



Close up ... Sidney eyes up the fantasy land with a telescope, left, All aboard the space Orbitron, above, and the menace of the haunted mansion, right.

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

SIDNEY didn't object to taking three days off during the school week. His first time abroad, first time on the Eurostar, and first time at Disney – how exciting! As part of the deal, though, he had to write a project about how to build a theme park. So when the other eight-year-olds were bouncing about in the Eurostar compartment, Sidney was toiling at his notebook, distilling the magic of Disney into advice for theme park builders.

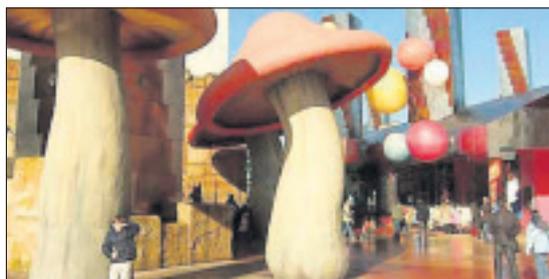
"Firstly," he wrote, "plan your theme park as a fun place. Why? Because otherwise people will not come."

The Northern French weather can certainly reduce the fun factor, I thought. Our arrival hit the tail end of some terrible storms and so our first sight of the Disneyland resort was as a dark, rainy area scattered with blown-down branches.

Everyone at the Newport Bay Club hotel was bright, smiley, and giving away free sweets. So, grabbing the brollies, we set out with light hearts, despite the dismal weather.

There are two parks –

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?



Magic loadstools ... Sidney down among the fairy stories.

Disneyland Park and the Walt Disney Studios Park. We headed first for Disneyland Park, with its fairy castle and elaborately landscaped "lands" of Adventureland, Frontierland, Discoveryland and Fantasyland.

As a Star Wars fanatic, Sidney was desperate to visit Discoveryland's "Star Tours" simulator, in which a routine space trip to Endor goes catastrophically wrong. Elaborate

"workshop" scenes line the queueing area, so the wait is rather fun, and the ride itself features a thrilling high-speed space chase. "My Star Wars dreams come true," sighed Sid happily, as we finally emerged, heads spinning.

Discoveryland is themed like a 1950s boys' space adventure comic, with vaguely technological attractions. Its newest arrival is the brightly-coloured Toy Story interactive ride, in which toy spaceman Buzz Lightyear solemnly explains with the aid of his Etch-a-Sketch how passengers can eliminate the evil Zurg with laser guns. Other adventures include a delightful space-ship roundabout called Orbitron and the park's biggest, scariest 40 mph loop-the-loop roller coaster, fired from a 22-metre cannon.

Before Sidney got too interested in the idea of that, we quickly suggested having a go on Frontierland's Big Thunder Mountain Railroad. Big Thunder's "wildest ride in the West" with guitar-pickin' background music is a moderately scary coaster. It features a mine train plunging into stalactite-hung caves and hurtling past real, rusting Victorian steam engines perched on the mountainside.

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 teaparty in the crumbling gazebo.

After laughing at the light-hearted and ingenious spooks 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 piratical revel 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 creaky, but still enchanting, Peter



Tea for two ... party time with Alice and the Mad Hatter.

Pan's Flight, Alice in Wonderland's Labyrinth, complete with Cheshire Cat, and the "Yah, stupid old dancing dollyies" (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 blushed 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 spinning 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.



Play's over ... Sidney works hard at his theme project.

FACTFILE

❑ For booking during May, there are up to 40 per cent off deals at www.leisuredirection.co.uk/disney
Tel: 0844 576 5504.

❑ Jenny Woolf travelled on Eurostar, which operates a daily direct service to and from Disneyland (not Tuesdays and Saturday except during school holidays), taking two hours 35 mins from London. Fares are from £69 standard class return (adult) £44 return (child aged 4 to 11). Visit www.eurostar.com or call 08432 186 186.

❑ The Disneyland Paris website www.disneylandparis.co.uk/ has more information about the parks and hotels.