

Using Garden Grocer During Your Walt Disney World Vacation: A Walt Disney World Service Review

by Jennifer Schuitema, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When planning a Walt Disney World vacation, dining plans can be just as important as your resort choice or FastPass+ reservations.

And the Disney dining topics seem to be limitless: Disney Dining Plan, Advance Dining Reservations, Table-Service meal, Quick-Service meal, Dole Whip, Epcot Food & Wine Festival, Mickey ice cream bars, turkey legs, and on and on.

I've handled dining at Disney in a variety of ways. On our first trip as a family, we stayed at Shades of Green where the Disney Dining Plan isn't an option. We simply paid as we ate. As this was my first trip to Walt Disney World as an adult, I hadn't fully thought through the dining portion of the vacation. Sure, I made reservations for character meals that my daughter loved, but I didn't think about the economy or value of dining at Disney.

□ On our second trip, call me crazy, I checked a suitcase full of food. I packed milk, yogurt, cereal, cheese, bread, peanut butter, jam, apple sauce, juices, and a variety of snacks. The checked baggage was opened and inspected by airport security, but everything arrived safely and the ice packs kept it all cold. We ate much healthier and saved money. A bonus benefit was having an empty suitcase to fill with souvenirs.

□ Since that trip, our travel dates have always coincided with the Free Dining promotion. We've had tons of fun with the Disney Dining Plan program and eaten at restaurants we most likely would not have tried otherwise. We've been to many great Signature restaurants, resort and park Table-Service restaurants, and Character Dining. Those experiences became an important part of our Disney traditions.

Unfortunately, our October 2014 travel dates didn't line up with the fall Free Disney Dining offer. Purchasing the Disney Dining Plan is not something I personally see as a good value -- particularly for my 10-year-old daughter, who no longer qualifies for children's pricing. So I decided to try something new this year: **Garden Grocer**.

□ For those of you unfamiliar with Garden Grocer, this is a service that delivers groceries within Central Florida, including Walt Disney World. They require a \$40 minimum product order as well as a \$14 delivery fee.

Orders of \$200 or more have a \$2 delivery fee. There is also an option to include a tip for the delivery person.

□ My experience began at GardenGrocer.com about a month before my trip. My first step was to create an account. Over the course of a week or so, I logged into my account several times to edit and add new items to my shopping cart. Each time I logged in, the items I had added previously were still in my cart. This allowed me time to make sure I was ordering everything that made sense for my travel party, which also included my daughter and my mother. In addition to food, I ordered cups, plastic cutlery, paper plates, bowls, and towels.

□ The ordering process at Garden Grocer was quite simple. I found the selection of products diverse. There was only one item that I searched for that was not available, Simply Lemonade, but I did find an acceptable alternative. Garden Grocer does accept special requests, but it wasn't necessary in this case.

□ The one thing I debated was the delivery time frame. I ended up choosing to have our order delivered on our arrival date. Then, I selected one of the available two-hour blocks that fell between my estimation of our Magical Express drop off and the approximate time I thought we would leave for Epcot that evening.

□ After I placed my order a representative from Garden Grocer called me. She verified the delivery date and location, and informed me that Bell Services at Port Orleans French Quarter would hold my delivery and refrigerate anything that required it.

□ On the day of our arrival, I received a text message from Garden Grocer at 1:01 p.m. to let me know that my grocery order was waiting for me at Bell Services and that my cold items were refrigerated. When we arrived at our resort, we first headed to the front desk. Our room was available, so we brought our bags to the room. I then went to Bell Services, who directed me to Luggage Storage right next door. This was really an unnecessary trip. I should have simply pressed luggage services on my in-room phone and had the groceries brought up to the room.

□ Once the groceries were delivered to the room by Bell Services, I unpacked the grocery bags, did a quick inventory, and made sandwiches to eat before heading to Epcot for the evening.

□ Over the course of the week, I found that we always ate breakfast in the room. Cereal, granola bar, or muffin and a piece of fruit with coffee, juice, or milk worked really well. Then, depending on our park schedule,

we would either eat dinner or lunch in the room and the other meal at a Quick-Service restaurant in a park.

□ One of the best benefits of our grocery delivery was the case of bottled water. I drink a lot of water both at home and on vacation. When vacationing on the Disney Dining Plan at Walt Disney World my strategy is to always get bottled water as the beverage that comes with my Quick-Service meal credits. On this trip we carried a few bottles of water into the park each day, avoiding paying for a beverage at our Quick-Service meal. I also enjoyed having a fresh bottle when I returned to the room and at bedtime. Each bottled water purchased in the parks is \$2.50 versus the 25¢ per gallon; I paid by purchasing a case.

□ As the week went by, my enthusiasm for cold sandwiches began to wane. One day we ended up eating two Quick-Service meals in the parks rather than one. I also found that I over-purchased on quite a few grocery items. Some of it couldn't be helped, for example the leftover peanut butter and jelly. But other items we simply didn't need. We didn't even open the cookies. We got plenty of sugar in the parks.

□ If I were to use grocery delivery again at Walt Disney World, I would make some changes to the quantity of food I ordered, or try it again during a trip that included my husband. Having another adult would have cut down on the leftovers.

□ Overall, having groceries delivered rather than purchasing the Disney Dining Plan saved us some money. We saved about \$200 by not purchasing the Quick-Service Dining Plan. We saved around \$530 plus any gratuity by not purchasing the Disney Dining Plan which includes Table-Service credits. This experience also made me take a closer look at the Quick-Service Dining Plan. We've never experienced this version, and I think it might be something we should try in the future if Free Dining isn't an option.

□ Garden Grocer really impressed me with their customer service. Everything went extraordinarily smoothly from the ordering process to their confirmation phone call to delivery of our groceries at our resort. If I were to purchase groceries for a Walt Disney World vacation in the future, I would definitely use Garden Grocer.

About The Author:

□ *Jennifer Schuitema is a florist living in Grand Rapids, MI with her husband and daughter. She's enjoyed spending the past decade raising a Disney fan. She looks forward to visiting Walt Disney World each year with her mom and daughter, and occasionally with her husband.*

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