

Wilderness Explorers Adventure at Disney's Animal Kingdom: Walt Disney World Attraction Review

by Jennifer Lambert, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The wilderness must be explored!

And now visitors to Disney's Animal Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World can become Wilderness Explorers themselves! In June 2013, Disney rolled out a new experience for kids of all ages (though officially aimed at kids 7-10) to learn more about the "wilderness" and earn up to 30 badges to become a Senior Wilderness explorer. The experience is based on Disney's movie "Up" where the character Russell was a Junior Wilderness Explorer knocking on the door of Carl Fredrickson to earn his final badge, "assisting the elderly," to become a Sr. Wilderness Explorer. This new interactive experience takes explorer recruits through 30 different challenges to earn badge stickers for their Wilderness Explorer Handbook.

The Wilderness Explorer's headquarters is located on the bridge between the Oasis and Discovery Island -- or drop by Wilderness Explorer stops in Africa, Rafiki's Planet Watch, Asia and Dinoland U.S.A. -- to pick up your Handbook there. At headquarters, you will receive a Wilderness Explorer sticker to identify yourself as a recruit in training, a pencil and a full color Wilderness Explorer Handbook. Your troop leader asks you to recite the Wilderness Explorer pledge: "A wilderness explorer is friend to all, be it plant or fish or tiny mole" and then give the official call including hand signals and "caw, caw, roar!" By reciting the Wilderness Explorer call, you earn your first badge. Once you have given your pledge and have your supplies you are instructed to look for the Wilderness Explorer symbol and use your map to find stations and badge guides throughout the park. There is no set path to take and you do not have to finish the adventure in one day; you can come back over and over to earn badges as long as the program is going on. Participation for the program is included in theme park admission. You can play the game all day or just hit one or two stops along the way -- it is all up to each explorer!

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□After asking if "big kids" can play (they can!) and taking my pledge, I proudly donned my "WE" logo sticker and began reading my handbook to find a station. My husband and I were enroute to ride Expedition Everest, but then I saw the Wilderness Explorer Clubhouse and meet and greet with Dug and Russell from "Up" and immediately got in line. Both Dug and Russell were gracious to take a photo and each

autographed my handbook. After a pat on the head to Dug (squirrel?!), we were off.

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□The first station we encountered was in Asia. The badge to be earned here was the Asian Culture Badge where each explorer meets someone from Asia. I spoke with a cast member from Jakarta, Indonesia. He asked me some questions of what I knew about Indonesia and then told me some history about the more than 7,500 islands of the country. We talked about the main islands of Indonesia; the Dutch and German background and language. He then played a song for me on an Indonesian instrument (we had to guess the song, it was from "The Sound of Music") and then he gave me my sticker badge and stamped my book. After successfully earning my first station badge; we went on to ride Everest and earned a second badge (Mt. Everest badge) by identifying items in the Everest gift shop used by mountain climbers in search of the Yeti. My third stop of the day was also near Everest, where I spoke to another cast member who told me lore about the Yeti and even asked me a few trivia questions about HER. Yep, it's a girl! (Hint, her name is Betty). This was of course the Yeti badge.

I earned four total badges and we were heading out of Animal Kingdom to park hop. We made one final stop at the Flamingo pond; learned about why flamingoes are pink (it's the pink shrimp they eat); and earned our final badge for the day (the Flamingo badge). It seemed that everywhere we went there was a station; and I can see how one could spend the whole day following adventure. Upon earning all the badges, you can earn Sr. Wilderness Explorer Badge. Earn five badges to become a Tadpole; earn 10 badges to become a Minnow and earn 20 badges to earn Fish status.

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□The Wilderness Explorer Field Guide is well done and a great souvenir. It is 40 plus pages, in full color and printed on recycled paper. There is space to sign the Wilderness Explorer pledge as well as a park map of all of the stations, space for notes in the "field journal" as well as instructions on where each station can be found and instructions on how to earn each badge.

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□The experience is new to Walt Disney World, but there is a similar experience at Disney's California Adventure near the Grizzly River Run attraction in Anaheim. Wilderness Explorers in California work to complete six challenges along the Redwood Creek Challenge Trail and when they finish; they also earn a Wilderness Explorer sticker and can participate in the Wilderness Explorer ceremony which is 10-15 minutes long and is followed by a meet and greet with Russell.

About The Author: Jennifer is a Disney veteran and self-admitted Disney

"geek", having visited Walt Disney World for the first time when she was just 6 months old. Jennifer and her husband Dave has been to Walt Disney World several times, on the Disney Dream in 2012 and to Disneyland in 2012 and 2013. Jennifer's Halloween costume this year is what else, a Wilderness Explorer!

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