

The Seas With Nemo And Friends: In Love With The Living Seas

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

"So what's your favorite Disney attraction, then?" Has a harder question ever been invented? There are just so many to pick from that I always find it very hard to answer that.

However, there are some attractions that have a very special place in my heart. The Seas with Nemo & Friends at Epcot is one of those. When I was a child, my family always seemed to plan their Disney vacations at the wrong time. We first visited Walt Disney World in 1981, and what happened the following year? That's right, Epcot opened for business. Fast forward and we returned in late 1987, just 18 months before what's now known as Disney's Hollywood Studios opened its doors. You get the picture.

That means my very first excursion into Epcot had to wait until 1987, but in a way, that was not a bad thing, as by then the park had seen the addition of the Living Seas pavilion. Planned from the beginning, it didn't debut until 1986, which meant that, the first time I headed inside, it was still a popular place and I clearly remember a long wait before we finally boarded our ride vehicle.

Of course in those days, you would wait for the pre-show entertainment and the journey down to Sea Base Alpha in those legendary "hydrolators." As it was our first visit, we dutifully trooped in to watch the short movie that introduced you to life underwater, and then it was our turn to travel down beneath the waves. Even as a teenager, I remember being impressed by the hydrolators. Of course I knew that you weren't really descending to the seabed, but my goodness, Disney did a good job of making you believe that you might possibly be.

Then it was on to the ride vehicles -- very different from the ones we see today, as there were no bright clams to glide around in. Instead you climbed into distinctly drab Seacab vehicles, but they took you on what I would guess was probably a fairly similar journey to the one you complete today. You'd sit and watch in wonder, as you glided through an underwater world with hundreds of creatures swimming around you. I still remember gasping as a shark swam past during that first ride and then grinning widely. What a great experience, and you could enjoy this without even getting wet!

From that point on, I was in love with the Living Seas. Our return trip as a family in 1996 didn't change that feeling at all, although by the time I

next visited on my honeymoon in 1999, the pavilion was starting to look as if it was in need of a little love. The crowds that once dominated the entrance were now gone, heading for new headliners, such as Test Track. The ride didn't seem as smooth and somehow the viewing areas just didn't seem as clean either.

It came as no surprise then, although it was still a great disappointment, when I heard that the ride portion of the attraction had been closed in 2001. It seemed like the beginning of the end for this once great pavilion and our return there in late 2002 did nothing to dispel that feeling. It was very eerie to just be able to visit the gift shop and the viewing areas and to see where the cars once used to run. I couldn't help but stand there and think what a wasted opportunity this was.

I guess Disney must have had a similar thought, because a couple of years later, things started to change with a refurbishment of the pavilion that was to take a number of years. The first sign of new life was the arrival of Turtle Talk with Crush in November 2004, which it's probably fair to say left everyone who saw it absolutely open-mouthed. Nothing like it had been tried before at Disney and to have the fun surfer dude turtle from Finding Nemo communicating directly with you was amazing. It's no wonder it drew the crowds and indeed continues to do so to this day.

Soon, Crush was joined by other marine friends from the film, with the addition of Bruce's Sub House, a hands-on play area for kids and the re-naming of the stingray area to become Mr. Ray's Lagoon. Nemo and Friends proved to be a great addition, as instead of just having fish on display swimming around, all members of the family could now hunt for familiar friends. When this first opened, I remember hearing children screaming "Nemo!" and "Dory!" as they spotted the fish. That was the point where I knew this pavilion was on the way back up.

The final part of the transformation saw my beloved ride brought back to life, with clam-mobiles taking you back through the aquarium, but this time with the addition of the familiar characters from the movie. The Seas with Nemo and Friends follows the film's story, starting off with Mr. Ray's class and then taking you along on the search for the missing Nemo. Along the way, you'll see the animated characters projected on to the aquarium, making it look as if they're swimming with their real counterparts, and you also get to meet Bruce close up. You glide underneath jellyfish and then get taken down the East Australian Current with Crush and Squirt in a section that can mess with your head if you're susceptible to motion sickness.

The first time we took this ride, it reminded me of the feeling I had had

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all those years ago on my very first visit to this pavilion. The magic had never really left this place, it had just got lost along the way, but Disney had done an excellent job of ensuring that it returned with a complete refreshment of the Living Seas, transforming it into The Seas with Nemo and Friends. There's now no greater delight for me than heading in there and seeing a whole new generation appreciate it, the way I did all those years ago.

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!](#)

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