

## Family-Friendly Dining

In the gastronomic universe, New York has a fair number of star-quality restaurants, but are they worth it if you're eating out with your kids? *Fuhgeddaboudit*. Le Bernardin and Nobu be damned—what I look for these days is a restaurant that's noisy and casual, where the service is relatively speedy, and where the menu includes at least one or two items from my kids' major food groups: chicken fingers, burgers, pasta, pancakes, and pizza, any or all of which could come with a side of fries. You can find plenty of such restaurants in New York, and they won't cost you an arm and a leg.

### DINING OUT WITH YOUR KIDS

You know a restaurant welcomes kids when they've printed up a place mat for young customers to color and when you get to keep the crayons you're given to color it with. If they've gone to the trouble of developing a specific children's menu, that's even better. A number of tourist-dependent restaurants around Times Square go this route, and we're grateful for them in a pinch. For us adults, however, the food is generally mediocre, and the only thing that's relaxing about the ambience is that we don't have to do the dishes afterward.

So we try to venture beyond Pizzeria Uno and T.G.I. Friday's. **Ethnic restaurants** are one good option—our kids will always eat pasta and rice—and New York, this great immigrant city, is rich in these. **Coffee shops** are another choice, and I don't mean just the corner Greek joints with the

revolving showcase of whipped cream-topped desserts. A number of trendy retro coffee shops have opened in recent years, adding upscale parent-pleasing food to the traditional menu of burgers, omelets, and grilled cheese sandwiches.

I'm not a big fan of eating at sidewalk tables—I'd rather get *away* from traffic and exhaust—but as soon as the weather warms up, many families opt for restaurants with **sidewalk seating**. The open-air arrangement minimizes your child's noise, provides endless distraction, and makes messes less important (there's always a pigeon or two around to peck up dropped french fries after you've cleared off).

Knowing how many Manhattan restaurants don't work for smaller children, for the most part I've tried to steer you towards those that do, although I also suggest some that appeal best to older kids. If your youngsters are well-behaved, adventurous eaters, your choice of eating places is obviously much broader.

As far as **hours** go, most Manhattan restaurants serve continuously—you can generally order dinner as early as 5pm if that's what you're used to, though most New Yorkers eat around 7 or 8pm. If you're dining anywhere in the Theater District (the W. 40s) or near Lincoln Center (the W. 60s), you'll be competing with lots of other people trying to finish dinner before an 8pm curtain time; unless you're trying to make that curtain, too, delay your arrival until 7:30 or so, when most of these restaurants are ready to

draw a sigh of relief and relax. Similarly, Midtown and Lower Manhattan restaurants can be very busy from 11:30am to 2:30pm.

I've noted in this chapter if a given restaurant doesn't take **reservations** or if reservations are generally necessary to ensure a table. If there's no notation about reservations, you have a fair chance of being seated even if you haven't called ahead, but making a reservation is always smart. Although some posh Manhattan restaurants still cling to formal dress codes, requiring men to wear a jacket and tie, none of the restaurants I list here do.

Because we do keep eating out regularly, we long ago stopped bringing toys to keep the kids occupied at the table (especially not if the restaurant has a jukebox or big street-side picture window to view the passing show). Our 14-year-old is finally willing to try stuff like fondue and crab cakes and mesclun salad. Even my picky-eater middle son has graduated from hamburgers to tempura shrimp and grilled chicken. With all the wonderful restaurants in New York City, the world is their oyster (just so long as we don't expect them to *eat* oysters—at least not yet . . .).

**A NOTE ABOUT PRICES** The following reviews include a range of specific menu prices as often as possible; I've also categorized the restaurants as expensive, moderate, or inexpensive, based on rough estimates of what it would cost to feed a family of four—two parents and two children, assuming that one of the kids is young enough to be satisfied with either a kids' meal or a half portion or just an appetizer. If this mythical family would have to spend \$75 or more for dinner (excluding any bar tab), I've classed that restaurant as **expensive**; between \$50 and \$75, **moderate**; under \$50, **inexpensive**.

**THE CHAIN GANG** Besides the restaurants covered in detail below,

there are a number of kid-friendly chains—some local, some national—with several properties in New York City that can be handy if you're in the neighborhood. I don't indicate a specific price category for them, but their prices are uniformly low.

Among the local burger restaurant chains, **Jackson Hole** offers burgers so thick and juicy they'll make your buns soggy (whatever that means), as well as grilled chicken sandwiches, some salads, and less successful Mexican dishes. A local ethnic chain worth seeking out is **Lemongrass Grill**, for Thai food. **Blockhead's Burritos** is a fun addition to the city's dining scene, with a menu of tortilla-wrapped meals that go well beyond the Mexican standards (like the West Indian vegetable casserole tortilla or the Bar-B-Cuban Chicken); teenagers in particular like its hipster decor and healthy emphasis on fresh vegetables, lean meats, and lard-free cooking. Bargain-hunters like the casual **Dallas BBQ** restaurants, where you can get big portions for under \$10. The menu holds no surprises: barbecued chicken, barbecued baby back ribs, barbecued sliced beef, half-pound burgers (turkey or beef). Just beware if you see a tour bus parked out front.

**Pizzeria Uno** is a known commodity: swift, cheery service; child-friendly amenities (kids' menu, crayons, flimsy activity booklet, drinks served in lidded plastic cups); and a saloonish decor with wooden booths, black-and-white tiled floors, and exposed-brick walls. Both the deep-dish and the thin-crust pizzas are decent; it's when they go beyond pizzas that you can't always be sure of what you'll get. **Houlihan's** and **T.G.I. Friday's**, both owned by the same organization, are dimly lit bar-and-burger joints. The service is fast, the regular menu spans everything from stir-fries to pastas to burritos, and the kids' menu rivals a Happy Meal any day. Prices here may nudge up into the moderate range.

**A NOTE ABOUT FAST FOOD**

The reality of eating out with small children is that fast-food joints are sometimes a blessing. Most of those in high-traffic areas of Manhattan are spanking clean and recently renovated; somehow, there's always a McDonald's or a Burger King or a

Sbarro's just where you need one. There's also a McDonald's delivery service operating in Manhattan (how New Yorkers do love to phone out for their food): Call ☎ **212/337-3278** to get your Happy Meals and Big Macs brought to your door.

## 1 Restaurants by Cuisine

**AMERICAN**

America ★★ (Flatiron District, \$\$, p. 121)  
 American Girl Café ★★ (Midtown, \$\$\$ p. 111)  
 Barking Dog Luncheonette ★ (Upper East Side, \$\$, p. 106)  
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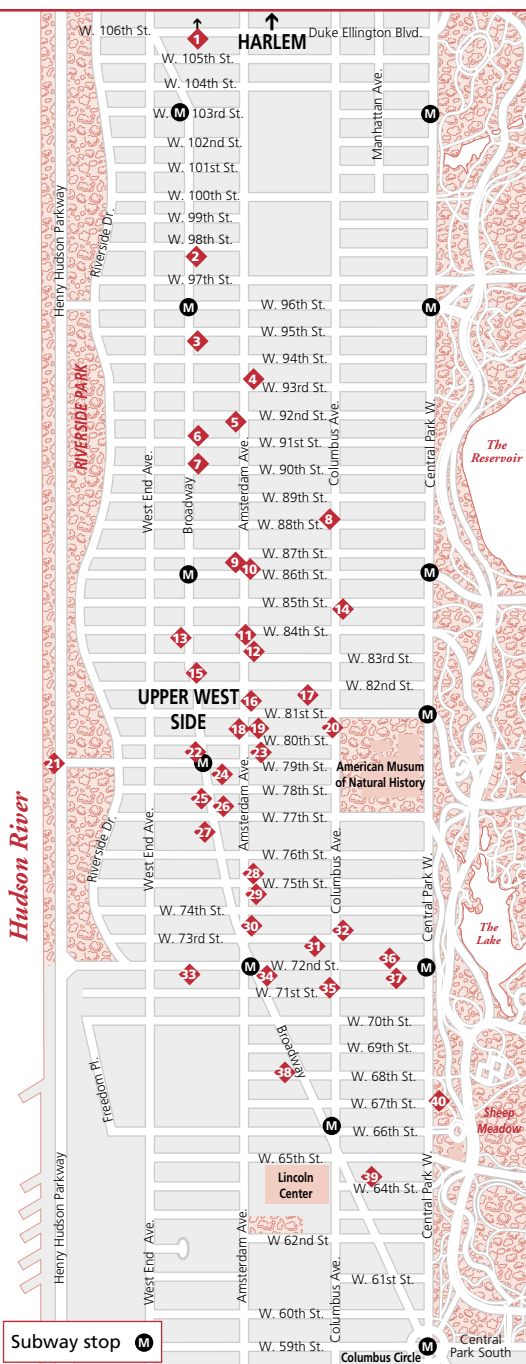
Manhattan Chili Company (Midtown, \$, p. 119)  
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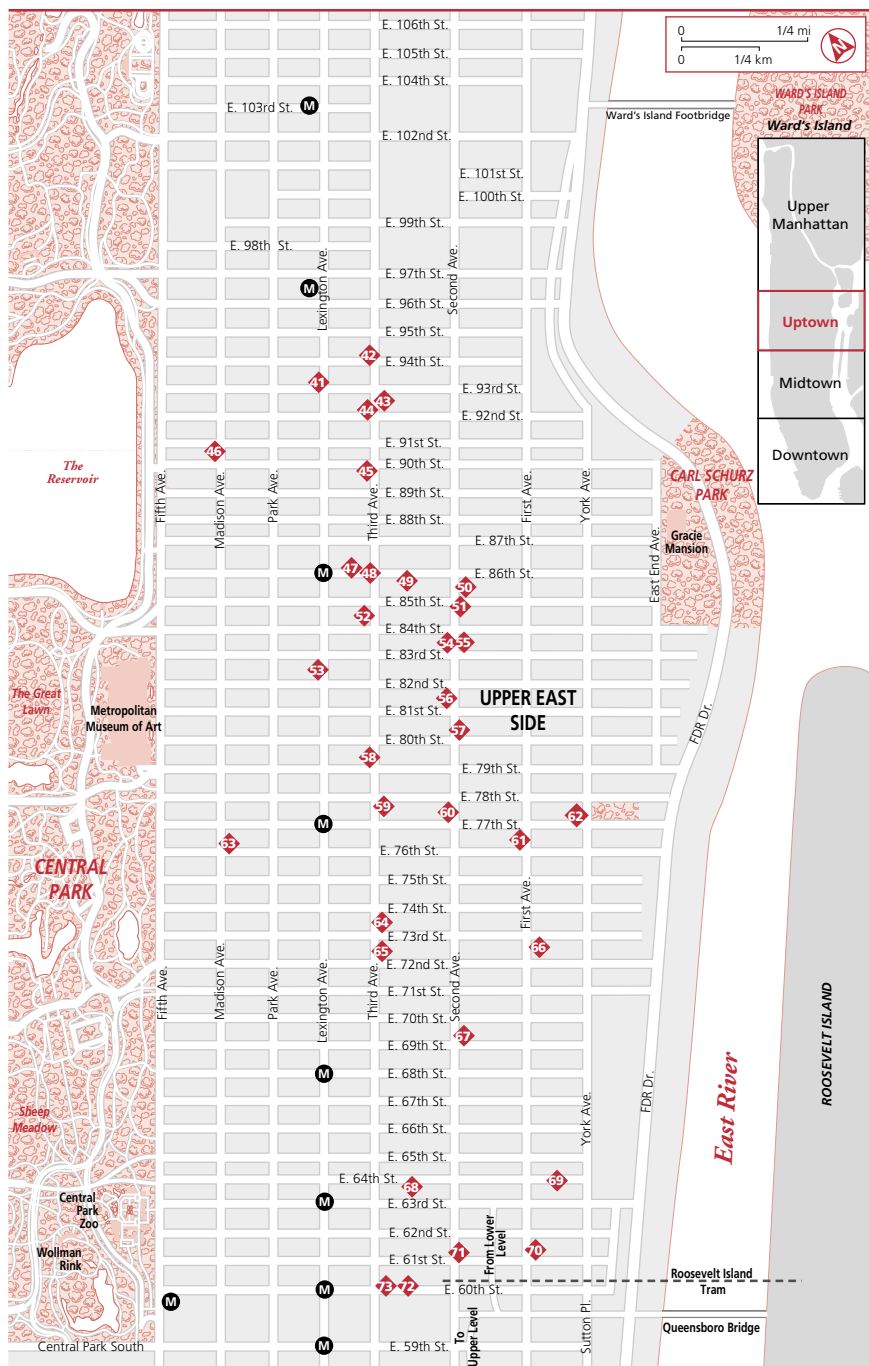
**BAGELS**

