

Enjoying While Expecting: The Epcot International Food & Wine Festival

by Erin Sforza, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When I was pregnant with my daughter, my husband and I had planned to visit his family in Florida, ending our trip with the all-important pilgrimage to the "house the Mickey built" to play one last time together before we were a party of three.

Many of my friends and family asked why we would even waste our time at Walt Disney World. For starters, I wouldn't be able to go on many of the rides, it was a lot of walking to do for a pregnant woman, it was warm, and ... well after that I kind of drifted off, to be honest. I knew that we were headed to Epcot for the Food & Wine Festival, which I had a hunch would be a great spot for me. I was not disappointed.

If you are planning a Disney vacation of any kind while expecting, don't ignore all of the wonderful advice you get from seasoned once-pregnant park veterans, as well as the usual precautions. Keep hydrated, rest frequently, eat well, and always make sure with your doctor that travel will be OK, because every pregnancy is different. That being said, the Food and Wine Festival is great for expectant moms for many reasons. There is a variety of different kinds of foods, not all of the special beverages are alcoholic, plenty of seating and indoor escapes from the sun and heat are available, and you will be able to go on some of the more gentle attractions.

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□ No matter what your craving or aversions are, you can alternately indulge or avoid them with ease. Every country offers more than one entree at the outdoor food stands, and the portions are also perfect for sensitive tummies. The way the festival is set up you can nibble and sip your way around the world until you and baby are content. Oh, and don't forget to partake in the desserts along the way! This is where the smaller portions are great too; you don't feel as if you (or baby) will be overdoing it. Epcot also offers wonderful sit-down restaurants serving nearly every kind of cuisine that you can think of. It was so much fun to see that not all of the festival's beverage offerings were alcoholic, too! There was a really nice ginger tea in China, and Via Napoli serves the most wonderful carbonated fruit beverages. You have a choice of strawberry, lemon, or blood orange and they are all fabulous!

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□ Epcot is also wonderful to explore while expecting because it's so easy to heed the advice to slow down and rest often. There are tons of comfy spots to sit down, many of them shaded, when you are exploring the

World Showcase. There is so much to see that you can't help but enjoy taking it all in at a nice, leisurely pace. Epcot also has some great indoor attractions to help you escape the heat. Some of my favorites are the "outdoor market" in Mexico, The Land Pavilion, the Seas Pavilion, and shopping in MouseGear. Shopping is also a lot of fun in the multitude of countries in the World Showcase.

If you are wondering whether there are any attractions that are suited for you while expecting you're in luck. Although you'll have to avoid rides like Test Track and Mission Space, you can enjoy plenty of other Epcot attractions. I was happy to find that Living With the Land, a tour through the Land Pavilion greenhouses, was available to me, as was Soarin', which is a simulated hang-glide over beautiful California. Be aware that some mummies-to-be with an aversion to pine or orange scents may want to skip this one, but otherwise it's always nice to feel weightless when you're in a condition where normally you may feel ... well, definitely not weightless! The Seas with Nemo and Friends is also a great ride. It's dark and cool and can be very calming. I love waiting to see if the dolphins are playing in the water at the end of the ride. (I also picked up the cutest bib for our little one with the seagulls from Finding Nemo yelling "Mine, mine, mine!") The American Adventure offers a nice seated and air conditioned respite, with a really well done show,. And don't miss the Voices of Liberty performing in the rotunda. They are just amazing to listen to. In fact, there are also a lot of musical performances that are worth stopping to see, especially the park-favorite group, "Off Kilter" in Canada. Then, there are the musical acts that are booked specifically for the festival's "Eat to the Beat" concerts.

□ I had so much fun in Epcot exploring the Food and Wine Festival as a mommy-to-be. The food was wonderful as always, I found some really fun non-alcoholic beverages to try, and there was plenty to keep me entertained without feeling like I pushed myself. There's no need to stress yourself out trying to park hop. You can slow down, take it all in, and end the day by hitting the Karmelle Kuche candy shop in Germany (hard) before settling in to watch IllumiNations and reveling in all of the smiles and compliments you received for being your cute pregnant self! If you're wondering whether you'll enjoy a visit to Disney World while expecting, there are certainly ways to make it a memorable experience, and Epcot is a great choice for a park to visit.

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