

**FROM FANTASY TO FEELING: FOOD, RIDES, AND SOUVENIRS AS SITES OF
NOSTALGIA AND CONSTRUCTED HAPPINESS IN DISNEYLAND**

Ms. Jubby Kumar

Research Scholar

Department of English & Foreign Language

Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya,

Koni, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh 495009

jubby2107@gmail.com

&

Dr. Manish Shrivastava

Professor

Department of English & Foreign Language

Guru Ghasidas

Vishwavidyalaya,

Koni, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh 495009

manishbilaspur@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Walt Disney said, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world." Disneyland, dubbed the happiest place on earth, is full of adventure, joy, excitement, and magic. For the people, it is a place where their dreams turn into reality, and they experience their own fairytales. Thousands of guests visit Disneyland every day in an attempt to leave their busyness and anxieties behind and spend a day in the magical world of Disney. Be it dressing up as Disney Princesses and exploring the castles, visiting the magical forests, riding the colourful rides, enjoying a Disney-themed meal, or taking pictures with your favourite Disney characters. Disneyland offers a one-of-a-kind experience for everyone. For the visitors, it is not just an amusement park; it is a world where they live their dreams with their favourite Disney characters in it. This paper aims to study: How Disneyland brings out childhood memories and nostalgia among visitors. How does Disneyland's atmosphere affect stressed adults and provide an escape? How does Disneyland contribute to bonding and making memories? How does Disneyland reflect the unique appeal of Disney characters by employing storytelling techniques and technology?

Keywords: Disneyland, Escape, Magic, Technology, Walt Disney

Walt Disney said, “I don’t want the public to see the world they live in while they’re in Disneyland. I want them to feel they’re in another world.” It all started with the creation of “Mickey Mouse”, one of the most beloved characters of all time, and now there are hundreds of Disney characters that Disney fans adore. Disney’s characters have been versatile, and they charm people of all ages. While young girls dream of being like Disney Princesses, little boys are thrilled to have a Buzz Lightyear action figure. Disney stories and characters have been a part of people’s lives since their childhood days. The story taught the children to be kind and courageous and gave them hope that if they can dream it, they can do it. Walt Disney was a dreamer; with his imagination, he created not only cartoon characters that have become an indelible part of people’s lives but also created theme parks that turned the viewer’s dreams into reality, called “Disneyland”. Disneyland is not just a theme park for the fans but a new world, full of dreams and possibilities.

The initial idea for Disneyland came when Walt was out spending the day with his daughters - he took them to ride the carousel, while he sat on a park bench watching and eating a bag of peanuts, he realized there should be a way that he and his daughters could enjoy the park together. This was to become Walt’s guiding principle behind Disneyland, it would be the first place of its kind where children and parents could go to enjoy themselves and have fun. (Walt Disney)

The first Disneyland Park was opened in 1955; now, there are six Disneyland parks worldwide. All Disneyland parks have different themes, shows, rides, and exhibits that appeal to people of all age groups. Leslie Le Mon, in her book, *The Disneyland Book of Secrets 2014 - Disneyland: One Local’s Unauthorized, Rapturous and Indispensable Guide to the Happiest Place on Earth*, says,

Disneyland was one perfect answer. It provided, an almost sacred space where it is permissible and safe to let one’s guard down, take a risk, rediscover imagination, have fun, express emotion, play and deepen family ties. This is powerful stuff even today, in our nation of workaholics and two-working-parent households, and it was certainly powerful in the anxious 1950’s.

This statement highlights the idea that Disneyland came as a blessing for the people when the people of America were going through a hard time, and people required motivation and hope for better times. People have an emotional connection with Disneyland that keeps growing with time. The craze for Disneyland parks is overwhelming. People not only wait in lines for two or three hours before the parks open, but some visit Disneyland parks seven days a week throughout the year to enjoy every attraction, ride, and food item that Disneyland parks offer. Walt Disney said,

The idea of Disneyland is a simple one. It will be a place for people to find happiness and knowledge. It will be a place for parents and children to share pleasant times in one another's company; a place for teachers and pupils to discover greater ways of understanding and education. Here the older generation can recapture the nostalgia of days gone by, and the younger generation can savor the challenge of the future.

For most people, their childhood phase was the best part of their lives. The experiences during childhood days create a strong connection with not only the people but also with the places where they create lasting memories. Since the launch of Mickey Mouse in 1928, Disney has created numerous unforgettable characters such as Snow White, Cinderella, Winnie the Pooh, The Little Mermaid, Aladdin and Genie, Simba, Woody and Buzz, Captain Jack Sparrow and many more. People have grown up with Disney stories and characters that have influenced them positively and shaped their minds. Walt Disney said about the influence of Disney movies on children: "Movies can and do have tremendous influence in shaping young lives in the realm of entertainment towards the ideals and objectives of normal adulthood". Disneyland is a magical place where one can reconnect with their childhood and relive the memories. Disneyland is created in such a way that people feel nostalgic. The music, food, rides, characters, souvenirs, and everything give them a special feeling that the visitors always remember. The attractions, rides, food, and adventures at Disney parks are always centred around characters. When people visit these parks, they feel like they are participating in activities related to the characters, which ignites feelings of nostalgia and brings back childhood memories.

