

Opening Day at Pandora - World of Avatar: A Walt Disney World Park Review

by Molly Juba, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When I began planning our Walt Disney World vacation last fall I had no idea that the **last day of our trip would fall on the opening day of Pandora** in Animal Kingdom.

Up until that point I had not paid much attention to the progress of Pandora. I have seen the movie but never really had much of an interest in it. As time went on, more and more amazing details came out about this new land in Animal Kingdom and I began to get super excited! Pandora is a land in Animal Kingdom based on the movie Avatar. There are two ride attractions, one shop, one quick-service restaurant and one quick-service beverage stand in the land. While I was thrilled that our family would have the opportunity to visit Pandora on this trip, I also felt a **little overwhelmed about being in a park on a grand opening day of something this big**. I knew if we were going to make it work I had a lot of research and advance planning to do. The day ended up being better than I could have imagined!

As luck would have it, the **first day FastPasses were available to book for Pandora** was also the date I could schedule my FastPasses as a Disney resort guest. Tinker Bell herself must have been sprinkling pixie dust on me that morning. I was online at 6:00 am to schedule Fastpasses and due to an apparent glitch in the system, I was able to get a Fastpass for both Flight of Passage and Na'vi River Journey. Soon after 6:00 am the system was reset to only allow one Fastpass for Pandora and two Fastpasses for other areas of the park.

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□As the trip got closer I began hearing about the **massive crowds expected at Animal Kingdom on opening day**. I went back and forth about my strategy for the day. It seemed I had two options: 1) wait in the massive long line with everyone else to get into Pandora early and spend the time there until our FastPasses began at 9:10 am or 2) head in the opposite direction and do other Animal Kingdom attractions until our FastPass time and hope we could get through the crowds to even get near Pandora with our Fastpasses.

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□We arrived via Disney bus from Port Orleans at 6:20 am to a HUGE crowd waiting just to get into Animal Kingdom Park. It really did not take too long to get through security and they began letting people into the park about 6:30-40 am for a 7:00 am Extra Magic Hours opening.

We were stopped before the bridge leading into Discovery Island and when they dropped the rope everyone headed for Pandora had to stay to the left. We decided to go against the crowd and head to Dinoland and see how many attractions we could knock out in the Extra Magic Hour and hope for the best getting back to Pandora. The rest of the park was an absolute ghost town! The cast members joked with us when we cut through Fossil Fun Games and said "You realize this is not Pandora, right?" In the end we rode Dinosaur, two rides on Expedition Everest, two rides on Kilimanjaro Safaris and had breakfast all before making our way to Pandora.

If you take a look at a map of the park that includes Pandora you will see there are **actually two ways to access Pandora**: one from Discovery Island and the other from Africa. I thought it would be less congested to access from Africa but that path was closed off to entering from that direction. So back around we went to access from Discovery Island!

□ The **crowds became crazy** coming from Africa as we got closer to Pandora. They began holding people back from entering Pandora near Tiffins. If you had a Fastpass with a current start time you were allowed in. If not, you were directed to the end of a very long line. It was super easy!

□ The FastPass process was extremely efficient. We went from the FastPass entrance to the beginning of the ride for Flight of Passage within 30 minutes and even less for Na'vi River Journey. I thought **navigating around Pandora was a bit confusing** with lots of little twists and turns to the paths which made the area feel much bigger than it really is.

□ By all accounts **Pandora is completely awesome!** The theming and detail of the land was so impressive. It really made me feel like I was in the movie. The landscape was lush and green with so many flowers and creatures. Absolutely beautiful!

□ The two rides were simply amazing! This is definitely Disney's **best work yet**. Flight of Passage was so well done. It is a 3D flight simulator ride. No other ride really compares to it. It is smooth like Soarin' but MUCH more intense with lots of twists and drops. It felt so real like you were right there in the forest! 3D simulator rides are not my favorite and I did feel a bit queasy after this ride but it was so worth it! I had heard various reports that people were disappointed by the ride vehicle because it was not comfortable for larger individuals. I could definitely see how this could be a problem. The vehicle is like riding a motorcycle (but actually you are on a mountain banshee!) and there is a restraint that pops up onto your back. A cast member had to do some extra

adjusting for my petite 16 year old daughter. Na'vi River Journey was peaceful and visually amazing with all of the bioluminescent flowers and creatures. A gentle and relaxing boat ride everyone will enjoy.

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□ After experiencing the rides I was interested in visiting Windtraders to **pick up a souvenir from Pandora** but the line into the store was extremely long and I did not wait. I had read that everyone leaving Flight of Passage would exit through the store but this was not our experience. There was also a small cart in Pandora that had more toy-like themed Avatar items, t-shirts and flip flops. We discovered that Discovery Trading Company near the bridge to Oasis also had some Pandora opening day items for sale like pins, hats, t-shirts and water bottles. However, if you want a banshee to ride on your shoulder then Windtraders is the place to go!

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□ By this time we were ready for lunch and left the Pandora area. People were lined up all the way back to Oasis just to wait in a line to enter into the Pandora land. They were then looking at **extremely long waits** (posted 3-4 hours) for the rides. I don't think I would have been willing myself to wait in such long lines to visit Pandora. I was extremely thankful for my Fastpasses after seeing the lines. By noon we were finished with lunch at Flame Tree Barbecue and were on our way back to the hotel to rest!

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□ Pandora is definitely a **"not to be missed" attraction** area! I highly recommend making plans to visit here on your next trip to Walt Disney World. Here are a few tips for visiting Pandora:

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□1) **Get a FastPass!** Keep trying if you don't get one on your Fastpass date. Having even one Fastpass will free up so much time for visiting other things in Animal Kingdom.

□2) **Get there EARLY!** Use morning Extra Magic Hours. Arrive at Animal Kingdom 60 minutes prior to park opening. If you plan on waiting stand-by for one of the rides, being ahead of the crowd will save so much time. Be sure to schedule your Fastpass for later to allow you enough time in the standby line.

□3) If you have the option, go to Animal Kingdom on **two separate days** and get a different Fastpass for a Pandora ride on each of those days. Visit other areas of the park early while everyone else is waiting in Pandora lines.

□4) Plan to **spend some time exploring the land of Pandora**. The scenery is absolutely breathtaking! There was also live entertainment when we were there. Enjoy a meal, snack or drink and take it all in.

□5) **See Pandora at night!** I was not lucky enough to have this fit into our schedule but all reports say it is amazing at night, illuminating the scenery into beautiful colors.

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