

Theme park dining is about more than just feeding kids an endless stream of burgers and fries, finds Katie McGonagle

ancy sinking a butterbeer in the Three Broomsticks, sitting down to dinner in the castle from *Beauty and the Beast*, or tackling the world's biggest stack of pancakes? Well, bon appetit.

Theme parks are known for pushing the boundaries - the biggest ride, newest movie tie-in, or most exciting attraction - and they are every bit as creative in their restaurant scene, too.

So if your clients are thinking a quick pizza pit stop is all that's on offer, open their eyes to the menu of options that will turn a simple breakfast, lunch or dinner into a highlight of their visit.

IN THE MOVIES

Stepping inside the silver screen can be every bit as thrilling as a rollercoaster ride, and that's exactly what Walt Disney World offers at Be Our Guest Restaurant in the Magic Kingdom. Designed to look like the magnificent castle from Beauty and the Beast, it's all stained glass, suits of armour and

elegant chandeliers lighting up a huge ballroom, where families can feel like royalty as they feast on French-inspired food.

There are more French fancies at Disneyland Paris, where Ratatouille-themed Bistrot Chez Rémy offers a rat's-eye view on a Parisian bistro, blowing everything up to ginormous proportions (and of course, the eponymous ratatouille is always on the menu).

In Dubai, the new IMG
Worlds of Adventure's link with
the Cartoon Network means
youngsters can dine with their
favourite characters at CN Feast,
or enjoy burgers and shakes
with Ben 10 and his buddies at
American-style diner Mr Smoothy

Back in Orlando, sprinkle a little Harry Potter magic with a stop at the Three Broomsticks in Universal's Islands of Adventure. Tuck in to reassuringly familiar platters of Cornish pasties or fish and chips, or sip a pumpkin juice and a flagon of butterbeer while imagining yourself in the heart of the Potter-verse.

FAMILY FUN

For a view the kids really won't forget, consider the Sharks Underwater Grill at SeaWorld. Diners get good food and full service, but what really sells it is the huge floor-to-ceiling windows to the shark tank. Though they might be struck by pangs of guilt if they order the fish...

If you're only spending one or two days at your chosen park, the

Supernova Shakes, Planet Hollywood Orlando key is finding quick options that don't take away from time better spent on rides and slides. Aquaventure, the water park for Atlantis The Palm in Dubai, has two time and wallet-friendly options: Sharkbites, near the beach, and Barracudas, which is next to the Tower of Poseidon and a good spot to wait while queues die down. The latter has Arabic mezze, shawarma and falafel, alongside more familiar options, so it's a good spot to introduce kids to local cuisine.

There's more summer fun to be had at Drayton Manor Park, which has a new afternoon tea served daily from 12pm-4pm, with sandwiches, scones and cakes for kids with a sweet tooth, or homemade scotch eggs, pork pie and cheese board for those with a savoury bent. Mum and dad can even upgrade with a glass of Pimm's or prosecco for an extra £5 (from £15 per adult and £7.50 per child).

FINE DINING

Michelin-starred dining might not seem a natural fit for a fun-packed park, but eating options have gone seriously upmarket over the past few years. The redeveloped Disney Springs boasts The Boathouse, right on the waterfront and featuring live music and romantic tours aboard The Venezia water taxi – with champagne toast and chocolate-covered strawberries, naturally. That's before you tuck in to a classy menu of fresh seafood, steaks and a raw bar prepared in its 8,000ft open kitchen.

Continuing the nautical theme,
Ammolite - The Lighthouse Restaurant
at Europa Park was the first theme
park eatery to earn a Michelin star,
and it's had two since 2014. With a
four-course meal setting you back €95
a head, excluding wine, it's more of a
romantic option than one for kids, but
worth splashing out on.

For a more child-friendly fine dining option, Bollywood Parks Dubai's Mughal-e-Azam is like a little slice of ancient India in the heart of the Gulf, inspired by a Bollywood tale from the era of the Mughal kings – and with a menu to match. Meals cost about £26 with soft drinks and £42 with house beverages.

SWEET STUFF

If you thought theme parks went to town on the main course, just wait until you see dessert. Universal Orlando's Toothsome Chocolate Emporium opened last September, moving dessert (and possibly guests' waistlines) up a few notches with an all-day brunch menu including French toast and crepes, plus milkshakes that are a meal in themselves, with toppings such as Key Lime Pie or chocolate-covered bacon. Yum.

The recently reopened Planet
Hollywood in Disney Springs also
goes to town on its shakes: taking
inspiration from its four-storey
stargazing observatory, added during a
multimillion-dollar refit, the Strawberry
Big Bang, Chocolate Comet and
Cosmic Cotton Candy are more like
works of art than simple smoothies –
just don't let kids eat a whole one or
prepare to deal with the sugar rush.

Efteling's traditional pancake house, Polles Keuken, which holds the world record for the tallest pancake stack, also lets kids Pimp Your Own Pancake for a bargain €5.50. Choose from whipped cream, sprinkles, chocolate sauce and ice cream, and then watch entranced as the kitchen comes to life on its own, complete with banging pots and pans. Good luck, mum and dad! ₩

Closer to home, Dutch theme park

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Toothsome Chocolate Emporium; afternoon tea at Drayton Manor; The Boathouse,





The Highlights



SHOPAHOLIC

We spent two hours and more than \$200 in SEPHORA, a beauty playground for hair and make-up lovers, in Town Center. We took advantage of complimentary make-up classes and mini makeovers, and walked out instant experts in contouring and highlighting. You'll find all sorts of famous make-up and hair products under one roof. Shopping is one of my favourite things so we made a whole day of it – and you can at Disney Springs, with firm favourites such as Zara, Anthropologie, Mac, Ugg and not forgetting the biggest Disney Store ever for all your souvenirs.



CHOW DOWN

My favourite restaurant is THE BOATHOUSE at The Landing, right on the waterfront. It serves the best and freshest oysters, ribs and steaks in the park, and the atmosphere is awesome. But the crème de la crème has to be the three-foot baked Alaska – easily the best thing I've ever seen or eaten in a restaurant. You can also try Morimoto Asia and Fronte a Cocina.



LA NOUBA, for the first time at Disney Springs is incredible. It's fast, furious and breathtaking, one of the best shows they perform and an absolute must for any special occasion. Tickets start at \$59, until the run ends in December. If you want more family fun, catch one of Disney's latest film releases at AMC Movies or strike out at Splitsville Luxury Lanes for a night of bowling and high fives.



Love to shop, love to eat and love to play? Disney Springs at Walt Disney World, Orlando, has got the lot, finds Flora loannou, as she shares a few of her favourite places



THIRST-QUENCHER

If it's pre-dinner drinks you're after or a cheeky lunchtime treat, head to JOCK LINDSEY'S HANGAR BAR, a 1940s aeroplane hangar inspired by the Indiana Jones films, on The Landing. The cocktails are amazing. Order yourself a Cool-headed Monkey, the rum-based concoction that got my night off to a fiery start.





PARTY TIME!

HOUSE OF BLUES had us on our feet and dancing the night away to live bands playing R&B, Latin, reggae, metal, hip-hop and, of course, the blues. You'll find the House of Blues on the West Side. It's a popular venue and home to fresh talent from around the world, so check before you go as you may need to book tickets. Other places to have a great night are Paradiso 37 Entertainment and Exposition park.

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