

## THE ULTIMATE THRILL - RIDE NIAGARA

Review by R. Esparrago

Visiting friends who live in Kenmore (near Buffalo), New York, or just finished eating lunch in the Hard Rock Cafe in the Toronto SkyDome Stadium? Well, if you have the time, drive to the Canadian side of Niagara Falls and nab a ride on the virtual simulator called The Ultimate Thrill - Ride Niagara. The virtual voyage simulates a futuristic shuttle system that transports vehicles below the Niagara River and up and over the Falls.

The adventure starts by taking the group into the "Panorama Theatre" where a movie discussing the history and perils of Niagara Falls is presented on an ultrawide screen. The legend of Lelawala is also presented, about the Native American woman who plunged into the Falls and forever became the famous "Maid of the Mists". This feature preps the audience for the ride ahead.

The group is then sent to the Transporter Room, a room made to look and simulate a large elevator dropping 2,000 feet underground to these "abandoned hydro tunnels". We are then directed to enter four shuttle vehicles, called "Drax E-1000", where we sit in rows in front of a small movie screen meant to be the front window of the shuttle.

A "tourist guide" appears on the screen and discusses the safety requirements necessary for the treacherous waters ahead and then the ride begins. We all laughed when a technician suddenly came up and wiped our virtual window. The Drax E-1000 then hummed to life and we began our simulated ride through the hydro tunnels. The shuttle took us beneath the Niagara River downriver from the Falls. The tunnel emerged above and upriver from Niagara Falls and our vehicle popped out of the tunnel and into the river.

Inside, we were all shaken about by the gyrations of the Drax E-1000 as it churned through the white water rapids. We screamed as we plunged over the great roaring Horseshoe Falls portion of Niagara and into the river. Finally, we felt ourselves being lifted by a crane by a comedic crew only to have them accidentally drop us back into the drink. We are then sucked into the famous Whirlpool downriver from the falls.

The Drax E-1000 is roiling all about when it finally stabilized and the great noise of water rushing all about us is silenced. Out of the darkness of the water, a vision of Lelawala, the Maid of the Mists, appeared before us and implores the mischievous gods of the Thundering Waters (Niagara) to release us from their grasp. The very next instant - we found ourselves back inside the tunnel with the Drax side doors opening to let us out. It was very amusing to find that the shuttles were dripping wet - as if we really had just emerged from the waters of Niagara!

All in all, a very fun experience although I did not like the small front screen in front of the shuttle. I enjoyed the little touches - the elevator ride, the water on the shuttles afterwards, and the technician wiping the front window at the start. Very good integration of sights, sounds, and vehicle movements by the Ride Niagara computer program. Definitely a recommendation if you want to simulate the experience of going over the Falls without having to actually get inside a wooden barrel and risking life and limb!

“Ride Niagara - The Ultimate Thrill” is located on 5755 River Road, Niagara Falls, Canada, directly below the Rainbow Bridge that connects the Canadian and American sides.

By the way, I was so unhappy with the eentsy weentsy screen that we immediately hiked uphill to the Imax® Theatre on Buchanan Avenue near the famous Skylon Tower in order to watch “Niagara: Miracles, Myths, and Magic”. That screen is ten times the size of a 35mm screen and over six stories high!

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