

Take a Walk on The Wild Side at Busch Gardens Tampa: An Orlando-Area Attraction Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

If you're a Disney fan, and you don't have much vacation time, it's very tempting to spend all your time at Walt Disney World, given there's already so much to see and do there.

We're fortunate in that our vacations are usually at least two weeks long, giving us some time to explore other parks. One of those we ventured to on our most recent visit to Florida was Busch Gardens, located in Tampa. In this series of articles, I'll be looking at our visit there, and some things first time visitors may find useful to know, in the hope of tempting you to a different park.

Firstly, how do you get there? Well, if you've perhaps driven to Florida in your own car, or have a rental car, that's the most obvious way, but if you don't want to drive, or don't have access to a car, the [Busch Gardens shuttle](#) offers a series of pick-up points from the Orlando area. If you've already got a ticket for Busch Gardens, even better the shuttle is free of charge, although be warned, if you're heading there on a busy day, and want to hit the main attractions, you may be out of luck, as they do warn you that sometimes it may not arrive until as late as 11:30am, and by then, you may have missed getting the jump on the crowds.

□ If you do choose to drive, it's a pretty straightforward route, and takes about an hour in total. It's a pleasant enough route, and certainly gave us a chance to see just how far the metropolitan area has expanded, swallowing up what was previously farmland.

□ We visited in the middle of the week in early March, and I already knew from the park opening hours that the chances were it would be a quiet day at Busch Gardens. Just like Disney parks, the shorter the hours, the lower the expected crowds, and when you see operating hours from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, you know you're not exactly going to be knocked off your feet by hordes of people, and so it proved to be.

Despite that, when we arrived, we paid for preferred parking, and I'm really glad we did, as that gave us just a short five minute walk to the park entrance. Without that, we would have had no option but to get the shuttle that operates in the parking lot, as the main parking lot is located some distance away.

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□ We headed into the park, with to be honest, no touring plan in mind. I know that sounds crazy, but let me say straight off here that neither of us are fans of thrill rides or coasters. The Seven Dwarves Mine Train in the Magic Kingdom is about our limit, and let's just say that Busch Gardens is right up there when it comes to the biggest, best and meanest coasters. I get sick just looking at some of them, never mind riding them! If you do like your coasters, you'll definitely want some form of plan of attack for the day, as lines can quickly form at the big attractions on busy days. That wasn't a problem the day we visited, with even the E-ticket rides only having a five minute wait during the afternoon from the information boards we saw!

□ We made our way through Morocco, which is at the park entrance, which in truth isn't home to many attractions. There is Iceploration at the Morocco Palace Theater, but during our brief day long trip, we didn't get a chance to sample any of the shows. However, just on the edge of Morocco, you can take your first steps into the animal habitats that this park is known for.

□ Myombe Reserve takes you into the jungles of gorillas and chimpanzees. Beautifully themed, complete with waterfalls, and lush foliage, and lots of space, it's a perfect place for the animals to hide away if the mood takes them, and unfortunately for us, that's exactly how the chimpanzees were feeling that day. We could see them in the distance, but certainly not to get a good close-up view of them, but despite that, we could instantly tell from their faces that they were relaxed, and isn't that one of the most important things when you see animals in captivity?

□ We had much more luck with the gorillas just around the corner, as there was a whole family, including a baby (Animal Kingdom is not the only place where there are young additions to the family!), and it was an absolutely adorable scene. Everyone in there took their time admiring the group, although as it was a quiet day, there was plenty of space for all of us to get a good view.

□ Coming out of the Myombe Reserve, we headed next into Cheetah Hunt, which is dominated by the coaster of the same name, a relatively recent addition to the park. It's no surprise that it's the first thing you see in this part of the park, given it's Busch Gardens' longest coaster at more than 4,000 feet long. Swooping across the savannah, where here is known as the Edge of Africa, it's designed to be sleek and quiet, so as not to disturb the animals too much, and it is fascinating to see how it swoops around the park, and gives you the opportunity to have a good idea of what you're letting yourself in for, if you're not too sure about riding it.

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□Also in the Cheetah Hunt area of the park, quite rightly, are the beautiful animals that inspired the coaster. This was such a pleasant surprise to me, given that I'm used to grabbing a glimpse of the cheetahs on Kilimanjaro Safaris only if they're in the mood. I think we've only seen them standing up once or twice during all our times on it.

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□We headed over to the enclosure, where the cheetah can get right up to a section of glass, with you beyond it, and that's exactly what happened. The rest of the enclosure is open air, with some clever theming ensuring that you're kept a safe distance away from these majestic hunters, meaning that photographers will be in their element. I certainly was, and got close-up shots, the like of which I don't think I've ever had the pleasure of on any previous visit to a safari park or zoo. You can even watch the cheetahs run -- check when you arrive what times that will be happening to see if it fits in with your plans for your day.

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□In the next of the series of these articles, I'll continue our exploration of the park, heading over to the Jungala area of the park, home to the park's famed white tigers.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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