

The Health Nut's Guide to Dining at Disney: A Walt Disney World Dining Review

by Amy Wear, PassPorter Guest Contributor

If you're like me, planning the dining aspect of your Disney trip is as important as choosing where to stay and what package to book.

The second that Disney confirmation email lands in the inbox, we jump on My Disney Experience and start planning where we'll eat each day. As soon as we're within the 180 days until magic mark, we're booking those hard to get Cinderella's Royal Table and Be Our Guest reservations. For the self-proclaimed health nut, however, planning a trip to Disney is met with varying degrees of anxiety. How can I possibly maintain a healthy lifestyle when vacationing in the magical land of temptation? Will I need to skip all the buffets?

The moment you step off the Magical Express bus, you'll be faced with gourmet Mickey treats at every turn. Who can resist a Mickey waffle or ice cream bar? Thankfully, Disney has been making efforts in recent years to offer more healthful choices. With a little planning, you actually can survive an extended Disney trip without derailing your goals. You are at Walt Disney World, however, and no matter how strict your diet is all year long, a little indulging is in order.

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□The menus at www.allears.net are an invaluable resource. There you will find detailed descriptions of the food offerings for every table and counter service location at Walt Disney World. Also note that the chefs at many of the restaurants will work with you to provide alternatives. While my girls love having breakfast with the princesses at Akershus, I strictly don't eat any of the items served family-style at this location. I noted this on our reservation and asked to speak with the chef when we arrived for breakfast on our last trip. He prepared me a wonderful plate of salad greens, couscous, and grilled asparagus.

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□If you're on the Disney Dining Plan, you want to maximize the value of those table service credits. If you have young children like me, that means you will gravitate towards the character dinners. Why spend park time waiting in line for photos and autographs when you can do that at character dinners?

On our first family trip in 2012, we enjoyed eight character dinners in nine days. Yes, you read that right. The pitfall for those who try to maintain a healthy lifestyle is that nearly all of those dinners are

all-you-can-eat buffet affairs. Many people can't resist trying to eat their money's worth. Instead of trying to eat until my stomach hurts, I focus on the special moments my girls have as each character visits our table. I keep the camera handy and make sure the autograph books are signed. Sometimes I have to remind myself to take some time to eat!

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□If you're splurging out of pocket for just one or two of these experiences, you may want to forget everything you've learned about making healthful food choices and indulge to your heart's content. On the other hand, if you're on the dining plan and have a date with Mickey or Cinderella every day of your trip, it's helpful to have a game plan.

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□First, look for the salads. The ones with leafy greens and other fresh veggies. Skip the creamy ones that likely have more mayo and oil than anything else. Take as much as you think you can eat and drizzle a small amount of salad dressing on top. Then move on to the cooked greens like broccoli and green beans. Again, take as much as you can eat. Watch out, however, for buttery green beans. Disney is famous for smothering them in butter! Most dieticians recommend loading up at least half your plate with raw and cooked vegetables (except corn and potatoes because they're mostly starch), so go for it. Make this the focus of your "all-you-can-eat" experience.

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□Next, look for what you consider essential to completing your meal, whether that is a bean-based dish, tofu, or lean meat. Remember to keep your meat portion to the size of a deck of cards. If you're vegan, vegetarian, or nutritarian like me, you can ask to speak to the chef about what dishes meet your dietary needs. You also want to do this if anyone in your party has a food allergy.

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□If you really want to stay on track, stop there and go back to your seat. Focus on eating all that micronutrient goodness before going back for more. Don't even walk by the deep-fried food display, also known as the kids' selections!

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□Chances are you'll still want to finish your meal with something sweet. Grab a small plate and load it up with some fresh fruit. Finally, scour the desserts for a small sampling of something that really seems "worth it." If you don't like it that much, don't waste the indulgence. Otherwise enjoy every bite and then put down that fork!

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□As for character breakfasts, be prepared for a mega dose of temptation. You will be faced with an array of pastries, bacon, eggs, sausage, and other fried food. I find it best to head for the oatmeal and then load up on the fresh fruit. Since I've always had a sweet tooth, I do feel that a character breakfast necessitates at least one Mickey waffle -

with strawberry sauce! If I'm being honest, I usually have two.

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□The good news is that a trip to Disney World involves a great deal of walking. Many people find that they are more active on a Disney vacation than they are at home. If you're crazy enough to weigh yourself when you get home, you may be pleasantly surprised to find that dial hasn't crept up a bit, even after you indulged in your fair share of treats. Some Disney veterans claim this is all part of the Disney magic!

About The Author: Amy Wear is a work at home mom, travel agent, writer, and registered occupational therapist. She lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and specializes in planning magical vacations for people of all abilities at Click The Mouse. You can find her online at <http://www.clickthemouse.ca/amy-w.html>

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