third choice when it comes to value resorts, mostly because the decor is fairly outdated. If you manage to snag a stay for around \$100 a night, then this is a great option. It's clean and you'll get a free hot breakfast. If you're getting quotes for around \$130 per night though, you'll most likely be better off elsewhere.

### *Moderate*

- [The Anaheim Hotel](#): Chic and unique, this resort is perfect for couples on their honeymoon or a group of friends traveling together. It is very adult-friendly, giving

off a 'Vegas motif' with the mid-century modern design. This hotel is quickly becoming my favorite place to stay.

- [Candy Cane Inn](#): Candy Cane Inn is a crowd-pleasing favorite among frequent visitors. The management is extremely friendly and the theming is adorable and perfect for kids. Better yet, they have private (free) shuttles that escort Candy Cane guests back and forth from the parks. This is a rare treat at Disneyland!
- [Fairfield Inn & Suites](#): This pick mostly comes thanks to the proximity of the hotel to the park entrance and the fact that it's cheaper than other nearby hotels. When it's a five minute walk to the security line, it's worth paying for convenience, in my opinion. Most rooms are Disney themed too, if you're looking for a touch of magic with your stay. And Panera Bread delivered right to your door? Yes, please!

### *Deluxe*

- [Courtyard by Marriott Theme Park Entrance](#): If you want a hotel that has great views of the parks, a five minute walk to the entrance, and your own balcony with a park view, the Courtyard by Marriott is ideal. The mini waterpark is first-rate with two huge winding waterslides and a smaller splash pad for younger kids. You can't go wrong here! The Courtyard, albeit slightly less grand, offers similar perks to the Grand Californian too, without burning such an enormous hole in your pocket of course.
- [Howard Johnson Anaheim Hotel and Water Playground](#): This HoJo has been going strong next to Disneyland since 1965 and is still owned by the same family. It's a fantastic kid-friendly choice that will allow you to easily walk from the parks to your pool for a midday break. There are two large swimming pools: the 'quiet' pool to which frazzled grown-ups can escape and a kids' pool with small water slides and a splash pad for the little ones. This hotel also offers theme park views in some rooms and is only a brisk five minute walk from the entrance.
- [This Residence Inn at Anaheim Resort/Convention Center](#): This is a great choice for those of us who like to be treated to some luxurious amenities while on vacation. The outdoor terrace features fire pits where you can take in the view of California Adventure, the pools have private cabanas and a small bar, and the sparkling rooms are updated and modern. The kids' suites are especially fun, with bunk beds decorated in whimsical polka dots, and even their own private bathroom.

### **When to Visit Disneyland**

There's no one picture-perfect season to visit Disneyland, and there will always be people blocking your view of the castle, unfortunately. So, it's best to approach the

experience of visiting the Happiest Place on Earth with the knowledge that there'll also be many, *many* other people there doing the same thing. However, you can be fairly strategic about your visit by stopping by at times which have, historically, seen fewer visitors.

This means you'll want to avoid the summer months though; the busiest time of year will now and forever be the summer months between the beginning of June and the third week of August. Following that, any holiday weekend where kids and adults have a day off are usually busy (think, Thanksgiving weekend). It's probably best *not* to go during Christmas week right through to New Year's Day either, or in mid-April, right around Spring Break.

### *Other Times When Crowds Will Spike*

- Expect big crowds right around late-2019, as Galaxy's Edge (Star Wars Land) will have opened.
- On Dapper Day. Check out the Disneyland [website](#) to see when Dapper Day falls and plan your visit for another time.
- During large conferences like D23 or trade shows. Check out the [Anaheim Convention Center](#) website for their convention calendar.

So, when should you visit if you want to avoid crowds? My personal preference is the second week of December. The weather is cool, Christmas is in full swing, and crowd levels are lower than normal. Visiting on weekdays is generally also a sure-fire way to experience a quieter park.

### *Other Times Crowds Might Be Light*

- From the second week of January through to March
- The third week of April until May
- The third and fourth weeks of August
- November (excluding Thanksgiving Week, of course)
- The first two weeks of December

### **How Long to Spend at Disneyland**

Most people recommend spending two to four days in the parks. On average, a park guest will walk about eight miles a day. Knowing that, I think four days is perfect. That way you can schedule in a 'break day' where you sleep in, hang out at the pool, and head into the park late. If you don't have four days to spare though, two to three days

will be enough to see all of the main attractions plus a few shows and parades. If you plan on heading down for three days, I suggest visiting one park per day and then on your last day you can hit up everything you missed in either park. If you're visiting for just one day, plan to arrive as soon as the parks open and create a solid plan of action for what you want to see and how to see it.

