Walt Disney World News

Dining Options Ever-Changing at Walt Disney World Resort

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. – With great eats everywhere – from *luxe* restaurants to fast- casual food in the theme parks, dining is a significant part of the Walt Disney World vacation experience.

With hundreds of places for a meal, guests don't have to travel the globe to taste the world. From South African wines to Florida-sourced seafood, Walt Disney World restaurants offer a dazzling array of upscale dining. And you'll also find micro-brews, house-made gelatis and other fast-casual tastes with big flavors.

Online dining reservations make it easy to book most Walt Disney World table-service restaurants up to 180 days in advance at www.disneyworld.com. Reservations can be made for up to 10 guests (more than 10 requires a call to Disney Dining Reservations). For booking by phone, call 407/WDW-DINE.

And each fall, more than 1 million fans head to the Epcot International Food & Wine Festival, a premier culinary event that has helped raise the bar on fine dining at Disney. Featuring great celebrity chefs and wine connoisseurs in the spectacular setting of World Showcase, the festival features tastes of wine, beer and food from around the world.

Healthful Initiatives

Even though vacation may be a time for indulgence, Walt Disney World chefs provide healthful options, serving more than 20,000 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables annually. (Every Walt Disney World table-service and quick-service restaurant offers at least one vegetarian option.) For lifestyle dining options, or for requests from guests with food allergies or intolerances, there are a wide range of choices, from kosher to gluten and sugar free. In 2009, Disney tracked nearly a quarter of a million requests for special dietary needs and allergies.

"We have a real commitment to innovative, healthy menus," said Mahmud Dhanani, vice president of Food & Beverage Concept Development. A new culinary dietary specialist recently joined the team to focus on vitality lifestyle ideas.

Revised menus require that no more than 35 percent of calories can come from fat – saturated fat and sugar must account for no more than 10 percent of the meal's calories. And chefs keep tinkering with recipes, such as smoothies, now made with non-fat yogurt and fresh fruit purees (now 120 calories and the former recipe was 420 calories).Kids' menus at Disney are evolving, and changes make healthier choices the standard instead of the "alternate." Grapes, apples, carrot sticks and unsweetened applesauce in place of french fries and 1 percent milk, or bottled water instead of soda, for instance. Guests must request fries and sodas (at no additional cost). Surveys show that 60 percent of all quick-service kids' snacks served healthy option choices.

What's New

La Hacienda de San Angel and Cantina de San Angel. At the Mexico pavilion at Epcot World Showcase, two all-new eateries along World Showcase Lagoon recently opened. La Cantina offers quick-service and features tacos, nachos and empanadas, and a variety of frozen margaritas. La Hacienda is a table-service restaurant with contemporary Mexican fare such as mixed seafood grill, roasted pork loin and flank steak. La Hacienda has its own “tequila ambassador” and features tequila flights and a whole new line of margaritas, including a coffee margarita. La Cantina, with indoor and outdoor seating, is open daily for lunch and dinner; 250-seat La Hacienda opens daily at 4 p.m.

Via Napoli Ristorante e Pizzeria. The lively, 300-seat restaurant that is operated by the Patina Group is full of energy with an open kitchen and three wood-burning pizza ovens that represent Italy’s three active volcanoes (Mount Etna, Mount Vesuvius and Stromboli). Those ovens crank up to 700 F with oak wood, and with a touch of Disney whimsy, the “faces” of the fiery ovens open their “mouths.” From *fritto misto*, an enormous platter of fried mozzarella, calamari, eggplant, asparagus, zucchini, artichoke hearts and *arancini* (rice balls) to the signature lasagna verde with spinach, Parmesan, béchamel sauce and a generous flourish of nutmeg, the menu is authentic. Patina Executive Chef Charlie Restivo really focuses on the pizzas, with mozzarella flown in from Italy, the water from a source in the United States that is similar to the alkaline of the water in Naples, and San Marzano tomatoes – absolutely no substitutions for a “certified” *Vera Pizza Napolitana*, with specific rules, including hand stretching the dough. The gargantuan “1/2 meter” to share is rolled to the table on a stainless steel cart.

Karamelle-Küche. German for “caramel kitchen,” the new shop in the Germany pavilion at Epcot is themed like an Old World German caramel shop. A show kitchen features cast members making fresh caramel popcorn, caramel apples, and caramel-covered strawberries and marshmallows. Werther’s Original candy is on the shelves, and the shop also includes gourmet caramels, cookies, brownies, fudge and cupcakes. It’s the only free-standing retail location in the world for Storck, makers of Werther’s Original Caramels, and you’ll find some goodies on the shelves that you can’t find anywhere else. The shop replaces the Glas und Porzellan shop.

Pollo Campero. The international Latin restaurant at Downtown Disney Marketplace, best known for its fried and grilled chicken, will also be offering chef-prepared salads, sandwiches, wraps, fruits and healthy snacks, as well as vegetarian, gluten-free, sugar-free, low sodium, and organic offerings. The quick-service eatery takes over the space formerly occupied by McDonald’s.

