

Pandora's Bar

Pandora: The World of Avatar is enough to sweep Flora Ioannou off her feet

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I'm flying through the sky, on the back of a dragon-like banshee, holding on for dear life with tears rolling down my cheeks and screaming in terror.

I soar across seas, speed through jungles and dive into caves, and all the time I can feel the beast's lungs slowly expanding and contracting - I'm petrified, but I still want more.

That's what's so exciting about the new Avatar Flight of Passage, the 3D centrepiece ride at Pandora: The World of Avatar, which opened in Animal Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando last year.

▶ PANDORA'S CHARMS

Disney's much-anticipated attraction has been a massive success, and you can tell by the queuing time: it now stands

at two hours, but the longest recorded on this ride has been six. Is it worth it? In a word, yes.

There's never been another ride like it at any of the Disney parks. The 3D simulator experience only compares to flight motion simulator Soarin' at Epcot, and yet it's like nothing I have ever experienced - and I'm a Disney veteran. What's worse is I was on the ride with five-year-olds who were clearly loving it and not the least bit scared.

The technology is cutting edge and the effects mind-blowing. Riders straddle motorbike-like seats that represent the banshee; you sit on, scoot forward and hold on to the handlebars while a safety bar holds you in place.

It swings and pivots and tilts so it feels as though you are actually diving off a cliff, swooping

“It swings, pivots and tilts so you feel like you are actually diving off a cliff and swooping through the waterfalls

through the waterfalls and off the high canopy of floating trees in the vast terrain of Pandora. And while doing so, you feel the ocean spray on your face and the wind through your hair.

This hair-raising ride takes four minutes from start to sudden finish and can't fail to leave first-timers speechless, so next, take it down a notch and try Pandora's second ride.

The Na'vi River Journey will

take you through a beautiful bioluminescent forest on a boat, past projections of animals on the riverbank and a Na'vi Shaman in full song - stunning and tranquil in equal measure.

Pandora - The World of Avatar covers a massive 12 acres, and it was a big hit with me, despite not even having seen *Avatar*, the blockbuster James Cameron film it's based on - shame on me!

▶ TALL STORIES

Disney will be hoping for the same success with the 10-acre Toy Story Land, which is set to open at Disney's Hollywood Studios on June 30. The new land will have you thinking you have shrunk to the size of one of Andy's green toy soldiers from the award-winning film (one of my all-time favorites) as

→ everything around Andy's back yard is built on an enormous scale.

The land will hold two main attractions: Slinky Dog Dash, an 18-seat rollercoaster ride, and Alien Swirling Saucers, themed around the little three-eyed, green alien toys from the claw machine at Pizza Planet, and essentially a modern take on a teacup ride. Both are high-energy, family-oriented rides, and I can't wait to be first in line.

In addition, there will be a quick-service restaurant called Woody's Lunch Box, made to look like the Tupperware lunch box Andy's mother packs for him to take to school, serving meals and old-fashioned soda floats.

And to welcome all guests at the new land there will be larger-than-life figures of Woody, Buzz Lightyear, Jessie and Rex.

▶ **SPACE RACE**

This year's Toy Story Land will be followed in 2019 with the opening of the 14-acre Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, also under construction at the park.



The new Slinky Dog Dash rollercoaster

PICTURE: MATT STROSHANE

A Star Wars-themed resort and hotel is also being built. It will be designed to give guests the feeling of boarding a spaceship and every window will have a view of 'space'.

Meanwhile, for anyone planning a return trip this year, there is more than enough new product to dazzle even repeat visitors. Star Tours – The Adventures Continue simulator has been updated with scenes from the

latest film, and if you can dare to keep your eyes open all the way to the last few seconds, you'll glimpse what Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge is expected to look like. Not everyone knows this, so don't forget to tell your customers.

There will be all sorts of fun at Disney's Animal Kingdom as it celebrates its 20th anniversary with Explorers Meet Up! A Great Bird Adventure, based on Disney Pixar film *Up*.

Plus there will be new character celebrations around the park and evening show Rivers of Light, which is mesmerising and not to be missed; what better way to end the day?

