

= Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin =

Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin is a theme area at SeaWorld Orlando headlined by a first @-@ of @-@ its @-@ kind motion @-@ based , trackless dark ride . The attraction opened on May 24 , 2013 as the largest attraction at any SeaWorld Entertainment theme park . The area was generally well received by critics and the public at its opening .

= = History = =

= = = Rumors and announcement = = =

In August and September 2011 , SeaWorld Entertainment filed trademarks for " Antarctica " to be used for a theme area , and " Empire of the Penguins " to be used for an amusement ride . This led to rumors that SeaWorld Orlando would replace its " Penguin Encounter " exhibit with a dark ride . A report by the Orlando Sentinel in October 2011 confirmed these plans , citing " government filings and interviews with people familiar with various elements " . At the time , SeaWorld Orlando would not publicly reveal its plans .

On November 8 , 2011 SeaWorld Orlando announced a multi @-@ year expansion plan featuring the opening of Turtle Trek in 2012 and " Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin " in 2013 . Although details of the ride were not released , creative director Brian Morrow said that the ride would be the coldest attraction in the world and would follow the journey of a tiny penguin . On April 24 , 2012 , the park revealed further details about the attraction : guests would ride in eight @-@ person vehicles , choosing among two levels of intensity (" Mild " or " Wild ") . The surrounding area would also feature a new penguin habitat , restaurant and store .

= = = Construction = = =

To allow construction to begin , SeaWorld Orlando closed Penguin Encounter , Friends of the Wild and the Antarctic Market Restaurant on January 3 , 2012 . The former attractions were demolished during the first half of 2012 , with vertical construction beginning in July . Construction continued into 2013 , with construction walls coming down one week before the attraction 's opening . The cost of the attraction was reported to be in excess of \$ 40 million .

= = = Opening = = =

On February 19 , 2013 , SeaWorld Orlando announced that " Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin " would open on May 24 . Unlike many attractions , the ride had no soft opening period ; instead , it was open to a select number of employees and their families , travel media and bloggers before its public opening .

On May 24 , 2013 , SeaWorld Orlando opened Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin to the public . The opening drew thousands of guests to the ride , with some waiting more than four hours to board . On May 25 , one of the penguins escaped the open @-@ air enclosure by leaping out of the water and into the public viewing area ; it was returned to the exhibit unharmed .

= = Ride experience and exhibit = =

Guests enter the queue from the Antarctica @-@ themed area of the park . Large groups of riders are admitted into a pre @-@ show room , where multiple projections of an Antarctic landscape are blended with 3D exhibits . In a narrated video , guests are introduced to a gentoo penguin colony in Antarctica featuring a newborn penguin named Puck . After the pre @-@ show guests follow a path to a junction , where they choose a " mild " or " wild " ride . They are then divided into groups of eight riders before boarding the ride vehicles at one of four stations . Riders are seated in two rows

of four , and restrained by lap bars .

When the riders have boarded , the vehicle is dispatched . It travels around an indoor Antarctic environment , spinning to view a variety of scenery and projection screens . The story which began in the pre @-@ show continues , with Puck venturing out into the sea . When he is underwater , Puck is chased by a leopard seal before resurfacing on land . The ride 's theme song ? " Antarctica : One World , One Family " by Lauren Alaina ? is then played as guests watch a live penguin habitat behind glass before the vehicles return to a four @-@ platform unloading station .

Guests disembark in an open @-@ air penguin habitat with an air temperature of approximately 30 ° F (? 1 ° C) . This exhibit has minimal barriers between guests and inhabitants , and is designed so guests can hear sounds made by the penguins .

A total of 245 penguins live in the exhibit ; species include gentoo , king , Adélie and rockhopper penguins . Lighting in the exhibit allows the park to control the seasons for the penguins . A 20 @-@ foot (6 @.@ 1 m) glass window allows guests to see them in their 45 ° F (7 ° C) pool from an underwater viewing area . The entire experience takes about 25 minutes . To minimise odors in the open @-@ air environment , SeaWorld staff clean the exhibit several times daily and replace the 20 @,@ 000 pounds (9 @,@ 100 kg) of snow each day .

= = Theme area = =

The Antarctica @-@ themed area is spread across 4 acres (1 @.@ 6 ha) inside SeaWorld Orlando . A 50 @-@ foot @-@ high (15 m) entrance archway is adjacent to the Sea Lion & Otter Theater , and a smaller entrance is near the Journey to Atlantis ride . In addition to the Empire of the Penguin , the theme area is home to several other attractions . A looping 45 @-@ minute soundtrack is played throughout the area . A " South Pole " is in the center of the area , and penguin carvings decorate the surrounding walls . The Expedition Cafe , South Pole Beverages and Glacial Collections sell food , drinks and souvenirs .

