



Park it: Family fun for vacation theme

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IT'S THE TIME of year when young and old give rein to their inner and outer child and head to theme parks. The following is a peek into what's new fun, plus a look at some of the old fun at California parks.

SeaWorld San Diego

Most visitors' lists include Shamu the killer whale. For 43 years, the ominously large orca has leaped and splashed his way to fame.

And this leading man's legend continues with the March 31 opening of "Shamu Rocks," in which the cetacean's repertoire includes dance moves performed to high-energy rock 'n' roll music along with hundreds of colorful lights and massive LED screens that flash images of different cultures around the world.

But Shamu isn't the only hipster in the park.

Three beluga whales,

Ferdinand, Ruby and Allua, are giving the big guy a run for his money. Guests willing to pay \$160 per person can get up close and personal with the whales and try out SeaWorld's new Wild Arctic Interaction. A group limited to eight gets to feed a Pacific walrus; visit gigantic polar bears; and then don wet suits to slide into the 650,000 gallon, 55-degree crystalline pool with three belugas, including 38-year-old Ferd, as he is lovingly called by the keepers. His two female buddies are both in their 20s.

The puppylike whales take their cues from the trainer's barely audible whistle. They glide toward guests with childlike enthusiasm. Their reward: a slimy

little fish treat. Twenty to 30 minutes is spent petting, feeding and even training the playful animals.

SeaWorld

■ SeaWorld, 500 SeaWorld Drive, San Diego; 800-25-SHAMU (257-4268), 619-226-3900; www.seaworldsandiego.com

■ Admission: \$56 ages 10 and older, \$46 ages 3-9, free 2 and younger

■ Parking: \$10 cars, \$15 RVs and campers

■ Wild Arctic Interaction: \$160 plus park admission. Includes wet suits, booties, lockers, changing facilities, showers and a 90-minute behind-the-scenes adventure. Reservations required.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE THEME PARKS

/ FUN AT CALIFORNIA THEME PARKS: Clockwise from top left is the new Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage at Disneyland; Six Flags Magic Mountain's Tatsu roller coaster; Universal Studios' newly updated CityWalk; SeaWorld San Diego's beluga whale interacting with visitor Mikayla Ressler; Six Flags Discovery Kingdom's Seafari adventures; and Legoland's new mini Las Vegas.

Parks

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Disneyland

Hail to the chief. Disney is the master of reinvention.

This year the venerable submarine ride is being converted to the Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage, to surface in Tomorrowland on June 11. The original submarines were enhanced to transport guests into an underwater, technicolored world. Eavesdrop on Dory, Marlin and Crush's shenanigans as they swim alongside your sub. An erupting volcano, scuba divers and squawking seagulls are all part of this E-ticket ride.

The park is also running a promotion called "The Year of a Million Dreams." Every day through December 31, at Disneyland and California Adventure, the so-called Dream Squad randomly awards gifts both big and small. A tap on the shoulder could result in exclusive pins, a shopping spree at Disney stores, Fastpass badges, a dining experience at Walt Disney's apartment. Among the big prizes: Three winners and their families will get to tour Disney parks worldwide. Eighteen guests and their families will win Disney cruises.

This year the park issues a new interactive invitation to young guests who wish to visit the Princess Fantasy Faire to make their own crowns and decorate a castle cupcake. Or they can join the Jedi Masters, where young Padawans learn to handle light sabers, preparing to face the dreaded Darth Vader.

Disneyland

■ Disneyland, 1313 S. Harbor Blvd., Anaheim; 714-781-4565 for recorded information; 714-781-7290 for guest relations; www.disneyland.com

■ Admission, Single-Day Theme Park (one park): \$63 10 and older, \$53 ages 3-9

■ Admission, One Day Hopper Pass (both parks): \$83 ages 10 and older, \$73 ages 3-9

■ Parking: \$11 cars, \$13 RVs and campers

■ The Disney Cruise Line: The ship Magic returns to the West Coast in May 2008 for 12 one-week sailings to the Mexican Riviera. Departing from Los Angeles, the ship will visit Cabo San Lucas, Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan.

