

School holidays

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For mouths of babes

Amuse kids and parents during the break without wheeling out the junk food.

As a loving parent, I'm all for making sacrifices for my child. Crawling over a desert of broken glass? Check. Running through hail and sleet to retrieve forgotten Florrie doll? Check. Eating a bloated muffin and drinking a \$4 teabag-tea made with lukewarm water? Sorry, sweetheart. We all have our tipping points.

It's a little-known fact that the real issue with school holidays is not finding things to keep the kids amused. Au contraire. It's finding things to keep the foodie parents amused at the same time. Here, then, are a few smart initiatives to see you through the school holidays – and beyond.

Kids' Corner at Melba Restaurant, The Langham

Everyone loves a buffet, of course. At least for the first half hour. After that, the low boredom threshold of the under-8s can start to play havoc with the happiest of family feasting scenes. Enter Deepak Mishra, new executive chef at Langham Melbourne, with his idea for a dedicated kids' section at the hotel's Southgate restaurant that goes well beyond the usual chocolate fountains and ice-cream with sprinkles.

"When I was working in Japan, a friend made Mickey Mouse sushi for her two-year-old son, who was a picky eater," says Mishra. "I saw how happy it made him and it got me thinking. Kids love packaging and presentation, so we've done a version of spaghetti bolognese that's en papillote, tied up in a bag so they can untie the string and eat from the little bowl the bag comes in. And the mini burgers come with tomato sauce in a pipette so it's easy for the kids to squeeze it on, themselves."

Also in the Kids' Corner (no grown-ups allowed): mini cupcakes with faces; mini Eton Mess made from marshmallow, meringue and creme chantilly; and pots of pistachio/chocolate/vanilla fairy floss.

And in the parents' corner? The rest of the rather excellent Melba spread.

Winning Tastes Pavilion, The Royal Show

There's a *New Yorker* cartoon I love of a frazzled mum with a carload of children pulling up to a burger drive-through. Says the guy slinging her lunch: "Free bourbon with every four kids' meals". Judging by the number of beer, wine and spirits brands crowding into the Winning Tastes Pavilion this year, it's not just the burger founts who get that family outings have special needs. The foodie cred of the Pavilion gets better



every year. This time round, newly opened Smith & Chips will be leading the pop-ups, dishing out fish 'n' chips and more. There's Mammasita in the Mexican corner, Tokyo Tina for freestyle Japanese, and a flurry of sweetie starts including Zumbo, LuxBite and Le Petit Gateau. You can catch a cooking demo (Taxi Dining, The Smith, Fancy Hanks) or a beer or spirits masterclass (Boatrock, Wolf of the Willows, Hippocampus distillery). Outside in the courtyard, a fleet of food vans will be serving up burgers (Royale Brothers), brisket and pulled pork (Burn City Smokers) and fried chicken (Willy's World Famous).

Winning Tastes Pavilion, daily at the Royal Show, until October 3.
royalshow.com.au.

Kids' gardening workshop at Basils Farm
So the budget doesn't quite run to lunch at Brae? Never mind. Think of Basils Farm as

Well presented: The sushi teddies at The Langham in Melbourne will keep young minds interested in their meal.

the family-friendly, grassroots alternative; a beacon of everything sustainable, home-grown, seasonal and delicious in an idyllic location on the edge of Swan Bay.

A vineyard, permaculture garden and cottage cellar door and cafe, Basils Farm is keeping the food chain admirably short with the second of its children's gardening workshops. Picture the scene: while you're relaxing over lunch at the cafe, your child is about 10 metres away learning how to grow vegies as well as helping feed the farm animals and joining in treasure hunts and other games. Before tucking in to their own lunch, too.

Kids' gardening workshop, Friday, October 6, Basils Farm, Queenscliff.
basilsfarm.com.au.

Main Street Mornington Festival

For its 22nd year, there was just one aspect of the annual Main Street Mornington Food, Wine & Performing Arts Festival its organisers wanted to ramp up – the kids' activities. "That was our whole aim for this year – to make it a festival where there really is something for everyone," says assistant director Paula Creek.

So that, then, explains the hula-hoop performer workshop, the magic show, the hip-hop dance crews, the stilt walkers, the petting zoo, and lots more besides.

More fun for the kids, the organisers reason, also means more time for parents to do credit to the more than 60 food and wine stalls lined up for this year.

Main Street Mornington Festival, Sunday, October 15, Mornington.
mainstreetfestival.com.au.