

Disneying across the USA

CHRISTINE KNIGHT rediscovers the eternal magic of Disney on a family adventure across the USA.



What happens when a mum who loves Aladdin has a daughter who loves Cinderella even more, and they convince their husband/dad that the best holiday imaginable involves all things make believe and magical, all the time? A decidedly Disney family holiday across the US, of course.

Did someone say aloha?

First stop: Hawaii's **Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa**. This luxurious property is a 45-minute drive out of Waikiki and away from the constant buzz of selfie-seeking tourists. In the peaceful neighbourhood of Kapolei, the resort is set against a dramatic mountain range overlooking the peaceful Kohola lagoon. We arrive after a 10-hour overnight flight from Sydney, red-eyed

01 A castle fit for a princess © Disneyland 02 Enjoying Caribbean beaches 03 Dressed to impress 04 Hanging out with sneaky Stitch 05 Exploring the ship with Mickey 06 All girls are princesses





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and a little bit wonky on our feet. While check-in isn't for another few hours, once the staff see our weary faces they magically find a room for us and we lie down to the sound of the ocean outside our window.... jet-lag bliss.

In any season, Hawaii is the perfect place to vacation, and with kids, even more so. Our stay is over far too quickly in a blur of lazy days swimming in crystal-blue lagoons, floating under waterfalls along the Waikolohe Stream and learning to hula under the stars. We meet the star of Aulani, Stitch (let's be honest, it's all about this mischievous alien here!), gorge on Mickey Mouse-shaped waffles for breakfast and learn to string our own leis. That is, when we aren't running up and down the beach looking for turtles. If paradise is a place on earth, the land of aloha just might be it.

Paradise at sea

At the end of our stay we bid a tearful goodbye to our new *ohana* (family) at the resort and fly across the US to continue our Disney adventure. Cape Canaveral in Florida is our next port of call, where we're boarding the majestic *Disney Fantasy* en route to the Caribbean and Bahamas. We are not cruise folk and are terrified of seasickness and gastro bugs – fears which turn out to be completely unfounded. We have forgotten that Disney has a way of working its magic any where you go and, while it can't control the weather (yet!), it manages to keep everything else on the ship not just running smoothly, but (there really is no other word for it) magically.

Imagine the fanciest hotel you've ever stayed at, with the most incredible service you've ever



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Together we ride stomach-lurching roller coasters to soar above the world and watch Anna and Elsa on stage in 'Frozen - Live at the Hyperion'. It's high summer, we're sweaty and there are crowds and queues everywhere. We don't care; frantically slurping ice-cream cones that melt over our hands before we can get them into our mouths and watching parades pass us by. My daughter's face is sticky with treats and alight with joy, and I think to myself: this is the magic of childhood, right here. ●

encountered, waking up every day to look at the rolling ocean or a remote island, and topped off with amazing evening shows. *That's* a **Disney Cruise**. Our most beloved characters wander the ship, happy to entertain little ones, and the *pièce de résistance* is a kids' club so good our child actually refuses to leave. Peter Pan teaches my daughter how to crow (thanks for that) and she swashbuckles with Captain Hook on Pirate Night.

We wake each morning of the cruise ready to be awed by a new location, from rustic Tortola in the British Virgin Islands to Disney's very own hideaway, Castaway Cay, where we feed stingrays who tickle the palms of our hands and rub up against our legs in an affectionate welcome. The staff remember our names, our waiters know I'm a fussy vegetarian, and our little girl is called "princess" wherever she goes.

From coast to coast

Because too much Disney is never enough, in New York we visit the famous **Disney Store** in Times Square. It is absolute mayhem. Packed to the rafters with bustling fans, I ask the staff if it's particularly busy today, to which they breezily reply, "no, it's like this every day". It seems that even in New York, tourists like to get their Disney fix. The store is the number one place to buy the fancy princess dresses my daughter adores so much, so we buy her the gown she's been endlessly begging dad for.

California is the final leg of our whimsical adventure and **Disneyland** is truly where my daughter's dreams come true: she undertakes Jedi training to wield a lightsaber against Darth Vader, transforms into a shimmering princess at the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique and eats enough popcorn to feed a family of four. She is in absolute heaven.

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