No matter how many days you plan on visiting though, just remember that you're on vacation and it shouldn't be stressful! If you miss a dinner reservation or skip a ride, don't fret. You're in a beautiful theme park with your loved ones and there's plenty to see and do. In fact, it's for that very reason—Disney FOMO—that I wrote a blog about [8 Ways to Alleviate Stress at Disney!](#)

## **Tips for Cutting Down Wait Times**

### *MaxPass*

I wholeheartedly endorse investing in the MaxPass. It costs \$10/day per person and you can either add it to your vacation package or purchase it daily through the Disneyland app. It differs from the regular FastPass in that you don't have to physically go to the FastPass kiosk and print out a ticket before returning later for the ride. All you have to do is go into the Disneyland app and reserve your FastPasses from the app. You can save so much time and stress by using this system. Plus, with a purchase of the MaxPass you get free PhotoPass photos for the day! The only downside is that you can only reserve return times for one attraction at a time and you must enter a park before using it.

### *Single Riders Line*

If you don't mind splitting up your party, you can head to the single rider queue and cut most of the line. The Single Rider Line is meant to fill in the empty seats in a ride vehicle due to an odd number of riders. You may get lucky and be seated with one of your party members, but you will most likely be with other guests. You can find most Single Rider Lines located right next to the regular standby line.

The rides with this option are Indiana Jones Adventure, Mattherhorn, Splash Mountain, Space Mountain (new!), Radiator Springs Racers, Grizzly River Run, and Goofy's Sky School.

### *Magic Mornings and Rope Drops*

Magic Mornings are when you can enter a park one hour early. Anyone with a three or more day park pass can use the scheduled early admission days. Disneyland offers Magic Mornings on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. If the park is not offering an early morning, arriving right when the park opens also helps. Bolt for the rides that

usually have the longest lines like Space Mountain, Matterhorn, or Big Thunder Mountain. Guests staying onsite can also use the Extra Magic Hours for one hour early admission to California Adventure on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays.

### *Book Dining Reservations*

Booking reservations is a way different story at Disneyland than it is at Disney World. You don't have to get up a 6:00am to make dinner reservations six months from now, for a start! In fact, I was able to make a same-day reservation at Napa Rose, the nicest restaurant the park has to offer. That said, I still suggest making advance dining reservations prior to your vacation because they can fill up and it's no fun wandering around a hot park, tired and hangry.

### *Mobile Meal Orders*

The Disneyland app contains all of your dining, FastPass, and resort reservations, plus it now allows you to pre-order from many locations around the park. Pre-ordering your meal will lessen your wait time considerably. Order during the lunch rush and grab a table! See all of the restaurants offering mobile ordering at Disneyland [here](#).

### *Character Breakfasts*

Meet 'n' Greet lines for characters can get very long. If you're interested in meeting some characters though, booking a character dining experience is a great way to go. It can also create a more intimate character experience. You can find characters at Plaza Inn, Storytellers Cafe, Goofy's Kitchen, and PCH Grill.

### *Rides after the Last Firework Show*

Families tend to rush out of the park after the last firework show, creating long lines at the bus stations and trams. If you're a night owl, plan on getting there later in the day so you have the energy to stay longer, ride more rides, and have an easier time getting home.

## **How to Book Your Vacation Package**

There are plenty of websites where you can book Disneyland packages, but the following are the most reliable and offer the best deals or perks.

[Official Disneyland Website](#)

*Pros of Booking through the Official Disney Website:*

- You can book your hotel and tickets together in a package. This will allow you to keep everything in one reservation, rather than booking hotel and tickets separately. It also allows you to cancel up to 30 days in advance without losing your deposit.
- You are rewarded with all the 'Magical Extras' that those staying in Disney-owned properties receive. These include perks such as free luggage tags, lanyards, pins, and a discount book for Downtown Disney restaurants and shopping.

*Con of Booking through the Disney Website:*

- If you're not staying onsite at one of the Disneyland hotels, it will most likely be cheaper to purchase your hotel and tickets separately or through a ticket discount website like [Get Away Today](#). You can compare prices through the official hotel website, Priceline, Get Away Today, and Disneyland.com to calculate the differences.

