

Dining Reservation Not Available? Do This Instead!: A Walt Disney World Planning Article

by Kim Ringlever, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The one down side to the Walt Disney World Resort is that it's impossible to do it all in one visit.

The desire to "get it perfect" can be stressful. More than once a friend has called me in disappointment because they couldn't get a dining reservation at Cinderella's Royal Table, Be Our Guest Restaurant, or Chef Mickey's. A lot of people are surprised to find out that these popular dining spots book up six months in advance.

If I were Cinderella's Fairy Godmother, I'd certainly use my powers to open more tables at these guest hot spots. But since I am a mere mortal, all I can offer is my advice for how to find the experience you want at another location or in another way.

□ Take Cinderella's Royal Table, for example. Everybody wants the experience of walking up the castle steps and entering the grand dining room. Meeting the princesses and eating like a king is awesome (grilled beef tenderloin and chocolate mousse for lunch, anyone?), but it's also expensive, a hard reservation to get, a heavy meal, and very time consuming. If a character meal is what you crave, it is much easier to get a reservation at The Crystal Palace and rub tummies with Pooh and friends. If it's princesses and not the royal feast you're after, consider forgoing the rich food at Royal Table and choose one of these options instead.

□ **Princess Plan B:** Start your day with the must-have photo in front of the castle. Disney's photo pass photographers will take one for you, and if you ask, they will take a shot or two on your own personal camera or phone. Take a stroll through the castle and slowly take in the wall mosaics. They are dazzling and make great photo keepsakes. Visit the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique for the latest in princess-wear and perhaps a souvenir crown or gorgeous gown. Next, seek out some princess meet-and-greets in Fantasyland. Ariel can be found in her grotto, Rapunzel and Tiana in Princess Fairytale Hall, and Merida at Fairytale Garden. Don't forget to visit Belle at the Enchanted Tales with Belle (more on that later) or Jasmine in Adventureland.

If you are feeling extra adventurous, take a mid-afternoon break from the Magic Kingdom, hop on the monorail that takes you directly to the

Grand Floridian Resort and Spa, and see the Disney Princess Promenade at 3:30 p.m. (except on Tuesdays). This isn't a traditional meet-and-greet. Cinderella and Prince Charming parade into the resort lobby for about 20 minutes and greet as many children as they can (3-12 is the age range given by Disney).

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□ Another restaurant reservation many families feel is a must do is Be Our Guest. Again, this is a hard reservation to obtain. While I will say, the venue is stunning and the food is delicious (do try the grey stuff), don't feel your vacation is less than perfect if you can't get in.

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□ **Belle Plan B:** Fill your belly with a ham and cheese-stuffed pretzel and a LeFou's Brew at Gaston's Tavern and then head to Enchanted Tales with Belle instead. If you are a Beauty and the Beast fan, you will love Enchanted Tales. Even my boys were wowed by the magical entrance and wanted to be cast in the retelling of Belle's story. Enchanted Tales is a one-of-a-kind hidden gem that shouldn't be missed. You truly are a guest in Belle's world and afterward each visitor gets a photo, a bookmark, and if you're lucky, a peck on the cheek from Belle.

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□ And now on to hard-to-get-reservation number three -- Chef Mickey's. Breakfast at Chef Mickey's is so much fun. For years, this was a must-have for me, I drove myself crazy stalking the Disney dining site for a reservation. I even settled for 7:30 a.m. slot on a Saturday mornings. Under much pressure from family members who prefer sleep over Mickey waffles, I finally relented and tried other options.

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□ **Mickey Waffle Plan B:** Book the character breakfast at Cape May Cafe at the Beach Club Resort instead. I liked the food better at this smaller and less crowded location. I was especially happy with the creamy cheddar grits and the hot apple quinoa cereal. Another plus, I could make my reservation just two days in advance. Be aware, Mickey Mouse does NOT make an appearance at Cape May Cafe, only Minnie, Donald and Goofy are currently at this location. However, I handled the omission by using a Fast Pass to meet Mickey at the Town Square Theater later in the morning.

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□ A second option that I personally haven't tried yet but will soon is the character breakfast at The Garden Grill in Epcot's Land Pavilion. Here you can have breakfast with Chip 'n' Dale, Mickey Mouse and Pluto. Even better, if you book early and finish up by 9 a.m., Soarin' is right next door. You can be one of the first to jump in line. No Fast Pass needed.

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□ So, whether you are a planner or a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants diner, you can get the experience you want one way or another. When staying

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at Disney, never hesitate to ask a cast member for their own little hidden gems and secrets. Disney fans are never shy about sharing their tips as well. Just make sure you have a few minutes to spare, because once a Disney fanatic starts sharing, it's hard to stop.

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