

HangTime at Knott's Berry Farm is illuminated at night, with chase lights following riders as they move along the track.



Themed THRILLS

Big changes are taking place at each one of Southern California's six major amusement parks, offering more adrenaline-fueled fun than ever before.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

For many, traveling is all about experiencing new cultures, indulging in culinary delights and learning about rich, vibrant histories. For others, it's simply about escaping everyday life in favor of something with more of a thrill factor: theme parks.

With a wealth of local parks to entertain visitors and locals alike, Southern California remains one of the hottest theme park destinations in the world. While millions flock to the original Disneyland Resort each year, hot spots like Knott's Berry Farm, Six Flags Magic Mountain and Universal Studios Hollywood to the

north, as well as Legoland California and SeaWorld San Diego down south, add even more adventure and nostalgia for families, thrill-seekers and those who are simply children at heart. And now, recently opened or soon-to-launch rides and attractions at each park will provide brand-new ways to create lasting memories.

DISNEYLAND RESORT

As one of the most popular theme parks in the world, Disneyland in Anaheim continues to captivate crowds with impressive additions to the 62-year-old park. The most anticipated attraction is Star Wars:

Galaxy's Edge, an immersive new world opening in 2019 that will be the first of its kind at any Disneyland park. Inspired by the ever popular sci-fi franchise, visitors will get the chance to pilot the Millennium Falcon, meet lovable robot BB-8 and enjoy unique drink concoctions in the cantina.

But before the futuristic fun gets underway, Disney is celebrating with a special festival centered on characters created by animation company Pixar. Deemed Pixar Fest, the fête kicked off on April 13 and will feature a variety of happenings through the start of September. At Disneyland

Park, spectators can enjoy a new fireworks display titled Together Forever – A Pixar Nighttime Spectacular, which comprises a flyover by Buzz Lightyear, the floating house from “Up,” music from “Coco” and more. Also in Disneyland, the Pixar Play Parade returns with new characters, such as those from “Inside Out.” Additionally, Disney California Adventure Park's Paint the Night parade has returned with a whole new set of characters. The dazzling, light-filled parade, which incorporates 1 million LED bulbs, is led by Sorcerer Mickey, while also incorporating Lightning McQueen from “Cars,” Mike and Sulley from “Monsters, Inc.” and the Incredible family.

Then, in late June, the former boardwalk area will reopen as Pixar Pier, where the roller coaster will be reimagined as the Incredicoaster, a whimsical playground dedicated to “Inside Out” will open and the pier's carnival games will be redesigned with Pixar characters. This area is also currently home to the Toy Story Midway Mania! ride, which will stay the same.

“As a travel concierge and mom of three children, who are each passionate in their love for Disneyland, ... [I am] always excited to visit the parks,” says Nanci Weinstein of Moments of Magic Travel, a company that specializes in planning Disney vacations. “... I am looking forward to sharing the Pixar theming with my clients because it focuses on the unbreakable bonds of friendship. The new additions will enable guests of all ages to interact with these storylines like never before.”

KNOTT'S BERRY FARM

While this farm-turned-theme park in Buena Park doesn't have numerous enhancements to offer this year, the one it does have is big: HangTime, the first dive coaster on the West Coast, opened in May, bringing with it a variety of unique elements that are sure to keep visitors enthralled. Ringing in at 150 feet, the twisty steel track takes riders up a 15-story vertical lift before suspending them over the 96-degree drop for several

THIS SPREAD: COURTESY OF KNOTT'S BERRY FARM



CraZanity at Six Flags

seconds before sending them down the steepest drop in California history. With five inversions (one being the second negative-G stall loop in the entire Western Hemisphere), guests can experience a feeling of weightlessness not found on most coasters. The ride is even better at night, when chase lighting moves with the train car as it travels along the track.

Always ones for innovation, the showrunners at Knott's were also the first to develop corkscrew inversion (used in the aptly named Corkscrew ride) in 1975 and the first to create a flywheel launch coaster with Montezooma's Revenge three years later. Last year marked another first for the amusement park: VR Showdown in Ghost Town offers a permanent, free-roaming virtual reality experience that allows players to interact with one another as well as the simulated world around them.

LEGOLAND CALIFORNIA

Children will be enamored with all of the changes taking place at San Diego's Legoland park this year. At the beginning of 2018, the amusement park's Lego Show Place Theater launched a new 4-D movie experience called "Lego Ninjago – Master of the 4th Dimension," where children are welcome to join Master Wu in the on-site dojo for an interactive training session.

Another expansion will be revealed this summer with the launch of a new water-based ride, Lego City Deep Sea Adventure. This submarine ride will escort visitors down below on a voyage to a sunken ship, offering views of colorful octopi and scuba divers, both made out of Legos, in addition to 2,000 real sea creatures like tropical fish, stingrays and exotic sharks.

SEAWORLD SAN DIEGO

Last summer, this marine-themed park opened Ocean Explorer, a kid-friendly land focused on deep-sea discovery. Despite the addition of five new rides, which are aimed at children and reminiscent of classic carnival rides, the attraction that has parkgoers buzzing is the Electric Eel roller coaster.