[Get Away Today](#): I don't normally trust discounted tickets and packages, but Get Away Today is reputable. If you're a vacation DIYer, this website is a reliable way to get slightly discounted rates on your tickets and hotel. Their customer service is always on point and booking is easy to deal with!

[Priceline](#) or [Booking](#): Booking and Priceline will both offer you great discounts as well. Just beware the extra fees! Sometimes the added fees will end up costing you as much as it would if you booked through the hotel directly. Always go through the checkout process and look at the final total then compare it to prices on the official hotel websites. Priceline also has the 'Express' option where you let the website choose your hotel in exchange for a discount. There is also a handy website called [Better Bidding](#) which helps travelers take a guess at what they're about to purchase.

[Hotel Tonight](#): Say you want to fly down to Disneyland on a whim. Hotel Tonight offers great deals for hotels if you didn't book in advance and want to do a last-minute trip. Although, I wouldn't rely solely on this app if you want a certain hotel. Rooms do sell out often and you have no say over where you stay when you book.

Vacation Rentals ([Airbnb](#) or [VRBO](#)): If you're traveling with a large group, another option worth considering is renting a vacation home. After all, renting a home or townhouse might prove more cost effective than reserving multiple rooms at a hotel. If

you're wary of renting from Airbnb, find homes that are owned by 'Superhosts'. Superhosts are highly-rated, with verified reviews and responsive hosts. The other option would be VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owner) which also have verified homes rented out by nearby homeowners. Either website is reliable.

Disney Travel Agent: This is a shameless plug for Disney Travel Planners everywhere. If you don't want the headache of researching over 50 Disneyland Good Neighbor Hotels then just reach out to a travel agent. I just happen to be a certified agent, so feel free to [contact me here!](#)

[Be Our Guest Vacations](#) and [Dreams Unlimited](#) are also reliable places to look if you want to use an agent.

## **Airports and Flights**

When booking a flight my go-to is [Google Flights](#). This is the easiest way to compare prices. For monitoring flight prices, [Kayak](#) and the [Hopper](#) app will watch rates for you and send email updates if prices increase or decrease.

As for where to land, there are six major airports in the Southern California area. However, I'm going to skip over the San Diego and Bob Hope airports, as it's unlikely you'll need to be in the San Diego or Burbank areas.

### *Long Beach Airport (LGB)*

#### *30 minute drive*

I have a personal preference for the quiet and breezy Long Beach Airport over John Wayne and LAX. It's much smaller and less congested than LAX, which means less confusion and exhaustion when trying to fight your way through the terminals. The taxi drop off and pick-up area is also easy to find and, if you're taking an Uber or Lyft, drivers have an easier time finding you. You'll get in and out quickly and with hardly any hassle.

The main downside is that since it is a smaller airport, there are fewer flights and airlines that land here, so your travel schedule and preferences need to be a little flexible.

### *John Wayne Airport (SNA)*

#### *20 minute drive*

John Wayne is a crowd favorite for frequent Disneyland visitors. Located in Santa Ana, it's the closest airport to Disneyland and, much like Long Beach, the airport is a lot smaller than LAX. The TSA line moves quickly and it is much easier to find your plane.



### *Ontario Intl. Airport (ONT)*

*40 minute drive*

The distance from Ontario Intl. to Disneyland is similar to that of LAX, but again, you'll have less of a headache at this airport. It's also fairly small and simple to navigate, with short wait times in the TSA line. People have had luck finding cheaper flights here as well, so be sure to check the prices here before booking!

### *Los Angeles Intl. Airport (LAX)*

*60 minute drive without traffic, 90 minute drive with traffic*

LAX is enormous so you won't have a problem finding a flight that works with your schedule, especially if you're traveling internationally or need a nonstop flight. When I want to leave California at a certain time, I usually go with LAX because they have far more flights than Long Beach or John Wayne. LAX is also a great choice if you want to add a day or two in Los Angeles to your trip.

The big LAX downside is that since it's so big, TSA lines move slowly and finding rental cars or the taxi pick-up zone can get confusing for both drivers and passengers alike. It's one of the busiest airports in the country, so bring your patience!

## **Transportation to and from the Airport to Your Hotel**

### *Taxi/Uber/Lyft*

If you're not familiar with the latter two services, Uber and Lyft operate very much like taxis. The difference is that the drivers use their own vehicles and you order pick-ups through their respective apps. Uber and Lyft are both easy to use and very affordable. You may be hesitant to try one of these companies, but they are just as reliable as being picked up in a yellow taxi. Employees have to pass background checks and the cars are checked for safety. Both companies are virtually the same (a lot of drivers work for both), but I have a strong preference for Lyft due to their higher quality of customer service and reliability. When recommending a rideshare company, I usually namedrop Lyft.