More Dining Highlights

Queen Victoria’s Room. Guests are indulged with an evening of divine tastes and plenty of pampering in the new Queen Victoria’s Room at Victoria & Albert’s at Disney’s Grand Floridian Resort & Spa. But Queen Victoria’s Room is about so much more than the feast. Behind closed doors, it’s different from Victoria &Albert’s elegant main dining room; the staff under the direction of maitre d’ Israel Perez expertly revives the European art of tableside finishes for each dish. With just four tables, diners are encouraged to savor each bite – and even to take a walk around the Grand Floridian between dinner and dessert. The restaurant has a new website, www.victoria-alberts.com. Cost for dining in Queen Victoria’s Room is $200; add wine pairings for $95. For reservations visit the website or call 407/939-3862. A jacket is required for men. Valet parking is complimentary.

Front-Row Seat for the Kitchen at New Chef’s Table at Flying Fish Cafe. Award-winning Chef Tim Keating at Flying Fish Cafe at Disney’s BoardWalk has a loyal following, and guests often ask him to create a special dinner – something that’s not on the menu. And most of the regulars love a seat at the wide granite bar facing the on-stage kitchen. Now the first six seats at the coveted Chef’s Counter are reserved for the new Chef’s Tasting Wine Dinner, a nightly affair that offers five courses paired with wine for a special evening – “a new spin on menu items,” said Keating. And there’s plenty of interaction with the well-orchestrated team of chefs. Sommelier Keith Gimbel expertly pairs delicious wines with each course. There are two seatings nightly, Sunday through Thursday, at 5:45 and 8:15 p.m. Cost is $135, $85 without wine. Make reservations at 407/WDW-DINE. There are a handful of blackout dates throughout the year (mostly around busy holidays).

Kona Island Sushi Bar at Disney’s Polynesian Resort. The 20-seat sushi bar is now open nightly, located right outside of Kona Cafe near the monorail. Mornings they serve coffee, tea, pastries and fruit. At 5 p.m., the menu morphs to sushi with about a half-dozen rolls, sashimi (fish without rice) and nigiri (fish with rice). If you prefer your fish cooked, there’s a delicious shrimp tempura roll with fresh mango or the Kona crab cake roll made with lump

crab, avocado and Asian tartar sauce. Traditionalists can stick with salmon or tuna sashimi or the delicious tuna poke salad. For vegetarians, there's a cucumber roll. Pair any pick with a classic mai tai or Kona Cool Sundown cocktail, Kona Fire Rock Pale Ale or Kona Longboard lager, wine or sake.

California Grill Celebrates 15 Years at the Top. Since May 15, 1995, the California Grill on the 15th floor of Disney's Contemporary Resort has been winning culinary accolades. Chef Brian Piasecki has been running the California Grill kitchen since January 2009, focusing on seasonal and local products when possible, and coloring outside the box with dishes such as seared bison and a lobster salad with yuzu mayo. But we know that it's the dazzling location high atop the Contemporary with a bird's eye view of the Magic Kingdom fireworks that really take the experience over the top. And manager and sommelier Bridget Sherren showcases a stellar wine list and runs a top-notch team in the dining room.

Kouzzina by Cat Cora. Celebrating its first anniversary, this Greek-inspired restaurant at Disney's BoardWalk pays tribute to celebrity chef Cat Cora's roots. Cora says that the new restaurant features "time-honored recipes passed down from my ancestors, as well as my favorite Greek and Mediterranean dishes that my family loves." The first and only female Iron Chef on Food Network's hit show "Iron Chef America," Cora is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Chef Dee Foundoukis keeps the kitchen running when Cora is on the road.

Tequila Bar at Mexico. La Cava del Tequila in the Mexico pavilion in Epcot World Showcase offers 95 varieties of the popular beverage. With 30 seats, the lounge offers premium tequilas and margaritas, with light Mexican appetizers. And an official "tequila ambassador" from Tequila, Mexico. Most guests order the classic margarita, served in Mexico City since 1963, a simple trio of *blanco* teqila with Cointreau liquor and fresh lime juice. A half-dozen small bites are on the menu, from chicken, shrimp and blue crab tostadas to shrimp cocktail, guacamole and beef taquitos. And if guests prefer a cocktail without alcohol, the frozen piñata is a delicious blend of coconut, pineapple and strawberry juices. No reservations; hours are noon to 9 or 9:30 p.m.

The Wave…of American Flavors at Disney's Contemporary Resort features a "super lounge" and upscale restaurant with "bold American cooking with flavors from all over the world." Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner, The Wave…of American Flavors offers seasonal menus featuring local and regional products when possible, organic beers and trendy cocktails such as the "antioxidant cosmo" with açai juice. The innovative wine list has a quirky claim to fame: all screw caps, no corks. Cutting- edge wines from around the globe are showcased, as well as organic draft beers.

More Attention to Nutrition

Walt Disney World Resort is committed to offering healthy snack options that are widely available. The number of fresh fruit carts at the parks is steadily increasing while other nutritious snacks like nuts and trail mix also are more readily available.

Disney is continuing to work with manufacturers to reformulate recipes for candy, packaged food and bakery items sold in the parks, or identifying replacement products to find new products that do not use partially hydrogenated oil. Portion-controlled snacks and treats and packaging to promote nutritious food are part of the changes, as well as sugar-free, gluten-free and low-calorie options.

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