

Mickey's Halloween Party 2012: Disneyland Special Event Review

by Brian Rawson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Halloween is one of my favorite holidays, especially when the celebration gets stretched out over several weeks.

My four-year-old daughter and I were visiting Disneyland for a week, and attended Mickey's Halloween Party in early October, 2012. Of course, we were there to have fun, but it was also interesting to compare this with Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party at Walt Disney World, which we experienced in September 2011 in Magic Kingdom.

Our party ran from 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm, but we were allowed entry to the park at 3:00 pm. On some nights, the party runs later, from 7:00 pm to Midnight, with entry at 4:00 pm. Many guests at our party were thoroughly confused when the park closed at 11:00 pm.

□ The hours of the party do not coordinate with the routines of pre-school kids like my daughter. In fact, most of the party occurs during what I refer to as her "witching hour." To minimize unnecessary drama, we slept in late, had a very casual morning, a big lunch, and a nap before entering the park at around 4:00 pm. We watched the 5:00 pm Mickey's Soundsational Parade and immediately queued for the Phineas & Ferb Trick-or-Treat Trail at Innoventions.

□ I'll be the first to admit, I didn't do my homework. I assumed that this party would be similar to the Magic Kingdom party we attended last year, except that Jack Skellington would have more of a presence. There were a lot of differences, but most had more to do with the park than the actual party.

Mickey's Halloween party at Disneyland, like anything Disney, is a mix of the good, the bad and the ugly. I will get the ugly out of the way first. The event can be draining. It drains kids' energy, it drains parents' patience, and worst of all, it drained my camera batteries. And I still can't explain why a father would yell at a cast member because the handful of treats she put in his treat bag included a box of raisins. We saw foolish parents at Magic Kingdom last year, too. Disneyland is no better or worse.

□ That's the ugly. Moving onto "the bad," the crowds are intense in a few places. Disneyland is laid out with a lot of narrow pathways and extremely dim lighting. The pathways around Big Thunder Mountain

were the worst. The dim lighting, combined with the textured walkways, caused a few people to trip, including my daughter. The crowd moved like a pack of zombies, stumbling and lurching along. The mature trees also contribute to the darkness, as well as making prime fireworks viewing locations hard to find without committing hours in advance. Magic Kingdom is bigger, with shorter trees, and more of great spots to watch fireworks.

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□"Halloween Screams - a Villainous Surprise in the Skies Fireworks" were scheduled for 9:30 pm. While I would have preferred to stake out a great spot an hour before the show, my daughter is a ride junkie, and reverts into a Mr. Hyde-like monster if we sit still for any length of time. So we rode Big Thunder Mountain Railroad and settled for a last-minute spot in the Frontierland side of the hub, with a view partially blocked by trees. I will have to search the internet for images of the giant balloon with an animated Jack Skellington that rises behind the castle, because I couldn't see it from this spot.

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□There's plenty of good to be found at Mickey's Halloween Party. To start with, the treats are abundant and awesome. Apple slices, raisins, Craisins, freeze-dried apple puffs, and carrot sticks address the healthier side of the treat menu, plus there's a huge variety of mini chocolate bars, Skittles, Tootsie Rolls, and Tootsie Roll lollipops. We didn't find Mickey Mouse lollipops (a favorite from Walt Disney World) or Smarties, but there was plenty of other good stuff.

Trick-or-Treat Trails featuring characters had slow lines, but the queues without characters were abundant and generous. Most Trick-or-Treat Trails had multiple treat stations. There were at least six on the trail along the New Orleans Square waterfront--we each received about a pound of treats on this trail alone. We always bring extra bags to hold our loot when the little Disney bags get full. This year's Disney bags are decorated with Frankenweenie and Wreck It Ralph movie ads, which look nice, but are likely to hit the trash bin as soon as they get home. The parade is brief, but has all the major characters on hand to celebrate Halloween. It's a lot more fun and less dark than last year's Halloween parade at Magic Kingdom. My daughter nearly pulled off my arm when the Magic Kingdom grave diggers scraped by our group last year. The only negative features this year were the death of my camera battery, and our distant perch at the princess meet-and-greet during the parade.

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□Parties are great for ride junkies like my daughter. At this year's party, we rode Astro Orbiter, Jungle Cruise, Splash Mountain, and Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, with less than ten minute waits at each attraction. We also visited the Tarzan's Tree House, bravely climbing it in the dim light. We also got photos with some hard-to-get

characters, including Imperial Storm Troopers, and Phineas and Ferb. I couldn't convince my girl to go anywhere near a villain, and she was pretty leery of pirates, too. She practically ran away when I suggested visiting the "Piratepalooza" dance party. There was a bunch of other characters who are on hand during regular park hours as well, including Jack Skellington, his friend Sally, the princesses, characters from Toy Story and Winnie the Pooh, as well as the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse crew.

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□ Most attractions had marginal lines, but a few, like Haunted Mansion Holiday, Space Mountain Ghost Galaxy, and Pirates of the Caribbean, attract massive crowds. We experienced most of those attractions days before the party, during regular park hours. I couldn't convince my daughter to ride Pirates of the Caribbean, but I'm my own worst enemy when it came to Fantasyland. We had a blast riding all the Fantasyland attractions after the fireworks at Magic Kingdom last year, and hoped to do the same this year in Disneyland. But Disneyland is different.

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□ Many Fantasyland attractions close and are roped off during the fireworks. Some re-open later; others, like It's a Small World, remain closed. Not knowing this, we found ourselves in the Small World area of Fantasyland with nothing to ride. While she looked longingly at It's a Small World and Mad Tea Party, my daughter reluctantly chose to wait to meet three princesses. During the first half-hour, we managed to move up to third family in line. Then all the princesses left for the late parade. The parade started in Main Street USA, so it was another 20 minutes before we saw it roll past our perch at the top of the princess meet-and-greet stairs. After the parade ended, new princesses returned, we got photos of my daughter with the princesses, and walked across the street into the Alice in Wonderland area. I convinced my daughter to walk past the Mad Tea Party and to the Alice in Wonderland ride, and were in line when the park closing announcement was made.

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□ In summary, both parties are great to collect an abundance of treats, photos with hard-to-find characters, and relatively sparse attraction line-ups. You can celebrate Halloween at Disneyland on select dates in October. These parties sell out, so book as early as possible.

About The Author: Brian Rawson is a single dad, now living near Calgary. His father took him on the Matterhorn Bobsleds when he was five, and since then, he has travelled extensively to feed his roller coaster addiction. He has ridden around 200 different roller coasters and experienced all the "Disney Mountains" in Florida, California, France and Japan.

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