

on the fly

SPOILED ROTTEN

BY JONAS MOODY

Vacation marketers have found their new demographic, and while these tiny consumers may not be guzzling overpriced martinis or booking weekend yacht outings, when it comes to matters of the purse string the tykes of luxury make their voices heard—one temper tantrum at a time.

Would you like your Yukitini shaken, stirred or served in sippy cup? While it doesn't contain alcohol, the kiddo cocktail—named after Yuki, the resident canine at Vail's Park Hyatt Beaver Creek (beavercreek.hyatt.com)—is served in a martini glass and garnished with a chocolate dog bone. This kid-friendly libation paints a perfect picture of the new mentality in luxury amenities: children should not only be seen and heard, they should be pampered and overindulged as well.

Not to sound bitter, but my mother's idea of a treat for us kids when on a family road trip in the minivan was stopping at the Dairy Queen for a dilly bar, finding a Motel 6 with a pool, or buying sparklers at a roadside fireworks stand. Never in her wildest imagination did she imagine that entire hotel rooms would be designed exclusively for children. However, that's just what Great Wolf Lodge (greatwolf.com) in the Poconos has done, creating a miniature cabin inside its family suite, replete with raw timber bunk beds. The Hilton Buenos Aires (hilton.com) one-ups Great Wolf with its Barbie-themed room. Every square inch of the bedroom is plastered with Barbie paraphernalia in a disturbing pink and plastic vortex of childhood nostalgia and merchandising hell. The suite is just off the hotel's deluxe suite, so mom and dad can shut out the eye-stinging den of the doll.

Other hotels offering doll-packages up the ante by training their staff to recognize and interact with the doll as a human guest, so as to further blur the blue-blood babes' perception of reality. The Fitzpatrick Hotel (fitzpatrickhotels.com) in New York offers young ladies the American Girl Experience, where the girl's doll is greeted by name and provided not only with her own miniature bed, but also turndown service, a terrycloth robe and slippers, and a place setting at breakfast. The Athenaeum Hotel (athenaeumhotel.com) in London may not perpetuate the living-doll fantasies, but it is equipped to plunge its younger guests into the mind-numbing depths of videogame worship. A number of their suites are furnished with an old-school inset videogame console, à la pizza parlor Pac-Man tables, only you won't find greasy slices on this furniture. Only the milk and cookies brought up to the kids before bed.

But not all hotels focus on the babysitting factor of

their amenities to leave the adults to their own devices and vices. Another trend brings kids along into the seedy world of boozing and gambling. Apart from the kiddo cocktails mentioned above, a rash of kids' casinos have sprung up in Prague with the express purpose of developing preschool-age gamblers. What happens at naptime stays at naptime? "If they play in our club and are at least a little bit handy, they will gain more toys than they could buy for the same sum in a toy shop," explains Martin Vozka, a representative from one of the gambling centers, as reported by the Prague Daily Monitor. Kids can cash in their chips for all sorts of prizes, from candy all the way up to the jackpot, a kid-sized Harley Davidson motorcycle. There are clear moral objections to be made about this enterprise, as 12-step programs haven't yet been implemented into the Czech preschool curriculum. Not yet, at least.

That's not to say that *all* these new extravagances centered on children are morally corrupt. On the contrary, many amenities are aimed at endowing the children of privilege with urbane leisure activities early on. The days of blithering for a pony, a Play Station, or a pair of Heelys roller shoes are long over. Today's youngster of breeding is keener on copper-bottomed sauté pans and crème brûlée torches, as the culinary arts have apparently found their way into preteen pastimes. The One & Only Reethi Rah (oneandonlyresorts.com) in the Maldives puts its young guests' silver spoons to work through free cooking classes under the tutelage of the resort's executive chef. While these upper-crusters get a head start on their sophisticated palates, the youngest of the highest echelons at the Four Seasons (fourseasons.com) in Wailea, Hawaii are treated to gecko safaris and lei-making classes while mumsy and dadsy are off playing doubles with the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers.


While the youngest wards of extravagance seem to be sitting pretty on the lap of luxury, one can't help but wonder what happens when Little Lord Fauntleroy and Veruca Salt grow up. A few family road trips trapped in a minivan certainly wouldn't hurt. When it comes to my kids, I'll strap them into the car with dilly bars and Motel 6 swimming pools as far as the eye can see—and Dear Abby's wise words on parenting in my head: "If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them, and half as much money." 



PHOTO BY PETER VITALE

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