H&H Bagels (Upper West Side, \$, p. 98)  
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# Uptown Dining

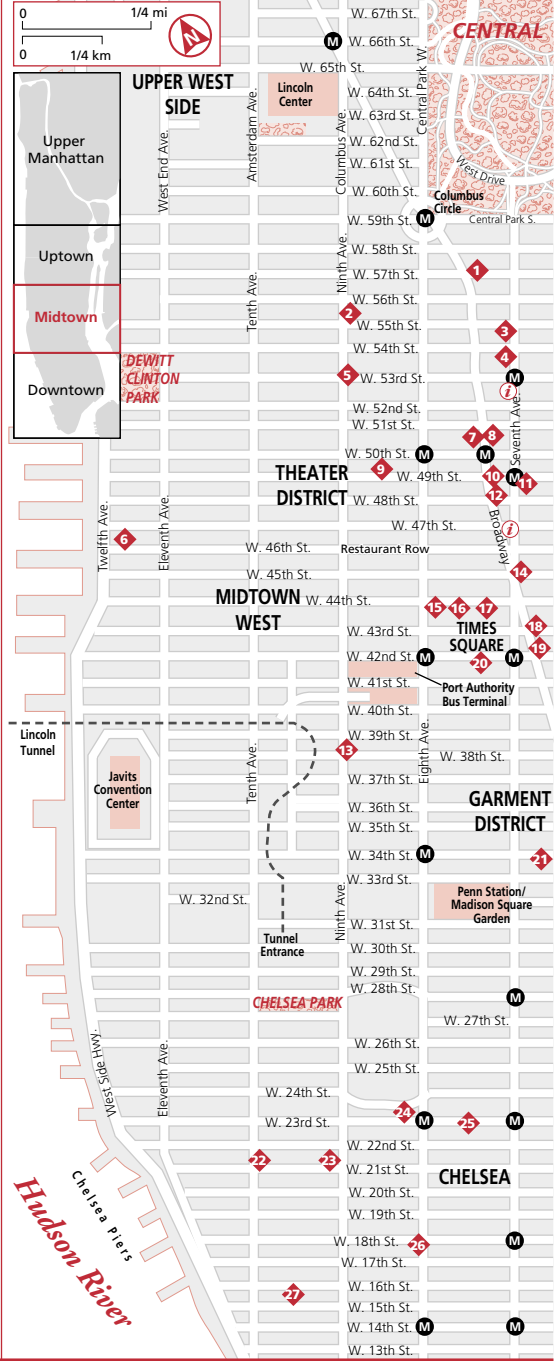
- Alice's Tea Cup **31**  
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Jekyll & Hyde Club **32**  
John's Pizza **15**  
Kosher Delight **47**  
La Bonne Soupe **40**  
Le Gamin **23**  
Mangia e Bevi **5**  
Manhattan Chili Company **18**  
Mars 2112 **7**  
Mickey Mantle's **29**  
Ollie's Noodle Shop **17**  
Palm Court **30**  
Patsy's Pizzeria **25, 50**  
Planet Hollywood **14**  
Prime Burger **36**  
Rock Center Café **41**  
Rodeo Grill **52**  
Route 66 **2**  
Ruby Foo's **10**  
Stage Deli **4**  
T Salon **55**  
Texas Texas Restaurant  
and Saloon **12**  
Virgil's Real Barbecue **45**  
Won Jo **48**

