

A GIANT rodent sticking its paws into the saucepans of a renowned restaurant is not exactly the image the great chefs of Paris might wish to encourage.

But it's a notion that's about to be given a big push by Europe's biggest theme park, just a pancake toss away from France's culinary capital.

From next month, the rats will be taking over at Disneyland Paris, scurrying their way ahead of Mickey and all the usual cartoon favourites, as the resort promotes its latest attraction, based on the adventures of Remy from the Oscar-winning film *Ratatouille*.

The story of the young rat who dreams of becoming a great French chef was a big hit with youngsters in 2007 but it's taken this long for Disney to develop an attraction the corporation's creative honchos consider worthy of the film's success. A lot of thought and money has been poured into making a ride which aims to give customers the singular experience of being a rat in a kitchen.

Thanks to a preview last week, I now know what it's like being a whiskery rodent scampering across the floor between waiters' legs, diving towards a hole in the skirting board as I flee a pan-wielding angry chef.

So how does it work? Well, like all the usual favourites at Disneyland, *Ratatouille: The Adventure* starts off in the usual humdrum way, queuing with a lot of other indulgent parents and their excited children, before clambering into six-seater vehicles (ratmobiles) that embark on a twisty journey through old Paris.

Then the experience gets very quirky indeed, with all sorts of techy tricks and 3D wizardry to give the impression passengers are hurtling through the kitchen.

There are a lot of unexpected twists along the way, like being squirted with water when a waiter opens a bottle of champagne, or the aroma of oranges as the ratmobile swings its way through the kitchen stores.

It certainly exercised my imagination, leaving me wanting more when I stepped out into the sunshine. I went on it another five times and my eight-year-old, Marina, summed it up succinctly as "truly awesome" (although initially she had been nervous about being turned into a rat).

True to the Disneyland ethos of providing pleasure while taking as many opportunities as possible to relieve the captive audience of its cash, the ride ends with the chance to slip into a real live restaurant, a smart recreation of the same place that Remy the rat eventually presides over as head chef in the film. There you can graze through the (limited) menu, which includes, naturally, his signature dish of *ratatouille*.

The official Disney line is that the new ride, which is in a French-themed area of the resort, will mean guests "can really experience what it's like to be a furry little rodent in a human-sized world as they dart quickly from hiding place to hiding place during this zany culinary adventure".

It's certainly a wacky addition to the plethora of attractions at Disneyland, which last year pulled in nearly 15million visitors, many of them Britons buckling under the pressure from their children to make the trip, having been

Thrilling furry tale at Disney

ADAM HELLIKER tests *Ratatouille: The Adventure* to find youngsters are the winners in Disneyland Paris's new fun-filled game of rat and mouse



MAGICAL: Marina, left, with Donald and Daisy Duck. Above, the new attraction

brainwashed by those constant TV adverts.

The peer pressure, "everyone else has taken their children, so why are you being so mean Daddy?" is certainly a big factor in getting parents to fork out a not inconsiderable sum for taking the family to France, although packages on Eurostar have made the proposition more attractive.

Going by train means you can be at the gates in under three hours after leaving London St Pancras, with no airline hassle about luggage (each passenger is allowed two suitcases with no weight restrictions). And the train on the Sunday evening leaves at around 5pm, giving visitors almost another full day.

Besides the huge excitement surrounding the new rodent attraction there are, of course, all the old favourites to see at Disneyland, all 60 of them, meaning an awful lot of walking (and very tired children at bedtime, which tends to extend to 11pm so they can see the nightly fireworks).

The most innocent, and still one of the most popular, is *It's A Small World*, where a boat takes you on a voyage around the countries of the world with hundreds of animated dolls in national dress.

Then there's the Mad Hatter's spinning tea cups; The Pirates of the Caribbean boat ride and the infectious gun-zapping on the Buzz Lightyear ride, or the giggling pleasure of being rocked around on the Slinky Dog ride (which Marina loved so much she went on

it seven times). There's the timeless charm of Peter Pan, flying over London on a journey to Neverland and a rumbustious encounter with Captain Hook, another ride which Marina wanted to try again and again. Boy, does Disney know how to pull the strings of a child's heart.

Ratatouille looks as if it is going to be an enormous success and on our visit we were joined by three members of McBusted, Matt Willis, Tom Fletcher and Danny Jones, who had been performing in Paris the night before. They went on the rat ride, with all of them absolutely loving it. They made Marina's day by signing her autograph book, which was already full of the scribbles of Goofy, Pluto and Donald Duck, for which she had queued with hordes of other cartoon fans.

Right now, as far as Disneyland goes, the rat will rule but never underestimate the pull of the mouse. It will take an infestation which Rentokil couldn't tackle to topple the affection of the world's children for the old favourites. Mickey and Minnie aren't ready to leave the stage for Remy just yet. Not for all the Camembert in Paris.

● GETTING THERE

Disneyland Paris (08448 008 111/disneylandparis.com) offers two-nights from £1,256 (four sharing), room only. Includes travel on Eurostar from London St Pancras, accommodation at Sequoia Lodge and park tickets. *Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau*: en.parisinfo.com

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