

Pleasure Island Today: The Changing Scene

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

There's one thing that's always constant at the Walt Disney World Resort and that's the fact that it's always changing. Even now, attractions that people love and hold dear are slated for major changes. Just think of the plans for the expansion of Fantasyland and what that will mean for the Toontown area of the Magic Kingdom.

One part of the World that is in the midst of massive changes is Pleasure Island at Downtown Disney. Until September 2008, it was the place to head to if you wanted an adult night out, packed with a wide variety of nightclubs. It was one of the only places that you could escape to where you knew the entertainment may not exactly be child-friendly. That was one of the great attractions to those who enjoyed Pleasure Island and I include my husband and myself in that group.

Sadly, while many of us loved our nights out there and behaved totally responsibly, it became apparent that not everyone did that. Disney's decision to close Pleasure Island didn't say anything along these lines, instead referring to the company's desire to "provide guests with new and exciting experiences" and the decision had been based on guest feedback. However, conversations we've had with Cast Members since the closure of Pleasure Island reveal that the complex did suffer from problems. We've heard stories of what's been described to us as an "unpleasant" atmosphere as a result of too much drinking and that was affecting the feel of Downtown Disney.

So what's happening to Pleasure Island now? Disney's says it will be, "an extraordinary mix of dining and shopping," a promise which didn't impress everyone, with some commenting that Downtown Disney is already packed with such things.

It was therefore with a bit of trepidation that we visited Pleasure Island on our last Disney vacation. It was certainly an odd feeling walking through the place on a Sunday morning. Even when the clubs were thriving, this would have been a quiet time to visit, but this time, it seemed almost spooky. I don't know what I was expecting, but as it's Disney, I think at the back of my mind, I thought we'd find an area that's almost complete. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

We entered from the side closest to Downtown Disney Marketplace, passing Fulton's Crab House and Portobello Restaurant, before entering Pleasure Island. Portobello was one of the first parts of Pleasure Island

to get a makeover, and very smart it now looks, too. There was certainly nothing wrong with how it looked before, but the mock brickwork on its exterior now is exceptionally striking.

The next thing you come across is Raglan Road, which has already become a firm favorite with many as a place to dine, offering Irish specialties in an authentic setting. As you round the corner, you can see the next change to the area, Sosa Cigars, and the view so far is a very classy and refined one.

However, carry on walking and the image changes completely to one that feels almost derelict and, to a certain extent, it is. The building formerly known as Mannequins Dance Palace, which used to play the latest dance music, is still there, complete with the entrance that the clubbers would have used. It looks exactly as it did when it was open, with the neon sign still in place, but obviously not illuminated. Right next door is another new addition, one of the most famous names in motorcycling, the Harley-Davidson merchandise shop.

Look to your right and you'll see what was once the Rock'n'Roll Beach Club, with facades once again still in place, but look to your left and it's a totally different story, with the newest restaurant to Pleasure Island, Paradiso 37, offering cuisine from North, Central, and South America and a selection of 37 tequilas, hence the name. The building is a mahogany one and with clean cut lines. It fits in remarkably well and it's the same story for Curl by Sammy Duval just opposite, a surf and skate shop that cuts a similar smart line. Next door to it is the former Comedy Warehouse building, now looking old and shabby by comparison to its newer neighbors. It looks as if it's just waiting to be torn down, making way for something new.

Walk up from Paradiso 37 and, further along on the same side of the walkway, you'll find the most beloved club of them all from Pleasure Island, the Adventurers' Club, which still lives on in the hearts of many Disney fans, ourselves included. As we walked past it, we couldn't help but think that nothing here has changed. It still looks ready to open for a fun night of madcap antics, but of course, it won't. Everything is still in place in terms of theming. I'm not just saying this because of the many wonderful nights we spent there, but it really does still feel like it could be part of the new Pleasure Island.

The same can't be said of the BET Soundstage Club next door, which just like the Comedy Warehouse, really looks like it's had its day and is ripe for replacing. Planet Hollywood, which was never entered directly from Pleasure Island itself still remains, an iconic sight as always, as does the nearby huge AMC cinema complex.

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The sad thing is the way that some of the nightclubs are still sitting there, with nothing happening to them. It's something you don't often come across at Disney. Even the latest announcements of additions and changes to Downtown Disney all seem to focus on the West Side area or the Marketplace, with the latest news for Pleasure Island only being upgrades to the entertainment system of the AMC Theaters.

For the foreseeable future, it seems that you will still be able to wander through Pleasure Island and get a glimpse into the past of what it once was. Although the future of the area is known, it's certainly slow to arrive and I look forward with interest to seeing what more shops and restaurants will be added in there to replace the now sad looking nightclubs that were once a great attraction for many.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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