

Epcot's Food & Wine Festival: A Tasty Review

by Cheryl Pendry, *PassPorter Featured Columnist*

We all know that Disney loves to celebrate. Whether it's a birthday, anniversary or family gathering, Disney will do all they can to make it especially magical. So when you think about Epcot's annual Food and Wine Festival, immediately you just know that Disney will do something to make these things, which many of us hold dear to our hearts, extra special. That's what I discovered on our first real exploration of the Festival last year.

The most important thing you need to know about the Food and Wine Festival, so that you're not disappointed, is that the vast majority of food, wine, and activities offered during that time will cost you more money on top of your park admission. Sure, there are some things that you can do for free, which we'll touch on in a moment, but the food and wine booths that you'll see scattered around the World Showcase lagoon definitely aren't free. We saw the booths on our honeymoon in 1999 and I remember being very disappointed that the items they offered weren't free samples being given away, but that you had to pay for.

Having said that, where else can you sample food from around the world to see if you like it or not? Last year's samplings, which ranged in price from \$2 to \$6, included such varied items as kiwi and custard rolls from New Zealand, spicy beef empanadas from Argentina, sauteed corvine from Chile, lingonberry mousse from Scandinavia, and vegetable curry with jasmine rice and lemon grass from Thailand. The beauty here is that if you take a bite of something and decide you don't like it, you haven't wasted a fortune on it.

And let's not forget the wines that accompany all the wonderful food at these booths. From green tea plum wine in China to sake in Japan, and Irish Cream, unsurprisingly found at the Irish booth, there was something for all tastes. As for wine, whether you prefer white, rose, or red; dry or sweet, you won't be disappointed. The Australian wine walkabout was a particular favorite of mine at last year's festival, allowing you to buy a certain number of samples of wine and then pick them as you walked about -- hence the name!

Beer drinkers aren't left out either, with various offerings at the different booths, along with a hops and barley market and great beers of the world, highlighting some familiar -- and perhaps not so familiar -- names. It seems that there aren't many people who are fans of champagne, at least judging by the bottles still chilling in our fridge. But

if you are a fan of the bubbly, don't miss the champagne booth and the delightful pairing with chocolate truffles, a must for anyone with a sweet tooth.

Although the Food and Wine Marketplace food booths are the most common way for visitors to Epcot to enjoy the festival, there's much more to it, depending on how much money you're prepared to spend on food. If the answer to that question is "nothing," then don't despair. There are a number of free events during the festival, but you may just find you have to give up park time to wait in line for them.

Last year saw complimentary cooking demonstrations, book signings, and even tasting sessions of both food and wine. As you can imagine, these are exceptionally popular, especially the ones that involve some eating and drinking for free! If you want to try any of these out, grab a festival program as soon as you can and work out which ones interest you, then be prepared for a long wait. You'll need to get in line at least 30 minutes before the event you want to see gets underway.

Another free event during the Festival is the Eat to the Beat concert series, staged three times a night at the America Gardens Theatre. If any of the acts performing while you're there appeal to you, arrive early to guarantee a seat, although we were able to catch some of the final parts of Gloria Gaynor's performance on her last night, standing at one side of the theatre.

Of course, if you love your food as much as I do, then you might want to spring for some of the more expensive options during the Festival, but be warned, when Disney calls them the "exclusive wine and culinary programs," it's for a reason. These events are not cheap and the prices would make many people faint! However, as you'd expect from Disney, if you do attend any of these events, you'll have an amazing time. We went to the Party for the Senses last year and I'll be reporting on our experience there in an upcoming issue of PassPorter News, but let's just say it was worth every penny and definitely something we'd do again.

In previous years, other special events have included the Food and Wine Pairings, offering three tasting-sized portions of food, along with their paired wines for \$40 per person. If you prefer cakes and pastries, then you could enjoy those at Sweet Sundays, with three dessert items created for you by a celebrity chef, at \$65 per person.

You could enjoy a three-course lunch with a celebrity chef at The Cook, the Book, and the Bottle for \$150 per person, while the Chef's Showplace allowed you to learn from the experts as you create a themed lunch with a visiting chef for the same \$150. If money is no object, then

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the Exquisite Evenings would set you back \$195 per person, but for that, you would get a team of chefs, some celebrity and some from around the Disney resort, preparing an amazing five-course feast for you.

All prices are from 2006 and did not include tax. These prices may increase for this year's Festival and the events are subject to change. As you can see though, there's certainly something for everyone to suit all budgets, from free to megabucks.

It's worth knowing that the Food and Wine Festival is a very popular event these days, especially with locals. We found Epcot to be packed out on Friday and Saturday nights in particular, meaning long waits at many of the food booths. If you want to experience the festival at a quieter time, try heading for Epcot during the week and at lunchtimes. Whatever you do, if you're heading to Walt Disney World during the Food and Wine Festival, don't miss it -- there really is something for everyone to enjoy there!

Note: The 2007 Food and Wine Festival runs from September 28 through November 11.

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!](#)

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