

## Tusker House at Disney's Animal Kingdom: A Dining Review

by Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnist

One of the benefits of traveling to Disney sans spouse is that you get to try all the different places that they may not like. My husband, Steve, is a wonderful man, but when it comes to food, he likes it plain and simple. So on my recent solo trip, I decided to check out a few places that he might not be adventurous enough to sample. One of these was Tusker House.

Not all that long ago, Tusker House transitioned from a counter service eatery to a buffet. In my opinion, Animal Kingdom was sorely lacking in food choices, and the addition of Tusker House as a sit down venue could only improve things. Although I had eaten here as a counter service and enjoyed it, I was anxious to see what they now offered.

Our lunch reservation was for 11:30 a.m., the first lunchtime seating. We arrived a bit early, and they were still cleaning up from the breakfast buffet. Tusker House now serves "Donald's Breakfast Buffet," which was originally served at Restaurantosaurus, located in DinoLand. The breakfast, characters and all, moved over here in November of 2007, leaving Restaurantosaurus to go back to its counter service roots.

We checked in at the podium. Despite the beehive activity going on in the buffet area, they allowed us to go in, look around and take some photos. The theming for Tusker House is much the same as it was. You feel as if you are walking into an African market place. The warm, muted colors are evident in the wall art, the ceiling drapes and the decor. Each food service area appears to be in its own individual market stall, leaving you with the impression that you are shopping for fresh goods on a cool summer day! Even the high ceiling conveys that marketplace feel.

Soon, we were seated. The tables are the same as they were, warm wood, heavy chairs and a continuation of the open-air market feeling. Our server, Melissa, was there quickly and took our drink orders. She explained a few things about the buffet, and we were ready to go! I was anxious to see the offerings, and to see if this would be a place that Steve might actually enjoy.

I started at the salad area. There were American favorites, such as Caesar salad and mixed greens. I decided I could get those anytime, so I tried a few of the more exotic dishes; the Tunisian couscous salad and the tomato and cucumber salad with mint and yogurt dressing. The food

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was fresh and delicious. There was also a selection of breads, including pita, served with several different condiments. These were also very fresh and tasty.

Steve doesn't eat salad, but would have liked the large bread selection. OK, that's one!

Then it was on to the main part of the buffet. They were still bringing a few items out, so that meant two trips! I started with the salmon and the carved pork loin. My side dish choices were then orzo pasta, couscous, veggies (which were delicious and I found out later, infused with saffron), and mashed potatoes. That was round one! Round two included the sliced sirloin, Basmati rice and some more veggies. Some of the items I didn't try were the rotisserie chicken, seafood stew, and vegetable samosas. All the food was fresh, hot and very good.

Hmmm; Steve would love the carving station, the chicken, the mashed potatoes, and yes, he loves orzo! That's two!

Tusker House also offers a children's buffet. It has the standard children's fare on it, such as macaroni and cheese, corn dog nuggets, and chicken drumsticks. It is in its own station amidst the rest of the buffet. I did score a few corn dog nuggets to balance out my African-themed meal. I did notice a few adventurous children trying some of the adult food, also. It was good to see that this option was available to them, as one complaint from parents at Walt Disney World is that the children's menu at many restaurants is far too limited for their children's tastes. This was a nice mix for both the mac and cheese crowd and the "let's-try-some-of-the-couscous" crowd.

Steve likes mac and cheese, too. That's three!

Finally, it was on to dessert. The dessert station is located in the middle of the serving area, almost as if it was an afterthought. It is set up in a sort of circle pattern, and the desserts are decadent! There was bread pudding, brownies, tarts, mini cheesecakes, chocolate cake...an amazing variety! And of course, being a buffet, you could have as many as you wanted! I came back to the table with my plate piled high!

Steve likes dessert; that is four; and I think we have a winner!

Tusker House was an awesome dining experience. There was plenty of exotic tastes for the adventurous eater, and plenty of American cuisine for the fussier eater to enjoy. This is definitely a return engagement for me, and now that I know what they have, Steve will be joining me. I think

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he will like it just as much as I did!

Tusker House is in Animal Kingdom, so park admission is required. The cost for lunch is \$21.29 for adults and \$11.71 for children. Dinner is \$28.75 for adults and \$13.84 for children. This includes tax and a non-alcoholic standard beverage, but not gratuity. Seasonal pricing may be in effect from 5/24 to 7/12, increasing the cost by a few dollars. Hours are 11:30-3:30 for lunch, and 4:00-5:00 p.m. for dinner. Animal Kingdom closes at 5:00 p.m. most nights. The lunch menu and the dinner menu are essentially the same.

Tusker House is worth a try. You will not be disappointed!

*About The Author: Sue Kulick is a resident of the Pocono Mountains and an avid Disney fan. She and her husband, Steve, live in a log home with their Golden Retrievers, Cody and Belle and their cat Tigger.*

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