Sidney’s three magic rules to get the theme park spell right

It was a working holiday for eight-year-old Sidney, writes Jenny Woolf. The challenge was how to build a theme park. Where better to go than Disneyland Paris to do the exciting research?

The careful, accurate theming in Disney parks is always a joy, and the road meandering through Frontierland’s log cabins and stockades led into a creepy, barren Haunted Mansion garden, complete with abandoned tea party in the crumbling gargoyle.

After laughing at the light-hearted and ingenious spooky scenes in the mansion, we made for adjoining Adventureland. Alas, the extensive caverns, rope bridges and playgrounds were too wet to use – although they dried out the next day. So, after taking in “Pirates of the Caribbean” – an animatronic pirate battle with amazing displays of cannons, blazing fires, treasure caves and skeletons – we finally arrived in Fantasyland, the prettiest Land of all.

Many of its rides are for the youngest children. They include the creepy, but still enchanting, Peter Pan’s Flight, Alice in Wonderland’s Labyrinth, complete with Cheshire Cat, and the “Yah, stupid old dancing dolls” (as Sidney put it) of “It’s a Small World” where brightly coloured figures representing every beaming ethnic stereotype imaginable sing an endless happy song.

And finally, in Fantasyland, the weather relented. The clouds parted and Hushed pink, and the park’s evening sunshine glittered off the trappings of the King Arthur Carousel horses. Light flashed off the river, gilded the pinnacles of Sleeping Beauty’s castle, as the day drew to its close.

It would be sunny now for the next few days, making the remainder of our stay bright and cheerful. Next morning, we’d visit the Studio Park, with its ultra-professional live shows, animation displays and car stunt driving, and an ingenious interactive cartoon show with Lilo and Stitch. We’d experience Crush’s dark roller-coaster, with its spanned turtle-shell seats, and the crumbling Hollywood hotel whose faulty elevator puts the terror in Tower of Terror.

But right now it was closing time, and we set out to find a meal amidst the flashing signs of Disney Village, a shopping and restaurant area dominated by a gorgeously coloured hot-air balloon at the end of the main street.

As we searched for a meal, Sidney thought up another theme park rule. “You must add in expensive rides and pay the staff, so you need to make lots of money.” Out of the mouths of babes – although Disney’s less expensive than it was and the good deals on accommodation and pre-booked meal deals do help keep costs down.

As we settled down to the Newport Bay’s evening buffet, Sid got his notebook out again. His third rule for would-be theme park builders! “Make sure you like theme parks,” he wrote. “so your park will be a fun place.”

How very true. We agreed that Walt must have absolutely adored theme parks – after all, he invented them. And despite more than a few raindrops, we loved Disneyland Paris, too.