Walt Disney said, "I love the nostalgic myself. I hope we never lose some of the things of the past". People grow up with fairy tales, folk tales, and stories they often come across during childhood. Some love the voices of certain characters, some love their cute attire, and others are drawn to their qualities. The admiration towards a character keeps growing and leads to dedication, creating loyal fans. The love for a certain character takes many to Disneyland. The response of visitors to the meet and greet events of Disneyland parks is overwhelming. Although they know that the cosplay artists play the roles of the Disney characters, their brains send positive signals, and people think that they are meeting their favourite childhood characters for real. This experience makes them nostalgic, and they remember their childhood days when they first got a hug from their favourite character or took a picture with them. It creates an emotional connection with the park.

Disneyland parks have been here for decades. Many rides and attractions are modified, and new versions are brought. People who visit Disneyland repeatedly with their

families through generations witness the changes. So, when people visit Disneyland with their children again, they want to recapture or relive their past experiences and become nostalgic. Some people go to the same spots and take pictures, and some recreate the pose they made years ago. When people find familiarity with the spots, rides, food items, or merchandise, it gives them comfort as they relive those memories. "Disneyland is a realm where cherished memories are crafted with every visit. The park's enchanting environment, beloved characters, and captivating experiences create memories that linger long after one leaves the park". (Four reasons why)

Be it "Let it Go" from *Frozen*, "Hakuna Matata" from *The Lion King*, or "When You Wish Upon a Star" from *Pinocchio*, which became Disney's unofficial anthem, Disney songs are loved by all. These songs are played in Disneyland's attractions and shows. The songs make the mood of the visitors merry. Similarly, popular food items such as cheesy Mickey Pretzels, Disney-themed caramel apples, churros, ice creams, popcorn, etc, make the hungry crowd of Disneyland happy and satisfied. Disney souvenirs such as headbands, popcorn buckets, pressed pennies, etc, are always in demand, but the most beloved Disney souvenirs are the autographs of Disney characters from the meet and greet events. The songs, food, and souvenirs of Disneyland are a part of the priceless memories created there. People usually remember the first time they danced while listening to a Disney jingle, had a bite of the cheesy Mickey pretzel, the crunch of the dill pickle-flavoured popcorn, or their first merch from Disneyland. These experiences make people nostalgic.

Why do we have to grow up? I know more adults who have the children's approach to life. They're people who don't give a hang what the Jones' do. You see them at Disneyland every time you go there. They are not afraid to be delighted with simple pleasures, and they have a degree of contentment with what life has brought – sometimes it isn't much, either. (Walt Disney Company)

Not only teenagers, but adults also find relaxation in temporarily detaching themselves from reality. When people visit Disneyland, the rides, food items, games, jingles or a specific memory related to their childhood make them nostalgic. They are immersed in the fantasy world that revolves around those remarkable characters. Disneyland is designed to stimulate people's imagination. Disneyland parks are huge with numerous rides, adventures, and attractions. There is a lot to see and experience in a day, and since everything is fast-paced, people barely have time to think about anything other than enjoying the things that the Disneyland parks offer them.

In Disneyland parks, people get to choose what they want to do, and there is no one to judge them. This gives people a sense of temporary freedom from their busy lifestyle. As people see others enjoying themselves, they are also able to relax and enjoy the happy and

positive environment of Disneyland. For once, they don't feel self-conscious and allow themselves to have a carefree attitude. "Disney brings people from all walks of life together at the parks and tells us that we can forget about the real world, even if it's only for a day. The parks tell us, Don't worry about what's going on in your life right now. Think about this moment and savour it. You're safe here" (Abell). The atmosphere of workplaces and schools is stressful and demanding; people are always overworking to meet deadlines, but in the Disneyland parks, there is no such thing as a timeline. People can take a stroll, take time to enjoy the shows and performances, relax to the tunes of their favourite childhood songs and enjoy the character-themed food at their own pace. There is no urgency, as they are not in a controlled environment that results in the production of dopamine in the body, and people feel relaxed. Walt Disney said, "That's what we storytellers do. We restore order with imagination. We instil hope again and again and again". In Disneyland parks, the food, music, rides, and everything is colourful, vibrant, and eye-catching. These things send positive signals to the brains of the people. This change in the surroundings has a calming effect on the people. Even a day spent at the Disneyland parks can result in a change in people's moods. The meticulously created fantasy world of Disneyland makes people feel as if they are transported to a magical world.

