Enchanted Efteling Escape

Holland’s Efteling theme park, the largest in the country, is a land that transports you to the fairy-tale kingdom created by the famous Hans Christian Andersen & Brothers Grimm 2 centuries ago.

Pass the grand threshold and reality becomes blurred as you notice those faces familiar to your childhood dreams – Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Tom Thumb, to name a few.

Though a theme park, with some outstanding rides, the focus at Efteling, unlike most other theme parks, is to provide an overall experience of fantasy and magic.

The most talked-about attraction has to be the enchanted forest. Slip through serpentine side-tracks, pass toadstools, a talking tree, a choir of singing mushrooms and the forest’s storyteller. Legend has it that this latter character is one of the forest’s oldest inhabitants, plucking myths from the bewitched branches which he adds to his book of tales. Stop him as he passes you and invite him to tell you a fable, perhaps one well-known to yourself or one known only to the whispers of the forest.

It is in this fairy-tale forest that you will also pass the delectable-looking domain of a witch. A particularly famous witch, in fact, whose house drew in the famous children, Hansel & Gretel. Cross the gate, however, and she will terrify children and adults alike with furious incantations screamed from the window, her black cat hissing and growling in accordance with her spells.

If you manage to find yourself through this mesmerising maze of magic woodland, take the relaxing, and beautiful, river tour. The Gondaletta allows you to appreciate the serenity of the surrounding nature. Enjoy the flower beds, low handing trees and picturesque windmills on this 20 minute tour, enough time for you to catch your breath before the excitement ensues again.

For the littlest ones, one must insist on a trip to Droomvlucht. Leave the world you know for a realm of fairies and pixies. Incredibly inviting, you’ll find it difficult to stay in your seat and not join the mythical creatures as they sit under castles built upon moons, enjoying the sweet birdsong and trickling ponds.

Of course, to keep the older ones happy there’s always the Baron 1898. Feel your heart force itself into your mouth as you plunge 37.5m into the pitch darkness of a mineshaft at 90 km/h. With twists and turns, you’ll scream from start to finish. The Python, too, is a sinuous as it suggests. Coils and corkscrews spin you round and round. Certainly not for the fainthearted.

Once you’re worn out of rides – if you ever could be – take a seat in the grandstand and watch the magnificent Ravejelin show. Be transported to a world of medieval valour as 5 brave horseman take on the evil Count Olaf Grafhart and his 5-headed fire-breathing monster.

The overnight accommodation makes sure to keep perfectly within the theme of wonder. From the Cinderella suite to a classic village house in the park’s hamlet of Bosrijk, to a treehouse on stilts lost withinin 50 hectares of forest, attempt to choose from these amazing options.

When it comes to dining, keep the whole family happy in the Pancake House, with sweet and savoury options to suit all. The pots and pans hung high in the centre every now and again feel a touch of the parks magic and begin to spin, gathering velocity until it’s a cornucopia of supernatural excitement. The descending silence of the spell wearing off only adds to the overall enchantment. Try and concentrate on only your food in the Octopus café, an underwater world reminiscent of The Little Mermaid. Creatures of the deep gaze down upon you as you dine…

The beautiful thing about this other-worldly land is that it provides escapism for everyone. These eternal fairy-tale stories are a place of wonder to all ages.