

SeaWorld San Diego Summer Nights: Disneyland and Southern California Attractions

by Randy Crane, PassPorter Guest Contributor

SeaWorld San Diego has kicked off its Summer Nights.

If you're planning a trip to Disneyland, it's worth taking an extra day (or two) to add on SeaWorld, especially during the summer.

Summer Nights runs daily through August 19, 2012, and then weekends through Labor Day. I had the opportunity to experience most of it during Passholder Previews June 16th, and would like to share what they have to offer with you.

□ All of the usual rides, shows, and attractions are open all day, but that is not all there is. In spite of the name, Summer Nights actually has some added elements during the day, too. Cirque de la Mer is a summer-only show featuring acrobatics and comedy performed by wildly-dressed performers (who are "strange underwater creatures"). It has elements of high-diving, trapeze work, feats of strength, and of course, humor. This is all set to a mysterious yet whimsical score (depending on what's happening at the time), and the performers are always impressive to watch.

□ The only unfortunate part of this show is the stadium itself. It's very difficult to get a good seat here, because most of the seats have an obstructed view of some part of the show. My recommendation is to arrive at least 30 minutes before showtime (a good rule of thumb for all the shows) and get an overview of the set pieces. Then choose a seat where you can see most of them -- or at least the ones that are most important to you. Another way to preview the stadium is to take a ride on the Bayside Skyride, which goes past the stadium from the back (behind the performance area), giving you a complete view of the stadium.

Another new addition to SeaWorld San Diego "launched" on Memorial Day Weekend, but goes well beyond Summer Nights. Manta is the newest ride at SeaWorld, and takes guests on a fast, diving, twisting -- yet very smooth and quiet-ride, simulating the flight-like swimming of the bat ray. Not to be confused with SeaWorld Orlando's Manta coaster, this one is much tamer, more of a family coaster, but still a lot of fun. Reaching speeds of 40 miles per hour, its highest peak is 30 feet, and it's tallest drop is 54 feet (no, those are not reversed). There are no

inversions, and you sit in a car above the track, not suspended below it, which makes it much more accessible for families.

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□The unique features of Manta, and the ones that make it a new favorite of mine are these:

□1) It features a double-launch! Like California Screamin' and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster, it starts with a launch. Manta has a second launch during the ride, though. I won't spoil the fun and tell you where.

□2) It's quiet! One reason I prefer steel coasters to wooden ones is the noise level. Manta takes this to a new level by being the quietest coaster I've ever heard. That also makes for a very smooth ride.

□3) It is a fast, terrain-coaster! Because they weren't able to build very high, Manta doesn't have any gigantic steep drops. It makes up for it by feeling fast -- especially for a family coaster -- reaching speeds of 40 miles per hour, and often hugging the terrain, which makes it feel even faster. It has more than a dozen twists and turns (including some very highly-banked turns), and the acceleration pulls up to 4 G's.

□4) The queue and launch area are beautiful. Like its Orlando counterpart, Manta's queue walks guests past aquarium tanks with several different kinds of sea life, and above the entrance to the line is a bat ray touch-tank. One you board the ride, you move into an enclosed launch tunnel with larger-than-life images of rays projected on a 270-degree surround-screen.

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□Manta has a height requirement of 48", putting it on par with California Screamin' and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster. I place the thrill level between Space Mountain and California Screamin'.

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□The "nights" part of Summer nights brings back two favorite animal shows, a fireworks "spectacular," and a DJ dance party. In order to have time for all of the nighttime fun, SeaWorld is open until 10:00 p.m. Monday--Thursday and 11:00 p.m. Friday--Sunday during Summer Nights.

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□Unlike past years, when the featured musical event was at the front of the park, Club Atlantis is back in the pavilion near Journey to Atlantis (hence the name). It features dance-offs, dance team performances, giveaways, and lots of music. If you've got teenagers or older elementary/pre-teen kids with energy to burn, this is the place to take them (or send them!).

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□The fireworks show is what I would call "a very nice show," but I've been spoiled by Disney shows. The fireworks usually happen right after the last Shamu show of the night -- around 9:50 p.m. -- and features the music from the Blue Horizons show. I recommend watching that last Shamu show, and sit in the center or left (as you view the show pool)

sections. This will give you a more direct view of the fireworks, but there really isn't a bad view there. If you want to watch and you're not planning to be at that last show, I suggest the front of the park, looking towards the Sky Tower.

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□ Finally, there are two returning night shows: Shamu Rocks and Sea Lions Tonite. Shamu Rocks is enjoyable if you like high-energy rock music and power ballads. If you want to see animal behavior, though, don't make this the only time you see Shamu. Shamu Rocks has a lot of music and lighting effects, fountain effects, and human choreography. There's even a rock guitarist who shows up for a solo during one of the songs. The whales take second place to many of these other trappings, and there are times when 2 or 3 minutes go by without even seeing a whale. That may not sound like much, but when you consider it's only a 20 minute show, 2 or 3 minutes at a time adds up.

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□ Sea Lions Tonite is my absolute favorite of the Summer Nights offerings, and possibly my favorite SeaWorld show overall, more for its entertainment and humor than its animal performances, although those are good. For this one you must be in the stadium at least 30 minutes before showtime. Not only is the show popular, but it has a silly, music-filled, and thoroughly enjoyable pre-show. In fact, I would say that if you arrive less than 15 minutes before the show starts, you're late!

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□ To get the most out of Sea Lions Tonite, you need to have been at the park most of the day and seen the other headline shows. The reason is that this show spoofs all of the others! Trainers, sea lions, and a river otter reenact parts of all of these shows in a good-naturedly mocking way. My favorite? When spoofing "One Ocean," the Shamu show, a "trainer" announces, "Hello everyone. It's such a privilege for all of you to meet me ... If we all work together our one ocean can continue to thrive and be beautiful, like me." Descriptions do not do this show justice!

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□ There you have it; 2012 Summer Nights at Sea World. Special shows, an all-new ride, and even more time to enjoy and learn about (and from) the animals. This makes SeaWorld a worthwhile add on to your Disneyland vacation ... or even a destination on its own!

About The Author: Randy Crane is a Travel Consultant affiliated with CruisingCo. & MouseEarVacations.com, and lives with his wife in Southern California. Along with his many Disney trips, he makes multiple trips to the San Diego area and loves to help people plan not only Disney trips, but Southern California vacations to all its amazing destinations.

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