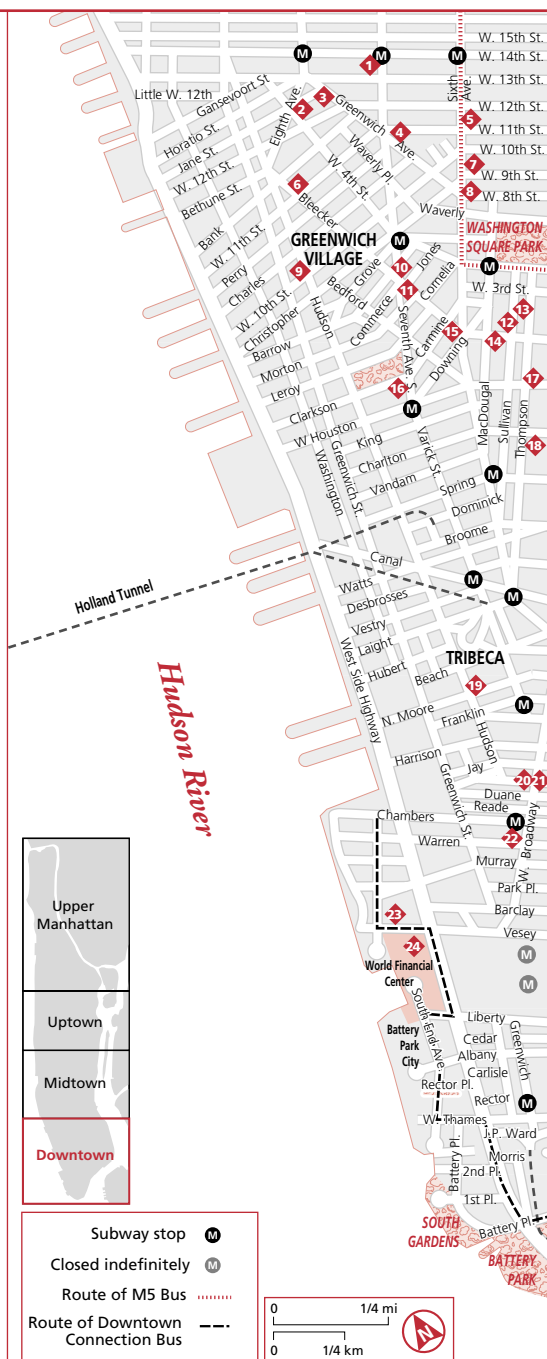




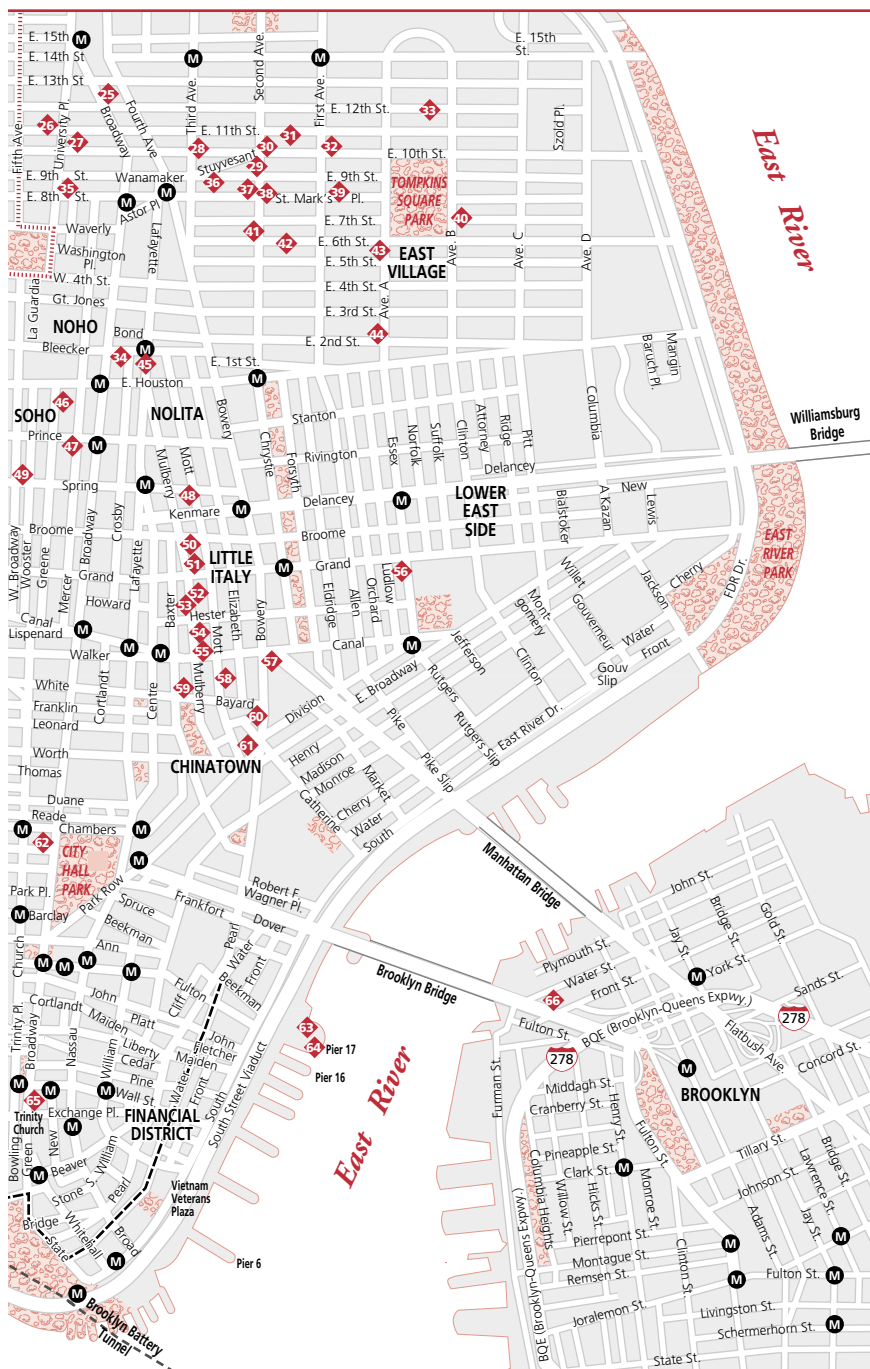


# Downtown Dining

- Angelo's of Mulberry Street **52**  
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 Grimaldi's **66**  
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 Il Fornaio **55**  
 Jekyll & Hyde Pub **10**  
 John's Pizza **11**  
 Johnny Rockets **35**  
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 Odeon **21**  
 Old Devil Moon **33**  
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 Peanut Butter & Co. **12**  
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## 2 The Upper West Side

### EXPENSIVE

**Ruby Foo's** PAN-ASIAN The Suzy Wong-style decor of this bi-level rice palace is eye-popping, and the menu hits all the high notes of Asian cuisine, from dim sum to sushi to maki rolls to Thai curries. Compared to more authentic Chinese, Japanese, or Thai restaurants, the food is only competent, but the stunning setting makes up for it—you'll feel like you're inside a jewel-toned lacquered box, with Chinese lanterns glowing overhead, your linen napkin crisply folded into a fan, chopsticks set before you in a gleaming metal stand. Don't expect to get in without a reservation, and don't expect the service to be speedy. The restaurant does, however, offer a coloring sheet and crayons to keep the kids busy. They will even make a good ol' PB&J for those kids who will not try the Asian cuisine.

2182 Broadway (at 77th St.). ☎ 212/724-6700. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Lunch \$20–\$25; dinner \$30–\$35 (average per person, including drinks). AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun 11:30am–midnight; Mon–Thurs 11:30am–12:30am; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1am. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**Tavern on the Green** AMERICAN/CONTINENTAL/ECCLECTIC Local wisdom has it that only tourists go to Tavern on the Green, drawn by scores of movies featuring this huge Central Park site with its Tiffany glass lamps, crystal chandeliers, surrounding gardens, and twinkling outdoor lights. To celebrate a special event, however, even New Yorkers find themselves considering this undeniably enchanting place. The menu changes seasonally, but expect such American dishes as grilled salmon, roasted rack of lamb, and aged sirloin, along with a handful of Italian dishes and fancy salads. The children's menu is surprisingly ordinary—roast beef, grilled cheese, chicken fingers, pasta—but it does indicate a commitment to family business. I'd save this place for a special celebration, and only with kids old enough to appreciate the glitz and glamour, because the service can be deadly slow and careless—and you know how fatal that is when you've got restless children.

In Central Park at W. 67th St. ☎ 212/873-3200. www.tavernonthegreen.com. Kids' menu, sassy seats. Reservations recommended. Lunch \$16–\$32; dinner \$11–\$39; kids' menu \$13–\$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm; Sat–Sun 10am–3:30pm; Sun–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11:30pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 66th St.; B, C to 72nd St.

### MODERATE

**Bella Luna** 🌸🌸🌸 ITALIAN This cool and sophisticated restaurant with art-hung white walls and dreamy lights rimming the plate-glass windows looks like it'd be strictly for grown-ups—and in fact it's the choicest dining spot above 86th Street on Columbus. But the owners have young children, and from day 1 the place has been extremely easygoing about young diners, always happy to bring them a small portion of plain pasta. The Tuscan-style pasta dishes are truly

## The Best of the Bagels

Why is it that bagels in other cities just don't taste as good as New York bagels? There can't be such a mystery, after all, to baking what's essentially a chewy bread doughnut. Yet we know many transplanted New Yorkers who beg us to bring real bagels with us when we come to visit. (Even New Jersey suburbanites make special treks into the city to get their bagels.) And bagels are such a great kid-pleasing food—New Yorkers even use them to pacify teething infants—that we'd hardly know what to do without them.

In my opinion, the premier outlet is **H&H Bagels**, 2239 Broadway, at 80th Street (☎ 212/595-8000), and 639 W. 46th St., between Eleventh Avenue and the West Side Highway (☎ 212/765-7200; call ☎ 800/NY-BAGEL for shipping anywhere). Besides selling bagels hot out of the oven to the public, H&H supplies bagels to delis and grocery stores all around the city, so look for signs boasting **WE HAVE H&H BAGELS**. The problem with H&H is that it has no seating and doesn't serve bagels with any spread (in local parlance, a "schmear"), though you can separately buy little tubs of cream cheese, chopped liver, egg salad, herring in cream sauce, whatever. At least the store has finally installed a coffee machine so you can get a cup of coffee to go. **H&H Bagels East**, 1551 Second Ave., near 80th Street (☎ 212/734-7441), is a former branch that had to litigate for the right to keep using the name; it too has wonderfully chewy bagels, with the added convenience of a deli counter where countermen can cut and dress your bagels. I know many people who'd award the crown to **Ess-a-Bagel**, 359 First Ave., at 21st Street (☎ 212/260-2252), and 831 Third Ave., at 51st Street (☎ 212/980-1010), which is a full-service bagel deli where you can sit down and eat. But if you really want to get authentic, you might journey down to the Lower East Side to try **Kossar's Bialys**, 367 Grand St., between Essex and Norfolk streets (☎ 212/473-4810).

superior, as are the salads, the bruschetta, and the glorious mixed antipasto starter (practically a meal in itself); my kids often fill up on the crusty, dense bread. We eat here just as often without the kids as we do with them, even bringing clients—the food's that good.

584 Columbus Ave. (btwn 88th and 89th sts.). ☎ 212/877-2267. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.95–\$20; kids' portion of pasta \$5.95. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Subway: B, C, 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Carmine's ITALIAN** The original location of this popular northern Italianer (p. 114) still is tough to get into, but reservations are accepted for groups of six or more. My advice is to get here early if you don't want to make your children wait. That said, this lively, hearty restaurant is fun, with a decor that's a 1960s throwback (dark wood trim, chrome bar stools) and a menu of superbly executed standards like shrimp scampi, rigatoni with sausage, chicken Marsala, veal scaloppine, and big thick steaks. The portions are served family-style and are legendarily huge, so order accordingly—insist on your children splitting a dish, even if they're extremely big eaters.

2450 Broadway (btwn 90th and 91st sts.). ☎ 212/362-2200. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted Mon–Fri 5–7pm; other times for groups of 6 or more only. Family-style main courses (serve 2–3 people) \$17–\$51. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm; Mon–Thurs 5–11pm; Fri 5pm–midnight; Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 2–11pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Dorian's** *Finds* AMERICAN Comfort food like pastas and pot roast dominate the menu at this homey restaurant, where the ambience is a sort of cross between *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. The garden room and parlor are light and cool, with ceiling fans, trailing plants, and lacy tablecloths lending an air of faded gentility; the upstairs library room features upholstered banquettes and shelves full of mystery novels. Service is genial, and while there's no specific kids' meal, children may be perfectly content with side dishes (the macaroni and cheese is my daughter's fave) or appetizers like clam strips or "Tastes Just Like Chicken" (which is, in fact, very tasty chicken tenders). The whole place is a little out of the ordinary, and a mixed neighborhood crowd ambles in to enjoy the funky ambience; children are just as welcome as everybody else.

226 W. 79th St. (btwn Amsterdam Ave. and Broadway). ☎ 212/595-4350. Main courses \$9–\$20; lunch special \$7.95; brunch \$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–midnight; Sat–Sun noon–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**EJ's Luncheonette** DINER With its blue leatherette banquettes, pressed-tin ceiling, and chrome-trimmed Formica-topped tables, this is a museum-perfect replica of a classic American diner, and the menu strives to match—burgers, omelets, salads, sandwiches—though it gives away its yupscale 21st-century character with a number of vegetarian specials. Sandwiches on the kids' menu may be served with whole-grain bread, so ask specifically to avoid violating your children's eating codes (better yet, opt for a fluffy stack of flapjacks). A feel-good sorta place, this chain (see p. 107 and 125 later in this chapter) couldn't be nicer to kids, at least at lunchtime. Halfway between the Children's Museum of Manhattan and the American Museum of Natural History, it's a natural for the family trade.

