

Disneyland®

ONE MOM DISCOVERS HER INNER ROLLER COASTER JUNKIE

My husband and I are outdoorsy, budget travel types, with a penchant for national parks and hiking trails. So our decision to take our kids to Disneyland was a major concession...a theme park trip, of all things. Curt and I imagined it would be the event of a lifetime for the kids (they'd been asking for years); our first destination geared just for them. We would enjoy it too, of course, through their eyes. The best part, though? We adults would be able to check off Disneyland from the to-do list.

Our first morning, a Wednesday, was one of the least crowded days in the park.

We arrived at the gates 45 minutes early, just as the guidebook recommended. We were among the first to enter Main Street—what cute little shops!—to stand at the front of the crowd with the rope barrier snaked across our waists, the castle shimmering before us, waiting for the 10 a.m. rope drop. A Disney cast member stood on the other side, shouting loud, cheery questions like a cheerleader at a pep rally:

"How are you?" Roar.

"Ready for some fun?" Roar.

By the time the rope dropped to let us storm across, we were as pumped as the kids entering Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

The four of us pounded toward the Peter Pan ride, recommended by a friend who advised riding early. Boarding with nary a pause, we got our first taste of the polished Disney experience as we sailed through the dark past Wendy and her brothers, the lost boys, and Captain Hook, music in our ears and twinkly lights at our feet. We sighed with satisfaction. I was captivated.

On to Alice in Wonderland and Pinocchio. The Matterhorn Bobsleds. Should I, I wondered? I had visited Disneyland for one day as a 15-year-old and loved the Matterhorn, but I'm not a roller coaster person anymore. These days, speed makes my

stomach heave. Still, the idea of waiting for my family like, well, a mom, while they shrieked around the mountain, seemed decidedly unadventurous. At eleven and nine, my kids were the perfect ages to bypass Disneyland's fear factor and its height requirements. If I rode, we could ride as a foursome.

Hopping into the bobsled, I strapped up beside my son, and we whipped our way around that mountain. My stomach didn't mind at all.

From there, straight to Thunder Mountain Railway, a Western-themed roller coaster that friends had neglected 15▶



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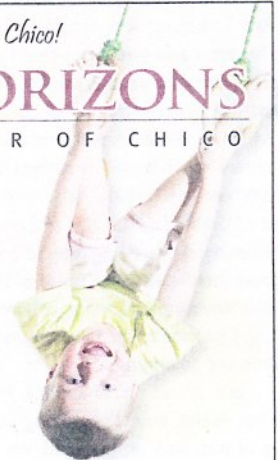
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Disneyland - One Mom Discovers Her Inner Roller Coaster Junkie

to mention (we liked it so much we rode it twice more, once at night). Then, hopped up on adrenaline, we moved on to Space Mountain, a ride I remembered from adolescence as the brand-new attraction whose pitch-black interior freaked people out. The precipitous drops and steep banks that left my head behind at times (and made my husband green)... it turns out were just fine.

The kids and I bubbled as we disembarked. "Let's go again," they said, bouncing as they walked, and I said I would go too. "Right now," they urged, "there's no line..."

"I think I'll wait at the exit," Curt said.

When we met him afterward, talking about which ride was next—Splash Mountain?—and striding off, heading for any kind of ride, Curt huffed behind us. "Wait," he said, "We're not going to run from ride to ride, are we? We're going to take a break, aren't we?"

The kids and I turned as one to stare. Was he serious? You're acting so, like, your age, I managed not to say. "Sure, we can take a break," I said. For about a minute.

Over the next three days, we rode,

walked, and explored Disneyland and California Adventure, the neighboring park. We rode everything together (my husband caught up with the pace) including the Twilight Zone's Tower of Terror, a lurching, stomach-dropping affair I normally wouldn't even consider. But the Disney magic had taken hold so hard I couldn't pass up the sophisticated experience of an elevator gone wrong, even if it meant leaving my stomach behind.

Along the way, I marveled at everything that makes Disneyland the destination it is: The impeccable cleanliness, for which I'd silently chuckled at my sister-in-law when she'd gone weak-kneed with admiration describing it (okay, I exaggerate, but she does love it, and now so do I). The cheerfulness of the employees—Disneyland isn't called the happiest place on Earth for nothing—in three days, I saw just one employee looking harassed at the end of a long day while dealing with three unsupervised kids. The diversity of the park—from Mickey's Toontown to Tom Sawyer's island, where we raised skeletons from the deep. Adventureland, where I felt as if I'd escaped

somewhere tropical. Above all, I fell in love with the fun we were having as a family. No bribing with jelly beans while hiking or asking the kids to be patient in a (yawn) museum, and no listening to whining (there was none).

My roller coaster bravado stalled at last as I eyeballed California Screamin', the second-longest roller coaster in the country. With a loop. Everyone else wanted to go, so they went without me and afterward described the sensations to assuage my fear: "You couldn't even tell you were upside down, Mom, really."

Okay then. Ty, my nine-year-old, accompanied me, proud to be the expert, describing what would happen in the first ten seconds. We shot off, faces plastered to our skulls, to climb the first hill and whip down (not so bad), then up, around, and down (still not so bad) to clickity-clack up the steepest hill. I knew what was coming, of course. When we got to the top and plummeted, the shriek in my chest (I'm more of a clenched teeth type) forced its way out, the high-pitched scream of a 15-year-old girl. My son looked sideways at me in alarm.



"Are you all right?" he shouted into the wind.

"I'm great!" I yelled back.

In fact, scratch that to-do list. I can't wait to come back. ■



Writer Joanna Nesbit still loves national parks and traveling abroad, but Disneyland is now near the top of her destination list.

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