

# Confessions of a Disneyland misfit

I'm about to uncover one of our nation's best kept secrets — the world's happiest place on earth isn't. Or at least it wasn't for our family of five last month when we made our maiden visit. On an average, my kids, ages 5-8, suffered from three to five meltdowns a day, not counting those of their folks.

And we weren't alone. As my husband and I looked around for some form of validation, we found it in the scores of kids screaming and parents yelling all in the name of having fun.

'Lest you think I'm making this all up, here are some snippets I overheard (and recorded): "Tommy, how bad do you want a spanking?!" came from one mom exasperated with her son's crying. "Hurry up!" was a recurring theme, especially during those early admission hours when every minute counted in order to get the most rides completed in the shortest amount of time before the crowds converged. "We're going to have fun today!" ended up sounding more like a command than an excitement builder. "Come on! Let's get this thing started!" was one dad's impatient response to the Dumbo line at 8:50 a.m. Perhaps the most shocking expose happened our last morning as we stood in yet another line at 7:25 a.m. for early admission into the park. The little girl in front of us started crying and pleading with her dad, "I don't want to go to Disneyland right now. I want to go back to our hotel," to



## HOME WITH A VIEW

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which he answered, "You're probably the only kid who has ever cried going into Disneyland instead of leaving!" I doubt it.

Like us, however, I'm sure all these families came home with pictures that don't suggest anything was amiss in the Magic Kingdom. There's our three hamming it up with Mickey and Minnie, looking in awe at the fair Snow White and lining up for their autograph from Chip. But in Disneyland, a picture is not worth a thousand words because it only tells the edited story that usually makes it back home. No one

was snapping pictures when Casey locked herself in the bathroom because she wanted to ride Dumbo first instead of third (and this was at 7 a.m. — it was a long day!) You won't see a photo of Riley rolling over in bed complaining, "I'm tired!" upon her wake-up call for 7:30 a.m. early admission. And you won't see Brady pouting because he wanted to drive the Autopia car this time instead of his sister. Perhaps the magic of the Magic Kingdom is that these setbacks are not the things the kids remember. Instead my kids will relive their favorite rides and plead to go back again. But for their dad and me the non-photographed images are just as strong as the documented ones, and we assure our kids it will take some time for those memories to fade and leave us Disney-ready again.

Our vacation didn't start out this way. Well, OK, maybe there was a 30-minute line just to register at the Disneyland Hotel — it was probably management's way of building up our line-waiting skills before the serious ones hit us in the park. But once on my first ride with my girls, It's a Small, Small World, I almost cried as I looked over and saw their faces of wonder. "This is what it's all about," I thought to myself as I looked forward to three days of enchantment. But unfortunately Disneyland is about a lot more than that. Because of its popularity, it's also about being overcrowded (even though the average attendance during our stay was only 16-20,000

a day compared to summer's average of 40-60,000), competitive as park-goers try to outsmart each other in reserving the best viewing spot for the Fantasmic show and garnering Mickey's autograph before he moves on, and rushed as guests scurry from one top attraction to another before the lines get too long. My husband and I also found ourselves longing for the old days when instead of unlimited passes you got books of categorized tickets, limiting you to a choice of four or five top rides. That might help reduce the scramble resulting from too many people trying to get on too few rides too many times.

It has been hard answering our friends' question, "How was Disneyland," knowing they expect to hear "Great!" instead of "It was good, bad and ugly." I feel like either I'm insulting their memories or identifying our family as Disneyland misfits. It's just that I'd like others not to feel as dysfunctional as we did when we discovered that some of the Magic Kingdom's magic had rubbed off since our last visit before kids. For some of us the idea of standing in long lines in the hot sun, racing from ride to ride, issuing early morning wake-up calls and jockeying for best show-viewing spots is not the stuff happily-ever-after vacations are made of. Pass the pixie dust, please.

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