

Going Deluxe with Your Dining: Our Experience with the Deluxe Dining Plan

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

For many years now, visitors to Walt Disney World have had Deluxe Resort options when it came to their on-site accommodations. Obviously recognizing a good thing when they see it, in 2008 Disney introduced their Deluxe Dining Plan.

For each night that you stay at Walt Disney World Resort, you get three meal credits per person that can be used for either table service or counter service meals, two snack credits per person, and a refillable mug, all for the price of \$69.99 plus tax per adult (age 10+) per night or \$19.99 plus tax per child (age 3 -- 9) per night for stays in 2009. In 2010, those prices will go up to \$71.99 per night for adults and \$21.99 per night for children.

Another important thing to know is that the table service credits include an appetizer, entree, and dessert, a big difference compared to the regular dining plan, which now no longer has the appetizer included.

As soon as I heard about the introduction of this new dining plan, I started to wonder whether it would work for us or not. Certainly, the existing Disney Dining Plan, which gives you one table service credit, one counter service credit, and one snack credit per night's stay wasn't an option for us, given our eating habits. We tend to enjoy two table service meals each day, with usually a snack for breakfast. Although the Deluxe Dining Plan would probably give us too many table service credits, I did figure that perhaps I could even that out by trying out a number of Signature Dining restaurants. For months, I debated whether to go for the Deluxe Dining Plan or not and, eventually, I decided in favor of giving it a go.

As Disney Vacation Club members, we just had to call DVC Member Services to get it added to our booking, and the process couldn't have been simpler. The only slight fly in the ointment I discovered when we checked in was that, because we were staying in a one bedroom villa for one night, then swapping over to a studio for our remaining five nights, we had two Dining Plans, one for each reservation. I had incorrectly assumed that we would have six nights' worth of credits available to us as soon as we checked in. Instead, we had just a day's allowance, followed by the rest of our credits the next day as part of our second

reservation. This required a couple of quick changes to our dining plans as we found ourselves with only three credits per person on our first day.

Before we tried the Deluxe Dining Plan for ourselves, I had heard all the horror stories of just how much food it involved -- and those stories weren't far wrong! If you're going to do this, then be sure to plan in a few Signature Dining options or perhaps some dinner shows during your stay, as these all use up two credits. Another option for quickly disposing of two credits, as we discovered, is to order room service. This is a really nice treat especially when you don't have to pick up the bill for it!

On days where we did go for Signature Dining meals, it generally meant that we could then either just have lunch and dinner or breakfast and dinner. If we needed it, we could just snack in between, which worked perfectly for us, as it fit our natural dining pattern. I felt much more relaxed at the Signature Dining restaurants, because I wasn't constantly worrying about how much the bill was going to come to. I knew it was all taken care of.

Having visited the Yachtsman Steakhouse, Flying Fish Cafe, and California Grill this trip, along with room service, I kept a note of how much each meal had cost us and it turned out that the best value for money came from the Yachtsman Steakhouse, which would have set us back \$151. Mind you, that probably did have something to do with having the Australian Wagyu Beef, a real snip at \$54. We were stunned to find that this entree was available on the Dining Plan and my husband was instantly coerced into getting it. There is no way he'd have had that sort of encouragement from me, had we been paying out of pocket! The second most expensive of the Signature Dining options was the California Grill, which came in at \$143, while room service would have cost \$136 and the Flying Fish Cafe came to \$127.

So was that good value for two table service credits? From the calculations I made, it certainly was. The trouble was that a lot of the other table service credits were used for breakfasts, usually the cheapest meal of the day. Having said that, dinner at 1900 Park Fare came in at something like \$60, while dinner at Boma set us back \$54. Even some of the character breakfasts weren't cheap, with Hollywood and Vine costing \$49, Chef Mickey's coming to a total of \$46 and the bill for the Crystal Palace would've been \$41.

On days when we had three table service meals, if we're honest, it was too much food for us. We're just not used to eating that much so frequently, so it's definitely worth thinking about whether the dining

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plans suit your usual style of eating while on vacation.

The main reason I had opted for the plan in the end was because we were traveling during the Epcot Food and Wine Festival. I figured that would be a great way of getting rid of our snack credits -- and so it proved to be. We made a couple of meals from feasting our way around the various festival booths. Sampling the more unusual food offerings was a really nice way to use these credits.

So at the end of our vacation, did we make the most of the Deluxe Dining Plan? Well, we managed to use every single credit. We had about five snack credits left on our last night, which we used in the Beach Club Marketplace the next morning to purchase some breakfast and snacks for the trip home. In the end, our total savings using the plan was \$258. Then again, you do have to look at that and question whether we would really have eaten that much had we not been on the plan. I suspect the answer to that is "no." We certainly consumed more than we usually would, but we came away feeling we had very much gotten our money's worth from the Deluxe Dining Plan. There's every chance we'll be trying it again when we next head back to Walt Disney World.

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!](#)

Article last updated: 08/20/2009

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