447 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 81st and 82nd sts.). ☎ 212/873-3444. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Breakfast \$4.95–\$7.50; lunch \$7.50–\$11; dinner \$9.95–\$16. No credit cards. Daily 8am–10pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**Good Enough to Eat** ★ AMERICAN This charming little restaurant grew out of a bakery, so you can bet the pies and cakes are excellent. Tables are small, with weathered wood pickets around to strike a rustic note; cut flowers add another farmhouse touch. Though the menu focuses on old-fashioned American dishes like mac 'n' cheese, meatloaf, and a classic turkey dinner, chef/owner Carrie Levin trained at the Russian Tea Room and the Four Seasons, and is perfectly capable of turning out stunning daily fish specials, lemon Parmesan chicken breast, and a vegetable napoleon that's memorable indeed. Pasta and chicken fingers are still available on the kids' menu, never fear, so you can keep finicky eaters happy while indulging grown-up palates as well.

483 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 83rd and 84th sts.). ☎ 212/496-0163. Kids' menu. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9–\$22. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8am–4pm; Sat 9am–4pm; Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm; Sun 9am–10pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Lemongrass Grill** THAI Succulent spring rolls and grilled skewers of chicken start you off right at this dependable Thai restaurant with its restful tropical-colonial decor (ceiling fans, bamboo, wooden rafters). Our youngsters feast on those appetizers and plain white rice, while we indulge in stir-fried beef and green-curry chicken and spicy pork chops. The tables are set close together, and things can get pretty busy, but the upside is that no one minds kids' messes



and noise—the staff actually seems to like children, and the service is attentive, if not chatty.

2534 Broadway (at 95th St.). ☎ 212/666-0896. High chairs. Reservations recommended for groups of 5 or more. Main courses \$6.95–\$19. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–10:30pm; Fri–Sat noon–11:30pm; Sun 1–11:30pm. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 96th St.

**Monsoon** ★ VIETNAMESE If your kids can handle the spicier types of Asian cooking, Monsoon is a good place to learn about Vietnamese food. This attractive, softly lit restaurant has lots of wood trim and plants (the colonial look, don't you know), and the staff is very tolerant of children. Grilled meat on skewers or the fine grilled pork chops are favorites with my kids, as well as the tender, savory spring rolls; my husband and I venture farther afield with the curries, stir-fries, elaborately shredded vegetable salads, and deeply flavored seafood casseroles. Your kids will feel grown-up, and you will all feel well fed.

435 Amsterdam Ave. (at 81st St.). ☎ 212/580-8686. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$20. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sun 11:30am–11:15pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**O'Neal's** ★ AMERICAN Opened in 1964 as The Ginger Man, this perennial Lincoln Center–area favorite is a great place, so long as you can steer around the pre-performance rush. The staff is adept at getting diners out in time for the 8pm curtain, but if you want a relaxed meal, come for dinner after 8pm, or do weekday lunch or an early weekend brunch. The rambling dining rooms have the authentic look of a turn-of-the-20th-century saloon—brass fittings, wood trim, tile floors—and the unpretentious menu runs the gamut from burgers to seafood with more than a bit of panache. The chicken paillard and broiled shrimp curry are two unfailing winners, but the daily specials are always worth considering. The burgers are some of the best in town.

49 W. 64th St. (btwn Broadway and Central Park W.). ☎ 212/787-4663. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended, especially for dinner or brunch. Main courses \$9–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–midnight; Sat 11am–midnight; Sun 10am–10:30pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 66th St.

**Popover Café** AMERICAN This pleasantly upscale café's signature teddy bears lined up in the front windows have always deluded folks into thinking it's a restaurant for kids—but it's not particularly so, and the staff has been burned enough by unsupervised brats that they've added a note on children's manners to their menu. With an unpretentiously handsome decor (red plaid banquettes, cadet-blue walls, granite-speckled Formica tabletops), it serves the West Side equivalent of the East Side ladies-who-lunch crowd, wholesome chic types who appreciate sprout-bedecked salads and soul-warming soups accompanied by a light-as-air baked popover. The owner seems somewhat to have accepted the family fate, serving milk in a lidded paper cup and adding a kids' menu of sorts—yet a grilled cheese cooked on hearty home-baked peasant bread isn't necessarily as good as one made with Wonder Bread if you're 4 years old. Avoid weekend brunch, when the lines can be ridiculous.

551 Amsterdam Ave. (at 87th St.). ☎ 212/595-8555. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Lunch \$8.95–\$16; dinner \$12–\$21; kids' menu \$3.95–\$5.75. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8am–10pm; Sat–Sun 9am–10pm. Subway: B, C, 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Rain** PAN-ASIAN/THAI The dreamy Maughamesque decor of this upscale West Sider perfectly matches its exotic cuisine, principally Thai but borrowing accents from Malaysia and Vietnam—peanut sauces; coconut-milk soups; grilled meats; stir-fries; and lemongrass, chile, and lime flavorings. Though there's no kids' menu, many young diners are happy with the chicken skewers,

noodle dishes, and rice. The place certainly is family-friendly, especially at lunch, despite the romantic calm of its softly lit dining room, with lots of drapes and rattan chairs and potted plants and fringed lampshades. **An added plus:** It's very handy to the Natural History Museum—repair here after a morning in the Asian-animals gallery, and you'll feel you've really been to the Far East.

100 W. 82nd St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 212/501-0776. High chairs. Reservations recommended. Lunch \$6.50–\$15; dinner \$11–\$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Sat–Sun noon–4pm; Mon–Thurs 6–11pm; Fri 6pm–midnight; Sat 5pm–midnight; Sun 5–10pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.; B, C to 81st St./Museum of Natural History.

**Trattoria Sambucca** ★ ITALIAN We like to come here for family birthday celebrations, and it's even better for young families now that it has added a supervised play center Sunday through Tuesday evenings. The waiters are very friendly to kids; you can color on the paper tablecloths; and the food is straightforward Italian classics, served in robust portions. (We have to remind our kids not to fill up on the delicious bread beforehand.) Dishes are served family-style, so don't overorder—our family of five chose two entrees and left a lot of food on the platters. The chicken piccata was a real winner, as was the penne with eggplant and mozzarella. The dining room is pleasantly soft-hued and contemporary, with sponged orange walls, iron sconces, and Tuscan painted pottery on wall brackets. Very casual, but you still get that special dining-out feeling.

20 W. 72nd St. (btwn Columbus Ave. and Central Park W.). ☎ 212/787-5656. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters, supervised play area Sun 3–8pm, Mon–Tues 5–8pm. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$20 (family-size portions); kids' menu \$9 (includes entree, drink, and ice cream). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm; Sun 3–10pm. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St.

## INEXPENSIVE


**Alice's Tea Cup** ★★ *Finds* BRITISH/ECLECTIC/DESSERTS My daughter and her friends adore this unique little spot snuggled into a West Side brownstone, with its shabby-chic jumble of secondhand furniture and mismatched china. Lewis Carroll quotes are stenciled onto the walls, and the gift shop in front is full of treasures. While it's perfect for tea parties—the menu of teas is encyclopedic, brownies and cookies arrive freshly baked and buttery, and crumbly scones are served with clotted cream and preserves—Alice's is brilliant for lunch or dinner, too, serving around-the-world favorites like cucumber sandwiches, curried chicken salad, and croque-monsieurs. Best of all is the after-school snack menu, which features nanny-beloved items like graham crackers and honey, carrot and celery sticks with peanut butter, and a sandwich of Granny Smith apple slices with Nutella. Eating here is a special treat indeed.

102 W. 73rd St. (btwn Columbus and Amsterdam aves.). ☎ 212/799-3006. Kids' menu, high chairs. AE, DISC, MC, V. Main dishes \$7–\$13, kids' menu \$5–\$8; \$12–\$30 high tea. Mon–Thurs 8am–8pm; Fri 8am–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–8pm. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St.

**Artie's Delicatessen** ★★ DELI My son, whom I suspect is secretly working on his own guidebook called *Best Chicken Fingers in the Northeast*, insists that the ones at this glossy retro deli/coffee shop are his New York City favorites. Pastrami is a cornerstone of the huge menu, though I was disappointed by it. Now that I've discovered the scrumptious meatloaf, I'll never order anything else. I also love the pickles that come standard with table service and the crisp, tangy coleslaw. My teenager is a fan of the hot chicken wings; he insisted we order a bucket for our annual Super Bowl party, and they were gone in 3 minutes. Hot dogs, potato pancakes, and grilled cheese sandwiches are other kid-friendly choices. Service is quick and friendly, and the white-tiled setting is always noisy enough that no one

minds if kids add to the din. Okay, so it's only a decade old, as opposed to bur-nished veterans like the Carnegie Deli or Barney Greengrass; Artie's still has good classic deli food, at least a couple of old-timer waiters, and a sort of go-figure nonchalance that's very kid-friendly and very New York.



2290 Broadway (at 83rd St.). ☎ 212/579-5959. www.arties.com. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches \$5.95–\$13; main courses \$7.95–\$17; kids' menu \$4.95–\$6.95. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 9am–1am. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th or 79th St.

**Barney Greengrass**  DELI As authentic as Artie's (see above) is con-tributed, Barney Greengrass has been a West Side institution since 1908, and it looks like it hasn't been redecorated in half a century—the chipped Formica tabletops, beige linoleum floor, stained brownish wallpaper, and fluorescent lighting are an aggressive statement of the fact that the food's so good, you come here anyway. I'm not a smoked-salmon expert, but the fish here is so silky, so meltingly tender, it converted me for life (problem is, nobody else's lox is ever gonna live up to this standard). The service is famously laconic, even gruff, but food arrives quickly. Sodas come in cans; the plates are plain white institutional china—who cares? Your kids may not get the time-warp charm of this place, but if they're at all inclined to try classic deli food—lox, chopped liver, cold borscht, chopped herring, whitefish salad, with omelets and bagels as safe alternatives—they'll love it. Especially good for breakfast.