### *Shuttles*

The two most reliable shuttle services are Disneyland Express and Super Shuttle. Unlike Disney World's Magical Express, the Disneyland Express is not free.

- [Disneyland Express](#) (SNA or LAX only): Round trips are \$11 per child and \$35 per adult.

- [Super Shuttle](#): Round trips start from about \$11 per person, depending on which airport you're traveling to or from.
- [Execucar](#) (Private Service): If you feel like being transported in style, a limo service like Execucar will whisk you and your guests straight to your destination in a premium sedan or SUV. This is a great service for those who want to arrive to their Disneyland vacation in style. Treat yo self!

### *Public Transportation*

#### *Two hour commute*

If you're super travel savvy and on a very lean budget, you can try using a city metro bus. A round trip will cost about \$5 per person. The total travel time from LAX is about two and a half to three hours; from LGB it's around two hours; from SNA it's more like one to one and a half hours.

The bus will drop you off directly at the Disneyland gate and from there you can take the ART or an Uber/Lyft to your hotel. Disney has detailed directions from each airport on their website which you can [visit here](#). You can map out your route using the websites below as well.

- [Los Angeles Metro](#): LAX
- [Orange County Transit Authority \(OCTA\)](#): SNA and LGB

### *Car Rentals*

All five airports have car rentals onsite. While LAX has more options, each airport has at least one company. I advise reserving your car in advance no matter what airport you use, but especially if you're landing at one of the smaller airports which have less rental inventory. If you plan on using a car after you arrive to your hotel, there are plenty of rental companies near the park.

- [Alamo](#) (Downtown Disney): This location can be found right behind the AMC Theatre in Downtown Disney and the cars are parked in the Paradise Pier Hotel parking garage.
- [Alamo](#) (W. Katella and S. Harbor Blvd.)
- [National](#) (W. Katella and S. Harbor Blvd.)
- [Hertz](#) (Near Anaheim Gardenwalk)
- [Enterprise](#) (Near Anaheim Gardenwalk)
- [Budget](#) (Near Anaheim Gardenwalk)

## **Transportation to and from Your Hotel to Disneyland**

### *Disneyland Parking Lots*

If you have to park in a Disneyland lot, Disney provides either tram or bus transfers to the entrance. The Toy Story/Pumbaa lot provides a bus drop off at the Esplanade and the Mickey & Friends lot provides a tram drop off at the entrance of Downtown Disney. From Downtown Disney, you can either take the monorail or walk a short distance to the Esplanade.

*Note: During the busy morning hours, the monorail is only available to Disney hotel guests.*

### *Opening Hours*

60 minutes prior to park opening

90 minutes prior to opening for Magic Mornings (Mickey & Friends Only)

### *Prices for Mickey & Friends, Toy Story and Pumbaa Lots*

\$20 All Day

\$25 Oversized Vehicles

\$30 for Bus or Extended Trailer (Toy Story Only)

\$35 Preferred Parking (additional \$15 per vehicle)

### *Prices for Downtown Disney Lot*

3 hours free with \$20 minimum purchase at Downtown Disney

5 hours free with validation from any table-service at Downtown Disney

Each additional hour is \$12, charged at 30 minute increments and \$6 charge after the 15 minute grace period

Maximum parking or lost ticket fee is \$48

### *Anaheim Resort Transportation (ART)*

The [Anaheim Resort Transportation](#) is a bus system owned by the city that transfers resort guests to the parks and other locations throughout Anaheim. The bus stops at most resorts and drops off at the bus loop in Disneyland's Esplanade.

To purchase the bus pass, you can include them in your Disney package, buy them separately online and have them sent to your home, or pick them up at the front desk in your hotel (if the bus stops at your hotel). You can check the [schedule online](#) and plan your day accordingly. Day passes are \$5.50 per adult and \$2 per child. To track your bus schedule, download the ART ticket app to your phone for updated information.

### *Taxi/Uber/Lyft*

If your hotel is not across the street or doesn't provide a free shuttle, a rideshare like Uber or Lyft is the best form of transportation to and from the parks. The good ol' yellow cabs still hover around the taxi loop at Disneyland, but Lyft and Uber tend to be cheaper than taxis. A ten minute car ride usually costs around \$8 and if you have a four person family, you can fit the whole gang in one car for that same price. This will end up being less expensive than taking the ART, which ends up being around \$22 for a family of four.

