

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter: Universal's Islands of Adventure

by William Clements, PassPorter Guest Contributor

On a recent trip we chose to visit Islands of Adventure at Universal Orlando prior to our Disney Cruise.

□ Our main goal was to visit The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, but we visited the entire park.

□ First off, I definitely recommend staying at a Universal Resort. The location is so close to the parks and the Resort benefits - early admission to parts of Islands of Adventure and Express Pass access to rides are great.

□ On our visit, we arrived at Islands of Adventure shortly after 8:00 am. We immediately went to The Wonderful World of Harry Potter, and the first thing we did there was Ollivanders Wand Shop. There was a 20 minute wait. Inside, "Mr. Ollivander" greeted us. He picked my sister, Katie, to have her wand "choose" her (as you may know, "the wand chooses the wizard"). This was a special effects marvel, the experience just like in the movies. After that we were shown into another room for our opportunity to pick (purchase) a wand.

□ We opted to skip the wand shopping and headed to Hogwarts Castle to ride Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey. If you're a larger person, some advice--there are "tester" seats right outside the entrance to the ride and test there, before you get on line, otherwise you will be holding up the line later to see if you need a "modified" seat. Both me and my father needed "modified" seats, but note that the modified seats are not wider than the regular seats; they just have more room for "bellies." The queue for the ride has fabulous theming, very authentic, except the walls were plaster instead of stone. The ride was so much fun! I rode it three times and could never figure out how they make the flight so realistic! One warning is that the ride tosses you around a lot, so some people may experience motion sickness.

After that we rode both sides of the Dragon Challenge, two intertwined coasters, each representing a different species of dragon. This time only I needed the modified seat, because I am so tall my shoulders didn't fit into the regular ride restraints. The Hungarian Horntail side had more corkscrews but was also smoother; the Chinese Fireball had more loops and was more jerky.

□ We explored the other "Islands" for a while, then had lunch at Mythos.

Mythos is definitely above average for theme park restaurants. I had the Mythos Burger (\$10.95) and it was delicious! My dad had the Roman Panini (\$9.95) and said it was good. My mom had the Spinach Salad (\$6.95) and said it was very good! After lunch we returned to Ollivanders to buy a wand, I got a wand of Birch (actually, cast resin). Then we went back to the hotel to swim and relax. The pool at the hotel was not a spectacular as some of the pools at Disney resorts, but it was still relaxing.

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□ After dinner is was back to Islands of Adventure for some late night rides. We went to ride Forbidden Journey again. The line was much shorter, but still had a wait. It was just as fun a before, so we decided to ride again. This time the line was even shorter, but we got stuck for a minute or two while upside down! It got started again but the sound, visuals, and ride were out of sync. Overall it was a great day.

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□ Some tips:

□ Stay at a Universal Resort to make the most of your stay.

□ Have a reservation for Mythos.

□ Go to Ollivanders first to avoid a really long line.

□ Islands of Adventure is really fun. As always, I don't suggest going to a non-Disney location expecting Disney service. I went to Universal expecting it to be along the lines of Six Flags and I found it to be much better! Definitely not Disney, but much nicer than I thought it would be. Universal definitely exceeded my expectations and ensured that I would return in the future.

About The Author: □ William Clements is a young Walt Disney and Disney Cruise Line enthusiast who has completed six cruises and has made twelve visits to a Disney Resort. In fourth grade he completed a report and presentation about Walt Disney and spends most of his free time researching Disney facts and Disney vacations.

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