

Exploring Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin : An Orlando-Area Attraction Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

When we made our most recent visit to SeaWorld Orlando, there was one absolute must-do for me. It was an attraction that had opened since our last time there--Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin.

The first time I heard about Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin, I was enthralled by the idea that finally these beautiful creatures would get an attraction befitting them. I had high hopes, having seen what the park had recently done with Turtle Trek, which showcases both the turtles of its name, along with one of my favourites, the manatees.

□ With both attractions, SeaWorld is cleverly limiting crowds by either adding a ride in at the beginning (Antarctica) or underwater viewing followed by a movie (TurtleTrek). It's a good ploy to restrict numbers, and presumably that's no bad thing for the animals, but it can be frustrating if these are animals you really want to see, so you may need to plan accordingly to avoid long waits.

□ With Antarctica, Empire of the Penguin, you're immediately immersed in the snowy wastes of the southern pole as soon as you arrive in this part of this park, with glaciers surrounding you, with the odd icicle hanging off them. Even though it was a warm day when we visited, I must admit I felt a chill when we got here.

□ The theme continues, as you enter the waiting area for the attraction, which takes you into ice caves, and as you watch, screens interwoven with the ice come to life, and you see a snowy wilderness, but then it moves further across, and you realise they're showing you a penguin colony. It's all animated, and they've done a great job of making them even cuter than they are in real life.

□ You then head another to waiting area, only this one features coloured lights, which wasn't what I was expecting, given they'd done a great job in immersing you so well into what felt like the real Antarctica just a couple of minutes earlier. Here, they divide you up into the groups who will be boarding the ride vehicle together, and you head into what I can only describe as a small capsule. It's here you meet the parents of a penguin chick called Puck, who is completely and utterly adorable. However, the day we did this, it seemed to be experiencing a few technical issues, shall we say? After the film concluded, we were left

sitting there for some time before the door finally opened to allow us out. As a warning, while neither of us are at all claustrophobic, we both voiced concerns that if you did have an issue with small spaces, this may freak you out.

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□When we finally did escape our capsule, our ride vehicle was waiting, and we suspect that's what the delay was, as no doubt it needed to be in place before they could seat us. I'd been fortunate enough to see a video on the Internet about this ride, so I had an idea of what to expect, but I had no idea there would be a seatbelt, given we'd picked the "mild" version of this ride. Just like Wild Arctic, an attraction SeaWorld has had for many years, you can pick one of two options for your ride. We opted for the gentler one, although there is a rougher, "wild" one for thrill seekers.

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□This is a trackless, motion based simulator experience, and we found even the mild version a bit much. To give you an idea, I can happily ride Big Thunder Mountain, managed Ok with the Seven Dwarves Mine Train, but after two rides on Expedition Everest, that was enough for me. With this ride though, you just never have an idea where you're going next, as you glide around on the ice, so it's easy to become disorientated. Trust me, trying to take photos while on this ride is not necessarily a good idea…

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□As you glide around, you follow Puck through his life, watching him growing up, and taking to the sea, where he learns about the dangers that lurk beneath the water. Of course there's a happy ending, but it's almost over and done with so quickly that you miss it, as suddenly your ride vehicle is rotating around, and finally you get your first look at the penguin habitat.

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□For me, this really was the highlight, as I found the ride a bit disjointed, with the story, at times, a little hard to follow, and what I really love about SeaWorld are the animals. I was lucky enough to have had some advice from a fellow traveller before we left home, which was to come armed with a sweatshirt, as this viewing area is exceptionally cold. My goodness, what a life saver that piece of advice was! While we lingered here, we watched plenty of other people come off the ride, stand there for literally no more than a minute, then move on, quickly realising that their flimsy summer gear was no match for the cold.

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□There's certainly plenty to see here, with more than 250 penguins, and if they're near the front of the exhibit, then my goodness, you really do feel close to them. We spent a fair bit of time talking to the staff here, and learning more about the species we were seeing, which was fascinating.

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□ This viewing area isn't the end though. You then have an underwater viewing area, which is literally floor to ceiling, meaning you have some superb views of the penguins flying around in the water. What I particularly liked about this was the lighting, which was very subtle, allowing you to get some great photos of their antics, if that appeals to you -- and it certainly does to me.

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□ Antarctica, Empire of the Penguin certainly does put these beautiful creatures on the map at the park, and I have no doubt that they are now being seen by many more people than in their previous home, when it was just plain old penguin encounter. There is a part of me though that wishes you could still just visit the viewing area, without having to take the ride, given I wasn't overly keen on it, and I can see how it could potentially be problematic to those with claustrophobic or motion sickness issues.

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!](#)

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