Disneyland Parks are designed to deepen the bonds. Doing things together brings people closer. At Disneyland, people create memories together that they cherish forever. It can involve taking pictures, playing games, admiring a particular character, or sharing common interests. Conversations with strangers while waiting in line for rides or food also create bonds. Sometimes, there is a group of people who participate in the same activities together; these experiences help the people bond with each other. People are immersed in what they are doing, forget their worries, and focus solely on having a good time together. Some parents are as dedicated Disney fans as their children. The parents are determined to take their children to Disneyland. They want their children to create lasting memories, as they did during their own childhood. "Disneyland also serves as a grand stage where life's milestones are celebrated" (Four reasons why). Many parents want their children to experience the magic of Disneyland by visiting it at least once in their lives. Thus, starts the traditions of creating memories at Disneyland together, be it birthdays, marriage proposals, or anniversaries, people go to Disneyland for celebrations. They recreate the pictures, enjoy the same food items they had together for the first time, and take the same rides. It strengthens the emotional connections between people.

The emotion of nostalgia is evoked again and again whenever people visit Disneyland. They relive the memories that they first created there. Listening to the same jingles can bring people back to the first time they heard a particular song, took a ride, or

enjoyed the shows together at Disneyland. The smell and taste of the treats they share can bring people closer to each other. Family dance parties are also a great time for everyone to connect and enjoy together.

One of the essences of Disneyland is its ability to foster familial bonds and friendships through shared experiences. The attractions appeal to visitors of all ages, making it a place where family members can relive childhood memories while crafting new ones. Beyond the rides and shows, Disneyland's magic lies in its capacity to unite generations in wonder and joy, creating timeless moments that families treasure forever. (Four reasons why)

Visits during festivals such as Christmas or Halloween are always special, as there are special themed decorations, food items, events, performances, and souvenirs. While people are at Disneyland, they are detached from modern gadgets; their focus is on enjoying and having a great time together, which results in the deepening of bonds.

According to Walt Disney, "Disneyland is often called a magic kingdom because it combines fantasy and history, adventure and learning, together with every variety of recreation and fun designed to appeal to everyone." Disneyland continues to improve, every year, new attractions and rides are added, the old ones are upgraded, and new stories, characters, and technologies are introduced. For instance, in 2024, a new ride called "Tiana's Bayou Adventure", a refreshed version of the classic attraction "Country Bear Musical Jamboree" and a theatrical performance "The Little Mermaid – A Musical Adventure" will be introduced. As Walt Disney said, "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world". People may visit Disneyland often, but there will always be something new to witness and experience at Disneyland.

Shows, parades, water projections, special effects, and fireworks are the must-see events of Disneyland parks. These experiences are interactive and immersive and contribute to the storytelling techniques. Fireworks and projections are a highlight of the shows every night. People tend to find the best places in the Disneyland parks to enjoy themselves. Children with their favourite Disney snacks and souvenirs wait anxiously for the dazzling fireworks and display of projections of scenes featuring their favourite Disney characters. Similarly, "Audio-Animatronics figures are moving — often speaking — lifelike figures that bring Disney's beloved characters and experiences to life. Effortlessly complementing Disney's storytelling tradition, these figures are designed and built by Disney Imagineers to embody the blend of imagination, innovation and spectacle that Disney is known for." (Disney Audio)

Storytelling techniques definitely make Disneyland more appealing to the audience. The atmosphere at Disneyland Parks is similar to that of Disney movies, making people feel as if they are part of the stories. For instance, “Audio-Animatronics figures let guests interact with Disney characters, creating tangible, memorable moments as they enjoy captivating rides and attractions”(Disney Audio). Each section in the park is designed with a particular narrative, character, and theme to give the visitors the best experience of their lives. The attractions, rides, and shows are meticulously created, such as,

World of Frozen puts a number of iconic scenes in the “Frozen” movies to life. Some of its signature spots include the North Mountain, with its peak as the highest point in Arendelle; the Ice Palace where Elsa unleashes her icy powers freely for the first time; Arendelle Castle, home of the royal family; the Bay of Arendelle, featuring the small fishing boat that Anna fell on when she met Prince Hans; Clock Tower where Anna danced with Prince Hans; and Friendship Fountain where Elsa uses her magical powers to freeze its water into beautiful snowflake ornamentations. (Daps)

Stories are narrated when people enter, and people are emotionally and mentally connected to the stories. “Frozen Ever After at Hong Kong Disneyland features Walt Disney Imagineering’s most advanced, fully-electric Audio-Animatronics® figures, which bring to life characters like Anna, Elsa and Kristoff with amazing realism” (Daps). These result in an inclusive and immersive experience for the visitors.

