

Making the Most of Your Meal: Enjoying the Trip to the Restaurant

by Yvonne & Sam Mitchell, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The growing popularity of the Disney Dining Plan has made for a lot of questions on the PassPorter message board about Disney's hotel restaurants and how to get to and from them.

When someone asks a question about travel to one of the restaurants, it's always about how to get there the quickest or shortest way. But going and eating at the restaurants on property can be more than a meal - it can be a truly magical experience. Walt Disney World is so vast, there are things you will never see or get to do if you always take the shortest or quickest route. So to make your dining experience more enjoyable, why not slow down and plan an adventurous or fun route around your meal plans? It gives you a chance to experience more of the wonder of Walt Disney World.

Here are a couple examples you can try or use them as starting points to make up your own routes:

Example Route One: Dinner at Disney's Wilderness Lodge

Leave a few hours early and take the bus to the Magic Kingdom. Have you ever thought of getting on the monorail and riding it all the way around and back? Well now is the time to do it! If you have kids, or are a kid at heart, ask a cast member at the monorail terminal if you can ride with the driver. It is first come, first served, so you may have to wait on this seat, but a ride in the front seat of the monorail is a special memory and a great place to get pictures. We were lucky enough to get a fun "driver" who took the funniest picture with our daughter. He asked us not to tell her until the pictures were "developed" (downloaded for those of you in the 21st century). It was a picture of her (all smiles of course) "driving" the monorail with him behind her in a perfect pose of prayer (as in we pray we'll all survive).

There are some things that can only be seen from the monorail. As the monorail approaches Disney's Grand Floridian, be on the look out for the Disney Wedding Pavilion on the right hand side. You just might catch a glimpse of Cinderella's Glass Coach carrying the new bride to her wedding. Be ready to snap some pictures.

(Special photo opportunity: As the monorail leaves The Grand Floridian Terminal, be on the lookout for the white buildings in the trees to the

left. This is the staging area for Cinderella's Glass Coach where the white horses are hooked up to it.)

Get off at the Magic Kingdom and go to the boat docks directly in front and take the boat to the Wilderness Lodge. The boat ride is relaxing, so hold your partner's hand and enjoy. If you have kids, the boat ride will be exciting for them.

At the Wilderness Lodge dock, take the boardwalk up and to the left and stop at Fire Rock Geyser. It goes off every hour from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm. This also gives you a great view of the Silver Creek Springs pool area. Follow the path up along the pool to the waterfall. Are you wondering where the water is coming from? Follow the path up to the Lodge and go inside and there on the left is Silver Creek hot spring coming right up out of the floor.

From here Artist Point is down the hall to your right. Whispering Canyon Cafe is straight ahead on the right across the lobby. If you have time before your dinner reservation, check out the awe inspiring 82 foot tall stone fireplace. It's simply amazing.

For a special treat for couples after your dinner, take the same path out of the Lodge and down by the pool. At Trout Pass pool-side bar, take the path to the right down to the beach. You can take a romantic barefoot stroll through the white sand or relax in a beach chair and watch the Electrical Water Pageant that crosses Bay Lake nightly.

Example Route Two: Dinner at Downtown Disney or Pleasure Island

For those shop-a-holics, here's a route that's sure to please. Make dinner reservations at one of the many wonderful restaurants available to you at Downtown Disney or Pleasure Island. The new Raglan Road offers Irish food with a twist and live music every night. Plan on leaving your hotel a couple of hours prior to your reservation.

Start at the Downtown Disney Marketplace and enter The Art of Disney store. Spend time watching a real Disney animator doing what he or she does best, as they create characters right before your eyes. Walk around and browse the art. Don't forget to make a wish and dream about what you'd buy if you could afford anything in the store. Share those ideas with family members - maybe they can make that dream come true for you someday!

Everyone loves Christmas! How about a stroll through Disney's Days of Christmas? Get into the Christmas spirit and buy your first ornament of

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the year. Who cares if it's July! Have pets at home? Disney Tails provides all kinds of goodies for your pets. Any pup would be proud to wear one of the adorable Disney "outfits" available. I personally had a ball buying Lady and Tramp merchandise for my mother, who's a big fan!

How about Mickey's Mart? Everything is under \$10! How many times have we said to our kids, "OK, one thing, as long as it's under \$10?" They'll have a ball figuring out what to get. You just might find a neat souvenir for yourself!

The Lego Imagination Center offers hours of free entertainment. You can take your children to the giant Lego table where they can build to their heart's content. But an even BETTER idea is leave the kiddos with one parent building the Lego's while the other parent makes a run through World of Disney, the largest Disney Store in the world. Ship everything home for a reasonable fee and surprise everyone at the holidays! Having worked up an appetite (and most likely a hefty credit card bill), head for dinner.

These are just a couple samples of the hundreds of routes possible around Walt Disney World. Taking the "long road" to your restaurant will open up a lot more of Walt Disney World for you and your family to experience in the time that you have.

About The Author: Yvonne (Tinkerbelz on PassPorter Message boards) runs the family antique jewelry business, and is a full-time mom. She was a peer reviewer for PassPorter's Walt Disney World for your Special Needs. She's been to Disneyland and Walt Disney World 25+ times. Sam (DVC_Increda_Man on the PassPorter boards) was a little reluctant to go to Walt Disney World for the first time in 2005, but enjoyed it so much that he is now a proud DVC owner. They are looking forward to their Walt Disney World vacation at the end of May.

Article last updated: 5/25/2006

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<http://www.passporter.com/articles/making-the-most-of-your-meal-enjoying-the-trip-to-the-restaurant.html>

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