

*Published by the Urban Spa as part of a Blog Series re: our Team Trip to Orlando, FL.*

Woke up bright and early on day two of our Orlando trip, grabbed a little breakfast and each of our favourite forms of caffeine, then hit the road for our first Theme Park day! We arrived at Universal Studios just before rope drop on what in photos appears to be a gorgeous Florida day, but in reality was the coldest day of the year.

It was about 3 degrees when this group shot was taken in front of the iconic Universal Studios globe. Note the jackets, long pants and occasional scarf. Oh, and the sandals (Kerri was obviously dressing for the weather she was hoping for). Only reached a high of about 12 degrees, but compared to the ice storms we were hearing about back at home, this was paradise!

Shortly after the park opened, our team broke off into smaller parties with like-minded goals for this Theme Park day: the adrenaline junkies who upgraded to fast-passes, the semi-junkie, semi-meanders who had a flexible but driven plan to hit up the main attractions and then wander around, the meanderers who wanted to soak up the sights and/or fully immerse themselves in the Wizarding World, then check out the rest of the park, and the lone wolf (Cole) who wandered off and took the most selfies with park characters out of all of us combined.

Aside from those in the group who had already been to the Theme Park Capital of the World, many of us hadn't really experienced a one before. We might have been familiar with Canada's Wonderland, but we were in a whole new world (or worlds) now. Universal Studios provides a fully immersive experience; as you travel through the different sections of the park, you leave the real world behind and find yourself in places you've only imagined or seen in movies/TV, such as a film studio backlot someplace in Hollywood or cartoonily-familiar Springfield, USA, home of *The Simpsons*.

There happens to be a *Hello Kitty* shop close to the entrance of Universal Studios and coincidentally, there also just so happens to be *Hello Kitty's* biggest fan in the Urban Spa Team. Samantha was positively thrilled start the day by meeting her idol.

Carry on down the road a bit and you find yourself in London, England, where right around the corner from Kings Cross Station you spot the secret entrance to Diagon Alley.... On the other side of the brick archway, everything — and I mean *EVERYTHING* — changes.

You forget you're in a Theme Park, it's all so real. It was a truly remarkable experience, being surrounded by what could only be described as *magic*. One could spend a full day in this section of the park alone and each in moment gaze upon yet another intricate detail that truly brought the place to life. Jennifer, an Esthetician at the Urban Spa, spent a lot of time photographing these details throughout her visit and says they were her favourite part of the day.

Sarah's favourite moment? That would be her first breath inside of the Wizarding World. It took us a minute before we all caught her shedding tears of joy as she took it all in.

Sarah helped coordinate this trip with our fearless leader Kerri, and for every activity and surprise they planned for us, they must have got satisfaction ten-fold. You could literally see this immense sense of accomplishment wash over their faces as all of their hard work was finally coming to fruition. Tye also tends to jump up and down.

Sarah's second favourite moment? When she realized a bit too far into the immersive line-up exactly how intense the "*Escape From Gringotts*" ride was, knowing that RMT Stuart was not a fan of thrill rides. He rode with us anyway and was a bonafide ride junkie by the end of the day!

Some in the group chose to upgrade their park tickets to include access to Islands of Adventure next door to Universal Studios, while some had won the upgrade (Team C again!). This gave us a ticket on the Hogwarts Express, which departed from Kings Cross and delivered its passengers into Hogsmeade Village. Aside from being a clever mode of transportation between parks, the train was also an immersive and thrilling experience.

Once in Hogsmeade, you can't help but notice Hogwarts castle towering in the distance: absolutely breathtaking. Inside, no a single detail was spared. As you wait in line for the ride, you are treated to a tour of the castle, through classrooms and common rooms, past winding staircases, through Dumbledore's office and even past the Sorting Hat. And the ride at the end of the tour? My own personal favourite part of the day. I rode it twice!

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the park, memories and inside jokes are being made as our adrenaline junkies, namely, Kerri, JG, Mike and Madison, are fast-tracking from thrill-ride to thrill-ride. One stand out moment came with this beast of a roller coaster in Marvel Superhero Island... THE INCREDIBLE HULK. The ride starts out by accelerating to 40 mph (64 km/h) in approximately two-seconds and launching its passengers into a series of twists, turns and loops that made Spa handyman (and all-around laugh-riot) Mike *ROARRRR* in the HULK's signature fashion.

Something truly remarkable and seriously weird happened to our RMT Cole while wandering around Universal Studios alone; he met Doc Brown of *Back To The Future* fame who gave him a message from the future! After posing for a photo together, the Doc had to run, but before he did, he told Cole to 'have fun sky-diving!' Cole didn't think much of it until later that night when Kerri and Sarah were announcing the next morning's surprise excursion: a trip to iFly Orlando for a bit of INDOOR SKYDIVING!

More on that to come...

Mélanie

On behalf of The Urban Spa