Walt Disney World News

“It’s Tough to be a Bug!” Even at Disney’s Animal Kingdom

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — They outnumber humans 200 million to one. They’ve lived on Earth more than 300 million years. They comprise 80 percent of the animal kingdom, so you’d think the numbers would count for something.

Not so, says the army of insects that spins the yarn “It’s Tough to be a Bug!” inside the 430-seat Tree of Life theater at Disney’s Animal Kingdom. The stinging truth: Bugs get no respect. The inside buzz: You’ll never look at insects the same way after hearing their tale.

“It’s Tough to be a Bug!” comes to startling life through 3-D animation, special effects and Audio-Animatronics characters. Finding The Tree of Life theater is part of the adventure.

After wending their way along the lushly planted paths surrounding the park’s majestic icon, Disney guests pass through an entrance into the tree’s massive trunk. Once inside, they circumvent the tree’s gnarled roots while awaiting entry to the theater. Famous cinema posters of the bug world entertain: “A Stinkbug Named Desire,” “Web Side Story,” “Beauty and the Bee” and “My Fair Lady Bug.”

Opera glasses aren’t required, but guests do receive a pair of bug glasses for a better look at the world “as a bug sees it.”

Moving inside the theater, guests get comfortable on custom log seating while admiring the theater’s tangled-root architecture and classic vine-draped ceiling. The “orchestra” is tuning up with a cacophony of insect sounds while a familiar buzzing sound emanates from inside the “wasp nest projection booth.”

As the house lights come on, an announcer reminds the audience to refrain from buzzing, chirping and stinging throughout the presentation. Oh, and by the way, no pollinating, either!

The spotlight finds the show’s “master of ceremonies,” Flik from the Disney film “A Bug’s Life,” who urges guests to put on their special “bug-eyes,” then dubs all audience members “honorary bugs.”

With a cast of millions of the most adaptable creatures on Earth, the show begins. Butterflies, bees and dragonflies flutter into position. A tarantula threatens. Our friend, the ant, explains:

“Take it from me, Flik, it’s tough to be a bug. That’s why we’ve developed some amazing survival techniques. For instance, deep in the jungles of South America, there’s a bug — well, technically he’s an arachnid, you see . . .”

Assisted by a pair of acorn weevils brandishing a sling shot, Chili the tarantula demonstrates his talent for throwing poison quills with deadly accuracy at a series of airborne acorns. Guests duck, jump and squeal as they feel the “whoosh” of the flying quills. Soon, the acorn antics spin out of control and Chili chases a wise-guy weevil into the wings.

Next, an acid-spraying soldier termite, known as the “termite-ator,” defends his mound by spraying intruders. Says Flik, “he’s buff, he’s ready and he’s . . . Whoa! and he is ruining our set!” The audience shrieks in disbelief as they, too, are hit with the “lethal” spray.

The lights, camera, action don’t stop here. The stinkbug soloist, Claire DeRoom, astonishes the audience with a marvelously malodorous performance. Her star turn, however, is soon overshadowed by Hopper, the villainous grasshopper from “A Bug’s Life.”

What bugs him most: humans’ insect intolerance. His mission: to wipe out the entire audience of honorary bugs. A swarm of wasps flies in with a “Knock ‘Em Dead” bug extermination company brochure and an old black-and-white sci-fi montage of humans trying to fight off giant bugs.

“You guys only see us as monsters!” he asserts from his perch above the audience. ” . . . Maybe it’s time you ‘honorary bugs’ got a taste of your own medicine!”

Soon, the audience faces a plethora of pesky perils: the sweeping swat of a giant flyswatter, the blinding fog of a giant can of “Bug Doom” spray and the prickly threat of a hornet squadron. Guests have little time to contemplate the stinging possibilities before the attack is launched.

The insect infantry is gleeful, shouting: “It’s a hit! Yahoo!” The audience barely recovers before a platoon of rappelling spiders descends above them.

Their fearless leader declares, “Bug bombs, zappers, sticky little motels . . . nothing can stop us . . .”

Well, almost nothing.

The ending is a surprise, of course, and the orchestra never misses a beat as Flik leads the bug cast in the grand, Busby Berkely-style finale.

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