



Ideas and Insights for Full-Service Restaurants | July 2, 2014

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Children Should be Seen and Not Ignored

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Kids dining at restaurants goes upscale THINKSTOCK

Upscale restaurants go beyond crayons and paper for children's dining.

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Restaurants have moved beyond crayons and coloring books to fully embrace children at the table, sometimes going so far as to entice children into the kitchen. It's a trend across many segments of the full-service industry, even gathering a following in finer dining.

"Spell family," instructs Rajesh Radke, director of food and beverage at Trecento Quindici Decano, an upscale restaurant in the St. Regis Aspen Resort. "It is a word, but it also stands for 'Father, Mother: I love you.'"

Radke explains, "We cater to the family as a whole." At the table, each child is given cookie dough to decorate and then the cookies are baked while the meal is eaten. "Parents take pictures of their kids with their cookies. They love it!"

Additionally, the resort's culinary team leads "Budding Chef" classes, where children participate in vegetable art and learn about culinary craft. A game room adjacent to the restaurant features table tennis, air hockey, Nintendo Wii, and arts and crafts, providing ample entertainment for children while adults relax at the table.

Second Home Kitchen + Bar in Denver also caters to families, hosting a pajama brunch on Sundays. Children are treated to a pancake bar, while parents indulge in a do-it-yourself Bloody Mary bar.

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“We want to offer guests a chance to go out, enjoy a mimosa, and a leisurely brunch without having to find a babysitter. The kids love it because they don’t have to listen to all the adults talk. They can go in the kids’ room, watch a movie, make a craft, and enjoy our pancake bar,” says Sandra Morriss, sales and marketing manager for Second Home Kitchen + Bar.

But kid-friendly dining isn’t just about keeping the little ones entertained and out of the way. It’s also about creating a healthy experience.

“My grandkids would sit down and be a little fidgety. They might start coloring or something. But then I thought, ‘Hey, why don’t we give them something to eat?’” says Michael Dellar, founder of Lark Creek Restaurant Group.

Now—within two to three minutes of seating a family—his restaurants provide coloring books and colorful veggie crudités, entertainment plus a healthy start to the meal.

“We always try to offer as healthy a menu as possible, and there are only a few fried options on the menu,” Dellar says.

Basically, he says they treat children the same way they treat adults—but instead of elaborate sets and sauces, they keep the children’s menu simple. That doesn’t mean compromising the culinary experience: “We don’t use the flavor extractor,” he quips. “Ninety-nine percent of kids are well-behaved. They’re learning to compose themselves, it’s a beautiful thing.”

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