### **Map of Parking Lots**

1. Mickey & Friends
2. Downtown Disney Lot
3. Pumbaa (Overflow Lot)
4. Toy Story

### **Map of Taxi Drop-Off and Bus Loops**

Finding the taxi loop is one of the trickier parts of a trip to the parks and can get stressful at the end of the day. When ordering your Lyft or Uber be sure to place your marker on the loop off of Harbor Boulevard. The drop-off loop is the faint grey line that the arrow is pointing to on the map below. For orientation, I've labeled Disneyland and California Adventure.

1. Bus Drop-Off/Pick-Ups
2. Taxi Drop-Off/Pick-Ups
3. Disneyland
4. California Adventure

### **Food Delivery**

Most hotels are near the CVS, Walgreens, or Target, which makes it easy to grab anything you may need on your way to the parks. For everything else, there are services that will deliver pretty much anything you want to your hotel. Want McDonald's pancakes but are feeling too lazy to pull yourself out of bed? Never had an In-n-Out Burger? Need a case of water? Get it delivered straight to you! You'll never go back to the old days of actually going *inside* a fast food restaurant.

Also, there are a select number of hotels that provide free grocery deliveries to their guests, so be sure to check out your hotel's website to see if that applies to you.

### *Restaurant Delivery Services*

Any of the services listed below are reliable, but Postmates typically has the most restaurants available for delivery on their app *and* offers [\\$100 free delivery](#) for first time users. The downside is that once you use your \$100, Postmates has higher delivery fees than other services. So, be sure to check with Grubhub and DoorDash once your free deliveries run out. Grubhub and DoorDash are very similar, but they may feature different restaurants.

- [Postmates](#)
- [Grubhub](#)
- [DoorDash](#)

### *Grocery Delivery*

- [Instacart](#): This website changed my life. It's the easiest way to have groceries from any nearby grocery store delivered straight to your hotel, on your own schedule. You can choose whatever grocery store you like in the area, add anything you need to your cart, and a shopper will pick it up for you. This is extremely convenient if you don't have a car and need to buy a lot of food for the duration of your trip. Most deliveries cost about \$10 and if you decide to use this service often, it costs \$149/year for unlimited deliveries.
- [Von's Grocery Delivery](#): Von's will deliver groceries from their store to your hotel between one to four hours post-purchase. The service is free with a minimum \$49 purchase.
- [Amazon Prime Now](#): This is an awesome service if you're already an Amazon Prime Member. You can have groceries and any other necessities delivered to your hotel in two hours. If you don't have Amazon Prime, you can sign up for a [30 Day Trial here](#).
- [AmazonFresh](#): The difference between Amazon Prime Now and AmazonFresh is that Fresh has about double the amount of groceries available for purchase. However, it is more costly at \$14.95/month after your free trial *in addition to* your Prime Membership. If you already use AmazonFresh though, this is a fine option for a grocery delivery in Anaheim.

### **Off-Site Shopping & Restaurants**

There are plenty of local and chain restaurants within walking distance of the parks. This gives you the option to quickly exit the park if you want to save money on a meal. Dinner options can range from McDonald's, to The Cheesecake Factory, to some local

standbys. For adventures outside of Anaheim, bustling Los Angeles is about an hour and a half away, and a quick trip there can make for the perfect way to extend your vacation!

### *Anaheim Garden Walk*

The Anaheim Garden Walk is a shopping and restaurant mecca located directly adjacent to the parks. It's basically a second Downtown Disney and is conveniently located near most Disneyland Good Neighbor Hotels. Here are a few notable establishments at the Garden Walk:

- House of Blues: Concerts and events are held here almost every night and you should definitely check out their infamous gospel brunch!
- The Cheesecake Factory
- Johnny Rocket's
- P.F. Chang's
- Bubba Gump Shrimp Co.
- Rumba Room Live
- Lush Cosmetics
- Geeky Mamas
- Go VR Gaming

### *Chain Restaurants across the Street from Disneyland (Harbor Blvd.)*

- McDonald's
- Panera Bread
- IHoP
- Cap'n Jack's
- Denny's
- Tony Roma's
- Cold Stone Creamery

### *Crowd Favorite Eats*

· Roscoe's Chicken & Waffles: What's better than a giant pile of fried chicken paired with an enormous fluffy waffle? Not much, but if you're not feeling that combo, Roscoe's serves all kinds of southern comfort foods, such as biscuits and gravy. The restaurant is about a 15 minute walk from the park entrance, so you might want to take a Lyft or drive to the location. However you get to Roscoe's, I promise it'll be worth the journey.

