

Twween spirit

With graphic art workshops and Marvel characters, there's still plenty to inspire older children at Disneyland Paris, finds **Robin Searle**

Like many other families whose travel plans were put on hold during Covid, we couldn't help but wonder what impact the enforced hiatus would have on our first holiday overseas when it finally arrived.

Back in early 2020, we were all set for our first family trip to Disneyland Paris, with a nine and 11-year-old both still in primary school and in prime position to make the most of the attractions – old enough to avoid most age or height-related restrictions, but young enough to still be enthralled by the characters.

Two-and-a-half years down the line, those nine and 11-year-olds were 11 and 13, both in secondary school, and as likely to be watching *Married at First Sight* as *Moana*. Would the magic still cast its spell?

Thankfully, we needn't have worried, with any fears of tween cynicism rearing its head evaporating the moment our Marvel-mad son Evan entered Disney Hotel New York – The Art of Marvel.

This epic overhaul has transformed what was becoming a dated property into a stylish and contemporary place to stay, with theming running from the wow factor Iron Man suits in the lobby to the toiletries in the bathrooms. A high point was the

impressive Skyline bar, with huge screens showing an aerial view of New York City that changes as day turns to night, and features intermittent appearances from Spider-Man and Iron Man.

For our arty daughter Bronwen – who is less up to speed on the adventures of *Doctor Strange*, *Thor* and *The Hulk* – the hotel also wowed with its array of Marvel artwork and another inspired addition, the Marvel Design Studio, which offers guests a chance to learn the tricks of the graphic artist's trade.

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

Having read in *Travel Weekly* the exploits of a colleague who was fortunate enough to attend the opening of the Avengers Campus in Walt Disney Studios Park earlier in the year, I knew the hotel was likely to offer a taste of something special. And any lingering worries that costume characters might fail to match up to the 'real thing' were soon gone, as Evan's expression changed from surprise to awe as first Black Widow and then Black Panther emerged on the Campus's rooftops to do battle with the evil Taskmaster.

The Campus itself isn't particularly large, effectively a single street running from the park's central plaza, but the level of theming and the ➤

Spider-Man
W.E.B Adventure in
Avengers Campus

DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Bronwen and Evan outside Avengers Campus in Walt Disney Studios Park; Iron Man suits in the Art of Marvel hotel; new drone show, Avengers Power of the Night **PICTURES:** Robin Searle; Sylvain Beche

constant stream of immersive character experiences – from the aforementioned Black Widow and Black Panther to Spider-Man, Captain Marvel, the Guardians of the Galaxy and more – ensure it's worth multiple visits. It is also home to attractions including the incredible Spider-Man W.E.B. Adventure, an interactive 3D ride that allows you to sling virtual webs to destroy rampant Spider-Bots and was hands down the top attraction across both parks for Bronwen and Evan.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Speaking of both parks, I was also interested to see if the original Disneyland Park would be able to cast its spell on our tween first-timers. Again, I'm pleased to report it certainly could, with the first sight of Main Street USA and Sleeping Beauty Castle getting the same reaction I would have expected had our pre-pandemic plans panned out.

Their advanced years allowed them to fully enjoy the larger attractions and coasters that may have been a step too far previously. But many of the experiences they kept returning to were the classics for all ages, including Peter Pan's Flight, Pirates of the Caribbean and the sleeping dragon hidden beneath the castle.

NEW FOR 2023

As anyone who has been to any Disney park more than once will know, no two visits are ever the same, thanks to the new shows and attractions on offer. And that is certainly the case this summer as

Disneyland Paris gears up for the grand finale of its 30th anniversary celebrations.

A new nightly drone show called Avengers: Power of the Night will run at Walt Disney Studios Park until May 8, while the park will also welcome a new theatre show called Pixar: We Belong Together. In Disneyland Park, the spectacular Disney Dreams show will return from April 12 – a particular treat for fans of Disney and Pixar's animated back catalogue – while the classic It's a Small World ride will also reopen after refurbishment.

Other landmark dates to look out for include the reopening of the Disneyland Hotel after its own revamp, while the clock is also ticking to the opening of Walt Disney Studios Park's much-anticipated Frozen-themed land. Casting our minds back to those original concerns about how slightly older debutants might find their first Disney experience, we needn't have worried. It's not a case of if they'll return, but how soon they can get back. **TW**

BOOK IT

A two-night stay at **Disney Hotel New York – The Art of Marvel** costs from £493 per person, based on two adults and two children (aged 11 and 13), with a departure date of May 21. Price includes unlimited access to Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios Park, but not transport. disneytravelagents.co.uk



Given Disney's origins, the idea of showcasing the work that goes into creating its animated films seems an obvious one, but I'll confess that sitting down as a family to recreate The Hulk or Donald

Duck wasn't something I'd envisaged being a big part of our stay. While it's mostly targeted at a younger audience, the **Marvel Design Studio** at the Art of Marvel hotel is a great way to spend time together, with in-person or YouTube tutorials teaching you how to draw a range of Marvel characters.

So inspired were we by our experience, we also took time to find one of Walt Disney Studios Park's established yet less high-profile attractions, the **Animation Academy**. This brilliant experience is free to join, with a genuine Disney animator taking budding artists through their paces with a step-by-step demonstration of how to draw characters beyond the Marvel Universe.

We took on the challenge of recreating *Frozen* favourite Olaf, and while some creations were more successful than others, it was a real high point and great for children who might need a brief break from the sensory overload of the parks.

