



Exploration Shuttle Excursion: Mariana Trench

The Story

Guests board the SS AL-G, where they are briefed by Captain Finn about the safety precautions for their impending journey. The Captain speaks briefly about the “Chum Bucket” that will carry the guests to the deepest part of the ocean: Marianas Trench. The Captain makes everyone a certified explorer, since for insurance purposes, they cannot be considered an inner space tourist. After the oath, guests board the XS-1 (Exploration Shuttle 1) and are turned over to the mission commander, Dr. Sally Shell. From here the attraction becomes a somewhat interactive motion simulator that takes guests deep into the ocean to reveal mysteries of something we know so little about: our oceans’ depths. Along the way guests not only experience the depth at which light disappears, but also bioluminescence. Some of the primary animal’s guests view are six-gilled sharks, anglerfish, coelacanth, gulper eel, and a giant squid. This encounter leads to a brief appearance of a young sperm whale which saves the XS-1 from doom when it grabs the squid as a quick meal. A small crack in the glass and the gentle spraying of water on the guests cause the Captain to call off any further diving and the vessel immediately returns to the surface.

The Layers

The attraction vehicle is not only a simulator, but has an extra layer built into the front dome which will have various types of bubbles at different times during the attraction. For instance, numerous larger bubbles while entering the ocean, and smaller less frequent bubbles while submersing or slowing to observe sea life. The outer part of the dome is a screen that shows the movie of what the guests are experiencing.

There are several small details included that can make all the difference within the experience and not overshadow the message about learning about something that makes up 83% of our world, yet we know more about the surface of Mars. For one, the film shown during the experience changes from daytime to nighttime to match the real world outside the venue (e.g., aquarium, zoo, theme park). Also, an ensign mentions a storm coming in the direction of the mission. The Captain says how the storms will not affect the guests, however it might make it difficult to bring the guests aboard the ship if the waves are too heavy. The storm arriving and affecting the surface will be mentioned again when the Captain calls off the mission. These details add to the suspension of disbelief.

Upon entry to the show building, guests find themselves in the engine room of a ship. There they wait until they are grouped to enter the mission preparation room, where the Captain briefs them and explains the safety procedures. From there they enter the XS-1 attraction simulator. Upon completion of the journey, guests exit the opposite side from which they entered, allowing for the efficient loading of the next group of explorers.

Depending on budget and customer preferences, there are many layers that can be added to the attraction. For instance, the Captain and Dr. Shell will be on video screens. If desired, the Captain can be represented by an audio animatronic.

Another “plussing” option would be to have more than one simulator. This might not work for somewhere such as Birch Aquarium at Scripps in San Diego, however it might be something that is necessary for a large aquarium such as the Georgia Aquarium.

A completely different “plussing” option for a facility such as the Sea Worlds around the world might be to have this attraction in a show building as a trackless ride system. This way it could still be a similar story but would be able to separate itself from its simulator cousins, and provide the guest throughput that is a must for a larger venue.

The Idea

The idea of this attraction is to combine a message of responsibility with the thrill of adventure. The aim is to inspire guests to explore the wonders of our oceans any way they can.