

Splash Down at Disney's Water Parks: A Disney "Extras" Feature

by Jean Cotting, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Your feet have swollen to twice their normal size, the "Stand By" lines are all 90 minutes, you can't get the "its a small world" song out of your head, and you're convinced that Chip and Dale are stalking you. Now what? Well, let me tell you about one of the best ways to spend a day away from the major theme parks when visiting the Walt Disney World Resort - water parks! Before I get too far into this article I have to post a disclaimer - I am a wimp! I will not be able to enlighten you with any first-hand accounts of the more intense water park experiences. I love gently curving water slides and tube rides. I am fond of bouncing around in wave pools. I am too big a coward to go on any of the death-defying-ninety-degree-straight-down-drop-to-certain-peril sort of water slides. Also, I have my eight year old son in tow, who is not a very strong swimmer. There are many fine books and web sites that can give you those details (like PassPorter, for instance).

First, a history of water parks at Disney. The original water park, River Country, closed a few years ago. You can still see remnants of the slides if you take the boat from the Magic Kingdom to Fort Wilderness. Some of my fondest recollections of childhood trips to Disney involved barreling down the flumes at River Country. Compared to modern water parks, River Country would probably be considered rather quaint - a few water flumes, a tube ride, and not much else. However, for the late 70s / early 80s it was state of the art. Every so often rumors circulate about Disney using the space for something new, but nothing has come to fruition so far.

Of the two water parks currently in operation, Typhoon Lagoon is the older. As you drive into the entrance of the park there are a series of driftwood signs explaining the story behind the Lagoon. I don't want to include any spoilers, but basically it explains just exactly how that boat, the Miss Tilly, got stranded on top of Mount Mayday that far inland. (Hint: It involves a typhoon.) There are all sorts of cute references to the story in terms of the theming. The general feel of the place is sort of tropical island, sort of Gulf Coast. The central area of the park is the wave pool and it is a fantastic pool. The pool alternates in half-hour long shifts between gentle bobbing waves and heavy duty body-surf quality big waves. The big waves are pretty intense and my son generally prefers to wear a life vest when the big waves come. After a shift of big waves we are usually sufficiently fatigued to either go lounge in our lounge chairs or go off in search of the wimpy slides. We are very

partial to Keelhaul Falls and May Day Falls, which are twisty-turning tube flumes. There is also a very entertaining family tube ride, Gang Plank Falls. For those of you looking for more exciting thrills there are plenty - the Crush-n-Gusher (a roller-coaster style slide), Humunga Kowabunga, and the Storm Slides. I've never been on them but have heard the shrieks of terror. (Just kidding ... kind of.)

Blizzard Beach is the newer of the two parks, and I have a confession. I visited it for the first time only a week ago. I had heard that it was the more dare-devil of the two parks and had decided to defer visiting until my son was a bit older. I have to admit that I was pleasantly surprised. There are plenty of the drop-to-your-death variety of slide but there are many diversions for the less adventurous souls. As the name would imply, there is a blizzard theme. Again there is a story behind the theming -- a freak blizzard in Florida, resulting in a ski resort. The landscaping is sort of Swiss Alps; I kept expecting to see a lonely yodeling goatherd. It's worth going just for the background music alone: Beach Boys and other surfin' music alternating with polka music and Christmas carols. We went this year on the last day of the season before it closed for rehab. It had been chilly and rained in the morning, so we practically had the entire place to ourselves. My absolute favorite thing about this park is the chair lift which takes you to the slides. You can pack in a lot more runs down the mountain when don't have to climb to the top each time. The chair lift gives you a lovely view of the last split second before those poor masochistic fools descend down Summit Plummet. We rode the family tube ride several times, Team Boat Springs, which we enjoyed immensely. This is a very long slide and I think you pick up a lot more speed and spinning than one generally does on a group ride. This is still not a slide I would call scary. The Toboggan Racers are also delightful. They are very, very fast, and at a few points I was convinced I was airborne. It's a double hump racing slide, no twists or turns, sufficient run-off at the end so that you've stopped before hitting the end, and it's only a few inches of water so it's good choice for timid swimmers. There is also a lovely wave pool. It does not have the rotation of really big waves like Typhoon Lagoon, just continuous, gentle, bobbing waves.

I have been to Typhoon Lagoon a number of times and Blizzard Beach only once, but based on my experience so far I would say I have a slight preference for Blizzard Beach. Here is some general advice for both water parks: Get there early if you want a chair. They go early. There are plenty of counter service dining opportunities, beverage stations, and of course, souvenir shops. I strongly recommend renting a locker. The parks are huge and you won't want to leave your belongings unattended. The refillable mug program is a fairly good deal. Up until last year one had to wait in line at counter service restaurants to get

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refills and it really wasn't worth the aggravation. They now have sticker on the mugs which you scan at beverage stations, no waiting, which is a much more efficient arrangement. Each of the parks does close down for a month or so in the winter, but they stagger it so at least one of the parks is always open. The water is heated and one can use a Plus Option for admission on the premium park admission tickets. Even paying for a ticket out of pocket I think it's one of the best values for your dollars.

So grab your towel and water-wings, I'll see you on the slopes!

About The Author: Jean Cotting is a first-time contributor to PassPorter News. She is looking forward to planning her next trip to Walt Disney World and perhaps working up the courage to try Humunga Kowabunga! (Ok, not really...)

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