

Disney Dining Plan: A Guide for 2011

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

To Dining Plan or not to Dining Plan?

That is the question that a lot of people heading down to Walt Disney World are now asking themselves. The answer is really that it depends on you and your eating habits.

The Basic Dining Plan has been around for several years now and for a price of \$45.99-\$47.99 plus tax for adults and \$11.99-\$12.99 plus tax for children ages 3-9 (price varies on time of year), it entitles you to one snack credit, one counter-service credit, and one table-service credit for each person, for each day of your stay. It's important to know that you'll be able to order a main course and a dessert with your table service credit, but appetizer and gratuity are not included in the price.

There's the first issue. If, like my husband, desserts are not for you (he's lacto-intolerant), then you've got a problem straight away. Of course, you can ask if you can have an appetizer instead of a dessert, but that's very much at the discretion of each restaurant and there's no guarantee you'll be able to do that.

The second issue is whether this pattern of eating will suit your family. Some families like the idea of having a snack for one meal, a counter-service meal for another, and finally sitting down to a "proper" meal at a restaurant for their final meal of the day. But if you're not likely to regularly have three meals or perhaps want to eat at mainly table-service restaurants, then this particular Dining Plan may not be for you.

That's probably the inspiration behind the Deluxe Dining Plan, which offers three meal credits per day that can be used at either counter or table service places, along with two snack credits per day per person and one refillable mug per person. With this plan, you do get the appetizer (as well as dessert) at table-service restaurants, but the gratuity is still not included in the price. The cost of this plan is \$78.99 plus tax for adults and \$21.99 plus tax for children ages 3-9 years old.

The Deluxe Dining Plan is an option that fits much more closely with our personal dining preferences, as we love to try out the various table service restaurants around the Disney parks and resorts. The Basic Dining Plan doesn't really allow that, but this plan gives you the flexibility to do that.

The problem is that the Deluxe Dining Plan can be a lot of food. It could be three meals at table-service restaurants and that's a lot of food for anyone, when you think about how big those portions can be! Also keep in mind that you're adding in appetizers to each of your meals, so you'll be presented with a three-course meal every time you sit down to dine. One way round this is to go for some signature dining options, which are two credits. These are Cinderella's Royal Table in the Magic Kingdom, the Hollywood Brown Derby at the Disney's Hollywood Studios, Jiko at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, the California Grill at the Contemporary, the Flying Fish Cafe at the BoardWalk, the Yachtsman Steakhouse at the Yacht Club, Artist Point at the Wilderness Lodge, and Narcoosee's and Citricos at the Grand Floridian. It's not the most economical use of your credits, but at least reduces the amount of food you need to consume each day!

As if those options weren't enough, there's also the Wine and Dine plan that you can add on to either of the Dining Plans we've just looked at. For \$39.99 plus tax per room per night, you get one bottle of wine per night from a selected list. Be warned though, if your travels take you to any of those signature restaurants, you'll end up using two nights' worth of credits.

Now for those of you thinking that this amount of food -- and possibly wine -- is enough to scupper any plans you had to walk round the parks during your vacation, help may be at hand. Obviously realizing that this was a lot of food for many guests, Disney is introduced a new Dining Plan in 2009: the Quick Service Dining Plan. This plan offers two quick-service meals for each person per night, including non-alcoholic drink, along with two snacks for everyone for every night you're there, along with a refillable mug per person. The cost of this plan is \$34.99 for adults per night and \$11.99 for children ages 3-9. There's a lot of debate about whether this plan is value for money or not, but one thing's for sure -- if you're not interested in table-service restaurants, it could be a good choice for you.

There are some important considerations to keep in mind with the Disney Dining Plans in general. To make the best of them, you really need to be planning on spending the bulk of your time on Disney property, eating at their various establishments. If you plan on heading off to perhaps SeaWorld and Universal Orlando during your visit, you may not get the best value from the plan.

Everyone in your room must also be on the same package, so you can't have some members of your family on the Basic Dining Plan and others on the Deluxe Dining Plan, another thing to keep in mind, as you need to be sure that whatever you pick will suit everyone.

Don't forget that to make the best of the table service dining plans, you'll also need to program in some table service meals and that usually means making Advanced Dining Reservations (ADRs). These can be made up to six months in advance and, for some of the more popular restaurants on property, such as Le Cellier in Canada, Epcot, Boma in the Animal Kingdom Lodge, or any of the character meals, they may be full with bookings many months before you get to Disney. Therefore, if you decide at the last minute that you want to add one of the Dining Plans, you could immediately be at a disadvantage.

If that's the situation you find yourself in, don't lose heart. There are a number of possible ways round this. Firstly, try making bookings for less popular times of the day, either for early or late meals, as these times will be taken up last.

If your first dining choice isn't available, it's worth trying for another restaurant. In particular, some of the resort restaurants that are open at lunchtime, such as the Kona Cafe at the Polynesian, the Wave at the Contemporary, Captain's Grille at the Yacht Club, or the Whispering Canyon Cafe at the Wilderness Lodge, tend to be quieter for those meals and you may be able to snag something.

Finally, if all else fails, do keep calling back, as people do change their plans and cancel their ADRs all the time. You may just be lucky enough to snag a cancellation.

The Dining Plans are available to add on to any Magic Your Way package that includes at least one day of admission. Disney Vacation Club members can also buy the plan when they stay at Walt Disney World on points and Annual Passholders can get the Dining Plans by purchasing a package without park admission. All your various dining credits must be used by midnight on the day you check out, otherwise they'll expire.

Learn more at Disney.com.

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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