

California Dreamin'

Disneyland and San Francisco Bay Area, California

12-16 October 2022



Disneyland! ✓



Chasin' Chewbacca

Resistance encampment, Planet Batuu
Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, Disneyland

Disneyland!

Completing Per and Olav's two-item California must-see list, we reached the promised land a week after beginning our wander through the California wilderness. They have been exposed to Disney movies since they began watching Winnie the Pooh on television.

That they would become aware of a "land" that celebrates these movies, enables visitors to meet the characters and immerses visitors in their stories was inevitable. No presence in the tidal wave of American culture that radiates around the globe from the nation's Hollywood media arm is more powerful or pervasive than Disney.



Back home in Norway on Sunday night, Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader (Per and Olav) have just finished trick-or-treating.

Hanne and I, like billions of parents, are Disney enablers. When she originally told me about her sons' priorities, Disneyland was the stated goal. She visited in 2003, when the Norwegian high school student exchange program — through which she would live in my hometown the following academic year — convened she and her fellow participants in Los Angeles for an orientation program. A year later, when she was about to graduate from [Richmond \(County\) Senior High](#), her class took its senior trip to Walt Disney World in Florida.

The Star Wars themed attractions, however, soon emerged as Per and Olav's goal within the goal. Star Wars' ever-growing collection of stories and characters — created not by Disney but movie maker George Lucas of Modesto — was purchased by Disney for \$4 billion 10 years ago after Lucas first licensed the Star Tours ride, based on Star Wars, which opened in Disneyland in 1987. Lucas later licensed creation of another Disneyland ride, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, based on another movie franchise he created. It opened in 1995.

Hanne didn't mention either of the Lucas rides when she recalled her first Disneyland visit. But Star Tours and two newer rides from that story collection — "Millennium Falcon (the name of smuggler Han Solo's spacecraft): Smuggler's Run" and the *pièce de résistance*, "Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance" — were known to the boys. So was the entirely new land Disney built to contain them, called "*Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge*," in California and Florida. Both outposts opened in 2019 just a few months after Emily's and my most recent trip to Norway.

The planning goal I set for myself, similar to seeing the biggest tree in Sequoia National Park, was to be sure they hit the Star Wars trifecta. Achieving it meant adopting and adapting to more complicated and more expensive Disney rules and procedures than either Hanne or I had dealt with before, but which heavily factor into today's Disneyland experience, especially post-pandemic. Visiting Disneyland today without a mobile phone loaded with Disney's app and tickets that include specific park reservations, extra-cost "Genie+" service and extra-extra-cost "Lightning Lane" passes, would be like sitting in heaven's waiting room.

I first visited Disneyland in 1969 when the entry fee included a book of ride tickets. An A ticket would get you a ride down Main Street in a fire truck. An E ticket would get you into one of the most popular attractions like "Pirates of the Caribbean" or the "Haunted Mansion." Astronaut Sally Ride put the phrase "[E ticket ride](#)," meaning the ultimate thrill, into American slang when she rocketed into space 1983. Just a year before, Disney had switched to a higher priced entry ticket that included all attractions you could squeeze into a day. Then, as crowds continued to grow despite one-hour lines at new rides like "Space Mountain," "FastPass" machines were added at the most popular rides so that the park-savvy could reserve a spot in a shorter line during a specified time period.

The latest evolution of Disney ticketing is Genie+ and Lightning Lanes, accessible only through the Disney phone app, and which effectively charges you \$25 per person to avoid a two-hour line at "Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance" if you get into the park gates before the limited reservations sell out. We hit the trifecta before lunch on the first of two days we spent at the park.

This kind of privilege for those who can afford it runs against deeply ingrained cultural traditions in Norway, where the "[right to roam](#)" allows you to hike and camp almost anywhere in the countryside that the land — whether or not it's privately owned — isn't cultivated. Braathens, a Norwegian regional airline, [introduced two-class service on its planes in 1998](#), a concept that eventually failed, partly because so many customers objected to the class distinction. Earlier this year, Tusenfryd, Norway's largest amusement park, experimented with selling 50 express passes per day to visitors who wanted to avoid lines. The passes cost about \$30 in addition to the \$50 park ticket. That experiment ended after the [controversy described here](#).

For those who would argue that cultural values are passed down genetically in a relatively homogenous society like that in Norway, I offer our Disneyland experience with Star Wars as a case study. Hanne, Emily and I discussed the Braathens and Tusenfryd examples — in English, of course — as we drove into one of Disneyland's massive parking structures. Per and Olav, whose skill at English is still in its earliest stage, could hear but probably had other things on their minds. There were no complaints when we saw the Rise of the Resistance ride sign giving a wait time of 2 hours and our Lightning Lane access got us in within 10 minutes.

With a big help from Hollywood, this is how American cultural values — good and bad — have spread around the world.



Interrogation

Resistance encampment, Planet Batuu
Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, Disneyland



A-wing Starfighter

Resistance encampment, Planet Batuu
Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge, Disneyland



Plummet

Splash Mountain
Critter Country, Disneyland



Winding down 1

Olav and Lucy Bunsen, kitty cat
Family room

Winding down 2

Per and Legos
Family room



Notes on photos

The sources for much of the Star Wars-related information here are the [Disney Parks Blog](#), [Star Wars Databank](#), [Undercover Tourist](#), [StarWars.fandom](#) and Gordon Meacham. Other sources are linked from each note.

