

Island Hopping

A guide to Universal Studios Islands of Adventure—from the inside out.

By Kris Hirschmann



The Incredible Hulk Coaster is just one reason to visit Islands of Adventure—but have a plan before you arrive.

AT A GLANCE

Seuss Landing: The Once-ler's House, The Cat In The Hat, One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish and Caro-Seuss-el

The Lost Continent: Poseidon's Fury; Escape From The Lost City, The Eighth Voyage of Sindbad and Dueling Dragons

Jurassic Park: Jurassic Park River Adventure, Triceratops Encounter and Pteranodon Flyers

Toon Lagoon: Popeye & Bluto's BilgeRat Barges; Me Ship, The Olive; and Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls

Marvel Super Hero Island: The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, Doctor Doom's Fearfall and The Incredible Hulk Coaster

SO YOU'RE THINKING OF heading out to Universal Studios Islands of Adventure for the day. Good choice! Orlando's newest theme park earns high marks from adults and kids alike for thrills, atmosphere, food and fun. But don't load the family into the minivan just yet. First, check out our insider's guide. We went, we saw, we oooohed, we aaahed, and we returned with a handful of tips that could just make your day.

WEATHER REPORT

BEFORE YOU HEAD FOR THE CAR, CHECK THE weather report for the day. Some of the best rides in the park, including the Incredible Hulk Coaster, Dr. Doom's Fearfall and Dueling Dragons, shut down at the hint of lightning. Central Florida is infamous for violent afternoon thunderstorms. If this weather pattern is forecasted, hit the thrill rides early.

Here's the good news: The weather in January is typically sunny and dry, so the odds are in your favor. Even if you do get rained on, the skies usually clear in an hour or two.

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

IF YOU HATE STANDING IN LINE, CONSIDER Islands of Adventure's VIP Tour. The tour is about five hours long and includes priority entrance and preferred seating at eight attractions. In other words, no waiting. And you don't even have to worry about getting dirty looks. Tours have a private entrance to the rides, so John and Jane Doe in line probably won't even realize you're there.

Two VIP tours are offered: Thrill Seeker and Family Adventure. A tour accommodates up to 15 people and costs \$120, plus tax, per person.

BABY/CHILD SWAP

YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE BOTH WANT TO RIDE, but one of you has to watch the baby. Who stays outside? No one. The park's Baby Swap policy allows you both to ride with a minimum of hassle. One person stands in line; the other waits with the baby (or under-height child) in a special holding area at the ride's load-off. When the first spouse gets off the ride, the couple executes a "baby swap," and the waiting spouse is loaded onto the ride with no further waiting. If you have both a baby and a ride-qualified child, ride officials may even allow the child to ride twice (once with each parent). The service isn't advertised, so ask ride officials for directions to the holding area.

INTO THE SPIDER'S LAIR

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF SPIDER-MAN is billed as the park's flagship attraction—and rightly so. The special effects

in this spinning, floating, falling 3-D adventure are nothing short of astonishing. You simply can't miss it. But here's the catch: The ride's popularity spawns the longest lines in the park, with waits as long as 90 minutes. The solution? Make Spidey your first stop upon entering the park. Waits are more reasonable in the early hours.

THE SOAK FACTOR

MANY WATER RIDES WARN IN VAIN OF WET things to come. But they're not crying wolf at Dudley Do-Right's Ripsaw Falls and Popeye & Bluto's Bilge-Rat Barges. Heed this warning: You will not get damp. You will not get a little wet. You will get soaked—stringy hair, wet underwear, squelching shoes and all. Free lockers are available at the entrance to each ride for cameras, dry clothing, etc.

Jurassic Park River Adventure, which posts just as many wetness warnings as the aforementioned two, actually isn't too bad. You're likely to escape with nothing worse than a sprinkling at the bottom of the final splashdown.

RED VS. BLUE

DUELING DRAGONS IS TWO ROLLER COASTERS in one. The rider sits in the belly of either the blue Ice Dragon or the red Fire Dragon, which duel it out through a series of corkscrews, inversions and hair-raising near misses. Each dragon provides thrills aplenty, and it's well worth your time to ride both. But if you must choose one, Ice earns the edge. It provides a more rough-and-tumble ride than Fire and will leave you feeling shaken and stirred.



Expect to be shaken up while riding Dueling Dragons.

THE CURE FOR WHAT ALES YOU.

THIRSTY FOR A BEER? TRY ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE'S own Dragon Scale Ale, the featured drink at the Alchemy Bar in The Lost Continent. Some might call it the perfect ending to a perfect day.

TAKING THE KIDS

ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE'S reputation as a thrill-ride paradise shouldn't discourage parents of young children. There's plenty to amuse the under-4-foot crowd. Here are a few insider's tips just for kids.

- In the Triceratops Encounter, a 24-foot-long, 10-foot-high triceratops moves, breathes, blinks and twitches in an amazingly lifelike manner. Kids should work their way through the crowd and get as close as possible to the trainer, who occasionally grabs young folks and lets them pet the dinosaur. Really lucky kids may even get sneezed on (it seems the beast has a bit of a head cold).
- Unless you've got time to kill, avoid the Pteranodon Flyers. The dinosaur-shaped gliders look enticing, but a typical 75-minute wait makes this tame 90-second ride one of the biggest disappointments in the park. The time is better spent in the fascinating Jurassic Park Discovery Center or the interactive Camp Jurassic area.
- If you can get your hands on it, read "The Cat in the Hat" before heading out to the park. The ride of the same name follows the story line of the book. Knowing the plot turns the characters in the ride—Sally and her brother; the anxious but well-meaning family fish; Thing One and Thing Two; and, of course, the Cat in the Hat himself—into old friends.
- On the ride One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish, riders steer fish-shaped cars up and down, trying to avoid occasional water jets as they go. Listen closely to the special rhyme that plays throughout the ride. It contains clues that will help you stay dry.
- Kids too young to ride the turbulent Bilge-Rat Barges can still get in on the action. Water cannons on the deck of Popeye's Boat are aimed squarely at the barges passing below. Drenching a parent or sibling might be just the ticket for turning those left-behind tears into squeals of joy.