

MOVIE THEME PARKS

Francis goes to Hollywood

I am frightened of mice. So I do not mind the sanitisation that Disney has applied to the land where Mickey is the master marketing mouse.

DISNEYLAND is a model society. A land where animals graciously extend equal opportunity to we humans who created them as an object of laughter. But to laugh *with* rather than *at*: the success of Disney characters is that we can identify with their predicaments. And if life cannot always offer an ever after happiness, at least there can be survival with a smile. Tears are for relief, never distress: there is no fate too extreme for an animator to reverse.

Welcome, says your souvenir guide, *to the happiest place on earth*. I surrender. Who wants to be a sociologist in a **Magic Kingdom**! But then surrender is not difficult, especially after an overnight in the Disneyland Hotel – sixty acres of self-contained resort grouped around a boating lake whose Seaports of the Pacific offer (and I quote) thundering waterfalls, exotic Koi fish ponds, Japanese gardens, famed dancing waters, unusual wares in the inter-

national bazaar, cocktails overlooking the marina, country western music and Dreyer's Puppet Theater. Who needs Mozart and Handel? Well I do, so I always tour a walkman. And I played it while watching the 24 hour Disney channel on my room TV.

The easiest exit from Disneyland Hotel is by monorail. And where does that monorail go? Right! To the Magic Kingdom. And it comes back – which is good news for the likes of me who need to press the abort button every few hours and return to partake of G & T lubrication. There is no need to go thirsty at Chateau Mouse, but it is rather awash in wholesome coke.

So there I was, breakfasted on easy over eggs, hash browns and have a nice day, standing in Central Square awaiting the chime of nine to signal the charge up Main Street USA to be early in line for the wonders of Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland. The British are supposed to be a nation of queuers but nothing seems to pleasure an American more than the possibility of

standing in line. Democracy is standing in line: you just have to stand in line and your turn will come. And Disneyland lines have markers every fifteen minutes of wait time: opportunity not only knocks but it knocks on cue.

I may be an equal opportunist but I have never got properly into the competitive spirit that equality of opportunity is supposed to breed. So, rather than sprint towards the star attractions, I drift into Main Street Cinema. This is a kind of *mouserama* – six screens showing, in piano accompanied monochrome, the real Michael Mouse photographed before he became a merchandising opportunity.

The facade of the **Disneyland Opera House** would beckon any theatric tourist. The show is a computerised 'audio-animatronic' salute to Lincoln but the foyers house a Walt Disney Museum with exhibits of pioneer animation and an audio-visual presentation of current techniques. A reconstruction shows both Mr Disney's offices – the formal and the working. There is fun in another theatre, the **Golden Horseshoe Salon** where Miss Lily and her girls join bartender Sam and his cowboys in a five-times-per-day half hour revue with can-can vigour. They perform with gusto and sincerity.

Sincerity and professionalism are fundamental to Disneyland success. There is no send-up. Reality is heightened with care and consistency. The massive investment in hardware is frequently matched by the artistry with which the investment has been spent. And there is much more to the professionalism than just smiles.

Whether taking a jungle cruise among the computo-crocodiles or viewing the Injuns from a sternwheeler steamboat, and whether flying with Peter Pan over the rooftops or with Michael Jackson through the galaxy, the slickness is saved from superficiality by immaculate timing.

For me there is a point where the fantasy becomes reality. **The Swiss Family Robinson** home is my treehouse dream come true – a magic palace of timber, bamboo and maritime fragments saved from the wreck.

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS is also a theme park, but the theme is people movies rather than the animated ones. Tours of this Hollywood back lot started in 1915 (25 cents including lunch box) but were suspended with the end of the silents. Today's Studio Tours, running every day of the year except Christmas and Thanksgiving, have hosted over 50 million visitors since their 1964 inception.

The core of a visit is the tram ride around the stock sets on the 420 acre back lot, but there is also an Entertainment Center with a series of theatric presentations of cinematic themes and opportunities to purchase movie related merchandise. (I did not respond to the invitation to 'be sure to visit our exciting

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