· Mimi's Cafe: Mimi's is a small chain with locations scattered throughout California and other states in the Southwest and Southeast. It's a favorite among park visitors due

to the convenient location across the street from the entrance and reasonably priced, good quality food. Serving up everything from breakfast tacos and mimosas, to warm baked muffins, this is a great option if you're tired of Disneyland fare and want to try something unique.

- **Coco's Bakery Restaurant:** Pie, pie, and more pie! Coco's is an all American small chain with locations in California, Nevada, and Arizona. Due to the large assortment of premium freshly baked pies and desserts, Coco's is adored by frequent Disneyland visitors. They also serve delish breakfast items like Cinnamon Roll French Toast and Potato Pancakes. I'd choose Coco's over IHOP any day!

## **Onsite Dining**

Booking table-service reservations at Disneyland is nowhere near as traumatic as booking dining at Disney World. There is no getting up at 7:00am (or 4:00am for us West Coasters!) to try and get a reservation 180 days in advance, only to find that everything you wanted has been booked in the last 30 seconds. Put simply, you can make your plans at a more leisurely pace for your Disneyland vacation.

Having said that, and although time slots don't get booked up nearly as fast as they do in Florida, I still highly recommend making reservations for lunch or dinner if you plan on eating at any of the Disneyland sit-down restaurants. If you know where you want to eat, I actually advise booking around 60 days before your vacation begins, which is when reservations are released, or at least a couple weeks in advance. If you don't have a reservation, you will most likely be waiting anywhere from 40-80 minutes for a table to open up, depending on the season. Keep in mind that Disney charges a \$10/person no-show fee if you don't cancel your reservation within 24 hours of your reservation.

The quality of food at Disneyland outshines Disney World, in my honest opinion. The hand-dipped corn dogs at the Little Red Wagon on Main Street or Corn Dog Castle in California Adventure are not to be missed. As far as table service restaurants go, there are quite a few locations that serve up some of the best food I've ever had.

### *Table-service favorites*

- **Carnation Cafe (Disneyland):** This restaurant has been around since the park opened in 1955. It's headed up by Chef Oscar Martinez, the longest-tenured Cast Member who just celebrated 60 years with Disneyland. If you're a Disney nut like me, you'll love the sentimental value of this restaurant. And if you're a foodie (also like me) you'll love the food here. Carnation Cafe serves comfort foods like fried pickles, baked potato soup, and Walt's favorite meatloaf.

- Blue Bayou (Disneyland): The coolest thing about this restaurant is that it's located inside Pirates of the Caribbean. The 'night-time' environment is dark, moody, and incredibly romantic. However, much like Rainforest Cafe, you're paying for the atmosphere, not the food. Unless, of course, you're talking about the Monte Cristo. It's the only thing worth shelling out a pretty penny for.
- Carthay Circle Restaurant and Lounge (California Adventure): "Hollywood, 1939. Amid the glitz and the glitter of a bustling, young movie town at the height of its golden age." This restaurant is inspired by the real Carthay Circle in Hollywood and is one of the most upscale restaurants at Disney. If you're only looking for a cocktail, the first floor has a lounge that does not require a reservation. Upstairs is the main dining room which leads into secluded dining areas and private dining nooks reserved for large groups. This place shares the same Chef as the Grand Californian's Napa Rose, Andrew Sutton, so you know the food is perfection.
- Lamplight Lounge, formerly Cove Bar (California Adventure): As we say goodbye to Cove Bar, we greet Lamplight Lounge with open arms. The re-conceptualized lounge is stunning and features unique cocktails, sushi, and the old Cove Bar favorite—Lobster Nachos. There's even a secret door that leads to a private dining area.
- Napa Rose (Grand Californian Hotel): This is my favorite restaurant in Disneyland and the best place you can go for a quiet evening out. Everything is delicious and the service is excellent. On a slow night, I like to take my champagne out to the fire pits on the outside terrace and listen to the ambient music and park guests in California Adventure. Pure Disney bliss! If you don't want to splurge on a full meal, visit the lounge for cocktails and appetizers. I can't suggest any one meal because the menu changes often and also because everything I've tried is so darn good!
- Splitsville (Downtown Disney): This is a brand-new bowling alley and restaurant, which recently replaced House of Blues. The retro concept is gorgeous and it's open until midnight for all you night owls. With crazy cocktails and bar food, this is a great place for a night out with friends or a friendly date night! And don't worry, House of Blues just moved down the street if you miss the old concert and restaurant venue.

