

Renaissance Fair loses its Flair - Places - Rants - Geek-Rant

Written by The Geek
Monday, 01 March 2010 08:52

Down here in South Florida, we have an annual event called the Renaissance fair, or the "Ren Fair" as we call it. It's basically a bunch of people, who put on silly garb, and put on shows and exhibitions, and give people a small taste of what it used to be like in the middle ages. Or so I thought, anyways.

So lets travel back in time about 5-6 years ago. I went to the Renaissance fair with some friends, and had a pretty good time. The tickets were reasonable (like \$10 each) on top of the \$1.50 to get into the park. Once inside, there were assorted vendors around selling old-style clothing and other miscellaneous stuff. But above all, there were very friendly people dressed up in Medieval garb wandering the crowd and interacting, and everywhere you turned there was a stage or show with people acting out skits, plays, or just having fun with the audience.

This is the Ren Fair I remember. It was more about giving people a dose of a time long passed than anything else. It was a nice getaway and to be honest, the time flew because you were having such a good time. Sure, you were walking through dirt most of the time, and sure, it was hot. But you didn't care. You watched some cool shows, caught a real jousting tournament (well, somewhat real), and it was a VERY relaxed environment. It was a fun experience and a good time all around.

So fast forward back to the current time. When I asked my daughter if she would like to do something special for her 15th birthday, she told me she would like to go to the Renaissance Fair. I thought it was a great idea, because I remembered the fun I had the last time I went several years ago. So I went online and bought tickets. Holy Crap! It cost me nearly \$100 just for tickets for my family and I. Adults were \$20 each, and kids between 5 and 10 were \$7 each. I love how anything over 10 nowadays qualifies for an adult price.

Not to be deterred, my daughter's happiness was at the forefront of my mind, so I ponied up the money and we set out on our trip to the park. When we got there, I will confess I was daunted by the sheer number of cars and the 45 minute line we waited into get into the park where the fair is hosted. Yes, this was just to get into the park itself, no the actual Renaissance fair.

Once we were parked and actually in the park, we were immediately barraged by stall after stall after stall after stall of people hawking their wares. At one point I actually found a program

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sitting on a table that had a semblance of a map on it. Under the map was a list of vendors who had a presence there at the fair. It was 5-6 columns of names of no less than 10 names per column. Holy crap, we're talking at least 50-60 vendors. So yeah, our first impression was "Medieval Fleamarket";.

So it was hot and we got thirsty, so we saddled up to one of the refreshment stands we found. \$3 a bottle for a soda. A regular 20 oz soda. Wow. As a matter of fact, there turned out to be like 20 or so "food wagons" scattered around the fair, and I would estimate that the average mark-up on everything was about 70%. But hey, we're a captive audience and you weren't allowed back in if you left, and heck who was going to want to fight the traffic and parking nightmare again? So nearly \$20 in drinks later, on we moved looking for something to see.

We passed maybe 4-5 stages in our grand tour of the fair, which is probably HALF of what I saw on my last visit. Even more depressing was the seating for each of these stages. I would have to say that these things had HALF of the seating available than they did the last time I attended several years ago. This meant less people could comfortably stay and watch a show, and would be forced to wander elsewhere to find something else to do (or more likely, to buy).

We wandered around for a good hour before we could find any show that we could sit at and when we finally settled down, I quickly wished we didn't. The guy running the stage we sat at was seemingly very friendly and very crowd-interactive. But he was also very perverted. After several crude sexual innuendos, I decided it was time for us to move on. I was not about to subject my kids to another second of jokes about seamen and bearded clams. So much for a "family environment";.

So we finally make it all the way around the fairgrounds to the lists. We are there 30 minutes before the next joust, which I deemed perfect timing. My kids are all a huge fan of the movie "A Knights Tale", with Heath Ledger, and I would say the biggest draw to coming to the Renaissance fair was to watch a real joust. Right? Wrong.

The jousting arena was a big rectangular area, through 3 sides of the rectangle were inaccessible due to the way everything was arranged. So the joust was viewable by only one side of the rectangle. Now, along the one good side of the arena were 3 or 4 sets of bleachers. So I sent my kids ahead to find a spot where we could all sit together to watch the joust. Well guess what? The bleachers are reserved. Reserved? Yes, for SEASON TICKET HOLDERS.

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What? So, the nearly \$100 I paid for us to get into this park doesn't even allow us to SIT DOWN to watch the joust?!

So I step back and look again at the jousting area. The bleachers take up a good 90% of the total viewing area. The rest of the area is about 20 feet on either end of the bleachers, giving the literally hundreds upon hundreds of visitors (except, of course, the people who forked out \$50 each for a season pass), 40 feet of space to watch the joust. There were already SO MANY people standing there that my kids didn't stand a chance in hell to even see a horse, let alone an actual jousting run.

So away we went, again, and quite disappointed. 40 minutes later we found ourselves back at the beginning where we came in. We had not found another show, nor anything at all that seemed much fun. I asked my kids, shall we go around again and find an open show? No. They wanted to leave. This place is lame. You know what? I agreed with them and we left.

So between gas, parking, tickets, and our sodas we paid somewhere in the ballpark of \$140 for the day, and had a completely MISERABLE time. It seems someone took the whole idea of the Renaissance fair and turned commercialized every aspect of it to churn every dollar possible out of the visitors. My kids and I were there for more than 3 hours, and were unable to find a show to watch, and were turned away (with quite rudeness, might I add) from the jousts.

But the biggest disappointment for me was the look on my daughter's face as we left. It was her idea to come to the Renaissance fair, and she had so looked forward to it, and was completely let down by the whole experience. It is for this reason that I will tell everyone that I see what a horrible experience the Renaissance fair was for us, and why my family will never be attending again. Ever.

What was once a cool place to have fun and forget about real life for awhile had become a vehicle to separate the visitors from their money. Gee, sounds like a trip to Disney World, doesn't it?