Amanda Chiu, senior producer at Walt Disney Imagineering Asia, stated: “Bringing our characters to life, featuring our unique, state-of-the-art Audio-Animatronics® figures, is a thrilling aspect of this project. It is a great testament to the amazing talents at Walt Disney Imagineering who made the impossible possible. We share the same goal with Walt Disney Animation Studios to create incredible entertainment for people of all ages, using innovative technology to tell a compelling, heartfelt story like never before.” (Daps)

The rides are themed around Disney stories, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the journey of a specific character. The guests also get to dress up like their favourite characters from Disney movies. For instance, at Hong Kong Disneyland, visitors can wear traditional clothes from the movie *Frozen*, get their faces painted with glitter, get their hair styled like Elsa, etc.

Disneyland is always evolving to make the experience of the visitors better; for this, they keep on employing advanced technology and apps. “Walt Disney World’s old paper ticketing system is now a thing of the past. It’s been replaced with a new planning tool – My

Disney Experience – which combines innovative, wearable technology with a powerful smartphone app” (My disney experience). It is a user-friendly smartphone app that makes the trip to Disneyland Parks convenient for people. Using this app, people can get fast passes which allow visitors to get early access, make advance dining reservations at the parks, check the waiting lines for the rides and shows, view the photos from Disney photopass, and create and share their Disneyland itinerary with family and friends. This app also allows people to get wristbands called MagicBand that can be used to make payments; these bands also act as Disneyland resort hotel keys and park tickets. “When visitors feel that their preferences and needs are understood and catered to, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty towards the brand. This can result in repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, further strengthening Disneyland's brand loyalty” (Liu and Liu). Using modern apps and technology has resulted in making the experiences even better.

Walt Disney about Disneyland said, “Here is the world of imagination, hopes and dreams. In this timeless land of enchantment, the age of chivalry, magic and make-believe are reborn, and fairy tales come true”. Not only have Disney stories and characters had a significant impact on people's lives, but Disneyland parks have also left a lasting impression. That's why people experience nostalgia when they visit Disneyland Parks.

The Walt Disney Company consistently demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion in its storytelling and corporate culture. Their efforts in creating authentic, memorable stories and experiences that resonate with audiences worldwide are noteworthy. This includes delving into new narratives and characters from diverse cultures and aligning with their Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives. (Liu and Liu)

Disneyland is not just a theme park but a world where people forget about their worries and enjoy themselves with their families. Disneyland is also a place where new memories are created and bonds are strengthened. A happy place where all the worries of life seem less troubling. People can not only hear the stories or witness the scenes, but can also be a part of the cherished stories. They can experience the climaxes and happily ever afters of their favourite stories. Disneyland is truly a magical place because it takes effort to make people happy, and they are doing it well.

Works Cited

- “4 Reasons Why Disneyland Is the Happiest Place on Earth.” 4TinyHands, 21 Feb. 2024, 4tinyhands.com/disneyland-is-the-happiest-place-on-earth/.
- Abell, Bailee. “Why Disney Is Truly the Happiest Place on Earth.” Inside the Magic, 15 Sept. 2025, insidethemagic.net/2020/03/why-disney-is-truly-the-happiest-place-on-earth-ba1/.
- Daps, Mr. “Hong Kong Disneyland Reveals First Look at Elsa Animatronic along with Other Frozen Details on 18th Anniversary.” Daps Magic, 12 Sept. 2023, dapsmagic.com/2023/09/hong-kong-disneyland-reveals-first-look-at-elsa-animatronic-along-with-other-frozen-details-on-18th-anniversary/.
- LE MON, LESLIE. Disneyland Book of Secrets 2014 - DCA: One Local’s Unauthorized, Rapturous and Indispensable... Guide to the Happiest Place on Earth. EISENBRAUNS, 2013.
- Liu, Jinni, and Yanan Liu. “Marketing charm of magic kingdom: An analysis of Disneyland’s marketing strategies.” SHS Web of Conferences, vol. 193, 2024, p. 01008, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202419301008>.
- Molly. “Disney Audio-Animatronics Technology: Bringing Your Favorite Characters to Life.” Disney Experiences, 22 Jan. 2024, disneyexperiences.com/disney-animatronics/.
- “My Disney Experience App [Guide: Simplify Disney World Trips].” Magic Guides, 6 Nov. 2024, magicguides.com/my-disney-experience-app/.
- Rachel. “New Summer Updates at Walt Disney World.” Disney Parks Blog, 10 June 2024, disneyparksblog.com/wdw/new-summertime-updates-announced-at-walt-disney-world/.
- “Walt Disney – the Dream of Disneyland.” Walt Disney Quotes, mywaltdisneyquotes.com/walt-disney-disneyland/. Accessed 24 Mar.