Knott's Berry Farm

Nose-dive, dip, turn and spin on Knott's Berry Farm's new roller coaster — Sierra Sidewinder. Opening sometime this summer, the rowdy ride will consist of two trains, each with four cars that continually rotate over 1,411 feet of track. Cowabunga, dude!

This coaster, the only one of its type in America, will be added to



COASTERSAURUS, located in Legoland's Dino Land, appeals to young children.

Knott's Berry Farm's already extreme coasters — Montezooma's Revenge, Boomerang, Perilous Plunge, Supreme Scream and Xcelerator.

For those not ready to walk on the wild side, hop aboard an original Butterfield stagecoach, and take a ride back in time. Or travel the rails on Knott's steam train, the Calico Railroad. Or stop by the marketplace for Mrs. Knott's chicken dinner, a staple at the park since 1934. Cordelia Knott's recipe has fed more than 20 million guests.

Little tykes can spend the day at Camp Snoopy. Here the lovable dog and his Peanuts pals offer 30 attractions for the young. They can soar in the Red Baron airplane or test their driving skills at Charlie Brown Speedway. Snoopy's favorite bird joins the fun at Woodstock's Airmail coaster.

If a little douse of H₂O is required on a hot day, hoof it to Knott's Soak City, the park next door. Six water slides, a wave pool, a lazy river and children's lagoon await.

Knott's Berry Farm

■ Knott's Berry Farm, 8039 Beach Blvd., Buena Park; 714-220-5200; www.knotts.com

■ Admission: \$43.95 general, \$18.95 ages 3-11

■ Admission, Knott's Soak City (opens for the season May 26): \$27.95 adults, \$16.95 ages 3-11

■ Admission, both parks, one day: \$61.90 adults, \$35.90 ages 3-11

■ Parking: \$10 cars, \$15 RVs and campers

Legoland

Eight summers ago, Legoland California opened its gates in the seaside community of Carlsbad. Its founders pioneered the notion of a theme park specifically for children ages 2 to 12 and their families.

But a new feature — a whim-

sical look at a mini Las Vegas fashioned out of Legos was definitely designed to amuse adults. The mini Vegas opened last month after three years in the making. The "Strip" is anchored on one end by the Stratosphere, which stands 20 feet tall. An exploding volcano fronts the Mirage hotel, and fireboats squirt water by New York, New York.

Although it's been open almost a year, Pirate Shores has been a hit among water-loving kids. Kiddies splash, splash and ride pirate ships equipped with water cannons. Don't worry about skinned knees — a special "no fault rubber" covers the ground to avoid boo-boos. Be sure to bring swimsuits.

Tiny tots love Coastersaurus, located in Dino Land. The junior roller coaster twists and turns at speeds of 20 mph.

Ventriloquist Kevin Johnson puts on a funny show at Playtown Theater Johnson's birdie sidekicks, Matilda and Clyde, prefer to be called Mannequin Americans, not dummies. The trio have made it to David Letterman show fame.

The heart of Legoland is California Miniland USA, of which the new mini Las Vegas is a part. Diminutive American landmarks include the Capitol in Washington, D.C.; a Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans; and Grand Central Station in New York City, among hundreds of others.

Legoland

■ Legoland, One Legoland Drive, Carlsbad, 760-918-LEGO (918-5346); www.legoland.com

■ Admission: \$57 general, \$44 ages 3-12, free ages 2 and younger

■ Parking: \$10 cars, \$11 RVs and campers

Great America

Have a "G'Day mate" at Great America's Australian-inspired Great Barrier Reef wave pool. The new 355,000-gallon merry-

making machine opens May 26 and will toss swimmers atop swells. The Great Barrier Reef has 21,882 square feet of water surface.

This wave pool joins existing heated lagoons, water slides, a multilevel water fortress and a "sprayground" in the park's 13-acre Boomerang Beach Club.

Fun performers include comedic magician Ed Alonzo, who calls himself the Misfit of Magic. Alonzo is best-known for his role as Max on TV's "Saved by the Bell."

Another Great America first is "Twistin' to the '60's," a hip rock 'n' roll dance party. Paramount Theater will be topsyturvy with tunes from the past. Bring dancing shoes and shake your groove-thing.

