

## Budget Breakfast: Saving Dollars at Disney

by Melissa Solbach, PassPorter Guest Contributor

When I started planning our family's first vacation to Walt Disney World, it quickly became apparent that we were going to be spending a lot of money.

So to help with this, I started looking at some alternatives and cost saving strategies. One of the things that we decided, was to stay off campus at a condo with a full kitchen and eat at least one meal there, everyday. For us, that meal was breakfast. By using this strategy, I guesstimate we saved well over \$200 in food costs alone!

Disney has many wonderful character breakfasts, which for a family of four can run anywhere from \$60 up to \$150 for one meal! If you are off-site, the alternative is fast food or pancake houses, etc. As the saying goes, you can have it cheap, fast, or good, but you only get two at one time. There are a few places in the parks to get breakfast, but it is usually a roll or something insanely sweet, which means you can expect to be out \$20 and headed for a sugar crash in a couple hours.

□ So for us, we decided to splurge once on a character meal and try to cut costs the rest of the week by cooking breakfast at the condo. While I got the kids ready in the morning, my husband cooked and we usually only had one or two pans to clean up. (Although no tongs, so flipping the bacon was a little tricky!) One of the things I really loved was that it helped me make sure we were getting some nutrition in our meals, because we all know that often-times on vacation, a balanced diet goes right out the window! Another selling point was that it gave all of us a sense of normalcy in an otherwise mind-blowing adventure.

(Mind-blowing adventures, while um...you know, mind blowing, can also be exhausting!) There is really something about a home-cooked meal, no matter how simple, that brings you back to reality. We enjoyed how it gave us all a chance to talk about the cool things we did the previous day and all the upcoming cool things planned for that day, and I think the kids benefitted greatly from it.

□ I like to plan things (and boy, did I hit the mother lode when we decided on Disney!), so I sat down and did a menu plan for our week on vacation, just like we do for a regular week. We thought we might make it back for lunch or an early dinner, but after a couple of days of research, we abandoned that plan and just stuck with breakfast, and ate the other two meals in the parks.

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With the at-home meals, there were a number of factors to keep in mind; cost, nutrition, ease of preparation and limiting waste. We tried to eat things that would stay with us, but not weigh us down. My husband and I are veteran theme park-ers and had our own tips and tricks to use, but this was the first big vacation with the kids, so that changed some things for us. We hit the parks running most days, and eating a big meal can really make that uncomfortable, not to mention nauseating (Tea Cups anyone?). Another thing is that while the two of us could push through our hunger until after normal lunch times to avoid the crowd, that was not going to be an option with a 1st grader and toddler. Melt-downs must be avoided, and that takes some forethought!

Of course, one of the reasons you might want to prepare meals at your hotel is to save money, and the key is to buy economical things that you will be able to use up completely during your stay. An entire box of cereal may not be the best option, but a dozen eggs and a package of sausages for a family of 4 are easy to use up. I even brought a few items from home, like single-serving peanut butter and some packets of instant oatmeal. The key here is to pack things that won't take any space, or weight, in your suitcase.

On our last day, we signed up for the latest available breakfast time for Chef Mickey's character buffet, so that morning's first meal was to get us by until 11:00 am when we could sit, eat, and relax. We baked cinnamon rolls (the kind that come in a tube) and that was enough to tide everyone over until we could stuff ourselves at the buffet and meet Mickey and Pals!

All that aside, we didn't make every breakfast at the hotel that week. We had planned one day off from the parks, and since we do not have a Dunkin' Donuts in our city, we stopped and got a few donuts so we could sleep-in the next morning. After lunch at Earl of Sandwich, we went back to the condo with its amazing screened in porch for a meal of frozen pesto pizza, pre-mixed Caesar salad, and a bottle of wine. My husband and I both agreed it was one of the most relaxing meals of the entire trip!

Here are some tips for cheap, easy, fast breakfast meals. We had the same meal a couple of different times during the week.

- \* We included lots of protein. My family loves eggs, bacon, and turkey sausage links. You could also use peanut butter as your protein.

- \* Think about planned left-overs. You can make a fantastic frittata or egg scramble with any dinner leftovers you have.

- \* The freezer section at the grocery store has lots of great options for breakfast, like pancakes, sausage, and cinnamon rolls. They will cost a little more than what you can make at home from scratch, but loads

cheaper and easier than eating out. After all, let's not forget you are still on vacation!☐

\* ☐☐And if all else fails, sometimes a box of Pop Tarts can work wonders for kids too excited to eat!

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☐When we checked out of the condo, we were pleased to see that we had used up everything we had purchased the night we arrived, except for two bottles of water, and we drank those on the way to the airport. We had an amazing trip, and the cost savings was great, but the time together as a family was priceless.

*About The Author: Melissa Solbach is a first-time contributor to PassPorter News.*

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