

Busch Gardens Africa: Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

It's not often that we make it over to Busch Gardens in Tampa to enjoy a taste of Africa. It's not that we don't like the park - far from it. It's the fact that it's located around an hour and a half's drive from Walt Disney World, so to go there really is a full day out of your vacation. So is it worth it? The answer is definitely yes. If you've got time, it's worth the drive.

The whole theming of the park is designed to transport you into Africa, with different lands that represent different countries and areas of that continent, such as Morocco, Egypt and Nairobi. There are also some lands that have nothing to do with Africa, such as Timbuktu and the Land of Dragons, but that's because these areas tend to be either packed with rides or aimed at younger members of the family.

Busch Gardens is very much a mix of two distinct theme park attractions - the big headliner rides, with lots of roller coasters for any fan of thrill rides, and animals. It's the latter that we go for, but it's worth knowing that if you are going for the rides, you're not going to be disappointed.

A quick look at the [Busch Gardens web site](#) will immediately tell you that many of their coasters are among the largest, the fastest, and generally the scariest that you'll find anywhere. For example, Gwazi is described as the "southeast's largest and fastest double wooden roller coaster," while Sheikra is the "nation's first dive coaster" with "first of a kind elements like a true 90 degree drop" and then there's Montu, described as "one of the tallest and longest inverted roller coasters in the world." You get the idea.

I'm the sort of person who feels sick just watching these rides, never mind going anywhere near them! The rides here are probably closest to Universal's Islands of Adventure in ride intensity, so the drive will be worthwhile for anyone who wants to experience some of the top coasters that Florida has to offer.

However, for us, there's much more to Busch Gardens than being flung upside down, around corners and having the life terrified out of you. On our first visit, we did wonder how much we would enjoy it, suspecting that it may just be a clone of Disney's Animal Kingdom. We were happy to learn it is not a clone.

The first difference you'll notice is that there are animals scattered

almost throughout the park. Turn a corner and you could come across elephants or crocodiles. Yes, there are trails, as you find at Animal Kingdom and there's a huge savannah as well, but somehow the animals are more obvious here. You don't have to explore the park in the same way you do at Animal Kingdom to discover them. The main trails take you the Great Ape Domain, which is beautifully themed with waterfalls and of course features primates of all sizes, including gorillas and chimpanzees. You can also venture to the Edge of Africa, which features animals such as hippos and lions. This is such a pleasant change from Animal Kingdom -- instead of desperately trying to spot the lion on the rock in the safari, you can get close and personal with these beautiful creatures, with some wonderful glass viewing areas into their enclosures.

However, the trails are just a part of the story. The main attraction is the Serengeti Plain that you can view from a number of different angles. First, there's the Serengeti Express Railway that runs round the edge of it or you can soar over it on the Skyride, which is a great way to get from one part of the park to another.

Perhaps the most exciting way to get into the Serengeti Plain - and get up really close and personal with the animals - is to jump on the Rhino Rally. It's Busch Garden's first foray into mixing a ride with animals, and they didn't do this by halves. It starts off just as you do on Kilimanjaro Safaris at Animal Kingdom in a vehicle, albeit a lot more bumpy. It's worth knowing that they don't stop for photos and they don't encourage you to use a camera while you're on the ride, although we've managed to get some fine shots on each of our trips round the rally course.

It's halfway round that things suddenly change. This is no ordinary safari. There's a swollen river in front of you and no way of getting across it. Just when it seems you're in dire trouble, your vehicle miraculously changes into a floating off-road vehicle; and just at the point when you're facing more peril in the water, you end up back on land. It's a fascinating ride, the like of which you won't find at any of the other parks and it's definitely one to try out on any visit to Busch Gardens.

As if this isn't enough variety, one of the other areas of the park is the Clydesdale Hamlet that's home to these beautiful creatures and Sprint the donkey, made famous by the Super Bowl ads. This area of the park is very different, as you leave Africa behind to head firmly back into American theming.

Another part of the park that's very different is Land of the Dragons. If you have little ones in your party, this is the area to head to, as

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everything here is designed with them in mind. Our niece and nephew loved it. In fact, it was a struggle to drag them away from it!

There's so much to see and do here, it makes for a very packed day. In fact, if you are a die-hard coaster fan, it could be worth spending more than one day out of your vacation at Busch Gardens Africa to cram everything in. It's only possible to touch on some of the highlights here, but hopefully this is enough to make you think twice about adding in at least a day's excursion over to Tampa to enjoy one of the hidden gems of the Florida theme park world.

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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