

Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge: The Joys of Animal Trekking

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Animal Kingdom. It's a simple enough name and tells you everything you need to know about the fourth theme park at the Walt Disney World resort - you're going to find animals there. Amazing then, that so many people who head for this park end up bypassing attractions that are home to some of the planet's most beautiful animals.

It's probably fair to say that nearly everyone who visits Disney's Animal Kingdom makes a beeline at some point during the day to Kilimanjaro Safaris. They set out on their "two week" trek into the African savannah, see hundreds of amazing animals and then as they leave the safari, they completely miss the signs for the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail -- or worse, choose to ignore them. As with everything else Disney does, it's no accident that the signposts are there. They're encouraging you to continue with your expedition, and this is quite some expedition!

A walking trail suitable for everyone, the Pangani Trail first takes you past the okapi, a striking and stripy animal, similar to Zebras. A beautiful deep brown color, the white stripes are on their legs, but perhaps the most stunning thing about these animals is their tongues! Stand there long enough and you may be lucky enough to see it flip out, although these are shy animals, so you may have to be patient.

From there, you head into a research building and the highlight here is the Naked Mole Rats, of Kim Possible fame. You may be able to see them burrowing around in their underground habitat. Then it's into the aviary area, one that I will confess, we used to walk through quickly. At first glance, you probably won't be able to spot anything, but keep looking and something will move -- maybe on the ground, maybe above your head -- and you'll realize that it's one of the beautiful birds that lives here.

Now for something that everyone comes to see. As you see the glass with the water beyond, you might first wonder what is contained in the murky depths, but when you see a bulky shape move, you realize what it is -- a hippo! If you ever wonder why you can never see these beautiful animals, this underwater viewing area gives you the answer. Hippos spend most of their time in the water and they're quite a sight.

Your next stop will undoubtedly include delighted cries of "Timon" from children, as they spy the meerkats, which can usually be found happily

basking in the sun. These guys make for some delightful photos.

As you'd expect, Disney saves the best for last. Your final stop takes you to the Gorilla Research Camp. The first time we visited, we were mesmerized by the glass-protected viewing area and couldn't believe how close we could get to the gorillas. You'll usually find Cast Members here who can answer any questions you have about the gorillas. It took us a while to realize that we could move on and enjoy more sightings around the corner on the swaying suspension bridge -- although watch out for energetic youngsters who seem to enjoy bouncing you around on this!

There's so much to see on the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail that you should allow at least 30 minutes to take it all in. The time will fly once you start spotting the animals and it's easy to stand in one section for 10 minutes, without realizing it. If there's a long wait for Kilimanjaro Safaris, it might be worth grabbing a FastPass and checking out the Trail while you wait for your FastPass time to roll round.

But this isn't the only animal trail that this park has to offer. Head to Asia and you'll find the Maharajah Jungle Trek, where you can wander through ancient ruins and encounter animals on the way. Of the two, this is perhaps the better themed and we always stop to take time to look at all the Asian architecture and artifacts around us.

The first animals you'll come across are the gibbons, members of the ape family. Just around the corner is the first animal viewing area. This is one area where you may have to search for your prey. The Komodo Dragon, the world's largest lizard, is not always the most camera-friendly beast, but it's very rewarding when you find him. The striking Tapir is also worth searching out and with half of him white and half black, he's easier to find in the undergrowth.

Next is an area that I can guarantee you'll either love or want to avoid altogether -- the bat viewing area. These guys don't do a lot for me, so we usually hurry past them, but there's a good collection of Asian fruit bats if you're a bat lover.

Perhaps the real reason I want to hurry past this section is because I know what's coming up next -- Tiger Forest, complete with some beautiful pools for them to drink or play in. Whatever time of the day you visit, you can usually find the tigers somewhere, so if they're not at the first viewing spot, keep going to the next one. Fortunately, even when these big cats are tired, they usually manage to pick an area right by the glass-protected viewing areas for a sleep, giving you amazing views of them. If you see them active by the pool though, stay put -- it's

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worth it if they head into the water to play, as that's a stunning sight and, as someone near us commented, "They're just like my cats at home... only a bit bigger!"

This isn't the final stop on the Jungle Trek. You'll see Elds Deer and Blackbuck next and then you'll head into the free-flying bird aviary. Again, it's worth taking your time here, as that thing that you originally thought was a leaf could turn out to be a rich green-colored bird.

As with so many of Disney's attractions, there are two ways to enjoy the trails in the Animal Kingdom. You can hurry through, perhaps only stopping to see the most obvious of animals, such as the tigers and the gorillas, or you can linger and explore it more fully. Nearly always your patience will be rewarded and you'll find a whole new world of animals that you hadn't previously realized even existed.

So while Expedition: Everest, Kilimanjaro Safaris or the Festival of the Lion King may be calling your name when you visit the park, try and find time in your schedule to stop by and enjoy the animals that gave their name to this wonderful Disney Kingdom.

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!](#)

Article last updated: 1/11/2007

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