541 Amsterdam Ave. (at 86th St.). ☎ 212/724-4707. Reservations not accepted. Egg dishes \$4–\$15; sand-wiches \$5–\$15; smoked fish platters \$19–\$70. No credit cards. Tues–Fri 8am–4pm; Sat–Sun 8am–5pm. Closed 1st 2 weeks in Aug. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Big Nick's Burger & Pizza Joint** BURGERS/PIZZA Cacophonous, crowded, and utterly unpretentious, this burger joint is great for kids. You squeeze in past a long counter with chrome stools, hoping one of the cramped leatherette booths in the back is free. Head shots of customers, famous or not, fill the brick-faced walls alongside hand-scrawled signs advertising dozens of spe-cials (all this on top of a menu that's almost bewilderingly extensive). Even the regular burgers are obscenely huge—my carnivore son, Tom, could barely get his hands around one—and the pizzas are gooey with crisp crusts (whole pies only, no slices). There are also steaks; pot pies; sandwiches; and lots of Greek dishes such as souvlakia, spanakopita, and gyros, all in huge portions. But keep one thing in mind: Big Nick's sees greasy food as a good thing. If you agree, you will be tremendously happy here.

(1) 70 W. 71st St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 212/799-4444. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St. (2) 2175 Broadway at 77th St. ☎ 212/799-4450. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St. Main courses \$4.45–\$16; weekday lunch specials \$4.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–5am.

**Boat Basin Café**   AMERICAN A stroke of genius, to put a restaurant here overlooking the houseboat marina in lower Riverside Park. Not only are there great views west over the Hudson (time it right, and you'll get a sunset show to die for), but the arched stone vaults of this open-air structure also have a kind of Venetian charm all their own. And the food is head –and shoulders above what you'd expect at an outdoor cafe: superb burgers, zestfully seasoned salads and sandwiches, and excellent grilled seafood. The trappings are supercasual—checked vinyl tablecloths, sturdy plastic chairs, folding tables, fries heaped in a plastic basket on wax paper—and the service can dawdle, but our kids didn't seem to mind, they were so busy counting boats on the river. They're smart enough to serve the kids'-menu sandwiches on white bread and not to blacken the hot dogs on the grill; the lemonade was too sour for our kids, but once they

realized they could pour packets of sugar into their glasses, they were delighted. This cafe is run by the management of the excellent **O'Neal's** restaurant (see above), which also operates two other seasonal restaurants: the **Hudson Beach Café** in Riverside Park at about 105th Street, and the **Ballfields Café** in Central Park, midpark at 65th Street, by the Heckscher ball fields.

W. 79th St. at the Hudson River, in Riverside Park. ☎ **212/496-5542**. Kids' menu. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$13–\$20; kids' menu \$2.50–\$3.50. AE, DC, MC, V. Early May to late Sept (weather permitting) Mon–Fri noon–11:30pm; Sat–Sun 11–11:30. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**Brother Jimmy's BBQ & Booze** BARBECUE/SOUTHERN As the evening wears on, this low-lit, cluttered joint becomes a noisy, beery Southern frat party, especially on nights when UNC and Duke square off in basketball. But the three Brother Jimmy's restaurants definitely like kids and prove it by letting the under-12 set eat free (two kids eat free with each paid adult meal). And the barbecue is some of the city's best, with meaty, spicy ribs, pulled pork, and chicken cooked slowly over hickory wood and slathered with a tangy sauce. Add a little cornbread, candied yams, corn on the cob, and black-eyed peas, and it's a welcome break from pizza and burgers.

428 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 80th and 81st sts.). ☎ **212/501-7515**. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 8 or more only. Main courses \$9.95–\$16; salads and sandwiches \$3.95–\$7.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5pm–midnight; Fri 5pm–1am; Sat noon–1am; Sun noon–11pm; Wed–Sun noon–midnight during summer months. Subway: B, C, 1, 9 to 79th St.

**China Fun** CHINESE The grandniece of Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, Dorothea Wu, is now a restaurateur in New York, and she runs this smart bi-level Mandarin-style place on Columbus Avenue. The look is clean and modern, with a bright abstract mural splashed on the high back wall; the food is classic and delicate, with lots of barbecued meats hanging in the glass-walled kitchen and dim sum carts trundling about. This is a good place to introduce your children to won-ton soups and dumplings without hauling them all the way to exotic Chinatown, though there are some more inventive dishes on the menu as well, including pineapple curry fried rice and chicken in peach sauce garnished with sesame seeds. The dim sum, served all day, is very reasonable.

246 Columbus Ave. (btwn 71st and 72nd sts.). ☎ **212/580-1516**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$6.95–\$15; noodles and rice \$4.95–\$8.95; dim sum \$1.25–\$5. MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St.

**Gabriela's** ★★ MEXICAN Gabriela's serves up astonishingly good regional dishes that go well beyond rote Mexican combo platters. On the menu is exotic stuff even adults may not want to try—roast cactus, for example—but you can't go wrong with any of the marvelous spicy stews and casseroles and pozole soups. The roast chicken is a marvel, succulent and delicately spiced; quesadillas are light, crisp, and flavorful; and there's a corn soup to die for. As for kids, there are simple tacos (served without hot red sauce—hooray!), accompanied by rice and beans, as well as a number of fruit drinks and fruit shakes, not to mention chocolate milk, which you don't find on many restaurant menus. The staff is cordial and accommodating; the simple coffee-shop decor (enlivened with colorful lacy doilies hanging from the ceiling) includes nice banquettes, which kids may prefer to chairs.

(1) 685 Amsterdam Ave. (at 93rd St.). ☎ **212/961-0574**. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 96th St. (2) 311 Amsterdam Ave. (at 75th St.). ☎ **212/875-8532**. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$6.95–\$16; tacos and burritos \$2.25–\$4.75; kids' menu \$4.95–\$7.95. AE, MC, V, DISC. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–10pm.

**Homer's** ★★ *Finds* AMERICAN/BURGERS My kids clamor to go here on a regular basis—regular meaning every weekend night. What's the draw? Well, the burgers are just right, and the french fries (Homerfries) are some of the city's best; the chicken tenders are indeed tender, the chili hot and gutsy, shakes and malts creamy and thick. Hot dogs come in several variations, and the slushies are . . . well, they're slushies, which you can't get in most restaurants. Check the blackboards for daily specials, which may include offbeat stuff like deep-fried Snickers. Don't worry, there are tasty soups and salads, too. The name refers to home runs (the owner used to play baseball), not to Homer Simpson, although Homer Simpson would be happy here, especially with the freshly made doughnuts. You'd expect a place with this sort of throwback menu to be loaded with kitsch, but the decor is streamlined and bright—the better to focus on the big-screen TVs, invariably tuned to either cartoons or sports.

487 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 83rd and 84th sts.). ☎ 212/496-0777. High chairs, boosters. Reservation accepted for parties of 4 or more only. Main courses \$1.95–\$4.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8am–11pm; Fri–Sun 8am–1am. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St.

**Hunan Balcony** CHINESE The Upper West Side has long been well served by Chinese restaurants, and Hunan Balcony is the granddaddy of them all. It's a big operation, smartly run, with a menu that tries hard to meet everybody's tastes—noodles, seafood, steamed items, spicy Hunan dishes, even sushi, plus the classic chow meins and egg rolls that characterized another American generation's idea of Chinese food. Purists will realize that the cooking isn't as authentic as you'll find in Chinatown, but it's usually delicious (I've eaten here so often over the past 20 years that I've occasionally hit an off night, but that's rare). Dishes are served family-style; children can drop all the rice they want, and no one seems to mind.

2596 Broadway (at 98th St.). ☎ 212/865-0400. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$6.50–\$13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–1am. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 96th St.

**La Caridad Luncheonette** *Value* CUBAN-CHINESE There's often a line at this cheap, authentic corner storefront spot, but customers move in and out fast—a hearty meal materializes on your Formica-topped table minutes after you order. The clientele seems split pretty evenly between those ordering white-rice dishes (savory Chinese stir-fries, chop sueys, and soups) and those going for the yellow-rice side of the menu (pork chops, fried chicken cracklings, and a divine Cuban pot roast my daughter attacked with gusto). This isn't a place for picky eaters—the mere sight of yucca and fried plantain side dishes send my boys into total appetite arrest—but anyone who's willing to try the food comes away happy. Though the place is cramped, crowded, and crazily busy, the taciturn Asian waiters never blink at a stroller blocking the aisle or a bread crust flung on the floor. What you see is what you get, and what you get is delicious.

2199 Broadway (at 78th St.). ☎ 212/874-2780. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$5.95–\$8.95. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–10:30pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**Mary Ann's** MEXICAN The West Side branch of this Mexican chain is its most kid-friendly, with a junior menu that includes quesadillas, tacos, chicken fajitas, and a red-cheese enchilada; there's even a hot dog for kids who won't try Mexican. The earth-toned decor is movie-set Mexican, with tile-topped tables and a sombrero or two on the walls; the food is uniformly good, delicately spiced rather than fiery, with fresh tomatillo salsa and handmade tortillas. A decent choice for families who want to sample good-as-homemade Mexican.

2452 Broadway (at 91st St.). ☎ 212/877-0132. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 8 or more only. Main courses \$6.95–\$12; kids' menu \$3.95–\$4.25. MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St.; 1, 2, 3, 9 to 96th St.

**Ollie's Noodle Shop** CHINESE The roast poultry hanging in the front window is a promising sign, and the cheery bustle inside carries out the promise of simple, filling Chinese food—nothing too exotic to challenge the taste buds. Besides the usual spring rolls, dumplings, and steamed buns for appetizers, the menu features lots of fish, grilled or steamed or braised or sautéed, and a fairly classic range of Chinese dishes (lemon chicken, double-sautéed pork, eggplant sautéed in garlic sauce). Be careful about dishes marked with little jalapeño peppers on the menu—those are way too hot for most kids. My kids usually opt for lo mein noodles or the broader chow fun noodles, topped with chunks of chicken and a few shredded vegetables. The service is brisk and tolerant; it can get pretty crowded on a weekend night, but tables empty quickly.

(1) 2315 Broadway (at 84th St.). ☎ 212/362-3111. Subway: 1, 9 to 86th St. (2) 1991 Broadway (near 68th St.). ☎ 212/595-8181. Subway: 1, 9 to 66th St. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$12; lunch specials \$5. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1am.

