

Wild Africa Trek at Disney's Animal Kingdom: A Guided Tour Review

by Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I was extremely lucky to be invited by Len Testa of Touring Plans.com to attend the first public offering of the new Wild Africa Trek at Disney's Animal Kingdom on Sunday, January 16th, 2011. Also in the first group were members of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel Erin Foster and Kim LaPaglia.

The Wild Africa Trek is an immersive experience inside Disney's Animal Kingdom and all guests have to be at least eight years old. The trek is three hours long and limited to 12 guests in each time slot. There are multiple treks each day, and we were told the treks would go rain or shine, though not when lightning is in the area. Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park admission is required in addition to the cost of the tour. Between now and February 26th, 2011, Disney is offering an introductory rate of \$129 per guest for the trek.

When making the initial reservation for the 8:00 am trek, the first in the morning, we were told to be at the Dawa Bar next door to the Tusker House Restaurant inside Disney's Animal Kingdom at 7:45 am. Since we didn't want to be late and my party was arriving from three different hotels, we decided the night before to meet at 7:30 am outside the park. I rode in Kim LaPaglia's van and we arrived at Disney's Animal Kingdom at 7:10 am only to find the parking lot blocked with cones at the toll plaza. After a while, a Cast Member appeared and I got out to talk with him; I was told that the parking lot would not open until 7:30 am. Keep that in mind and don't arrive too early at the park if you are on the first tour.

After checking in at a podium for the trek, we were told that it would be at least two hours before we would have a bathroom break, so don't drink too much coffee before going! After the entire group of 12 was ready to go, we were led down a small trail to the start of the trek where we found Disney Imagineer Joe Rhode and Michael Colglazier, the Vice President of Disney's Animal Kingdom for an unexpected ribbon cutting ceremony. I was in shock to see Joe Rhode there, who was instrumental in the creation of the park! The ribbon ceremony was very short, but I did make it a point to walk up to Joe Rhode and thank him for making such a beautiful park!

We were then led to an area with complementary lockers and asked to store all loose items, including wallets, keys, cell phones, backpacks, etc. We were then fitted with an expedition vest with a safety harness.

Keep in mind that cameras will only be allowed on the trek if they can be securely tethered to the expedition vest. However, don't worry if you don't want to do that! The trek guides will take photos all along the trek of you and the animals, and all of the pictures are made available to you via PhotoPass as part of the cost of the trek. It seemed to me that at least one of the guides was always taking pictures during the entire three hours.

There were a lot of Cast Members available to help us put on our expedition vests and to tighten all of the straps, etc. They also helped us secure cameras and a water bottle that we could keep after the adventure. Supposedly they can also secure a cell phone if that's your only camera, but nobody in our group did that. During the trek, guests will have to walk across rough terrain and, in my opinion, should not be afraid of heights. To make sure there wouldn't be any problems later, Disney built a "test rope bridge" right at the start so guests can make sure they are comfortable walking on a bridge with nothing but the ground underneath it, as opposed to hungry crocodiles! After everybody in the group made it across the test bridge, we were ready to go explore!

After being given a wireless receiver and earpiece, we were led through Harambe Village to the Pangani Forest Exploration Trail. I don't think the earpiece was necessary for the 8:00 am tour as the park wasn't open to the public yet and thus was very quiet, but one would be absolutely necessary for later tours. As long as you are relatively close to the guide so that you can receive the signal, you will have no problems listening while trekking. After observing the usual gorillas and a few other animals that can be found on the Pangani Trail, we were led off the beaten path to begin the real adventure!

The safety harness attached to our vest allowed us to be tethered to an overhead safety track at various points on the trek, including when on the rope bridges. The first time we used the tether was to get a stunning look at hippos, just 10 feet below us on a riverbank. There was a Cast Member already there when we arrived ready to throw watermelon into the river to attract the hippos to us. Those guests willing to trust the safety harness and lean over as far as they could got the best views in my opinion. We also used the safety tether when we trekked across a rope bridge that goes over the normal Kilimanjaro Safari trucks, and then later over enormous crocodiles. I thought it was fun to wave to the Kilimanjaro Safari trucks as they passed; I wondered how Disney worked us into the story being told on those trucks since we were in view of guests at several points along our trek. However, I had to leave for the airport soon after the trek and didn't get a chance to experience any changes made to Kilimanjaro Safari before leaving.

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After coming off the bridge, we were led to an overhang where we could stare down at the crocodiles, which were extremely close but unable to climb up to us! It was incredible seeing the huge crocodiles up close and personal!

After about two-thirds of the time had passed, we were led out onto the safari in our own trek truck, not the normal trucks used in the Kilimanjaro Safari tour. Our truck had an open area in the back allowing us to sit when the truck was in motion, but then to stand at various points along the way to take as many pictures as we wanted to and to really get a good luck at the animals. As part of our safari tour, we were taken to an exclusive safari camp that offered incredible views of the animals, exotic foods to try, and a bathroom break! Our breakfast consisted of a really yummy yogurt (and I generally dislike yogurt), soft cheeses, fresh fruit, slices of prosciutto, and salmon. We were also served the famous Jungle Juice from the Tusker House Restaurant. Lunch will be served for treks starting later in the day and will consist of different offerings, including curry chicken.

The Wild Africa Trek was an incredible experience and I recommend it to anybody who wants to get closer to the amazing animals in Disney's Animal Kingdom. Our guides did an excellent job telling us about all of the animals and making us believe that Florida was a long way away and that we were actually in Africa. They were excellent story tellers and never once broke character. If you are interested in booking a Wild Africa Trek, call 407-WDW-TOUR as soon as possible, but no earlier than 180 days in advance. I have a feeling this is going to be very popular for a very long time! I can't wait to take my own family on a trek!

PODCAST ALERT: Listen to article author Bernie Edwards chat about the Wild Africa Trek Tour on [Episode 57 of the PassPorter Moms Podcast!](#)

About The Author: Bernie Edwards lives in Maryland with his wife and two children. He is an engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel. He enjoys visiting both Walt Disney World and Disneyland, and sailing on the Disney Cruise Line.

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