

The Star Wars Launch Bay at Hollywood Studios: A Walt Disney World Attraction Review

by Tracy Bratlie, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Star Wars: The Force Awakens finally arrived in theaters last December!

To celebrate, the Disney Parks have dreamed up new attractions, experiences, merchandise, and food offerings. In the Walt Disney World Resort, Disney's Hollywood Studios is becoming Star Wars Central. Fans used to go there on weekends in May and June to geek out at Star Wars Weekends, but now, the Park has year-round Star Wars goodness.

One of the newest experiences is Star Wars Launch Bay, located in the former Magic of Disney Animation building in the Animation Courtyard section of Disney's Hollywood Studios. I got to experience it on December 10, less than two weeks after its premiere. It is a walk-through exhibit showcasing all seven of the Star Wars films as well as Star Wars Rebels on Disney XD.

□ The outside of the building hasn't changed much. It was repainted to look a bit sleeker, and it has a huge First Order flag on display. There is a pair of First Order Stormtroopers patrolling the entrance. They instruct guests to remain calm and orderly. These guards take their duties seriously, so you won't get a hug or an autograph. Move along!

□ When I arrived, there was no wait to get into the building. I had heard that when it first opened, there were lines to get in, but it wasn't a problem for me.

At the entrance, Cast Members will instruct you that you may either watch a twenty minute film tribute to the Star Wars movies or skip the film and go straight into the exhibit. I hadn't seen The Force Awakens yet, so I opted to skip the film (Disney says there are no spoilers, but I wanted to be safe).

□ Inside, you will find two meet and greet options, Chewbacca and Kylo Ren. I felt like it would be weird meeting a Star Wars villain, so I headed to the Chewbacca line. It was posted as a twenty-minute wait, but it only took ten minutes. While in line, we could look at an exhibit of light sabers belonging to various Jedi from the films and cartoons. I enjoyed reading the descriptions of the weapons (nerd!).

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☐ I loved meeting Chewbacca! This was absolutely the highlight of Star Wars Launch Bay. He meets guests in a dedicated room. Much like meeting Mickey Mouse at the Magic Kingdom, you can't see Chewbacca until you are next in line, so it feels special when you get to the front of the line. His area is decorated in that vine-covered stone temple style of the Maz Kanata's compound, which suits Chewie's wild nature. He is tall and friendly, and he has a great Wookiee growl. We got some great PhotoPass pictures. My sister looked like a little kid again, meeting her favorite character!

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☐ [Disney Visa cardholders have access to a special line to meet Kylo Ren from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., so they may be able to shorten their wait time, and they get access to the PhotoPass photos at no charge.]

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☐ After we left the meet and greet area, we went into the walk-through exhibit. Honestly, it seems underwhelming at first. The old Animation building essentially just got a new paint job. But Disney took the time to add details to the sparse, temporary area to make it work. The whole room, from floor to ceiling, looks worn out, just like the films. On the left, there's a little photo-op of the Mos Eisley Cantina where Luke Skywalker met Han Solo. It doesn't look like much, and we were about to walk right past it. But a Cast Member (not a PhotoPass photographer) offered to take our photo holding the fake drinks at the bar. It came out fantastic! We also got a great photo of my sister and I playing holochess in the Millennium Falcon. Allears.net reports that you'll find walk-around characters like Greedo and some Jawas in this area, but they were not around on the night I visited.

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☐ In display cases, you can view detailed replicas of iconic Star Wars props like the Millennium Falcon, pod racers, and Stormtrooper helmets. There are also some exhibits on specific characters including Rey from the new film.

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☐ One of the last rooms in the exhibit is a display of Star Wars inspired artwork. These pieces are actually for sale, if you want to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars on them. It's like a very crammed version of the Art of Disney store. I was tempted to buy something, but I resisted.

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☐ To no one's surprise, the exit is through a gift shop. But this is no ordinary gift shop! Launch Bay Cargo offers high-end fan merchandise. Serious cosplayers can purchase a Darth Vader costume for \$4,000. The far wall contains a display of high quality miniatures intended for collectors. There are some fun items like lightsaber umbrellas and lamps. There is even a MagicBand on Demand station, where you can design your own MagicBand and have it printed right there. You can

also get a phone case printed. And, of course, T-shirts!

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□ I loved my visit to Star Wars Launch Bay! I capped off the evening with a ride on Star Tours: The Adventures Continue, which included a teaser look at some of the locations in Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

About The Author: Tracy Bratlie has been visiting Walt Disney World since it was a one-park destination! Now she enjoys sharing all four parks with her kids and other family members. She lives in chilly southern Minnesota, so she escapes to Florida whenever she gets the chance.

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