

The World is a Theme Park

Who doesn't love theme parks? Disney's Magic Kingdom gives us the lands of "yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy." EPCOT takes us around the world. Universal Studios takes us into the movies, from *Harry Potter* to *The Mummy*. We're even more fascinated by fictional theme parks like Jurassic Park (dinosaurs!) and Westworld (become a cowboy!).

As we cross from one part of a park to another, we leave behind medieval knights and come upon space aliens. In theme parks, we are heroes, and we are surrounded by opportunities for adventure. Theme parks – from the mundane parks of today to the Westworlds of tomorrow – offer us access to romance of the kind most of us don't see in our everyday lives:

Romance, n. "a quality or feeling of mystery, excitement, and remoteness from everyday life."

We wish the world could be more like those places. That's why we go. But we also know world contains the same adventures that theme parks miniaturize and caricature for us. How to get that same theme park feeling of romance from the world is a bigger question. Most of us don't feel like we have the courage, skills, or resources.

But what if we treated our world like a theme park?

It's not that far off. Granted: we have to go a bit further and work a bit harder. But the attractions are probably cheaper than the cost of a ticket to Westworld (and don't involve robot exploitation/robot uprisings).

There are a few things that contribute to the romance of a theme park that are available all around us:

1. **Different worlds:** There are different kinds of "worlds" all around us: OfficeWorld, CommuterWorld, GroceryStoreWorld, as well as the more exotic destinations. All of these worlds have different scenery and contexts, different rules of play, and different games to master. All of them challenge us to play a part with skill and resourcefulness. They all contain beauty and rewards far greater and far more solid than the ones available in theme parks, too.
2. **Quests and adventure:** The real world is also full of quests which beat out any amusement ride. Every person who needs our help is an opportunity for a quest. Every stroke of inspiration is an invitation to creative adventure. Changing someone's tire, painting a portrait, or traveling across your state might be our own personal theme park's best attraction yet – and many of them will happen in the normal course of our

lives. These mundane things, if approached with a playful and adventurous mindset, can become far more meaningful and interesting than drinking fake butterbeer at Harry Potter world.

3. **Freedom and fresh beginnings:** We love the anonymity that comes with imagination. Theme parks do well to provide this, whisking you away from your everyday cares and baggage. But we can in our real lives have the same freedom we feel in those theme parks. Any kind of step into a new world will let us try out a new identity also, whether we're joining a gym for the first time (want to try out the macho man persona? Go for it!) or starting to do research for a book (try on the bookish author persona). Every new interaction and new discovery lets us reinvent ourselves.

Theme parks are wonderful, but they're only really useful if they do their job of reminding us that romance and adventure lie outside our own doors. We can create experiences far more magical than any cooked up by Disney's Imagineers. So instead of treating the world as a static place or a dangerous place, let's start looking at it as a park made for us to enjoy.