

# A KRUSTY EXPERIENCE

• *The Simpsons Ride at Universal Studios Florida and Universal Studios Hollywood*



by Brian Szaks

The Simpson family hasn't exactly been known for flawless family vacations. It seems that every time Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie embark on a trip, we can expect something to go wrong. In fact, the family has never visited a theme park without causing mayhem in one form or another.

In the past, the family has triggered human-killing parade robots with the flash of a camera at Itchy and Scratchy Land, Homer has had his one-too-many-donuts stomach stuck in the H2WHOA! waterslide at Mt. Splashmore Water Park, and even sweet innocent Lisa has gone on a drunk rampage through Duff Gardens after drinking the water from "Little Land of Duff" ride. Viewers of *The Simpsons* TV episodes can be assured that the yellow (or canary and goldenrod) clan of five will be experiencing just under 30 minutes of comedy, action and mayhem.

These factors made the concept of The Simpsons Ride a natural fit for both Universal Studios Orlando and Universal Studios Hollywood. Of course, being a great fit does not mean a simple task. Universal Creative had to design and construct a ride that would not only fit inside of a preexisting ride building, but would also fit the brand: the overall theme and culture of *The Simpsons*.

Throughout the 1990s and well into the 2000s, the ride buildings on both coasts were occupied by the Back to the Future – the Ride simulator attractions. But in 2007, Universal Creative decided that Doc Brown had flown his last DeLorean, and it was time for something fresh... and yellow. Universal's project team worked closely with vendors to ensure that every aspect

of the ride would be refreshed or new. They also applied green-building values through such measures as utilizing some 2,500 LED lights to cut power usage by almost 75%.

The Simpsons Ride is a perfect homage to everything "D'oh!" The ride sits within its own unique environment: Krustyland theme park. It is ostensibly owned by Krusty the Clown, who has a knack for "sparing all expenses," and has, as the story goes, opened his own property adjacent to Universal Studios. Guests are treated to a facade that boasts a faux roller coaster and themed carny games, and even a giant Krusty head that guests walk through.

The queue, which leads guests to three different levels, houses monitors that play a mixture of classic *Simpsons* clips as well as new material, including a fantastic short featuring Doc Brown that explains why Krusty built his theme park

where Back to the Future – the Ride once stood. Inside the show building is a "midway" lined with carnival booths manned by Springfield's "finest" residents, ranging from Patty and Selma to Hans Moleman. Here, character videos seem to interact with each other creating a witty and entertaining banter.

A large monitor overhead begins the first pre-show, drawing guests further into the storyline and evoking a sense of escapism into the *Simpsons* realm. Here guests learn that Sideshow Bob has snuck into Krustyland in another attempt to kill Bart (he has had numerous failed attempts in the past) and the guests have been invited to ride Krusty's new "thrill-tacular" ride. Breaking up into groups of six, guests are led into a second pre-show room where they learn more about the ride, are pulled further into the story and watch a humorous safety video featuring Itchy and Scratchy.



The Simpsons Ride at Universal Studios Hollywood



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Once the attraction doors open, guests filter into the loading area for the main show, designed to look like a station for a classic dark ride. The cars, complete with faux dark-ride guide wheels on the back, are somewhat reminiscent of the original Back to the Future ride with their over the head “gull-wing” doors. Each car has 12 speakers that utilize an impressive 6.1 surround sound system. Those, together with the 90 other speakers in the dome (including subwoofers) all assist in transporting riders into Springfield.

As the cars begin to rise nine feet on their scissor-lift motion based platform, placing visitors inside the vast dome screen, the video starts and they are plunged into the animated world that literally surrounds them. Disbelief is readily suspended and from that moment on, the ride is a fastpaced, laugh-a-second romp through Krustyland as Sideshow Bob chases after Bart as the guests follow along. Hidden jokes, nods to the past and light-hearted jabs at numerous other theme park attractions and at Universal itself, are assisted with water squirts, flashes of light and a surprisingly effective baby powder scent. The attraction leaves guests with a reminder why *The Simpsons* is still going strong as the longest running sitcom after 20 years, why motion simulators are still effective and why details and creativity are essential to the creation of a successful immersive and compelling experience.



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