

# Fun *run*

**“To infinity and beyond!”** Those are the words going through my head on a cold, wet night in London as I find myself pounding the pavement on one last training session before I set off for the Disneyland Paris Magic Run Weekend. If Buzz Lightyear can keep going, so can I.

That’s because I’ve taken up the opportunity to visit Mickey and the gang, not just to enjoy the rides, sights and sounds of Europe’s number-one theme park, but also to join thousands of others on a weekend fun-run challenge.

This is no average half marathon, however, as we’re in for four fun-packed days of sport and entertainment, with all the magic you’d expect from a Disney break.

## ► RACE DAY

I’m up early with the trepidation of the task ahead, but the

gathering crowd definitely has a sense of energy about it, buoying the runners along as my colleague Sean and I prepare for the start of the race. Before I know it, it’s time for the countdown, met with huge cheers and high-fives all around.

“Cinq, quatre, trois, deux, un, allez!” And then we were off, surging past a waving Mickey Mouse (in full running gear, of course) and into the park, lit up with a brilliant sunrise.

As the runners begin to find their pace and settle into a rhythm, we pass the first of many photo opportunities, as the cast



**Travel Weekly’s Oliver Palmer gets his running gear on for the Val d’Europe Half Marathon at Disneyland Paris**



## TOP TIP

Watch a video to see how Oliver got on during his half marathon, at [tinyurl.com/magicrun](http://tinyurl.com/magicrun)



## EAT

### Inventions at Disneyland Hotel

Join Mickey, Minnie and the gang as they high five and pose for photos in one of the park's most popular dining experiences.

## STAY

### Disney's Newport Bay Club

Designed as an early 20th-century mansion set on Lake Disney, this hotel is awash with maritime romance. It's a 15-minute walk or complimentary shuttle ride away, and guests get extra time in the parks on certain days.

## PLAY

### Marvel Summer of Super Heroes

This summer's live-action production featuring Captain America, Spider-Man and Doctor Strange, will be taking place from June 10 to September 30. It will be followed by a new Marvel-themed attraction that will replace the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster Starring Aerosmith.

➔ of *The Lion King* comes in to view around the corner. They're cheering, jumping, whooping and certainly giving the sort of encouragement we need as we pass the first mile marker – only 12.2 to go!

Around mile four, we leave the park crowds behind and head out into the French countryside, with a chance to admire the idyllic scenery and collect our thoughts. Just as I'm reflecting on how those months of gruelling preparation were worth it, I'm jolted back to reality by the sound of a full brass band – we've arrived in the university campus just outside the Disney parks, to find a cheerleading troupe there to greet us.

The miles continue to tumble, and with each marker, we're met with DJs, dancers and entertainment, spurring us on to see what the next corner brings – it's like finding yourself in a Disney film. Even more so as we pass the 'parking lot' of Walt Disney Studios, running between the original cars used in Pearl Harbor and Con Air, and alongside Cruella De Vil's black-and-white spotted Rolls-Royce. With so much to look at, it's easy to forget you're even running a half marathon.



**I feel a 'whoosh' rush past and find I am being overtaken by a flowing purple and blue carpet with golden tassels**

With the end in sight, I feel a 'whoosh' rush past and find I am being overtaken by a flowing purple and blue carpet with golden tassels. I was always a big fan of *Aladdin* but I can't believe I'm being beaten by a rug. So, with a final blast on the afterburners that Buzz Lightyear would have been proud of, I cross the finish line in what has genuinely been the most enjoyable half marathon I have ever run.

### ► CHEER SQUAD

It's certainly worth highlighting that although I might have put in the training, the Disneyland Paris Magic Run Weekend wouldn't be the same without the thousands of spectators who line the route and cheer you on through the difficult stages of the

route, not to mention the dozens of Disney characters on hand.

In total, a team of more than 1,500 volunteers are there for support and hand out an impressive 70,354 bottles of water and 21,800 bananas in just one weekend. That's on top of the 7,250 metres of fences and 2,000 traffic cones used to secure the courses that magically disappear as soon as the race is over (it must be Tinkerbell and the fairies) to allow guests to continue to enjoy the park in its entirety.