This coaster, which is the tallest and fastest in San Diego County, opened in May, inviting guests to experience what it's like to twist and flip like an eel swimming through the ocean. Accelerating to more than 60 mph in mere seconds, this new thrill ride electrifies riders with multiple launch experiences throughout the course of the ride, a height of nearly 150 feet and a 360-degree heartline roll that comprises elevation changes to keep the riders' hearts at roughly the same height throughout the ride. As part of the same expansion, the park also commenced Mission: Deep Discovery, a virtual adventure that has teams of one to four people explore the deep ocean. The excitement doesn't end there, either, as a moray eel exhibit is located nearby, offering large windows perfect for viewing the animals in their underwater habitat.

While the opening of its third roller coaster is a big deal, Electric Eel is not the only enhancement to the park. Though SeaWorld San Diego is already home to the Sesame Street Bay of Play, this slew of educational

characters is venturing out through the beginning of September as part of the new Sesame Street Party Parade, featuring 10 themed floats, famous characters like Elmo and Big Bird, and special moments that stop the parade for performances such as jumping rope, hula hooping and guitar playing.

SIX FLAGS MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Thrill-seekers should head straight for Six Flags, an amusement park that certainly wasn't built for the faint of heart. The rides here are bigger and better than anywhere else in Southern California, and the park recently launched an initiative to keep the gates open every day of the year. With more than 15 large-scale roller coasters, as well as an assortment of rides aimed at kids and families, daredevils and little ones can have simultaneous adventures in this Valencia-based park.

Perhaps most important to note is the upcoming opening of CraZanity at Six Flags' new boardwalk-themed area. This summer, the pendulum ride, which moves back and forth while rotating and gaining height with each swing, will entertain visitors at speeds of up to 75 mph. The ride will offer a feeling of weightlessness that appeals to thrill-seekers near and far.

"With the addition of CraZanity at Six Flags Magic Mountain, the park will go to an extreme level with another record-breaking element:



Lego City Deep Sea Adventure will take visitors on a submarine ride.



Pixar Pier is scheduled to open at Disney California Adventure Park in June.

tallest pendulum ride in the world at 17 stories in the air," says Connie Lujan, the park's publicist. "It's the perfect addition to our collection of world-class ... attractions."

Six Flags also transformed Lex Luthor: Drop of Doom, the tallest drop tower on the West Coast, into a virtual reality experience titled DC Super Heroes Drop of Doom VR in March, marking the park's second experiment with high-intensity VR rides, following The New Revolution roller coaster, one of the park's classic coasters that was refurbished for this purpose and reopened in 2016. The new ride's action centers around Superman and Wonder Woman as they battle Lex Luthor, 400 feet above a virtual rendition of Metropolis.

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD

While Universal Studios is still basking in the glory of its wildly successful expansion with the opening of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter in 2016, it continues to enhance the visitor experience with even more attractions. New magical escapades will be available this summer, including two new spells to cast on the streets of Hogsmeade (incendio and alohomora), plus interactions with Madam Malkin's Talking Mirror and fresh lunch offerings at the Three Broomsticks, including a cheese toastie with chicken and a Sunday roast sandwich.

The park's most recent addition is the Animation Studio Store, which opened in March to reveal an array of Sanrio merchandise and treats as well as items from Illumination Entertainment films like "Despicable

Me" and DreamWorks Animation movies like "Kung Fu Panda." In addition to shopping, guests can meet Hello Kitty, donned in a red dress adorned with filmstrips, just outside the shop.

Scheduled to open June 15, "Kung Fu Panda: The Emperor's Quest" will be the debut attraction for the new DreamWorks Theatre. The story follows Master Po, the Dragon Warrior, as he sets out to deliver a rare and powerful liquid to the palace. Incorporating seven projectors, 180-degree visuals using interior projection mapping and special effects like water and wind, the immersive experience will have guests feeling as if they're tagging along on Po's journey rather than just watching it.

Then, in September, Universal will close Jurassic Park - The Ride to make way for an all-new attraction, set to launch next year. This new iteration, the Jurassic World Ride, will introduce an updated color scheme, never-before-seen dinosaurs, advanced storytelling and technological enhancements that the original, 22-year-old ride is lacking. 🦖



Hello Kitty at Universal Studios

PRODUCTS FOR PARK HOPPING

These items, each available at Monarch Beach Resort, will ensure seamless packing for a trip to any theme park.

Stay hydrated with the resort's own 17-ounce, logoed **WATER BOTTLE** from S'well, which has a stainless steel design that keeps water cold for a full 24 hours, \$38, at Part and Parcel.

Keep your skin safe from the sun's rays with Coola's **ORGANIC SUNCARE TRAVEL SET**. In addition to a piña colada-scented sunscreen spray, you'll enjoy a facial moisturizer, after-sun lotion

and protective lip balm, all in easily packable sizes, \$39.99, at Miraval Spa Retail.

The lightweight **TECHLOOM PHANTOM RUNNING SHOES** by Athletic Propulsion Labs, available in both men's and women's sizes, boast all-day comfort thanks to the brand's Propelium sole, from \$145, at Life in Balance Boutique.

There's nothing worse than traipsing around a theme park all day with the sun in your eyes, so pick up some stylish Tom Ford **ANGUS SUNGLASSES** to ensure you can take in all the sights, \$445, at Life in Balance Boutique.

Padded handles make the logoed **TOTE BAG** perfect for long days at the park, so toss your gear inside and get ready to enjoy the rides, \$38, at Part and Parcel.

