

## Crystal Palace: A Disney Character Dining Review

by Jennifer Shorey Arnold, PassPorter Guest Contributor

I love going to Crystal Palace! We make a point to try to visit for breakfast once during every Walt Disney World trip.

□ It's just so much fun to enjoy good food and visit with Pooh and Friends in such a beautiful space. Crystal Palace is a character buffet dining experience in Magic Kingdom. If you're on the Disney Dining Plan, it requires one table service dining credit per person. The restaurant is located at the end of Main Street, U.S.A. in the Hub, just to the left of Casey's Corner and just before the bridge to Adventureland. You can't miss this beautiful building with its glass windows and Victorian touches. I love how bright and open the place feels, and the breakfast buffet at Crystal Palace is delicious! There are lots of options to fill you up before you begin your fun filled day, from traditional breakfast items to fun, chocolate Mickey waffles, pastries, and fresh fruit. Although the Crystal Palace can get very busy, I have never found it to be overly loud thanks to its high ceilings.

Normally, we schedule an early morning dining reservation, before official park opening time. It's such a great way to start your magical day at the Magic Kingdom! It's so amazing to enter the Magic Kingdom before it officially opens for the day and walk through the tunnel to find Main Street U.S.A. quiet and peaceful, with Cinderella Castle glistening in the early morning sun. For some trips, we've even been lucky enough to find Disney PhotoPass photographers along Main Street, taking photos of guests with the castle in the background.

□ I always make it a point to schedule our advance dining reservations (ADRs) as close to the 180-day mark as possible. However, for our most recent trip, I got sidetracked and only started booking dining reservations about two months before our trip. Since Disney was offering a Free Dining promotion, we discovered that all breakfast reservations for the week of our trip had already been booked. Disappointed, we decided to check to see if other meal times were available. Luckily, we were able to find an available early dinner reservation for the same evening as our Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party tickets. I had always read good things about their dinner buffet, so we went ahead and booked the reservation.

□ That day we made a point to have a big breakfast at Kona Cafe in the Polynesian Resort before entering the park, and then a small snack around lunch time in the Magic Kingdom. At 3:15 pm we were at the

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restaurant, ready to check-in for our 3:30 pm reservation. Our name was quickly called and we were amazed how fast we were seated. In fact, they took us a few minutes earlier than our scheduled dining reservation. This was a nice surprise, since at breakfast we often have to wait for at least 10 minutes after our scheduled reservation for our name to be called for seating.

As you enter through the beautiful glass doors of the restaurant you are greeted by adorable topiaries of Winnie the Pooh and his friends Piglet, Eeyore, and Tigger. Even though our reservation was at the very beginning of dinner service, we were still a bit surprised to find Crystal Palace to be extremely quiet, with only a few tables occupied here and there. As we were seated, the cast member explained the path that the characters would follow around the room. Since our table was near the start of the character path on our side of the dining room, she advised us to watch for the characters as they pass through the atrium, so we would not to be out of our seats when the characters came by our table. Also, she reminded us that occasionally the characters would lead the children in a parade around the room, and assured us that if the parade starts while the characters are out visiting tables, they will return to the table where they left off, though first they'll go back to the kitchen for a quick break. The cast member then gave us a quick description of the buffet and took our drink orders.

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□ Almost as quickly as we were seated, we saw Piglet crossing the atrium to the tables in our section. After a few minutes of photos and hugs with Piglet, we made our way to the buffet. We definitely were not disappointed; everything looked great and fresh. There was a nice-size selection including salads, vegetables, meats, and a large dessert section. There was even a "Pooh's Corner" section with items that were kid-friendly like pizza and macaroni and cheese. I couldn't resist getting a bit of the macaroni and cheese for myself. We quickly returned to our table and found everything we tried to be simply delicious.

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□ After returning to our table, I was a bit surprised to see that Pooh had started making his way around our section of the restaurant. He visited with the few other occupied tables and then came around to ours, where he posed for photos and gave big hugs. As Pooh walked away we noticed, to our surprise and delight, that Eeyore and Tigger were close behind him. Soon, they too had visited our table. Looking at my watch, I noted that we had seen all four characters in only 30 minutes! This had never happened when we'd been here for breakfast. At breakfast, the cast members have always said that it takes 45 to 90 minutes to have your meal and be visited by all the characters. Sometimes it has taken closer to 45 minutes, but on average it takes about 1 hour for us to see every character and eat our breakfast.

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□ This turned out to be such a great visit! Not only did we get to see all the characters in such a short time and enjoy a new meal at Crystal Palace, it also seemed like the characters were able to spend a little extra time with us and every table in the restaurant, since it was not packed. I personally found this to be amazing, since we were just two adults at the table, and in visits past it seemed like we'd say hello to a character, pose for quick pictures, and the character would rush off to the next table. This time the characters all took a few extra minutes to horse around and visit with everyone. All the characters were great, but Tigger was a blast! He jumped around and acted silly with us and one of the cast members, and he hugged my husband so hard that he nearly knocked off his baseball cap. I will cherish those memories and pictures for a long time to come.

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□ Thanks to this visit, we have decided that we will definitely start visiting Crystal Palace for more than just breakfast!

*About The Author: Jennifer is a Disney enthusiast and loves to visit Walt Disney World and Disneyland with her husband as often as possible. When not at the parks, she enjoys sharing her knowledge of Disney with family and friends to help them plan their own Disney trips.*

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