There's plenty more for runners to enjoy across the weekend, too, with the runDisney Health & Fitness Expo. Not only is this where runners need to collect their registration packs and find out what awaits them on the course, but it's also the place to engage with guest speakers, check out cutting-edge running gear, buy official race merchandise or get advice on fitness and nutrition.

In 2006, The Walt Disney Company made a global commitment to support parents in creating healthier families by using its stories and characters to make healthy living simple and fun. This includes introducing robust nutritional guidelines for food and ➔



**ON THE RUN:** The start of the Val d'Europe Half Marathon



→ drinks, and offering content focusing on healthier lifestyles such as the Disney Channel's *First-Class Chefs* and *Aim High*, and initiatives such as Change4Life's 10-Minute Shake-Up and the #HealthilyEverAfter marketing campaign.

## ▶ PARK LIFE

I might be here for the run, but that doesn't mean I can't have fun along the way. In fact, one of the key selling points for this half marathon is that it offers as much off the course as on, and it can easily be incorporated in a family break or a getaway with friends.

Alongside the classic attractions – I certainly haven't grown out of Space Mountain and the Runaway Mine Train – we head to Pirate Island and are greeted by Captain Jack and his band of merry crew on their clumsy quest to unearth hidden treasure.

Pirates of the Caribbean is one of the park's most popular attractions and takes you on a journey through a moonlit lagoon, taking in all manner of characters and sights before washing



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up in Captain Jack's Restaurant des Pirates, much to the delight of the watching diners.

As we take our seats to the sounds of musket fire and explosions, smoke fills the air, mingling with the smells of some delicious fish and seafood.

After dark, we're in for even more excitement, as the parapets and turrets of Sleeping Beauty Castle appear to move as mind-blowing special effects bring the wonder of Disney to life before our very eyes, in the new Disney Illuminations show.

We join the crowds, holding our breath as 'ohhhhs' and 'ahhhhs' fill the air while fireworks fizz through the

night sky. Flames and water work in perfect harmony, wowing the senses as *Star Wars* lasers slice through the mist, all the while Mickey conducts a series of projections of famous Disney tales.

That's not the only bit of sparkle added for the park's 25th anniversary celebrations last year. The new Disney Stars on Parade means every day is parade day, featuring eight colourful tales – from *The Lion King* and *Toy Story* to *Peter Pan* and *Finding Nemo* – to make Main Street USA the liveliest place to be.

**Book it:** Disneyland Paris Magic Run Weekend will return on September 20-23, with kids' races, 5K, 10K and half-marathon distances available. A three-day package for a family of four starts at £1,686, departing September 21, based on four sharing a Standard Lake Side room at Disney's Newport Bay Club with easyJet flights from Luton, three-day park hopper tickets and free half-board meal plan, for bookings made by July 31. Add a half-marathon bib for £66 per adult. [run.disneylandparis.com/bookings](http://run.disneylandparis.com/bookings)

TW

**BELOW:** Runners on Main Street



## Disneyland Paris Magic Run Weekend in numbers

**20,030 runners**, between the ages of one and 82 took part in the second Disneyland Paris Magic Run Weekend, representing more than 40 nationalities – nearly **5,000 more runners** than for the inaugural event in 2016.

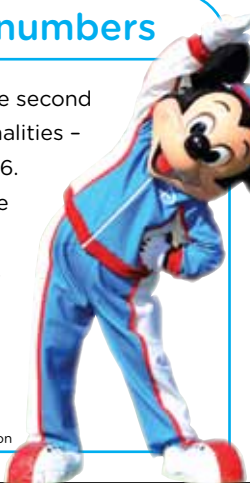
**1,069 children** between the ages of one and 12 participated in the runDisney Kids' Races of 100 metres, 200 metres and 1km.

**5,364 people of all ages** participated in the **5K**, which was held at night for the first time.

**6,462 runners** took part in the **10K**, which was new last year.

**7,135 runners** participated in the Disneyland Paris Val D'Europe Half Marathon.

Figures based on 2017 participation



**RUNNING MATES:** Ollie(right) with Travel Weekly colleague Sean

PICTURES: YANN PIRIOU / JON FURNISS