

Not A Chicken Nugget in Sight - Almost: Children's Dining at Walt Disney World

by Rachel Smith, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I'm going to say what we all know to be true: overall, kids' meals lack nutrients, creativity, and variety.

Walt Disney World has made some advances in kids' meal technology (gastronomy?) by offering healthier Mickey Check meals, but I find that they have a ways to go in variety and incorporating fresh fruits and vegetables.

On our most recent visit to Walt Disney World, my goal was to plan our meals to avoid ordering kids' meals for my children. We were on Disney's Plus Dining Plan, which allows for one table service meal, one quick service meal, and one snack per person, per night. I was going to accomplish my no kids' meal goal without bending the rule that states children must order from a children's menu when one is available. Above all, I'm a rule follower. You know what they say about the best laid plans…

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□It is very easy to avoid a children's menu in a table service restaurant at Walt Disney World; you just have to do some planning. My first suggestion is to make sure you make your advance dining reservations (ADRs) 180 days in advance. This will allow you the full range of Walt Disney World restaurants to choose from.

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□Avoiding kids' meals is most easily accomplished at a buffet restaurant. Buffets don't require diners to commit to one entree. My girls love the breakfast buffets at both Disney's Beach Club Resort's Cape May Cafe and Disney's Yacht Club Resort's Captain's Grille. These girls could live on Mickey Waffles, scrambled eggs, and strawberries if I let them. Buffets almost always come with a few fresh fruit options, regardless of the time of day. Buffets are also my choice for guests with a picky palate.

If you'd prefer not to serve yourself at a buffet (you are on vacation after all), Walt Disney World offers quite a few restaurants that offer a family style meal. Your entire family can share a bottomless platter of meats, potatoes, and vegetables at Disney's Wilderness Lodge Resort's Whispering Canyon Cafe. On our most recent visit, our waiter noticed the girls' affinity for corn on the cob, so he brought out a second helping for them to enjoy. My near-vegetarian preschooler appreciated

this. The Whispering Canyon Cafe does offer individual meals from the menu as well.

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□Avoiding kids' meals at Walt Disney World's quick service restaurants proved to be a little more difficult. You won't have to plan 6 months in advance like you will for a table service restaurant, but planning ahead is still important.

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□With the Fastpass+ system now in full effect, and my innate need to plan, I knew which of the parks we would be in each day as well as what general area of the park we'd be in at meal times. I reviewed the menus at AllEars.Net approximately a week before our departure to find kids' meals that my children would enjoy.

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□At Epcot, we had a quick lunch at the Tangerine Cafe in the Morocco Pavilion. My girls chose the chicken tender kid's meal. While this may be the most stereotypical kid's meal I can think of, I knew that the girls would be sampling the hummus, couscous, and salad from our plates to round out the meal.

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□We were fortunate to get a lunch Fastpass for Be Our Guest at the Magic Kingdom. This was -- by far -- our least stressful quick service meal. I pre-ordered our meals, so after checking in, we found a table and waited for our meals to arrive. Juggling two hungry preschoolers is difficult enough without carrying a tray of food and drinks. The girls each had grilled cheese and tomato soup and joined the clean plate club (Is that still a thing?) for the first time on the trip.

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□If anything, children are unpredictable. They'll devour mashed potatoes on Monday and declare them to be "yucky" on Tuesday. To avoid a hangry (hungry + angry = hangry) meltdown, I pre-ordered snacks from Garden Grocer and had them delivered to our resort. Therefore, I almost always had apple and pepper slices, pretzels, a peanut butter sandwich, and granola bars in my day bag to keep the girls happy.

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□At check-in at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, the front desk said it best, "If you're hungry, go eat." I wasn't strict about my dining plan schedule, aside from table service restaurants. Younger children need to take frequent breaks for rest, hydration, and shade. I suppose all of us do.

About The Author: Rachel is a native Ohioan where she lives with her husband, Scott, and two daughters. She plans vacations to Disney and the world at TheTravelSmith.net. In her free time, she is on staff at [Camp Throwback](http://CampThrowback), the original adult summer camp.

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