= = Production = =

= = = Ride system = = =

Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin features a prototype , motion @-@ based , trackless dark @-@ ride system by Oceaneering International , producer of ride systems for The Amazing Adventures of Spider @-@ Man , Transformers : The Ride , and The Curse of DarKastle . The ride is the first of its kind in the world .

When Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin was announced in November 2011 , Oceaneering had already developed a working prototype of the ride vehicle . The first concept art for the attraction was released in April 2012 : a circular ride vehicle , seating eight riders in two rows of four . On May 11 , 2012 Oceaneering filed a patent application for the ride 's technology . At the November 2012 IAAPA Attractions Expo , SeaWorld Orlando and Oceaneering International revealed the trackless , motion simulator @-@ based ride vehicle to the public .

Each battery @-@ powered vehicle , or AGV , is made up of two platforms . Riders sit on the upper platform , which provides three degrees of freedom . A lower platform provides omnidirectional lateral movement . Unlike previous ride designs , the trackless system and the wheel and motor configurations allow movements diagonal to a rider 's perspective . The vehicles use a dead reckoning system developed by Frog AGV to navigate their way through the environment , allowing a vehicle to cross another 's path . Each vehicle features a built @-@ in controller , which wirelessly communicates with a central ride @-@ system controller . Movement commands are issued by the ride @-@ system controller , and executed by the vehicles ' controllers . A specially @-@ designed battery and charge system allow the vehicles to be quickly charged while docked at the loading and unloading platforms .

= = = Marketing = = =

SeaWorld Orlando announced Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin as part of the park 's largest expansion thus far . With 18 months between its announcement and its opening , the park wished to generate demand for the ride . As part of this campaign , SeaWorld released a promotional video in July 2012 and a series of videos (Behind the Freeze) featuring creative director Brian Morrow .

= = Reception = =

Dewayne Bevil of the Orlando Sentinel said that " the hottest attraction in Central Florida theme parks this week is also the coldest . " Bevil interviewed several park guests ; comments included " I thought it [the ride] was really cool " and " it 's beautiful " , and some described it as better than the attractions it replaced . Barbara Nefer of Examiner.com said that guests would love Puck , the ride 's central character . She preferred the wild version of the ride , describing it as " actually still very family friendly " and saying that the exhibit was a " huge highlight " of the attraction . Robert Niles of Theme Park Insider agreed that the highlight of the attraction was the penguin exhibit . Niles described the dispatch procedure as crucial to the ride : " if SeaWorld can dispatch a quartet of ride vehicles every minute or so , as designed , fans will find this a fun ride " . In a later article Niles highlighted some guests ' criticisms of the ride , describing it as " lacking an engaging story and not delivering enough on @-@ ride views of the attraction 's stars -- SeaWorld 's penguins " . However , he argues that SeaWorld 's promotions were too photorealistic creating " expectations for an experience that the ride did not deliver , perhaps setting up many of those visitors for disappointment " .

Lawrence Goldsmith of the Daily Mirror and Susan and Simon Veness of the Daily Mail , shared the sentiment of other reviewers : the penguins are the stars of the show . Goldsmith said that the ride options (mild or wild) allowed everyone , from children to thrill @-@ seekers , to " enjoy the experience equally " . Susan and Simon Veness described the ride section as thrilling , calling it " one of the highlights " of the attraction . Arthur Levine of About.com gave the ride three out of five stars . Levine gave this moderate rating because he felt conflicted : the animations themselves were good , but the overall storyline was sparse ; the ride system was intriguing , yet it was under utilised . He concluded by applauding " SeaWorld for taking the bold initiative to build a major @-@ league attraction " , but stated " the ride feels rushed and too short " .

From a commercial perspective , the opening day of the area saw guests waiting in line for more than four hours to experience the flagship attraction ; SeaWorld had estimated queues of approximately half that time . Dennis Spiegel of consulting firm International Theme Park Services expected attendance to increase between five and ten percent . Spiegel speculated that this rise would be higher than if a single attraction were unveiled ; however , it would be less than the 36 @-@ percent increase for Islands of Adventure after the opening of The Wizarding World of Harry Potter .

In November 2013 , Oceaneering won a Thea Award from the Themed Entertainment Association for outstanding themed entertainment and experience design , for the trackless ride system developed for Antarctica : Empire of the Penguin .