

**FLORIDA**

# Penguins march into Florida's SeaWorld Orlando

## Antarctica ride and habitat a cool addition to SeaWorld Orlando

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FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, JUNE 02, 2013 12:00 AM EDT

SeaWorld Orlando's new penguin habitat

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**SeaWorld Orlando's new penguin ride and habitat: Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin teaches kids about the marine birds. SEAWORLD ORLANDO PHOTO**

It was a steamy day in May when SeaWorld launched its coolest Florida attraction.

After more than two years planning and preparing, SeaWorld Orlando finally debuted Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin on May 24 -- a super-cool new ride and habitat for 200-plus penguins that resembles the Southern Hemisphere's Continent of Antarctica, including icebergs, high winds and snow caps.

It's Orlando's coldest theme park attraction to date -- no easy feat considering central Florida's penchant for palm trees and plus-30-C temperatures.

A gentle, all-family ride, Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin is the latest attraction to open at SeaWorld Orlando since TurtleTrek debuted in 2012.

In what's labelled "a first of its kind," riders enter through a series of chambers, each with a lower temperature and humidity level than the one before it. The system is designed to acclimatize guests gradually, as well as to cool and de-mist the air brought in with them.

Guests are then introduced to Puck, a newborn penguin chick, whom they follow on robotic mobile simulators. The cars

spin, wobble and shake as they follow Puck's journey across Antarctica in search of shelter and safety from vicious predators.

The ride is the creation of Brian Morrow, SeaWorld's director of creative development, who calls it "highly intelligent and highly unpredictable."

"When our little hero penguin learns to waddle and slide, we'll feel what it's like as the car moves and reacts to the story-line. When he takes his first swim or barely escapes danger, our guests will feel as if they're right there with him," Morrow says.

While the ride itself has two options: Mild and wild, creators of Antarctica have gone a long way to ensure it's family friendly. Even the wild setting is tame in comparison to rides at other theme parks. Indeed, there are more extreme rides at SeaWorld Orlando, too.

More thrilling than the ride itself, however, is the stuff that comes after. Antarctica's mobile simulator delivers riders to a sub-zero penguin habitat that's truly impressive. A cavern filled with ice, water and snow houses 250 penguins from four different species: Adelle, gentoo, king and rockhopper. Guests are invited to linger in this chilly chamber, watching the goofy penguins wobble and play. They hop into icy pools and swim like torpedoes -- this is Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin's most fascinating aspect.

Even Jack Hanna is impressed. As a celebrity animal expert, host of TV's Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures and favourite guest of David Letterman, Hanna was present at the May opening to check it out.

"I wanted to see what it's like," he says. "I heard about this new penguin thing and I had to come here and see it for myself."

Hanna, who's visited penguins in the real Antarctica three times, gave SeaWorld's simulated habitat thumbs up, calling its creators "innovators" and praising the attraction's subtle educational aspects.

"Everybody can't go to the Antarctic," he says. "That's why I'd encourage parents to bring their kids here (to SeaWorld Orlando). These animals aren't going to make it unless people see them, and love them and understand them. (Children) have to experience what it's like down there, and they have to have fun doing it."

Kid-friendly educational aspects of Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin also include interactive touch screens that explain penguin life, talks with SeaWorld's penguin educators, and an underwater viewing theatre from which to view penguins' swimming prowess -- all of it makes the attraction worth a visit.

SeaWorld ranks among the world's best at making marine life a fun, memorable, family learning experience. Lifestyles and habitats of sea turtles, whales, dolphins, manta rays and sharks are all showcased well as the Florida park.

"No one has ever experienced what we're bringing to Orlando this year," says Terry Prather, SeaWorld Orlando president, of the Antarctica opening.

"The first-of-its-kind ride, the cold, the wind, the thrills and danger of Antarctica, coupled with getting up close to penguins in their freezing world is something only SeaWorld can do."

### **Antarctica's penguins**

Here are some facts revealed at SeaWorld Orlando's New Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin:

- The real Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, highest and driest place on the planet.
- A penguin's blubber provides insulation against the cold, and their feathers act like shingles on a roof, overlapping to create a nearly impenetrable barrier to wind and water.
- Penguins dive up to 450 times per day to find food -- their favourites? Herring and capelin.
- Antarctica's ice sheet is the biggest chunk of ice around. Its thickest area is nearly 4,755-metres deep, nearly as deep as

the highest peak in the Alps.

-- Approximately 70% of the world's supply of freshwater is stored in Antarctica. However, some parts of the continent haven't seen a raindrop or snowflake in more than two million years.

**Other must-sees at SeaWorld Orlando:**

-- TurtleTrek: A 3-D, 360-degree film that follows the path of a sea turtle from birth on a beach to deep water and adulthood.

-- Shark Encounter: Underwater, closeup views of sharks and frightening sawfish.

-- Stingray Lagoon: Opportunities to pet and interact with stingrays.

-- One Ocean: A highly-energetic musical show featuring whales, including Shamu.

-- Blue Horizons: Dolphins and tropical birds interact with divers, dancers and trapeze artists.