## **Dressing for the Parks**

Don't be afraid to dress for comfort on your Disney trip. You'll be walking more than you normally do and standing for hours under the sweltering, ruthless California sun. For daytime wear, I suggest a pair of shorts, light tank top or t-shirt, and sturdy athletic shoes that offer some arch support and don't rub your heels. Shoe inserts like [Dr. Scholl's](#) might give you some extra comfort and a hat or sunglasses can help shield you from the sun. Sundresses are light and airy as well! I tend to think like a hiker when I dress for a day at the parks. I even invested in a [hiking tech shirt](#) that wicks off the



sweat so I don't end up drenched by midday. When packing, just remember that you will be climbing in and out of ride vehicles so you want comfortably-fitting outfits.

Dressing for dinner at Disney is a little different. Carthay Circle and Napa Rose have a distinctly upscale feel, so you could consider wearing something a little nicer if you want to make an effort. You don't have to go out of your way to do so though. Unlike Disney World, Disneyland dining dress codes are not stated on the website, although I wrote an article on [Dressing for Dinner](#) if you want more tips. It's targeted for Disney World, but the general overview is the same.

## **Disney for Adults**

I write a lot about doing Disney as an adult so I wanted to give some tips and ideas for traveling to the parks as a grown-up. Disney isn't just for kids anymore and I'm a huge advocate for parents enjoying themselves just as much as the little ones when they visit. Here are the links to my full guides, including my most important piece on how to find good coffee in the parks!

- [Disneyland for Adults](#)
- [California Adventure for Adults](#)
- [Downtown Disney for Adults](#)
- [10 Disneyland Hotel Activities for Adults](#)
- [Where to Find Good Coffee at Disneyland](#)

## **Theme Parks within a One Hour Drive of Disneyland**

### *Universal Studios Hollywood*

Universal Studios is located right in the middle of Hollywood, about an hour's drive away from Disneyland. Consider adding a couple days in Los Angeles if you plan on flying in or out of LAX. To get to Universal Studios from Disneyland, you will need to book a tour shuttle bus (like [Lux Bus](#) or [Grey Line](#)) or rent a car. For tour buses, be aware that you are on their schedule and your trip won't be quite as flexible. If you like guided tours though, then you will enjoy either company!

Last time I visited, I opted to rent a car because I wanted to explore Los Angeles after my day in the park. I rented from the Alamo located in Downtown Disney. Universal parking costs \$25/day.

One thing to keep in mind: Universal Studios Hollywood is much smaller than Universal Studios Orlando. Theme parks occupy much less land in California in comparison to

Florida. However, it is set against an incredibly beautiful landscape. The rolling Hollywood Hills make for a gorgeous backdrop to the theme park and the real studios used for filming television shows and movies surround the park. The tram tour at Universal Studios even guides you through a studio backlot created by Steven Spielberg. And you may even spot a celebrity or two! Universal definitely beats out Disneyland when it comes to queuing too—the lines are nowhere near the same length! I arrived at 1:00pm and rode almost every attraction I wanted to by the time it closed at 8:00pm.

### *Knott's Berry Farm & Soak City*

One of my favorite childhood memories was heading to Knott's Berry Farm for their famous fried chicken and buttery biscuits. After all these years, Knott's seems to be truckin' along even if it is a wee bit run down. If you decide to visit this park, do your best not to compare the entertainment and theming quality to Disney. Nothing else can really compare to Disney parks. However, if you feel like venturing into new theme park territory, Knott's Berry Farm is a cute place to visit and has more thrill rides than Disneyland. If you're traveling with water park lovers, remember that Soak City is the water park extension of Knott's Berry Farm. Disneyland happens to be lacking a water park, so this is a great option for the summertime! Be sure to buy your tickets online though, as they're much cheaper on their website than at the gate. Since it's close to Disneyland, you can either take the ART or a Lyft for about \$15-\$20.