Cover (Hanne Hovden photo) — After seeing his first Disney movie, probably *The Lion King*, one of Hanne's sons asked about the castle that appears in the [intro to modern Disney productions](#). Was the castle real? Per and Olav got confirmation of her answer on this trip by visiting the first, and smallest, castle in what are now six Disney "castle parks" around the world. Each castle has its own design. They are in Disneyland in Anaheim, California, part of what is now called Disneyland Resort, which includes a second park called California Adventure; Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, one of a group of parks including Hollywood Studios, Epcot and Animal Kingdom; Tokyo Disneyland, which is paired with Tokyo DisneySea as Tokyo Disney Resort; Disneyland Paris, which is paired with Walt Disney Studios Park; Hong Kong Disneyland and Shanghai Disneyland. If you watch the movie intro linked above, which is just one variation on a basic theme, you might want to read some of the public comments attached to it to get a sense of the emotional reaction that it creates among viewers.

Chasin' Chewbacca (Hanne Hovden photo) — Chewbacca, whom I consider a Wookiee from North Carolina because of his name, appeared in the very first Star Wars movie, *Star Wars: Episode IV — A New Hope*, in 1977. For those of you keeping score at home, that was 45 damn years ago! Per and Olav met him on the planet Batuu at a camp where the Resistance has holed up in Disneyland. Perhaps he's retired from his co-pilot job on Han Solo's Millennium Falcon spaceship. He also has the Santa Claus-like ability to be in multiple places at once, like Disney World in Orlando. Emily was chasing him, too, in her sunglasses and striped shirt, and I'm right behind her. Nice pedi, Chewie.

Interrogation (Hanne Hovden photo) — Kylo Ren, backed up by a couple of Stormtroopers, confronts Per on Batuu, asking him if he's loyal to the First Order. In the Star Wars movies, Ren was born Ben Solo, son of Han Solo and Princess Leia, but succumbed to the dark side of the Force and is one of the leading bad guys in episodes VII, VIII and IX of the movie series' sequel trilogy. Princess Leia founded the Resistance, which is encamped here on Batuu, meaning Ren is trying to root out people loyal to his mother. Both Per and Olav are wise to what's happening and now have their own lightsabers if it ever happens again.

A-wing Starfighter — Perhaps you know this spacecraft better as the RZ-1 A-wing Interceptor, which it was called back when the early rebel movement used them against the Empire. I always mistake it for something we've given Ukraine to use against Russia. Either way, this A-wing has seen action in the war between the Resistance and the First Order. The boys were happy to finally see it up close.

Plummet — Splash Mountain is a ride Hanne remembered fondly from her 2004 Walt Disney World trip as a senior at Richmond Senior High in North Carolina. It was first introduced at California's Disneyland in 1989. In this picture, a freeze frame I lifted from video I shot, Per and Olav are in front with Hanne (black top) and Emily (sunglasses) behind them and then a woman in a white top who appears to be falling asleep and somebody maybe wearing a hoodie. This ride and its reincarnations in Orlando and Tokyo are one of the wettest and most popular at each of those outposts in the Disney-verse and also one of the most controversial, illustrating Disney's attempts to keep up with social change. Splash Mountain is based on several of the [Uncle Remus stories](#), whose main characters are Br'er (Brother) Rabbit, Br'er Fox and Br'er Bear. Those stories were named for their fictional black storyteller and narrator who spoke in the dialect of enslaved plantation workers in the American South. The actual author was [Joel Chandler Harris](#) of Eatonton, Georgia, a white man who collected the stories from slaves he talked with during the Civil War while working at a small newspaper owned by a plantation owner. He published them beginning in 1880, 15 years after the war, in columns by-lined "Joe Harris" that he wrote for *The Atlanta Constitution* and in

books and magazine articles published nationally. Mark Twain was a fan and [Booker T. Washington wrote approvingly to Harris](#) saying “In a speech on Lincoln's Birthday which I am to deliver in New York, I am going to take the liberty to quote liberally from what you have said.” But [Alice Walker wrote in 1981](#) that Harris had stolen “a good part of my heritage.” The legacy of cultural appropriation transferred to Disney in 1946 after his studio released the Academy Award-winning movie *Song of the South*, based on Harris' stories. Soon after I began reading in the 1950s, my parents gave me an Uncle Remus book published by Disney, which I loved. I began speaking like Uncle Remus in my everyday conversations. Our family dentist heard me one day and was offended that a white boy was talking like that. He told my parents they should take the book away from me. That never happened. But Splash Mountain is due to be closed soon in Disneyland in reaction to continuing criticism. The ride is scheduled to [reopen in 2024 re-themed as the 2009 Disney movie *The Princess and the Frog*](#). That story traces its roots to a German fairy tale from the Brothers Grimm but is set in 1920s New Orleans with Princess Tiana as the first black Disney princess. Rewriting fairy tales whose authors receive no royalties is [a cornerstone of Walt Disney's business model, beginning with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937](#). Today, dropping Uncle Remus is controversial among Disney critics, meaning that what my dentist wanted is now coming true but not for his reason.

Winding down 1 — Olav, in his new Star Wars socks, and our cat, who does not answer to the name Lucy Bunsen, relax after the long drive back to San Jose the day before. Tomorrow his family will board their flight back to their home just in time to return to school.

Winding down 2 — Per is still working on his Lego model that he bought at the shopping mall. The stuffed bear is from our hot dog stop the day before at the Black Bear Diner in Bakersfield.

Golden Gate good-bye (Emily Meacham photo)— Ten days after Hanne and her sons landed in San Francisco, we finally get to the Golden Gate Bridge to say good-bye.

Meeting Mr. Vader





Golden Gate good-bye

Golden Gate Bridge
Marin County, California