

Discovery Cove: An Orlando Attraction Review

by Carolyn Brooke-Millward, PassPorter Guest Contributor

We recently experienced a lovely day at Discovery Cove in Orlando, something we had never done before, and we were really excited to try this new experience!

On the day of our booking, we had to get up at 6:00 am to ensure we were there when the park opened at 7:30 am, as we had been advised to get there as early as we could. We were staying about a 20 minute drive from the park, which is located directly opposite Sea World.

□ When we arrived, we checked in, and were given a 9:30 am slot for the Dolphin Swim, then directed to the breakfast buffet. The food was lovely, with lots of choices -- we had an egg and ham croissant with cheese, yoghurt, a bowl of fresh fruit, coffee, and fruit juice, but there were also pastries and muffins available. After breakfast, we walked around a little to orientate ourselves and just have a look around. One word of warning here though; the staff is extremely helpful, but a little too helpful sometimes. We found it difficult to just wander around, as we kept getting stopped by staff asking us what we were looking for and trying to direct us somewhere! My husband got a bit irritated by all this and was a bit short with one or two of them, after we had been stopped for about the fifth time in the space of five minutes! In the end, we gave up trying to look around, and just found the lockers nearest to our allocated dolphin bay, (Seahorse), where we left our stuff before collecting sleeveless wetsuit jackets, and finding a bench at the cabana.

□ At about 9:20 am we were ushered into an open-sided room, where we were ticked off a list. Then, we sat to watch a short video presentation about Sea World and what they do for animal conservation and rescue. We were then split up into groups of nine people, and led to the Seahorse cove, where we lined up in water that was not particularly deep, but had an extremely slippery floor -- my husband actually slipped over into the water! Luckily, nothing was injured but his pride.

A trainer then explained what would happen next, and called our dolphin over to us. We were shown how to do hand signals to get her to respond to us, doing things like presenting parts of her body for inspection, waving her tail at us, etc. This was great fun, and the dolphin appeared to really be enjoying herself.

□ Next we were asked whether we wanted a deep water or shallow water experience, and those who chose shallow, (including me!), were

directed off to the side of the cove, to another dolphin and trainer. My husband swam out to the deeper section, was shown how to correctly hold the dolphin's dorsal and side fins, and was then towed back to shore. We each got a turn at being towed back, which was a bit scary because of the speed, but very exhilarating! Those of us in the shallower water stood at the edge of a lip where just beyond our toes the water was much deeper, to accommodate the dolphin obviously.

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□ We got to rub the dolphin's back to say thank you, and then fed her some fish. She did a sterling job of towing us back!

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□ We were then taught a hand signal that gave each dolphin a shelf of hands to put her head on, so we could pose for a photo kissing the dolphin. This was lovely, and before we knew it, an hour had passed and our experience was over! (We were originally told this swim experience would last about 30 mins).

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□ After this, we were free to spend the rest of the day at our leisure. We went snorkeling in a tropical pool that had huge rays and other large fish in it, and sharks behind sloping glass so that it looked like you were swimming above them. We also spent some time sunning ourselves on a couple of the many chaise lounges around, drinking lemonade slushies and coffee, and nibbling on cheesy Goldfish crackers and Lays chips. Then we tried the warmer pool, which had a sand floor and was so relaxing. We floated around the lazy river, which was a lot of fun but was also very deep in places, over 8'; I think, so I was glad of the noodle I was hanging onto! It also seemed to go very deep and then shallow again with no warning, and I banged my shins on an unseen underwater cannon at one point too -- ouch!

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□ Around 2:30 pm we were ready for lunch, so we headed for the restaurant again, where we had a very tasty and fresh meal. I got Hawaiian chicken with rice, and my husband opted for the same chicken but with fries. We also got a huge pickle, and some potato and egg salad, to share. We followed this with Key Lime cheesecake, (me), and chocolate fudge cake (hubby). We also had coffee and orange Fanta.

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□ After lunch we spent some more time floating in the warm pool, and then at 4:00 pm we realised we needed to collect our free photo soon, so we got dried and changed in the shower rooms. We intended to have showers when we got back home, but had we realised there was shower gel and shampoo in the shower rooms, I think we would have planned to shower there. Anyway, we headed round to the photo store and collected our complimentary photo, then decided to purchase the photo and DVD package which was quite expensive, but you do get a lot for

your money -- a DVD of the whole dolphin interaction experience, a photo album and CD of all photos taken, a set of printed off pictures, and a poster of whichever is your favorite photo.

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□ We had a quick walk through the aviary, hubby took lots of photos everywhere, and then after a final cup of coffee, we left as the park was closing.

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□ Overall, this was an amazing day, and while it may seem like a lot of money for a one-day experience (the rate for the "day resort with dolphin swim package" varies seasonally and by day, from \$229 to \$459 for ages 3 and up), everything we needed for the day was included: unlimited breakfast, dolphin encounter, access to all pools, snorkels and face masks, wet suit or sleeveless jacket, unlimited lunch, drinks all day including alcohol if desired, special animal-friendly sun cream, towels, shower gel, and shampoo. Plus we were there from park opening to park closure, so we had a really full day of entertainment and events.

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□ I believe you can also rent a private cabana for the day, although we didn't look into this, and you can also book an experience day without the dolphin encounter, which brings the price down a little.

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□ I cannot recommend this experience highly enough -- but just make sure you book it well in advance, as it does tend to sell out quite quickly. They limit the number of spaces available each day, although this does then mean that the park is never over-crowded, which is lovely.

About The Author: Carolyn is a life-long Disney fan from the UK, having made many visits to the parks in Paris, Florida, and California. Next year should see her first visit to the Disneylands in Tokyo and Hong Kong, hopefully! Her wonderful husband is also a huge Disney fan, although he claims he only goes along with her plans to keep the peace! Carolyn is the author of "Tiggerific Travels", an e- journal of trip reports dating from 2006-2010, with a second volume due out shortly.

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