

Virtual Magic Kingdom: A Disney Feature

by Robin Krening-Capra, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Looking for a way to fill the void we all feel between Disney trips? Want to make new friends who love Disney as much as you do? Do you miss walking around the parks and visiting the lands?

Come on, we all know you are dreaming of that next Disney vacation. It's okay to admit that you are a true Disney addict and crave the sights, sounds, and smells of the parks. You can even admit to ordering the next planning DVD just so you can glimpse the parks.

Knowing we all suffer "park withdrawal," Disney has designed an online multiplayer game called Virtual Magic Kingdom, or VMK, to help fill the void. The game opened on May 23, 2005 and allows players of all ages to live the Disney magic from home. To play VMK, you create an account by submitting an e-mail address and picking a character name. Next, you choose your character's gender, hair style and color, facial features, and even its skin tone. Picking your first outfit is fun, with many wardrobe choices. My character can even wear glasses so she can see where she is going! Finally, you choose one of six rooms so you can design your own guest room.

Once your character is properly clothed, you enter the Virtual Magic Kingdom where you will be known as "Guest" until your character's name is approved. Upon entering VMK, you notice it's designed around the lands of the Disney parks, Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, Main Street, Adventureland, and Frontierland. It also has guest rooms. Players explore VMK by traveling via paths or the monorail, a journey that reminds you of the real parks.

Each land contains mini-games at which the player earns credits needed to purchase items from the inevitable Disney gift shop. Miss the Jungle Cruise? Visit the mini-game Jungle Cruise in Adventureland, where you will take pictures of animals with the virtual camera you bought at the virtual VMK Central. While you won't see Johnny Depp, you can play Pirates of the Caribbean and shoot cannonballs at opposing pirates. Is your dream to be the 1000th ghost in the Haunted Mansion? Play the Haunted Mansion game in Frontierland (there's no Liberty Square/New Orleans Square here) and vacuum ghosts to earn points. (This is my favorite game because I can always tell my husband that I am vacuuming -- he doesn't need to know I am vacuuming virtual ghosts!) You can even search for and take pictures of Hidden Mickeys while you

explore VMK.

VMK has Disney Characters who acknowledge you when you enter their rooms. The characters, such as the Yeti, Captain Blackheart, and the three Hitchhiking Ghosts, welcome you with their own little silly greetings. The Characters have even been known to wreak havoc by sending players on exciting treks through the Virtual Magic Kingdom.

It wouldn't be Disney without the gift shops, so of course these, too, can be found in VMK. Yes, you can make purchases of virtual clothes, furniture, posters, and pins! Players compete in mini-games, which award credits towards the purchases. Players can also visit Disney Characters for daily credits.

Your virtual purchases are used to clothe your character, decorate your guest rooms, and add to your pin collection. Miss purchasing clothing in a Disney shop? Have no fear; VMK sells virtual clothing items as well! There is a wide variety of everyday clothes, such as bottoms, tops, shoes, and hats. VMK will also sell special items, such as Princess dresses and crowns, space suits, diving helmets, Expedition Everest climbing gear, cowboy outfits, and Haunted Mansion suits, amongst other items. Often times the special clothing items are only sold for a short amount of time before they are pulled from the shelves, making them virtual collectors items.

There is a variety of items for furnishing your guest room, such as a thrones, rocking chairs, Madame Leota globes, posters, rugs, and water fountains. Players decorate their rooms to create a fun place to hang out with friends and play games. Awards are even given for best-decorated or themed rooms.

Pin collectors are not forgotten at VMK and pins can be purchased in shops or won in games. The pins reflect different Disney attractions and resorts. Special pins are awarded for finding Hidden Mickeys, discovering Disney Characters for the first time, or reaching a certain level in a mini-game.

My favorite pins are the Magic Pins, which allow players to briefly activate a special effect. With a double click of the mouse, a player can teleport, drive a car, or turn into a snowman, bat, or pirate. My favorite Magic Pin is the Dancing Inferno, which makes the player appear to be dancing in a ring of fire. Inferno is only given in staff games and is quite rare. When I won my Inferno, I was so excited I could barely type "thank you" to the staff member!

One of the goals Disney had when creating VMK was to draw people

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into the parks. By creating in-park quests, Disney hoped to lure the addicts from the virtual park to the real parks. In June 2005, both Disneyland and Walt Disney World opened up VMK Central. Here players explore the parks to complete in-park Quests. These treasure hunts send players through the parks in search of answers to questions about park attractions. To participate in the Quests, the player must download a Quest from the VMK web site before leaving home (Quest sheets are not given out at the parks) and exchange it for a Quest card at VMK Central. Once you correctly complete the Quest you are awarded cards that contain codes for virtual items.

Disney also encourages those of us who are addicted to VMK to make purchase in certain shops in the real parks. Buy candy and receive a card with a code for a Virtual Penny Press. Purchase a hat at a certain shop and earn virtual gold Mickey ears.

What do players do with the stuff they purchase or win? Trade! Players are able to trade items they no longer want for items they either collect or want for their virtual character. It can be exciting to finally trade for an item you have been looking for. Who needs baseball cards when you have virtual VMK items to trade?

The question many parents have when allowing their children to play VMK is whether it's safe or not. Rest assured VMK is very safe for players of all ages. VMK is monitored by staff members who can be identified by VMK_ or HOST_ in their names. Staff members not only host fun games and events, they are immediately available when a player calls for help. The staff members monitor conversations and will ban players who are not following the VMK values. Asking for personal information is not allowed and will get players banned. Community Members also help monitor the game. Most importantly, the VMK dictionary is quite limited and prevents players from using numbers and many words.

While designers of VMK haven't quite figured out how to get the smells of the parks to us through VMK, they have captured the magic for those of us who cannot get to the parks. VMK may have been designed with children as the focus; however, many of the friends I have met on VMK are adults and are fellow Disney addicts. Regardless of age, VMK allows the player to relive the magic of Disney.

My name is Robin, and I am a VMK addict!

About The Author: Robin is a PassPorter Message Board Guide and is addicted to Disney and VMK. She and her husband teach middle school in a suburb of Denver, Colorado.

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