

A very merry Mickey

Disneyland Paris has just kicked off its Christmas season with a flurry of festive fun, finds **Qin Xie**



ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!" Santa's familiar greeting booms out from nowhere, taking me by surprise. I had just arrived on Main Street, USA, the first destination as you enter Disneyland Paris. And even though Christmas trees and decorations are everywhere, the fact that it's daytime in mid-November, with fairly mild weather, means the experience is a little more confusing than anything else.

But it doesn't take long to get into the Christmas spirit – this is the holiday season at Disneyland Paris, after all. Indeed, a light flutter of 'snow' appears as if on cue – as it does at least 12 times a day here – and the already excitable children around me start jumping up and down with their hands in the air.

Overhead, fairy lights are twinkling against the shiny baubles on Mickey-shaped garlands all the way from City Hall, where a 24-metre-tall Christmas fir takes pride of place, to Sleeping Beauty's castle.

I'm told more than 1,000 decorative objects, from presents and candles to snowflakes and

lights, adorn this single majestic tree alone; I haven't tried counting them all, but suffice to say the view is pretty spectacular.

ALL THE TRIMMINGS

While much of the action is concentrated around the entrance, the festive spirit permeates every corner of the park, as I discover when I make my way around. It's the Christmas music and festive decorations I notice first, but since this is Disney, every little detail is considered.

Take the gardens, for example. The parks' horticultural team spent four days planting more than 37,000 flowers, including different shades of heather, to create festive snowflake shapes. There are also 73 smaller Christmas trees across the two parks, each covered in lights and ornaments. It means every photo you take will have something festive in it.

The Disney team has also created a number of exclusive food items for the Christmas season. At sit-down spots such as the Plaza Gardens ➤

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS

For collectors, it's hard to beat a replica of the lead float from Mickey's Dazzling Christmas Parade, an exclusive to the park this year. Mickey, dressed in a festive outfit, is in a steam engine at the front while Chip 'n' Dale are decorating the Christmas tree at the back. Priced at €159.

Pick up an advent calendar; Mickey, Minnie and friends appear in the traditional chocolate version, or you can get a new tea option where each of the doors opens up to a different tea or flavoured infusion. Both €20 each.

Sparkle as much as the parks' Christmas lights by donning the festive edition of Minnie's headband. This year, it's a gold number covered in sequins, priced at €22.99.

top tip

Meet and greets with characters now take place at dedicated Selfie Spots around the parks – dedicated to Frozen, Marvel Super Heroes and more – and at select hotels. You can still get great souvenir photos, but social distancing means autographs are a thing of the past.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Disneyland Park entrance; festive Mickey and Minnie; Christmas-themed food and drinks

PICTURE: Valentin Desjardins



Restaurant, located right opposite the castle, it's a three-course meal featuring a festive savoury pie, followed by stuffed turkey with chestnuts and morel mushroom sauce, finished with a candy cane yule log.

For me, it's much more fun to graze my way around the snack stops, with the added benefit of saving time for the rides. In Disneyland Park, I find treats like gingerbread trees and a Christmas beignet (a Nutella doughnut with festive icing). And in Walt Disney Studios Park, there's a little Christmas food market near the Ratatouille ride where I snack on roasted chestnuts, tuck into cheesy tartiflette with mulled wine, before satisfying my sugar craving with a warm, buttery crêpe from candy cane-coloured chalets.

SEASONAL SHOWS

Jostling for space with the rides and attractions are the festive shows. During the day, Disneyland Park has Let's Sing Christmas!, a sing-along performance with Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Daisy and Goofy at Discoveryland's Videopolis Theatre. Even though the capacity inside is huge, its popularity means the queues are comparable to those at the Buzz Lightyear Laser Blast ride. If you don't want to queue, pop into Cafe Hyperion instead, where the dining room overlooks the theatre.

It's much easier to catch Donald and Goofy in the open-air performance of A Funny, Snowy Winter over in Walt Disney Studios Park. Performed in a combination of English and French, the sketch sees the duo navigate all sorts of misadventures as they prepare for Christmas. It also happens to be one of the best places to get a selfie with the comedic duo without having to queue.

The highlight has to be Mickey's Dazzling Christmas Parade, though, and Disney has pulled out all the stops for this all-singing, all-dancing show, including creating more than 200 dazzling costumes. Mickey leads the floats, but it's also a chance to spot the likes of Cinderella and Tinkerbell, as well as Stitch, Winnie the Pooh, and Santa himself.

Like other Disney parades, you'll need to get there early for the best views. But even then, there's so much to take in that you'll want to see it more than once. Fortunately, it's on twice a day, at 2.15pm and 6.15pm.

But if you only have time for one show, make it the evening one and pick a spot under the bright lights of Main Street where, as Santa passes in his float, the aforementioned flutter of 'snow' follows him. It's a scene that even Scrooge would find hard to resist. **TW**

BOOK IT

The Christmas season runs until January 9, 2022. Two nights at Disneyland Paris starts from £398 per person (based on two adults and two children aged three to 11), including accommodation at three-star Disney's Hotel Cheyenne, park access and return Eurostar travel via Lille. disneyholidays.co.uk

For the latest trade information including details of what to expect at the 30th anniversary celebrations of Disneyland Paris, taking place in March 2022, visit facebook.com/disneyforagents or travel agent website disneytravelagents.co.uk