**Pizzabolla** ★★ *Finds* PIZZA/ITALIAN This casual corner spot, with an upscale trattoria decor of brick facing and mustard-colored walls, never fails us. The menu isn't huge, but we still have a hard time choosing—the tangy thin-crust pizza? A velvety pasta? The superb chicken tenders? A satisfying Caesar salad? The staff is friendly and responsive; it's just the right place to plunk yourself down and relax after a dizzying day, and so unpretentious you may be surprised to realize how good the food is.

654 Amsterdam Ave. (at 92nd St.). ☎ 212/579-4500. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$6–\$12 individual, \$11–\$23 family, \$5–\$6 kids' menu. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Wed 11:30am–10pm; Thurs–Sat 11:30am–11pm. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 96th St.

**T & R Pizzeria** PIZZA Need a pizza near the Natural History Museum? Here's the place for a quick slice or a pie to go—a very dependable neighborhood storefront pizzeria. No fancy airs or graces, just good pizza.

411 Amsterdam Avenue (at 79th St.). ☎ 212/787-4093. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$12–\$14. No credit cards. Mon–Tues 10am–midnight; Wed 10am–1am; Thurs–Sat 11am–3am; Sun 10am–11pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 79th St.

**V & T Pizzeria-Restaurant** PIZZA/ITALIAN With its brick walls, painted murals, low lighting, and red-checkered tablecloths, V & T looks just like the campus pizza joint it is, the campuses in question being nearby Columbia and Barnard. The pizzas are fabulous, with thin crusts, runny cheese, and robust tomato sauce; other southern Italian dishes, like lasagna and baked ziti, are heartwarming good, too. Not much on ambience, but then, you don't get a lot of attitude, either.

1024 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 110th and 111th sts.). ☎ 212/663-1708. High chairs. Main courses \$6–\$17. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to 110th St.

**Vinnie's Pizzeria** PIZZA/ITALIAN One of the best by-the-slice walk-in pizzerias in the city, Vinnie's also provides table service if you want to go beyond the wonderful pies and order pasta, antipasti, or salads. At \$1.70 a slice, the pizza is a good deal, flavorful and nicely gooey. The location is handy too.

285 Amsterdam Ave. (btwn 73rd and 74th sts.). ☎ 212/874-4382. Reservations not accepted. Pizza \$1.70 slice, \$8.75–\$19 pie; pasta \$5–\$9. No credit cards. Daily 11am–12:30am. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St.

## THE CHAIN GANG

Handy to the American Museum of Natural History is the **Pizzeria Uno Chicago Bar and Grill**, 432 Columbus Ave., at 81st Street (☎ 212/595-4700). There's a **Dallas BBQ** at 27 W. 72nd St., between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue (☎ 212/873-2004). The **Jackson Hole** at 517 Columbus Ave., at 85th Street (☎ 212/362-5177), has sidewalk seating and lots of parked strollers on weekends.

### 3 The Upper East Side

#### EXPENSIVE

**Dumonet** CONTINENTAL Sunday brunch is probably the best time to splurge on this tony dining room if you're with kids: Young brunchers can serve themselves from a special balloon-festooned buffet table laden with items like French toast cut into animal shapes and minisize pizzas and burgers. But there is a kids' menu for other meals as well, and if your youngster scores an A in etiquette, this hushed, handsomely appointed restaurant is good for a special occasion.

In the Carlyle Hotel, 35 E. 76th St. (at Madison Ave.). ☎ 212/570-7192. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Main dishes \$28–\$48; kids' brunch \$25; other kids' meals \$5–\$24. Breakfast 7am–11am; lunch noon–3pm; dinner 6–11pm; Sun brunch noon–3pm. Subway: 6 to 77th St.

**Petaluma** ★ ITALIAN A good place to take a well-behaved child for a special meal out. The atmosphere is indeed friendly to kids, and the thin-crust pizzas from the brick oven go down well with youngsters. With such upscale food—risotto with porcini mushrooms, spinach gnocchi, swordfish with tomatoes, capers, and olives—it'd be nice to have a child appreciate it. The dining room is mellow and contemporary, with saffron-colored walls and plenty of room between tables; service is attentive but low-key.

1356 First Ave. (at 73rd St.). ☎ 212/772-8800. High chairs, boosters. Main courses \$13–\$28. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3:30pm; Sat–Sun noon–3:30pm; Mon–Sat 5–11:30pm; Sun 5–11pm. Subway: 6 to 68th St.

#### MODERATE

**Barking Dog Luncheonette** ★ AMERICAN The Barking Dog isn't automatically a family restaurant, but that's what I like about it. Convenient to the 92nd Street Y and Carl Schurz Park, this sleek retro diner is suffused with a mellow glow from golden walls, wood-trimmed booths, and parchment-shaded lamps at every table. The dog motif amuses my daughter: Posters, cookie jars, and even bulldog hood ornaments from Mack trucks put dogs all around the room, and there's a dog bar outside, a blue-tiled corner trough with a polished spigot. But what really makes this place work for families is that it serves breakfast until 4pm—kids can feast on waffles or blueberry pancakes while parents get a chance to eat something suitably grown-up, like a salad of field greens with goat-cheese croutons or a grilled fillet of salmon sandwich. For dinner, there's a good fried chicken with real mashed potatoes, baked ham, pot roast, and a homey meatloaf, as well as more sophisticated stuff like the pan-roasted breast of chicken with piquant Mediterranean-flavored ragout. Bribe your children with old-fashioned ice cream sodas and sundaes, served from a vintage soda fountain.

(1) 1678 Third Ave. (at 94th St.). ☎ 212/831-1800. Subway: 6 to 96th St. (2) 1453 York Ave. (at 77th St.). ☎ 212/861-3600. Subway: 6 to 77th St. Boosters, sassy seats. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$10–\$15; sandwiches and salads \$5–\$11. No credit cards. Daily 8am–11pm.



**Big City Bar and Grill** AMERICAN/ECLECTIC Though it looks like so many other noisy dinner saloons along the Third Avenue dining strip—dark wood furnishings, plate-glass windows, and a large central bar area—Big City actually has a good-size children's menu (with some unusual offerings such as teriyaki steak tidbits, popcorn shrimp, and pigs in a blanket) and, at certain hours, a downstairs play area where you can send youngsters to enjoy themselves while you linger over your meal. The adult menu, too, ranges beyond the expected burgers, steaks, and Caesar salads to include items like jalapeño poppers, Santa Fe salad, an herb-garlic wrap with Thai chicken, and seared-ginger tuna steak. The staff is friendly and the bar scene not too overpowering.

1600 Third Ave. (at 90th St.). ☎ 212/369-0808. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters, supervised play area Sun–Tues noon–8pm; Sat noon–6pm. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Dinner \$7.95–\$16; kids' menu \$4.95. Daily noon–4am. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.

**EJ's Luncheonette** DINER Breakfast is an especially good time to check out this old-style lunch-counter diner, one of a number of locations throughout the city (p. 99 and 125). The classic repertoire of burgers, salads, and sandwiches—plus daily specials like skinless fried chicken and turkey meatloaf—makes it a good bet for lunch or dinner, too, so long as you can get in. The tile floor and high ceiling usually ring with noise.

1271 Third Ave. (at 73rd St.). ☎ 212/472-0600. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Breakfast \$4.95–\$7.50; lunch \$7.50–\$11; dinner \$9.95–\$16. No credit cards. Daily 8am–11pm. Subway: 6 to 77th St.

**Fetch** ★ AMERICAN/ECLECTIC A welcoming environment and friendly staff go a long way to make this neighborhood favorite work for kids; what really seals the deal is the dog theme, with snapshots of beloved family pups covering every inch of the warm yellow walls (hence the restaurant's name). The ever-popular burgers and fries are flavorful and nongreasy, and I applaud the kids' menu for offering grilled chicken instead of chicken fingers. Delicious salads, omelets, soups, and pastas give the grown-ups a decent range of options, with grilled fish and roast chicken added at dinner; it's hard to resist the Philly cheese steak. Truly a place to yap about.

1649 Third Ave. (btwn 92nd and 93rd sts.). ☎ 212/289-2700. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$18, kids' menu \$5.95–\$7.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; Sat–Sun 11am–3:30pm; daily 5–11pm. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 96th St.

**Googie's Luncheonette** DINER This upscale coffee shop's bright, clean, pastel-toned decor lacks the sassy retro atmosphere of EJ's or the Barking Dog (see above), but the food is perfectly fine, especially if your kids, like mine, are pasta omnivores. It's usually bustling, and though the service can be slipshod, no one will hurry you out the door. The menu features a fair number of Italian dishes along with typical diner fare—burgers, club sandwiches, omelets, or even a fairly decent sirloin steak, to be accompanied if at all possible with the excellent shoestring fries. The pasta sauces are a little less spicy than I like, but my kids seem to prefer 'em that way. Googie's is a useful option for a late breakfast, with Italian frittatas in addition to standard waffles, pancakes, and French toast.

1491 Second Ave. (at 78th St.). ☎ 212/717-1122. High chairs, boosters, sassy seats. Sandwiches \$5.95–\$8.95; main courses \$7.95–\$17. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Wed 9am–midnight; Thurs–Fri 9am–1am; Sat–Sun 9am–2am. Subway: 6 to 77th St.

**Luke's Bar & Grill** ★★ AMERICAN/BURGERS It's hard for me to analyze why I like Luke's—it just seems to me like a very civilized place where children

are included as a matter of course. Lots of brick and wood give it a warm, clubby look that's also somehow young and casual; there's definitely an active bar scene here, but it never overwhelms the pleasant, relaxing restaurant. Luke's burgers are really wonderful, firm and yet juicy, with an ever-so-slightly charred outside, and the salads are big, fresh, and well conceived. My younger ones go for the grilled cheese sandwich, roast chicken, or one of the pasta dishes. There's no attitude on the part of the waiters: They seem genuinely happy to serve youngsters, even babies. If only more restaurants were like this.

1394 Third Ave. (btwn 79th and 80th sts.). ☎ **212/249-7070**. Boosters, sassy seats. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$5.95–\$16. No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–2am. Subway: 6 to 77th St.

