

Signature Disney Dining: The Disney Dining Plan at its Best

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

One of our great delights whenever we're at Walt Disney World (WDW) is enjoying the multitude of dining opportunities on offer. It's always interesting to see people's faces when we talk about the places that we've eaten, especially when it comes to Signature Dining. I can understand the confusion people feel -- after all, WDW has four theme parks, so surely that must be a recipe for burgers, hot dogs and fries? Nothing could be further from the truth, if you know where to look.

If you want fine dining at its best, then all you need to do is head to any of Disney's Signature restaurants, as they're now called. If you're on the Disney Dining Plan, eating at these places will cost two dining plan credits per person. Although it may not be the best possible use of your credits, it's something we love to do, knowing that we don't have to worry about the charge at the end of the meal, which can easily head into three figures, even for just the two of us.

The majority of the Signature Dining restaurants are located at Disney's deluxe resorts, with two exceptions. Cinderella's Royal Table in the Magic Kingdom is perhaps the one restaurant most out of keeping with the other Signature experiences, if only because the price you pay to dine there has just as much to do with the appearance of Disney princesses and its location in Cinderella Castle, as the food being offered. Sure, the food is very palatable here, but it's definitely not one of the better deals on the Dining Plan.

The other theme park signature eatery is the Hollywood Brown Derby at Disney's Hollywood Studios, and it too isn't the best value on the Dining Plan, coming in cheaper (on average) than most other Signature restaurants around Disney. Having said that, the atmosphere is wonderful here, taking you back to the golden era of Hollywood, with some wonderful dishes to sample, especially the famous Cobb salad, which everyone should try at least once. It's a real break from the park outside, taking you away to another era completely.

To get an experience that really is away from it all, you're best heading for one of the resort Signature restaurants, and there are plenty to pick from, with the majority located at the resorts near to the Magic Kingdom. Perhaps the most spectacular is the California Grill, located on the 15th floor of the Contemporary Resort, offering stunning views towards the Magic Kingdom and over the Seven Seas Lagoon. One of the big draws here is being able to watch Wishes fireworks from your table,

but don't worry if you can't get a coveted window seat, you can always stroll outside onto the balcony to watch it from there. The food here, as you'd expect from the name, is Californian and the main draws for us are the sushi and the flatbreads, although Valrhona chocolate cake is a particular favorite of mine as well!

Moving out towards Bay Lake, the next Signature restaurant you come to is Artist Point at the Wilderness Lodge. I think what I love most about this place is how homely and warm it feels, thanks to the beautiful dark woods here. It's also home to another famous dessert, the Artist Point Cobbler, made with berries and house made black raspberry ice cream, which is quite something to experience. Another famous dish here is the Cedar Plank Roasted Pacific King Salmon. If you're a fish lover, this is something you have to try. It's also the place to sample buffalo, something that doesn't appear on menus very often.

Taking a trip across the Seven Seas Lagoon, the Grand Floridian is the most exclusive resort on property and, as such, it's no surprise that it's home to two Signature restaurants. The first is Narcoosee's, which may take the prize for most romantic location, situated in a building just by the boat dock, offering beautiful views of the Magic Kingdom and Wishes. We adored the food here -- the crab cakes and scallops still stick in my mind -- but sadly we found it to be noisier than we would've liked.

The second is Citrico's, which blends the flavors of Florida and the Mediterranean. I'll be honest here, it's the only Signature restaurant at Disney which hasn't gelled with us to date. Our meal there wasn't good, but in fairness to it, I'm sure we'll give it another try one day, as I've heard very good reports from many others.

[Ed. - The Grand Floridian is also home to Victoria and Albert's, Disney's finest restaurant, which does not participate in the Disney Dining Plan, so it is not on the official list for Signature Dining.]

Another place that we didn't have a good experience with at first was the Flying Fish Cafe at the BoardWalk. Similarly to Citrico's, having heard nothing but wonderful things from other people, we gave it another shot and were similarly enchanted with it. As a non-meat eater, this place is wonderful for me, with the accent on fish. However, if you're not a fish eater, you'll still find plenty for you on the menu. I went for the Chef's Thunder recommendation, a group special menu items that change regularly. We were particularly impressed with the desserts here, which we felt were more unusual than are often on offer at Disney and again, these seem to change regularly.

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Across from the BoardWalk, the next Signature dining location is the Yachtsman Steakhouse at the Yacht Club, and despite my fears, I was able to find plenty on the menu to keep me satisfied. The scallop appetizer was an absolute stand-out for both of us and my husband was in heaven, with so many meat choices in front of him. I found a fish and vegetarian choice on offer, although the menu changes regularly and both the items we enjoyed are no longer to be seen there. It very much reminded me of Artist Point in terms of setting, with beautiful mahogany wood everywhere, which again gave it a very homely feel.

The final Signature Dining restaurant on Disney property is Jiko at Animal Kingdom Lodge, which is very different to all the other offerings, with its accent on African food and wine. The flat breads and the soups here are superb, and there's a good choice of both meat and fish dishes on the menu. On both our visits here we've found it to have a quiet and relaxed atmosphere.

If you haven't yet sampled any of the Signature Disney restaurants, don't leave it too long, as all have something special to offer guests. To us, it wouldn't be a Disney vacation without a visit to at least one of these great restaurants.

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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