Book it: Seven nights at Walt Disney World Resort with Walt Disney Travel Company, including economy flights with Virgin Atlantic from Gatwick and accommodation at Disney's Beach Club Resort, costs from £1,840 departing June 14. The price is based on two adults sharing a standard room, with airport transfers and Disney's Seven-Day Ultimate Ticket.

disneyholidays.co.uk



Europa-Park – The Perfect Short Break Destination

Across Europe in one day

In the heart of the border triangle, between the Black Forest and Vosges, lies the best theme park worldwide. Whether Ireland, France or Spain - 15 European themed areas with exemplary architecture, gastronomy, and vegetation are waiting to be discovered by visitors from around the world, embarking on a journey of discovery through Europe with over 100 attractions and shows and the promise of lots of fun and adventure for the whole family.

The park's own 4* hotels provide everything visitors need for a perfect family holiday or romantic wellness weekend with an authentic atmosphere and ambience unique to each themed hotel. The diverse culinary offers seal the deal for a restful stay. With numerous log cabins and covered wagons, there is also no shortage of extraordinary accommodation at the Europa-Park Camp Resort. Lovers of the Wild West can sit around the campfire in the tepee village and later crawl into their authentic tents.

New 2018: Starting this summer, young and old alike will be able to look forward to the redesigned Eurosat - CanCan Coaster, including yet another Coastality experience. Also new is the arrival of the beloved bear Paddington to the English themed area, whereas in Greece, an entire ice show will be dedicated to the cuddly children's book figure.



Europa-Park is open daily during the summer season from 24th March 2018 until 4th November 2018 from 9am to 6pm (longer opening hours during peak season)
For further information call: +49 7822 / 77 66 88 or visit www.europapark.de | @EuropaParkUK

WHAT'S HOT FOR 2018?

Walt Disney World



What are the hottest rides, restaurants and attractions to watch out for at Walt Disney World Resort this year? **Flora Ioannou** rounds up the latest news from the Orlando theme park to send your sales soaring

GREAT FOOD

Want to suggest a great place to eat? STK at Disney Springs serves the best steaks and has a seriously good DJ pumping out the latest tunes while you eat. It's one of the hottest new places to open in Disney Springs, so reserve a table before rocking up.



A FAMILY MUST-STAY

If you're booking for a family, recommend Disney's Beach Club Resort. This New England-style resort hotel includes amazing pools, a man-made beach lagoon and spacious rooms, plus a character-themed meet-and-greet restaurant Cape May Cafe, all just a hop, skip and jump away from Epcot.



LIGHT FANTASTIC

Rivers of Light at Animal Kingdom is set to an original music score with a series of video projections and a choreographed laser show on the lagoon. It's a great uplifting story that will have you humming the enchanting tune for days, and there are no loud bangs as Disney takes into consideration the animals that live in the park.



PICTURE: DAVID ROARK

GUT-BUSTER

Treat yourself by heading to Beaches & Cream, a retro soda shop at Disney's Beach Club Resort. It's all about comfort food, and the pièce de résistance is the famous gut-busting Kitchen Sink dessert, which has eight enormous scoops of delicious ice cream and every topping imaginable. Just don't try it on your own - you'll need your whole family for this one.



FAVOURITE RIDE

Not a new one but my all-time favourite ride at Magic Kingdom is Buzz Lightyear's Space Ranger Spin. This indoor ride is interactive, letting you spin your car and shoot simulated laser cannons at Zurg and his minions, while building up your score. It's not a fast ride but it's loads of fun for the most competitive families.



HOLD ON TIGHT!

Test Track at Epcot lets you design your own car then test it out in all weathers and terrains. The final leg takes you to speeds of up to 65 miles an hour, making this the fastest ride at Walt Disney World Resort - just don't wear your Mickey ears on this one or you'll lose them.



THE FINALE

For an incredible finale, head to Cinderella's Castle in the Magic Kingdom to watch Happily Ever After - the most spectacular firework display you'll ever see. It leads you through a breathtaking journey of Disney's best animated films and includes lasers, lights and projections. This awe-inspiring 18 minutes will bring any Disney fan to tears - it did for me.