Great America

■ Great America, 4701 Great America Parkway, Santa Clara; 408-988-1776; www.pgathrills.com

■ Admission: \$46.95 general (ages 3-61 and 48 inches or taller), \$29.95 ages 62 and older and 48 inches or shorter

■ Parking: \$10 cars, RVs and campers

Universal Studios Hollywood

Lights, camera, action! The entertainment capital of Los Angeles has relaunched CityWalk, an open-air leisure and nightlife complex. It includes California's largest

IMAX 3-D theater, an eight-story structure with a 59-foot-by-81-foot screen and seating 420.

CityWalk's 18-screen movie theater has added spacious 26-inch rocker seats, cushioned armrests and floor-to-ceiling screens.

NASCAR fans can live out their dreams at the Silicon Motor Speedway virtual race track. Rodeo wannabes can test their skills on a mechanical bull. And for the tamer crowd, there's bowling under neon lights.

Universal's movie-based theme park is in the process of revamping the popular Revenge of the Mummy ride; no details revealed.

The news is out, however, about the fall debut of SkyVenture Hollywood. An indoor sky-diving wind tunnel will propel guests over 40 feet in the air and keep them suspended with 125 mph wind thrusts.

Universal Studios

■ Universal Studios, 100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City; 800-UNIVERSA (864-8377); www.UniversalStudiosHollywood.com

■ Admission: \$61 general, \$51 children shorter than 48 inches, free ages 3 and younger, \$109 Front of Line Pass ages 3 and older

■ Parking: \$10

Six Flags Discovery Kingdom

What's new at Six Flags? For starters, the name. Formerly Marine World, the park officially became Six Flags Discovery Kingdom on Jan. 17. The new moniker more accurately represents the park's range of attractions, which have been renamed into areas of "Land," "Sky" and "Sea."

Memorial Day marks the opening of a Thomas the Tank Engine attraction. Thomas Town includes the cheeky little train, along with Harold the Helicopter, Bertie the Bus and Sir Topham Hatt, which children ride to explore the mythical island of Sodor.

"Land" visitors can also go on a safari as they feed giraffes, or catch a glimpse of lions and jungle cats.

In the "Sea" area, a new killer whale show opened March 24. The show stars Shouka the killer whale and zany dolphin performers. Walruses, sharks, stingrays and penguins also live in this area.

The "Sky" area of the park houses roller coasters, including

Vertical Velocity and Medusa. The park has more than 35 rides.

Those interested in meeting a variety of animals can purchase a Seafari Pass, new as of March 24. The pass enables visitors to feed dolphins, sea lions, lorikeets and giraffes, as well as ride Tava the elephant.

Six Flags Discovery Kingdom

■ Six Flags Discovery Kingdom, 1001 Fairgrounds Drive, Vallejo, 707-643-6722, www.sixflags.com

■ Admission: \$49.99 for 48 inches; \$29.99 for shorter than 48 inches, free younger than age 2

■ Parking: \$15 cars, RVs and campers

■ Seafari Pass: \$19.99

Six Flags Magic Mountain

Thrill junkies — prepare yourselves for Magic Mountain's newly opened adrenaline-fueled rocket coaster — Tatsu. Tatsu has been open 11 months but is still the most talked-about attraction in the park as the king of coasters — the claim being that it's the world's fastest, longest, largest and tallest stomach-churning beast. It travels 62 mph for 3½ minutes, blasting through a 124-foot pretzel loop.

The park is known for its coasters, with Colossus as the tallest and fastest wooden roller coaster in the West. Viper strikes its victims as it twists along the largest looping track in the world. But the parks piece-de-resistance only needs one letter: X. It is the world's only four-dimensional roller coaster.

Magic Mountain does have its softer side. Guests can hang with their favorite Looney Tunes characters. Each morning, one family is picked to participate in the park opening, which features confetti and a celebratory dance with Bugs and his friends. Tweety, Daffy, Taz and the rest of the gang spend the remainder of the day pestering visitors with their antics.

Six Flags Magic Mountain

■ Six Flags Magic Mountain, 26101 Magic Mountain Parkway, Valencia; 651-255-4111; www.sixflags.com

■ Admission: \$59.99 general, \$29.99 younger than 4, free ages 2 and younger

■ Parking: \$15 cars, \$20 RVs and campers