### *Legoland*

Legoland is about one hour south of Disneyland and the cheapest way to get there is to rent a car for the day. However, you can also take the [Lux Bus](#) or [Starline Tours](#). This park is super cute and fun if you have little ones and you're looking for a new park to try. If you've never been, I would be wary about bringing older teens because they're not quite the demographic Legoland goes for. Remember that Legoland is more than a theme park though—there's also a waterpark and an aquarium onsite!

## **Helpful Planning Resources**

It's time to get organized! If my book hasn't answered all your questions, these are my favorite go-to websites, books, and blogs for when I plan my vacations. They've turned me into the Disney expert I am today.

### *Official Disney Sources*

- [Disneyland App](#): You can book dining, MaxPass reservations, and view the park map or parade and show schedules on this app. Just be aware that the app will drain

your battery so I recommend taking a screenshot of your FastPasses and dining reservations. That way you don't have to open it constantly in the parks.

- [Disneyland Website](#): To get the most up-to-date news about ticket information and park hours, the official Disney website is the most reliable source.
- Play Disney Parks App: Just for fun! If you have impatient little ones (or impatient older ones), this app is great at capturing their attention while waiting in line. The app allows you to interact with select queues in the park. By answering trivia, playing games, or interacting with the queues, you can earn rewards in the app and compete with other people in your travel group.

### *Pre-Vacation Planning & Organization*

- [Google Trips](#) (App Only): I reached out to some of my fellow travel bloggers and most of them use Google Trips to keep their vacations organized. The app pulls your hotel and flight confirmations from your Gmail account and uploads them automatically. From there, Google suggests other things to do while on vacation and also allows you to build itineraries and day plans.
- [OneNote](#): An alternative to Google Trips is OneNote, which allows you to write notes, organize them into categories, paste helpful articles, and attach hotel and ticket confirmations. The great thing is that it's available to view and edit both on your desktop and on your phone from within the app. Also, if you add the [OneNote Extension](#) to your desktop, you can clip anything from any website and then categorize the content.
- [Touring Plans](#): Touring Plans has been my go-to website and app for Disney guidance over the years. For a subscription fee, you can get pre-planned itineraries built by the experts, reliable attraction wait times based on user input statistics, and crowd estimates for future dates. The owners of Touring Plans are also the masterminds behind the [Unofficial Guide to Disneyland](#), the comprehensive guide books that are updated yearly.
- [Amazon](#): I highly suggest pre-purchasing any sunscreen, over-the-counter medications, or other necessities on Amazon (or your nearby Target/Walmart) before coming to Disneyland. The prices are hiked up in the parks and you don't really want to be scouring Disneyland for sunscreen while trying to make it to your lunch reservation on time. Keep your eyes peeled over the next couple days because I'll be sending you a comprehensive guide to what you should consider buying on Amazon before visiting the parks!
- YouTube: If you've never visited Disneyland, YouTube is one of the best resources to get a feel for the attractions you want to ride or skip. I've often heard of travelers with children heading to YouTube to check whether a ride will scare them. They will pull up a ride POV video and have them watch it beforehand. This is also helpful for those who get motion sickness and would like to know how intense a ride can get.

### *Disney Guide Books*

- [The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World](#): This guide book is referred to as the 'Disney Bible' and is written by the same people who own and operate the reputable [touringplans.com](#). Every year, they come out with an updated version of their unofficial guides and every year they get better and more detailed. I started buying these books in 2012 and have purchased every new version since. The size of the book can be intimidating, but I treat it as an encyclopaedia, rather than something I need to study cover-to-cover.
- [Birnbaum's 2018 Walt Disney World: The Official Guide](#): This is the only guidebook with Disney's official stamp of approval. It's also less dense than the Unofficial Guide so if you plan on packing it in your suitcase, it won't be quite as heavy. This may sound juvenile, but I love this book because it has high-quality, colored photographs. It's a fun guide to look through if you have kids, or if you're a kid-at-heart. It's a great book that'll get you excited about your vacation!

### *Other Disney Blogs*

- [Disney Food Blog Guides \(Website and eBook\)](#): Pretty much any restaurant and food item on Disneyland property has been reviewed on [Disney Food Blog](#). Their eBook is beautifully done with photographs, four planning worksheets, updates on closures and refurbishments, and fun tips like the 'trendiest bar' or 'best hot dogs'.

If you didn't find everything you needed in this book, any of the aforementioned websites and books will surely have the answer. Please also feel free to email me if you have any specific questions about the book, constructive feedback, or just want to drop me a love note. Like I mentioned before, I moonlight as a Disney Travel Planner totally free of charge and I'm open to inquiries and comments!