Feelings of Comfort
at the
Walt Disney World.
Theme Parks

An Honors Thesis
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by
Brandon Smith

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Barb Stedman

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

For the past 30 years Walt Disney World has been entertaining guests like no other vacation destination on the planet. Certain qualities, achievements and mindsets have made the Walt Disney World Resort a highly successful development for the Walt Disney Company.

Reasons exist for the success of the Walt Disney World theme parks. In general, the theme parks have been designed to make guests feel comfortable. "Feelings of Comfort at the Walt Disney World Resort" takes a closer look at several elements that comprise this overall feeling of comfort. Everything from landscaping and storytelling to synergy and terminology contribute to a park guest's positive experience.

Through words, pictures, sounds and interactivity, "Feelings of Comfort at the Walt Disney World Resort" will provide a better understanding of what makes the Florida vacation destination such a success.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my thesis advisor Dr. Barb Stedman for her patience in this long-distance partnership. Her willingness to oversee my progress on this project from over 1000 miles away was a tremendous undertaking that should be commended! She kept me grounded to reality while the Disney “magic” attempted to overwhelm my thoughts.

Additional recognition should be given to all of the people that kept me focused while spending time in Florida. My three roommates and all of my Disney co-workers were wonderful people to spend six months with and they have provided a wealth of ideas for this project...even if they didn’t realize at the time that their offhand comments would manifest into great ideas.

Finally, generous thanks is due to Dr. Joe Misiewicz for convincing me that I could study, work and graduate on time while living in Florida. When it seemed like making a six-month trek south would result in an extra semester of school, he was quick to help me figure out a way to get the most out of my internship.
Reflections

Three years ago an idea popped into my mind that I found very worthy of pursuit: working at the Walt Disney World Resort would be a very interesting and fun experience. The summer of 1999 found me working a river-raft attraction in Disney's Animal Kingdom, and the spring of 2001 had me working full-time on a prime time ABC concert special broadcast from Walt Disney World.

Working and living at the Walt Disney World Resort sparked my interest in the creation of the parks and the reasons for their success. I began to wonder why guests, myself included, have such fond memories of Disney World and continue to visit year after year. Through books and personal exploration I was able to examine the parks more closely during the summer of 1999, but the exploration was leisurely and undocumented. Therefore, when the opportunity arose to study and work in Disney World during the spring of 2001 I thought it a perfect opportunity to record my observations and experiences at the Resort.

After months of studying and experiencing Disney World I have formulated some firm ideas regarding the many Feelings of Comfort found within each of the four theme parks. The first steps in creating these ideas began with childhood memories and the experiences from two years prior. Then, venturing into the park, closer observation of guest reaction, architectural design, crowd control, landscaping, and environments led to a firming up of these ideas. A journey into the written materials regarding the Disney theme parks added supporting information for these ideas and even sparked a few new ideas. Finally, having firmly shaped these ideas, I took them into the theme parks once again for a final test of accuracy.
The presentation of these ideas in a multimedia CD format seemed appropriate for a discussion about the Walt Disney World Resort. Multimedia graphic content is different from a traditional text-on-paper approach and is much better suited to the non-traditional theme parks Disney has created. The combination of photo, story, music and interactivity is very similar to a day in a theme park: many elements uniting to create an overall product.

Spending time examining the Walt Disney theme parks has been a very enjoyable and eye-opening experience. Unfortunately, I can never again pass through the Disney turnstiles and look at the parks with awed eyes like a typical tourist. However, the incredible feats of Imagineering (Disney's term for the combination of imagination and engineering) take on much more significance to me now than they ever have before. The Feelings of Comfort in Disney theme parks is something people almost take for granted when in reality there is a tremendous amount taking place behind the scenes.
Works Cited


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