

Typhoon Lagoon: My Family's Favorite Water Park

by *Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor*

Whenever my family and I discuss going to the Walt Disney World Resort, my two boys, ages 6 and 11, always bring up visiting Typhoon Lagoon or Blizzard Beach, the two Disney water parks.

While we don't always go to a water park on every trip, because most of our family trips are during the winter and it's sometimes too cold, I have no doubt that when we do go, it's the highlight of our vacation ... and Typhoon Lagoon is our favorite water park!

Typhoon Lagoon is a 56-acre water park themed with a tropical island setting, and it is absolutely beautiful! Unlike most of the other water parks across the country, the infrastructure for the various slides and pools are hidden by the theme of the park; "Legend" has it that a typhoon wreaked havoc upon a tropical paradise, tossing about boats, fishing gear, surfboards, etc. and the result is today's Typhoon Lagoon. The icon of the park is "Miss Tilly," a shrimp boat impaled upon a mountain called "Mount Mayday" that erupts with a 50-foot geyser of water! The park contains slides, pools, a lazy river, and unique Disney touches, such as a saltwater artificial coral reef pool full of tropical fish! There are places to get food, picnic areas, shops to explore, dressing rooms, lockers, and showers. If you forget your towel, you can pick one up in a shop or rent one from the park.

I personally recommend getting to Typhoon Lagoon first thing in the morning; the park can get crowded in the afternoon. In fact, it can even close due to capacity on a hot summer day! One of the first things to do after entering the park is to set up "home base", i.e. a lounge chair or two to call "home" for the day. My family usually finds a nice place on the edge of the Surf Pool or in Ketchakiddee Creek, the young children's area in the park. You can also rent a premium beach chair space at Typhoon Lagoon, which consists of two lounge chairs, an umbrella, a cocktail table, and two towels; you can reserve it in advance by calling 407-WDW-PLAY or, if any are available, on a walkup basis from High 'N Dry Towel Company. For more money, you can even rent a private "Beachcomber Shack" which can accommodate up to six guests and includes an attendant, private lockers, lounge furniture, tables, all-day drink mugs, cooler with bottled water, and rental towels; advanced reservations can be made at the number above.

Typhoon Lagoon's Surf Pool is simply incredible. It can send waves up to

six feet high every 90 seconds. My boys absolutely love playing in the pool, but guests should be careful if they've never visited before. Six-foot high waves pack a lot of energy, and I've seen a lot of inexperienced guests get knocked down. So if it's your first time, I suggest going in slow and experiencing the waves at the edge of the pool before moving in closer. However, definitely give it a try. I personally love it! Also, if you have young children, look for the attraction Bay Slides, which are beginner slides that send young guests down gentle slopes that end in a secluded corner of the Surf Pool.

While Typhoon Lagoon is probably best known for the Surf Pool, my family's favorite attraction at the water park is Castaway Creek, followed closely by Crush 'n' Gusher. Castaway Creek is basically a "lazy river," a gently winding 2100-foot stream where guests relax in inner tubes while circling around the park through rain forests, caves, and waterfalls. Crush 'n' Gusher is a roller coaster-like waterslide, themed around an abandoned and decaying tropical fruit processing center. During part of the ride, you actually get transported uphill by powerful water jets; there are three different waterslides making up this attraction, and all are wonderful! If you've been on the AquaDuck on the Disney Dream cruise ship, then just think of something longer and more thrilling with more ups and downs along the way.

Guests seeking thrills should try Humunga Kowabunga, which consists of three enclosed "speed slide" flumes that send guests about five stories downward at speeds up to 55 miles per hour. Less thrilling attractions include Storm Slides, Gang Plank Falls, Mayday Falls, and Keelhaul Falls. All of these attractions can be found on Mount Mayday. Gang Plank Falls is a nice family raft ride featuring a large four-person inner tube; it's short but fun! Try to experience Gang Plank Falls early in the morning as the line for this attraction gets relatively long in the afternoon.

Shark Reef gives you an opportunity to snorkel among tropical fish and sharks. However, the sharks are small and harmless! You will be loaned a face mask, snorkel, and life vest, and given instructions on how to snorkel. Unfortunately, you are not allowed to linger or this would be an incredible attraction; instead, you are required to swim straight across the approximately 60-foot pool and then get out. However, if you want to spend more time in this pool, you can sign up for the S.A.S. (Surface Air Snorkeling) Adventure. This program uses a small tank and regulator, similar to what you would find if you were SCUBA diving. It costs extra, but you can spend a half-hour in the pool. Guests age 5 and up may participate. Look for the information kiosk near the entrance to Shark Reef to sign up.

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For younger guests, Typhoon Lagoon offers Ketchakiddee Creek. This is a children's play area featuring 10 different activity areas and is designed for guests under 48 inches tall. It consists of slides, a water playground, fountains, geysers, waterfalls, a leaky tug boat, and a scaled down water raft ride. There's even a small sandy beach in the area for young guests to enjoy!

For something really unique, sign up for surfing lessons in the Surf Pool. Yes, surfing lessons! While I've never done it, I've been told it's a great way to learn to surf. Typhoon Lagoon's Surf Pool can produce the perfect wave on demand, whereas you may have to wait a long time for a suitable wave in the ocean. Thus, you can learn very quickly. Surfing lessons are available for guests age 8 and older in the hours before Typhoon Lagoon opens to general guests. Class sizes are limited and there are two instructors there to help. The class consists of a half hour of instruction on land followed by two hours in the water. Reservations can be made by calling 407-WDW-PLAY. There's even occasional evening surfing for experienced surfers with their own boards after park hours.

Swimming and playing all day will make most guests hungry, and there are several counter service places in the park to grab something to eat. My family's favorite place is Leaning Palms, which offers hamburgers, hot dogs, pizzas, chicken nuggets, and salads. Right next door is Happy Landings Ice Cream, obviously a place to pick up the perfect treat on a hot summer day! Another good combination is Typhoon Tilly's and the Snack Shack near the rear of the park, to the right of Mount Mayday. Also, be sure to pick up some mini-donuts at the mini-donuts shack near the front of the park; they are wonderful, especially with the optional chocolate sauce! You can even pick up a refillable mug to use at several locations throughout the park; it's just like the refillable mug program at the Disney resorts, but you have to purchase a Typhoon Lagoon specific mug. Finally, you can bring in your own food, but no alcoholic beverages or glass containers are permitted.

On your next visit to Walt Disney World, be sure to visit at least one of the water parks. My family's favorite is Typhoon Lagoon, and just because we don't visit often in the winter time, don't let cool weather stop you! Excluding the snorkeling area, all of the water in the park is heated to a toasty 75-80 degrees year-round. In cooler weather, you just have to figure out how to quickly get from one heated body of water to the next when going from attraction to attraction!

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

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enjoys visiting both Walt Disney World and Disneyland, and sailing on the Disney Cruise Line.

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