



Dining with kids (It can be done!)

BY KATIE KELLY BELL

When I asked my three children to come up with their favorite Atlanta restaurants, they unanimously chorused, "Brusters!" Naturally, because the only food they serve is ice cream. It's a fine place to dangle out there as a reward for behaving during dinner on the town, but there are numerous places in Atlanta where the dining is the reward for everyone. And, your children might even thank you when all is said and done.

When my kids need dinner and a show I rely on **Taverna Plaka** (2196 Cheshire Bridge Rd., 404-636-2284). Greek cuisine is very kid-friendly (try the fried calamari, shrimp croquettes and lemon roasted potatoes), but Greek belly dancing is without peer. The festive, jovial atmosphere also does a terrific job of drowning out any squawks from toddlers. Be sure to schedule your visit for a Thursday when the belly dancers also perform a fire and sword show.

The fountain at **Sabroso** (351 Moreland Ave., 404-475-8888) is another superior diversion. Kids can enjoy the water on the oversized, enclosed patio without disturbing the whole restaurant. The kids' tapas menu is a no-brainer (mine are mad for the mini-grilled cheese and Spanish tortilla). My husband is just grateful for the cold beer, and I can order an unusual glass of wine.

Often the dessert menu is motivation enough for anyone under the age of 10. **Ted's Montana Grill** (multiple locations; 1874 Peachtree Rd., 404-355-3897) specializes in bison burgers, but the Edys Dreamsicle milkshakes are sinfully memorable — my children still talk about them. Mom can dine fastidiously on a bison burger (less cholesterol than fish), and then help her child finish the milkshake. Booths are oversized and the wikki stix (essentially wax covered, multi-colored pipe cleaners) are ideal

for keeping troops occupied while awaiting a plate of onion rings. Adults should order a bottle of fine Cabernet, and snack on a bison ribeye or plate of succulent short ribs accompanied by fresh from scratch sides like squash casserole and garlic mashed potatoes — either way the meal will be retro American fun.

In keeping with the dessert theme, I would be remiss if I failed to mention **The Cheesecake Factory's** (multiple locations; 3024 Peachtree Rd., 404-816-2555) more than 35 varieties of cheesecake. The exhaustive menu will please everyone and the service is swift, but be prepared to wait for a table. Even better, go early. Be sure to try the avocado egg rolls and the Navajo sandwich — warm fry-bread stuffed with grilled chicken, avocado, red onion and mayonnaise.

Murphy's (997 Virginia Ave. NE, 404-872-0904) has that splendid synergy of a killer boutique wine list, seasonal all-American menu and some of the best desserts in town. The bonzo is legendary in Atlanta for its layers of chocolate mousse, cheesecake and fudge brownie, and it's big enough to share.

Of course, there are those times when you simply want to elevate your experience, celebrate a milestone or just sing happy birthday in a sophisticated setting. Those times call for the **Park 75 at the Four Seasons** (75 14th St., 404-253-3840). The upscale spot actually has a kid's menu (see sidebar), the prices are





pleasantly affordable and the big kids get a three-course meal with paired wines. Just when the server arrives with your entrée, the manager discreetly offers your children a video-on-demand to enjoy while they finish off dessert. Premium service tends to bring out the best in kids, and this dining room is the place to prove it.

If the kids are revved up and you are anxious about their noise level, entertain your crew with the Circuit City atmosphere at **Fox Sports Grill** (261 19th St., 404-207-1369). Loud, cavernous and populated with television screens, the space amply accommodates rambunctious small people, and dad can keep up with the game. Bites such as the fried calamari or the enormous pear salad round out a standard menu of beef and chicken dishes. Kids' meals include a chocolate sundae, too.

Atlanta also has abundant taco joints (tacos are a universal kid food), and most are as delicious as they are affordable. **Taqueria del Sol** (1200-B Howell Mill Rd., 404-352-5812; 3659 W. Ponce de Leon Ave., 404-377-7668) helps speed the dining process along with counter ordering. Pick out your table and wait a scant few minutes for the chow to arrive. My kids always Hoover up the fish tacos (considered by some to be the finest in Atlanta). The coating is not lumpy and greasy, and the jalapeño tartar sauce adds just the right kick. The rotisserie chicken enchilada with lemon cream sauce is my personal favorite, perfect with a side order of charros beans and Spanish rice.

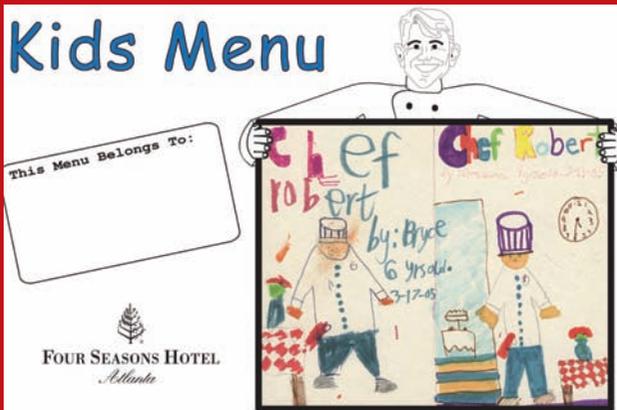
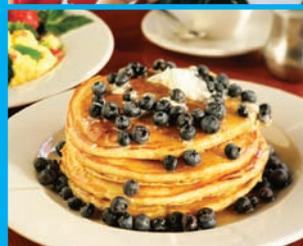
If you prefer a more upscale Mexican experience, try **Sala** (1186 N. Highland Ave., 404-872-7203). The pork tacos are one of the best items on the menu, and the patio is a great place to relax and let your kids "express themselves" without embarrassment. Be sure to try the queso fundido, a narcotic mixture of melted cheese, chorizo, roasted poblano chilies and caramelized onions. My kids love this "dip" as they call it, and when they feel adventurous we order the elote, a grilled corn on the cob rubbed with mayonnaise, añejo cheese and chili powder.

Absolutely no round-up of kid-friendly restaurants would be complete without

mentioning **The Varsity** (multiple locations; 61 North Ave. NE, 404-881-1706). One of Atlanta's landmarks, your kids will love the snappy service (expect to hear "What'll Ya Have?" many times).

Known as the world's largest drive-in restaurant, it's been in business since 1928. Many a luminary has tasted the hot dog magic at The Varsity. The chili cheese dogs are fantastic; they taste best when served with a frosted orange. Top off everything with a fried apple pie and enjoy the scene. **W**

Staff members' kids Adafa, 5; Nicholas, 3; and Murphy, 2, chow down on hot dogs, French fries and frozen orange drinks at The Varsity. Also pictured are Ted's Montana Grill, Park 75, Fox Sports Grill, Taqueria del Sol and Murphy's (the restaurant, not the little girl) — including its famous bonzo cake (bottom, right).



Park 75 in the Four Seasons Hotel doesn't do anything half way. So when the restaurant decided to cater more toward their younger clientele, they pulled out all the stops. First, they asked kids what they wanted on the menu. The answer — mac 'n' cheese (from a box, naturally), cheeseburgers, fries, chicken fingers (you know the drill). Next, they asked employee's kids and pint-sized guests to submit drawings of local kid-friendly attractions. The winning entries now grace the restaurant's kids' menu — the winners got to choose from a tea party, an ice cream social or a fabulous cake baked by Park's 75 talented pastry chef, David Jeffries. "The menu was developed by children, designed by children, and it's just been a huge, huge hit," says Director of Public Relations Marsha Middleton. -JW