**Serendipity 3** DINER/DESSERTS This cheery, bright restaurant with its snugly deep booths and Tiffany-style lamps has a classic coffee-shop menu, with especially good burgers. But it's best known in the under-12 population as a source for huge, wickedly rich desserts; fountain sodas; and ice cream sundaes. The Outrageous Banana Split is priced at \$17 and worth every penny. Because space is tight, strollers and carriages cannot be accommodated within the restaurant.

225 E. 60th St. (btwn Second and Third aves.). ☎ **212/838-3531**. Boosters. Reservations accepted for full meals only. Main courses \$6.95–\$18. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri 11:30am–1am; Sat 11:30am–2am. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.

**Tony di Napoli** ITALIAN Hearty southern Italian food is served family-style at this genial Upper East Side neighborhood spot, which opens a big sidewalk cafe in fair weather. Polaroids of satisfied customers in the front window and black-and-white head shots of race-car drivers on the yellowed plaster walls give it the look of a vintage family-owned red-sauce joint, though in fact it's part of the Dallas BBQ restaurant empire. Sunday lunch is the most popular time for families (Tony's doesn't serve lunch on weekdays), but you'll find kids sprinkled around the boisterous dining room on weeknights, too. The family-style menu is strong on pasta dishes, with several chicken and veal offerings as well, plus a two-person steak for dedicated carnivores. If your family can't agree on dishes, half portions can be ordered for individuals, as well as kid-size portions of pasta (there's no separate kids' menu). Though I prefer the similar food at Carmine's (p. 98 and 114), the scene here is less trendy, and the prices are certainly reasonable, considering that you can get away at \$20 a head, including wine for adults. Note that there isn't room to park strollers beside tables.

1606 Second Ave. (btwn 83rd and 84th sts.). ☎ **212/861-8686**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses (serve 2–3 people) \$11–\$44; kids' pasta portions \$5. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5pm–midnight; Sat–Sun 2pm–midnight. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Barron's Pizza** *(finds)* PIZZA We stumbled into this pizzeria one Sunday noon-time and had some of the best pie of our lives—tangy sauce, fresh mozzarella, crisp chewy crust—along with friendly counter service. The decor is a little different from your standard storefront pizza shop, with mosaic tile designs and wrought-iron cafe chairs. This is the sort of place you might not seek out without a recommendation, so take it from me: It's well above average. We go back whenever we're in the neighborhood.

1426 Lexington Ave. (at 93rd St.). ☎ **212/410-6600**. Slice \$1.50; plain pie \$10. No credit cards. Daily 7am–11pm. Subway: 6 to 96th St.

**Brother Jimmy's Bait Shack** BARBECUE/SOUTHERN The rowdy road-house charm of Brother Jimmy's always appeals to kids—blackened catfish and

peel-and-eat shrimp are featured on a menu otherwise heavy on barbecued chicken, ribs, and pork. The kitchen doesn't stint on the spices, and beer flows plentifully. But kids are welcomed warmly, with a kids-eat-free policy that can't be beat anywhere else in town. (Two kids per parent, and they have to be under 12, but it's still a great deal.) A variety of nightly "events" like All-U-Can-Eat Sundays and White Trash Wednesdays make every evening a party here.

1644 Third Ave. (at 92nd St.). ☎ 212/426-2020. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 8 or more only. Main courses \$10–\$21; salads and sandwiches \$4–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5pm–midnight; Sat noon–1am; Sun noon–11pm. Subway: 6 to 96th St.

**Brother Jimmy's BBQ** BARBECUE/SOUTHERN With a jumble of frat-party paraphernalia littering the walls, low-lit Brother Jimmy's brings hickory-smoked Carolina barbecue to New York City. No baby back ribs here, only thick 'n' meaty St. Louis–style ribs, served in hefty dinners that also include cornbread and a choice of country sides; if your kids aren't into collard greens (yeah, right), you can satisfy them with creamed corn, french fries, or macaroni and cheese. As with the Upper West Side location (p. 103), it may be best to get here early, before the frat party swings into high gear.

1461 First Ave. (at 76th St.). ☎ 212/288-0999. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 8 or more only. Main courses \$10–\$21; salads and sandwiches \$4–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–11pm; Fri–Sat 5pm–1am. Subway: 6 to 77th St.

**California Pizza Kitchen** PIZZA/CALIFORNIAN Frankly, I think the idea of a pizza topped with barbecued chicken or shrimp is an abomination, but this cheery chain restaurant surmounts that objection for me because it's so darned kid-friendly. The menu does include other items, like salads and soups and pasta dishes, and you can order more traditional pizzas, which come out of a brick oven on the ground floor. My younger son pronounced the pepperoni pizza the best he'd ever had (but remember, he was under the influence of being given crayons, an activity sheet, and a take-home plastic cup); his older brother and dad are partial to the barbecued chicken pizza, which is surprisingly good. Service is decently prompt, and the kids' menu is smartly focused on pizza and pasta, including perfectly plain (no sauce) spaghetti and penne. The black-and-yellow decor is clean and modern, neither beachy nor barlike, and the noise level is just right—we could hear one another talk but didn't feel self-conscious when the kids became exuberant. It's a middle-of-the-road option that comes in real handy.

201 E. 60th St. (at Third Ave.). ☎ 212/755-7773. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for parties of 8 or more only. Main courses \$6.50–\$15; kids' menu \$5. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.; E, N, R, V, W Lexington Ave.

**John's Pizza** ★★ PIZZA The great Village pizzeria chain (see p. 119 and 128 later on in this chapter) has opened this East Side branch for thin-crust, brick-oven pies, substantial green salads, and a few well-executed pasta dishes. The menu's limited, but every dish on it is delectable.

408 E. 64th St. (btwn First and York aves.). ☎ 212/935-2895. Reservations accepted for groups of 10 or more only. Pizzas \$9–\$15, toppings \$1–\$2; pastas \$7.50–\$8.95. AE, MC, V, DISC. Daily 11:30am–11:30pm. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.

**Lexington Candy Shop** ★★ ★ Finds DINER Walking through the door of the Lexington Candy Shop is like passing through a time warp: Inside is a perfectly preserved old luncheonette that makes EJ's Luncheonette (above) look like Planet Hollywood. It's been around since 1925 and looks it. There's a counter with chrome-rimmed stools, along with a handful of wooden booths, where you

can down creamy milkshakes and malts, fresh lemonade, buttery grilled cheese sandwiches, super BLTs, outstanding cheeseburgers, and crinkle fries. And best of all, the staff seems to positively perk up when they see kids coming. The candy-shop component doesn't consist of much more than a rack of Milky Ways and Hershey Bars just inside the door; the front window is also crammed full of stuffed animals for sale, which guarantees that my children never pass by without stopping. And I don't mind, because it's the sort of place that warms the cockles of my heart.

1226 Lexington Ave. (at 83rd St.). ☎ **212/288-0057**. Boosters, sassy seats. Main courses \$3.95–\$11. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–7pm; Sun 9am–6pm. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.

**Lili's Noodle Shop and Grill** CHINESE My kids are big fans of this kind of noodle-shop/roisserie food, and Lili's is their favorite place for it. The food is delicately spiced and not too greasy, which is a feat considering how barbecue-roasted pork and chicken can be. We also like the noodle dishes, even plain lo mein; the soups come in enormous bowls and can be a challenge to finish, but the broth is light and flavorful, filled with fresh noodles and vegetables. Light varnished woods and streamlined shapes give the decor a smart, modern feel, and the service is efficient, casual, and friendly.

1500 Third Ave. (btwn 84th and 85th sts.). ☎ **212/639-1313**. High chairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.

**Sassy's Sliders** *Value* BURGERS The decor is very 1950s—wall tiles, Formica tables, and linoleum, all in Fiestaware colors—and so is the fast-food concept: 2-inch hamburgers steamed with onions, so small and moist they slide whole down your throat, hence the name “sliders.” I've been addicted to them ever since I was a kid going to White Castle, and I've turned my older son into a fan as well. But Sassy's Sliders are much better than White Castle's, and with other choices like grilled chicken, ground turkey, and veggie burgers, this nifty little spot should satisfy everyone in the family. The slider is a perfect-size burger for a kid anyway, and at these incredibly low prices, you may be able to feed the whole gang for less than \$20. Most of its business is takeout and delivery, but there are a few tables inside.

1530 Third Ave. (at 86th St.). ☎ **212/828-6900**. Reservations not accepted. Burgers \$1–\$1.10. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–noon. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 86th St.

## ICE CREAM & SWEETS

It's awfully hard to resist the gimmick of **Cold Stone Creamery**, 1651 Second Ave., at 85th Street (☎ **212/249-7085**; [www.coldstonecreamery.com](http://www.coldstonecreamery.com)), and judging from the lines out the door, I'm not the only one who's fallen for it. Comfort yourself with the thought that the long wait will give you and your kids plenty of time to choose your combo of base ice cream and two mix-ins—there are so many possibilities, it'll take a while. While you're pondering, the chirpy servers will periodically burst into hokey songs whenever they receive a tip. It's expensive but delicious, and my kids endured a 40-minute wait without once saying they were bored.

## THE CHAIN GANG

The Carnegie Hill branch of **Jackson Hole**, 1270 Madison Ave., at 91st Street (☎ **212/427-2820**), is perpetually mobbed after 3pm with kids from the clutch of private schools nearby; the main thing here is the burgers, which are fat and juicy (prepare to wipe your child's chin). There are two other East Side Jackson

## The Cupcake Craze

Whether it's the crowns of butter cream frosting, the portable charm of a cake that fits in your palm, or an automatic response to fond childhood memories, Manhattanites old and young alike crave cupcakes. And cupcakes abound. Scattered throughout the city, bakeries that feature shiny glass cases full of these beloved treats have multiplied, with some small shops drawing not only neighborhood crowds, but also citywide fame.

