

Universal: For Non-Thrill Seekers?

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Even if you haven't been to Universal Orlando before, there's probably one thing you've heard about the complex. It's certainly something that keeps appearing in just about everything I read about it -- that it's packed with the area's biggest and baddest roller coasters.

It's something that makes non-thrill riders, like me, break out in a cold sweat. Will there be enough for me to do there? Am I going to be wasting my time -- and my money -- if I get tickets for the parks there? Perhaps that's one of the reasons that I'd avoided those parks for so long. That and my aversion to leaving Disney property for any reason -- other than shopping, of course!

So, having ventured over there on our last trip to Orlando, what's the verdict on those questions? Well, you'll certainly notice that there are a lot of rides that turn you upside down or plunge you downwards at sickening speeds, but you'll also find that there are also plenty of other, more sedate attractions that will suit you perfectly. In short, if you don't do thrill rides, then you'll still find plenty to occupy you at Universal Orlando, principally in Universal Studios Florida, although there are still some good reasons to visit Islands of Adventure.

The biggest reason for me is the incredible theming at Islands of Adventure, Universal's newest park. You really feel as if you've stepped into a Disney park when you walk in through the Port of Entry. Immediately you're spirited miles away. As you wander through the different lands, keep an eye out for all the wonderful sayings -- and fun photo opportunities -- in Toon Lagoon, the various elements from the film in the Jurassic Park section, and the various Dr. Seuss characters in Seuss Landing. But perhaps the best area of the park is the Lost Continent. There's just something about it that really does make you feel that you are stepping into another world and its theming would happily fit into any Disney park, although I'm not sure the Imagineers would admit to that! It certainly looks as though Universal took a leaf out of Disney's book when creating Islands of Adventure.

The theming isn't the only reason to visit this park. There are various attractions for the whole family to enjoy. If you've got children in your party, then make a beeline for Seuss Landing, where everything you can see is either curved or slanted. There are no straight lines in sight, because that's exactly how Dr. Seuss drew. The big draws here are the Cat in the Hat, which takes you on a six-person spinning sofa through the pages of the famous story, and the High in the Sky Seuss Trolley

Train Ride, the newest addition to Seuss Landing, which offers you a bird's eye view of this part of the park.

Of course, you'll also find the traditional rides here, each with a Seuss-like slant on them, such as the Caro-Seuss-el. While One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish, may be one of the more traditional rides, something like Dumbo the Flying Elephant in the Magic Kingdom, but there's a twist to it. You need to listen carefully to the song that's playing while you're up in the air steering your fish through an obstacle course of fountains. Of course, younger members of the family may just ignore this challenge altogether and attempt to get you as wet as they can!

And if you like to get wet, then Islands of Adventure has plenty of opportunities to do just that! Popeye and Bluto's Bilge Rat Barges, a longer -- and wetter! -- version of Kali River Rapids at Disney's Animal Kingdom, along with Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls, with its 75 foot plummet, are the places to head on a hot and sunny day. And if you don't want to get wet, you can use the water cannons to ensure that anyone who's a bit dry at the end of their adventure will be soaked to the skin when they finally get off!

Another water adventure is the Jurassic Park River Adventure, a raft ride where you're confronted by 'Raptors and a T-Rex, before plunging down the final 85 foot drop. If that doesn't sound like fun to you, you can always head to the nearby Discovery Centre while the rest of your party gets wet. This is a hidden gem with lots of things to see and do. Head downstairs and take an X-ray of a dinosaur egg. The result is something really cool!

Back at Universal Studios Florida there are plenty of attractions to enjoy where you won't be thrown around or left feeling queasy. Many of them are essentially shows or demonstrations of stunts, such as Twister... Ride It Out, where you'll feel the force of a tornado, or Earthquake, where you're trapped on the subway in San Francisco just as the "Big One" strikes. For our money, we far preferred Earthquake as the effects were a lot more impressive, but both are well worth seeing.

Other shows that really are almost too good to fit into the show category are Shrek 4-D, where you follow the adventures of Shrek, Princess Fiona, Donkey and friends in Ogrevision -- you have been warned! Terminator 2: 3-D is regarded by some as the finest attraction at any theme park in Orlando and it seems wrong to describe as a show. It's a mix of live action stunts, special effects and 3-D imagery, with actors appearing to come out and go back into the screen. You won't see anything like it anywhere else. Having said that, Terminator does have

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the potential to scare young children, so it's worth trying it out first, before taking any youngsters on it.

And then there are the more traditional attractions, complete with plenty of theming and the odd surprise along the way! Jaws falls into this category, where you'll re-visit the film and find out just how persistent that Great White can be, while E.T. Adventure could easily fit into a Disney theme park. Both attractions, like so much else at Universal Studios, are based on the movies of the same name. Although you don't have to have seen the film to appreciate them, it does help.

There is so much more to see and do at each park, none of which involves turning you a lighter -- or darker - shade of green. So if all that talk of Universal being home to Orlando's meanest roller coasters has so far put you off from visiting the parks, then don't let it put you off any longer. Even the coaster-shy will find plenty to entertain them -- so much so that we're heading back to Universal Orlando on our next trip to see all the bits we didn't get round to seeing last time, so maybe we'll see you there. We'll be the ones who won't be on any of the big thrill rides!

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!](#)

Article last updated: 4/5/2007

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