

Advanced Dining Reservations: Strategies and Tips for Walt Disney World

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

"How on earth do I know where I want to eat six months before my Disney vacation?"

That's rapidly becoming one of most frequently asked questions on the PassPorter message boards, ever since Disney changed the booking policy for their table service restaurants, allowing Advanced Dining Reservations (ADR) to be made up to 180 days beforehand. Previously, you could make your bookings, then known as Priority Seating, 90 days before your planned dining day.

For those of us like myself who love to plan, this change allows us to start thinking about what we want to do at Disney and when a lot earlier than we could reasonably justify previously. But for many people, that's a frightening prospect. So where do you start?

The first thing to think about is whether you want to make Advanced Dining Reservations in the first place. Whenever people ask if they should, the answer is usually unanimous -- if you've got a particular restaurant in mind and you want to eat there on a certain day or for a certain meal, your best plan is to make an ADR. Ever since Disney introduced their Dining Plan, it's done exactly what they hoped it would, with bookings for their restaurants increasing dramatically. It is no longer uncommon to see signs at the theme parks, telling visitors that there's no availability at any table service restaurant for lunch or dinner, sometimes even at the quieter times of the year.

When you're thinking about which restaurants you might like to try at Disney, there are a couple of invaluable resources that will help you make your decision. One is a copy of PassPorter Walt Disney World. It's full of information about each Disney restaurant, complete with examples of menu items, how much your meal will cost, and ratings from Jennifer, Dave and readers. And if you're a vegetarian or on a diet, there are guides to which restaurants will be best for you.

If you're anything like me, you'll want to see a sample menu before you book at any restaurant and fortunately, you can find all of them online at AllEars.net in their superb menu section of their website. If you're still unsure about your choices after looking at the menus, there's no substitute for real life experience and you can find out what other

people have thought of particular restaurants by asking the question on the PassPorter message boards in the [Feasting & Snacking forum](#).

Once you've come up with some ideas, the next thing to do is have a look at where on Disney property your choices are. If you've got a couple of restaurants you want to try in Epcot, then you can either schedule them for the same day, perhaps heading to one for an early lunch and then finishing your day with dinner at the other. If time allows, you might be able to schedule two days at Epcot, dining at each of your choices. After all, the last thing you want to end up doing is having to leave the park you've decided to visit for the day to head over to another one, just for breakfast, lunch or dinner. It's something we've done on a couple of occasions, but we usually have the luxury of being at Disney for longer than many people, with our shortest visit lasting for eight nights.

As well as restaurants in each of the theme parks, don't forget about the great places to eat at the various Disney resorts. If you're at Magic Kingdom for a day, you can easily hop on the monorail and enjoy the dining options at the Contemporary, Polynesian and Grand Floridian, while the Wilderness Lodge and Fort Wilderness are only a boat ride away. So although there are only five table service restaurants inside the Magic Kingdom, there are plenty of choices nearby.

Equally, there's also a range of restaurants to try at Downtown Disney. We all need time away from the theme parks and what better way to do that than spending some time shopping in the Marketplace or partying at Pleasure Island and stopping to enjoy some good food?

Don't forget to think about when you might have late nights -- perhaps you'll be taking advantage of Evening Extra Magic Hours at one of the Disney parks? Well, the last thing you want to do is schedule a breakfast the next morning at a too-early time, especially if you're going to have to allow time to get to your restaurant as well. Deciding to book a character breakfast at the Crystal Palace at 8:00 am, when we were staying at Saratoga Springs and would be out until nearly the night before at Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party meant we didn't get much sleep that night!

One thing to remember when you're trying to work out your restaurant bookings is that you don't want to miss some of the great attractions that Disney has to offer. Many of them run continuously, but there are some that only take place at certain times. We made the mistake on one vacation of planning most of our dinners for between 7:30 and 8:30 in the evening, which meant we only had one or two opportunities to see IllumiNations at Epcot, which was showing at 9:00 nightly. It's a mistake

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we haven't made since and fortunately, it's something Disney has taken into account.

They now publish their theme park opening hours, along with details of nightly firework shows, evening parades, such as SpectroMagic at the Magic Kingdom and the afternoon parades in the Magic Kingdom, Disney's Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom six months ahead, so by the time you go to make any dining plans, you'll also have a good idea of what will be on and when during your stay. So if parades or fireworks are important to you and your family, you can ensure that your dining plans don't interfere with your plans to see these great Disney traditions. Details of Extra Magic Hours will also be published at this time, so you can decide if you either want to avoid those parks on the days they open early or late or whether you want to take full advantage of the additional hours.

Planning meals at six months out is certainly daunting and it's not something many people are used to. You don't have to phone up on the 180 day mark exactly though, especially if you're happy to make your choices between a few different restaurants. The most popular ones that tend to fill up first are those with characters, dinner at Boma at the Animal Kingdom Lodge and dinner at Le Cellier in Epcot -- now rumored to be the most popular place to dine on Disney property.

Once you've made your bookings though, you know that you have a restaurant you can enjoy on a particular day. If you want to change your mind nearer the time of your vacation, you can always see if you make a booking somewhere else and then go back and cancel your original. However, if you do find that everywhere is full, you've got the consolation of knowing that you planned far enough ahead to get into that restaurant you really wanted to experience.

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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