

Grad Nites @ Disney: The Ultimate Graduation Party

by Dorie Haggerty, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Do you have a high school senior who will be graduating next year? Do you want to send them off in Disney style? Then Grad Nite is for you! We had the opportunity to attend Walt Disney World's Grad Nite 2006. The Magic Kingdom was turned into a party zone from 10:00 pm until 4:00 am and the party rocked!

Grad Nite is an event held every spring on select nights when the Magic Kingdom is reserved for the use of graduating seniors, attending as part of an organized group. But wait! It's not just for school groups. Grad Nite is for any youth group: Boy Scouts, church youth groups, and more! If your school is not participating, it is easy for any Group Leader to register a group and join in on the fun. Go to <http://www.disneyyouthgroups.com> to find out how to register and join one of the greatest events at Walt Disney World. As Group Leader, you arrange all transportation, tickets and chaperones.

We didn't know what to expect when we arrived at the Magic Kingdom around 9:45 pm. But in true Disney style, everything was planned to perfection. Upon arrival at the party, there are hundreds of cast members to direct you. Right outside the parking lot entrance gate (to the right), cast members will lead you down the road to your destination. Depending on your mode of transportation, you are guided to parking. We had a van and were sent to the handicapped parking at the Ticket and Transportation Center. Disney buses were waiting to take us to the Magic Kingdom.

At the entrance to the Magic Kingdom, security lines were set up. Be prepared - there is a dress code and thorough security checks including a bag and body check. They not only check your bag, they empty out your bag. Hand wands were used, shirts pulled out of pants, shoes checked. Despite the thorough checks, it only took about five minutes to gain entrance to the park.

The Group Leader has to register at the Chaperone Headquarters located at Tony's Town Square Restaurant. Cast members will take your cell phone number for emergencies. If you do not have a cell phone, they will give you a pager. If any member of your group is in trouble or needs you, a Disney cast member will call you.

Now the party begins! Most chaperones let the teens go explore on their own. We set a time and location to meet up for some of the special

events. By this time, we (the chaperones that is) were thirsty and Disney was kind enough to provide a complimentary chaperone lounge inside Tony's Town Square Restaurant. They had drinks (cans of soft drinks, coffee, tea, water) and snacks (popcorn, fresh fruit and cookies). A complimentary breakfast is also served for chaperones at the Crystal Palace. Beware, the breakfast closes early and fills up quickly. A good time to attend is around 1:30 am.

So what is there to do? Oh, not much. Just attractions, eating, dancing, fun zones, and fireworks! Most of the attractions are open and had a five to ten minute wait. Of course the longest line was Space Mountain! The arcade games were free, making the Tomorrowland Arcade a very popular place. A few restaurants are open; our group ate at Cosmic Ray's Starlight Cafe. And from the moment you enter Main Street to every nook and cranny of the park, there was music and dancing! A song would begin and about 90% of the teens would dance their way down the street.

The teens absolutely loved the special zones: Suds Foam Zone in Fantasyland (Yes, so many suds that the teens were soaked all the way through!); Dance Zone in Tomorrowland; and the Coca-Cola Interactive Zone in Adventureland (They had a basketball contest that drew a huge crowd!). There was also a Karaoke Party in Adventureland and the teens would line up to sing on a stage at Disney! The Galaxy Palace Theater was showing music videos and movies. At 12:30 am they showed "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe."

Our favorite part of the night was the Celebration in the Sky Fireworks. At 12 midnight, the show began. It is a fireworks dance to the top hits of today. It was spectacular!

To capture all the fun during Disney Grad Nite 2006, Disney had PhotoPass Photographers everywhere. They offered 50% discount on all 5x7 pictures. Now that's Disney service!

Characters in graduation dress were all around the park. Think your teen is too cool for characters? No way! They took pictures with all of the characters.

The biggest draw for the night was the group Simple Plan. At 1:45 am the front of Cinderella's Castle was filled with teens attending the concert. Chaperones were able to walk on just about any ride we wanted! Other groups performing various times throughout the party were Frankie J, Omarion, FeFe Dobson, and Teddy Geiger.

Our chaperones thought that the night would drag on, but it was so

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exciting and action-filled that we didn't even realize it was time to end! At 4:00 am, everything stopped. The music turned off all around the park and everyone was escorted out of the Magic Kingdom and led to the ferry boat. While we were inside the park having fun, all of the buses and other vehicles were moved into the Ticket and Transportation Center parking lot. As you exit the Ticket and Transportation Center, there are billboards with your school/group name and the location of your vehicle. You walk out to the parking lot to find it. Our bus was located in the Sleepy section of the lot. At about 4:20 am, you would think we would be sleepy, but nope - we had too much fun. Our teens were still smiling once we made it to our van.

And now it's all over, but the memories are priceless. When I ask them, "How was Grad Nite?" I get an instant smile and a twinkling eye. Yes! Disney has worked their magic!

Want to join the ultimate graduation party in 2007? Grad Nite 2007 dates have already been set. Don't miss out on the fun!

About The Author: Dorie Haggerty previously contributed an article in September 2004 chronicling her Grand Gathering to Walt Disney World. Oddly enough the contributor of the travel article for that issue was Joy Gray who contributed the above article about Bermuda! .

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