Among the most popular are **Magnolia Bakery**, located at 401 Bleecker St. (at W. 11th St.; ☎ 212/462-2572), and the **Cupcake Cafe**, on the outskirts of midtown (522 Ninth Ave., at 40th St.; ☎ 212/465-1530), probably the two joint progenitors of the cupcake frenzy. (Frequent mentions on *Sex and the City* didn't hurt Magnolia's fame any.) For these bakeries, the story is in the frosting; Whether piled on in flowerets or cloudlike curls, there's always enough to trump the cake. Both shops produce and sell thousands of the miniature cakes daily and have loyal customer followings. Farther north, **Two Little Red Hens** on the Upper East Side (1652 Second Ave., at 85th St.; ☎ 212/452-0476) and the two locations of **Crumbs** (321½ Amsterdam Ave., at 75th St., ☎ 212/712-9800, and 1371 Third Ave., at 78th St., ☎ 212/794-9800) feature decadent goods—we're talking frosting you can really sink your teeth into. And in the middle of it all, the **Buttercup Bake Shop**, a descendent of Magnolia located at 973 Second Ave. (at 51st St.; ☎ 212/350-4144), offers a challenge to even the most determined sweet tooth. Both cake and frosting are overwhelmingly sweet—combined, they could send you into sugar shock. For the faint of heart or appetite, it might be best to split.

—Connor Puleo

Holes, at 234 E. 64th St., between Second and Third avenues (☎ 212/371-7187), and 1611 Second Ave., between 83rd and 84th streets (☎ 212/737-8788). A good-size **Pizzeria Uno** at 220 E. 86th St., between Second and Third avenues (☎ 212/472-5656), a **Dallas BBQ** at 1265 Third Ave., between 72nd and 73rd streets (☎ 212/772-9393), and a **Blockhead's Burritos** at 1563 Second Ave., between 81st and 82nd streets (☎ 212/879-1999) round out the neighborhood.

## 4 Midtown

### EXPENSIVE

**American Girl Café** ★★ AMERICAN Girls would have begged to come to American Girl Place's house restaurant anyway, but parents will be gratified to discover that the food is actually good. Advance reservations are essential, up to 6 months ahead at busy seasons, but it never hurts to stop by the front desk as you enter the store just to see if there are any free slots. Prix-fixe pricing simplifies everything, as does the small, well-chosen menu. As soon as you sit down, you're offered warm, gooey cinnamon buns (don't bypass these). At lunch and dinner,

there's one choice of appetizer (an arrangement of crudités, dips, cheeses, and breads that's already on the table when you arrive), and everybody gets the same dessert, a yummy little pudding in a chocolate cup. Special touches make all the difference, as with the kids' pizza, decorated with veggies to look like tic-tac-toe, or the baby-size hamburgers with curly fries. Best of all, there are special doll seats where girls can prop their American Girl dolls while they eat (the dolls get their own tea sets, and you wouldn't believe how many girls carefully feed their dolls). If you haven't brought a doll, they'll even lend you one for the meal. The waitstaff is unfailingly patient and kind, and the decor is sophisticated yet girly. The experience will make your daughter's day, and—surprise, surprise—yours too.

609 Fifth Ave. (at 49th St.). ☎ **877/AG-PLACE**. [www.americangirl.com](http://www.americangirl.com). High chairs, boosters. Reservations required. Brunch \$18; lunch \$20; tea \$20; dinner \$23. AE, DISC, MC, V. Subway: E, V to Fifth Ave./53rd St.

**Benihana** ★★ JAPANESE Watching the Benihana chefs at work with their flying knives, slicing and dicing the meat, seafood, and vegetables they'll grill on the teppanyaki right at your table, is endlessly fascinating to my kids and their friends. (Best trick: the onion transformed into a smoking volcano or the shrimp tail flipped into the top of the chef's hat.) As far as Japanese food goes, this doesn't require as adventurous a palate as, say, sushi does, so it's a good choice for kids—these kitchen samurai even managed to get my son to try shrimp for the first time (he promptly fell in love with it). For adults, the grilled food is a decent nongreasy option; small portions on the grill turn out to be a very hearty meal when they're all added up. What with the teahouse decor and the low tables, kids may feel they're getting an exotic Eastern experience, though this operation is clearly tourist-oriented, and truth be told, some of the chefs look bored with their work. But even if you don't get one of the show-off types, you'll find you can't take your eyes off the cook at work, and folks sharing the communal tables are oddly drawn together by the experience.

(1) 120 E. 56th St. (btwn Park and Lexington aves.). ☎ **212/593-1627**. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.; E, V to Lexington Ave./53rd St. (2) 47 W. 56th St. (btwn Fifth and Sixth aves.). ☎ **212/581-0930**. Subway: E, V to Fifth Ave./53rd St.; F to 57th St.; N, Q, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave. Boosters. Reservations recommended. Lunch \$8–\$15; dinner \$15–\$42. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm and 5–11:30pm; Sat 1–11:30pm; Sun 1–10:30pm.

**Mickey Mantle's** AMERICAN Young fanatics hungering for a brush with athletic celebrity may not get the point of this sleek blond-wood sports shrine owned by the late, great baseball star Mickey Mantle: The autographed jerseys hung on the walls belonged to Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, Stan Musial, Yogi Berra, and Joe DiMaggio, names from long-ago baseball cards, back in the days when they gave you bubble gum with your cards. Oh, yeah, there's a Shaquille O'Neal autographed basketball, but who's this Johnny Unitas whose name is scrawled on the football next to it? What the place lacks in ESPN glitz, however, it gains in food and a smart, friendly, casual atmosphere. A couple of upscale dishes like grilled swordfish, herb-roasted chicken, and wild-mushroom ravioli grace the menu, but most of it is studiously down-home; Mick's own picks include chicken-fried steak, Texas barbecued ribs, and grilled sirloin chili with blue-corn tortillas. The Little League menu has the usual range of chicken fingers, grilled cheese, spaghetti, and burgers. Dig the Scooter Pie sundae. TV monitors everywhere are usually tuned to some sports event, and oil paintings of baseball players festoon the walls of the quieter, carpeted back room.

42 Central Park S. (btwn Fifth and Sixth aves.). ☎ **212/688-7777**. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$25; kids' menu \$8.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–midnight; Sat 9am–midnight; Sun noon–midnight. Subway: N, R, W to Fifth Ave./59th St.

**Planet Hollywood** AMERICAN The Times Square location makes this movie-themed restaurant more convenient for tourists than when it was on 57th Street, but it has lost some of its pizzazz. Large display cases in the high-ceilinged rooms feature a thinned-out collection of film memorabilia (with the nationwide proliferation of Planet Hollywoods, there must not have been enough to go around); what's left is mostly costumes and weapons from movies you never heard of. Forget the classics: We're talking action movies and music videos (no surprise, because the founders were Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Demi Moore). The trendy California menu of past years has been modified in a middle-of-the-road direction, with hamburgers, steaks, and grilled fish. But on the plus side, the restaurant is now big enough that you may not have to wait in line to get in, especially if you go before 8pm, and there is now a kids' menu of standards like burgers, mac 'n' cheese, and pizza. The dramatic central room still has a bit of buzz, though the upstairs bar seems to be where it's happening. No matter where you're seated, tour the room to see all the displays; eventually you'll find something cool.

1540 Broadway (at 45th St.). ☎ 212/333-7827. www.planethollywood.com. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$21; kids' menu \$8.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–midnight; until 1am Fri–Sat. Subway: N, Q, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave.

**Rock Center Café** ★ ITALIAN If it weren't in the very heart of Midtown, this restaurant might have cause to be snooty about children, with its sleek mahogany-trimmed contemporary decor and upscale Italian food (stylish pastas, roasted chicken, fish, and steak). But as they say in the real estate biz, location is everything, and this location couldn't be more of a tourist magnet: set right on the lower plaza of Rockefeller Plaza, where you can watch the ice skaters in winter and sit out under Prometheus in summer. (And if that isn't enough of a thrill, you can ride a tiny glass-enclosed elevator down from sidewalk level to the restaurant.) Where tourists flock, there are bound to be children, and the Rock Center Café has shrewdly decided to make the most of them with a decent children's menu—chicken tenders, handmade penne pasta, and a grilled cheese sandwich made with fontina cheese on Italian bread. Everything about this place spells Special Event.

20 W. 50th St. (at Rockefeller Center). ☎ 212/332-7620. Kids' menu, high chairs. Reservations recommended, especially for lunch. Lunch \$14–\$28; dinner \$15–\$28; kids' menu \$8.95. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Subway: B, D, F, V to 47th–50th sts./Rockefeller Center.

**Ruby Foo's** PAN-ASIAN This Theater District location of the Asian-themed chain (p. 97) is good for special events—the decor is as stunning as a movie set, the food precisely presented, the whole atmosphere trendily abuzz. The menu ranges all over Asia, with dim sum, sushi, hand rolls, and Thai curries. Best for older kids who can appreciate the setting and are willing to sample exotic dishes.

1626 Broadway (at 49th St.). ☎ 212/489-5600. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Lunch \$20–\$25; dinner \$30–\$35 (average per person, including drinks). AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1am. Subway: 1, 9 to 50th St.

## MODERATE

**Café SFA** ★ ECLECTIC Many things recommend this department store café for lunch or afternoon tea: its high-floor views over Rockefeller Center and St. Patrick's (insist on a window table), elegant weekday tea service from 3 to 5pm, and the smart kids' menu—soup and sandwich, miniburgers, a hot dog, or a PB&J sandwich, with a choice of drinks that includes chocolate milk. Grown-ups will feel very ladies-who-lunch-ish with selections like grilled salmon, turkey club,



Cobb salad, a portobello focaccia sandwich, and an asparagus-and-mushroom risotto. The decor is thick-carpeted and pleasant, with golden hues and mahogany-stained wood trim. Just one bit of advice: If you've got boys, steer to the right when you step off the elevator, because you'll be walking through the ladies' lingerie department—better for them to see the negligees than the bras and garter belts.

In Saks Fifth Avenue, 611 Fifth Ave. (btwn 49th and 50th sts.), 8th floor. ☎ 212/940-4080. Kids' menu, high chairs. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$8–\$18; afternoon tea \$19; kids' menu \$5.25–\$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11am–5pm (Thurs until 7pm); Sun noon–5pm. Subway: E, V to Fifth Ave./53rd St.; B, D, F, V to 47th–50th sts./Rockefeller Center.

**Carmine's** ITALIAN Northern Italian, and lots of it. Family-style dinners make this a natural if you're eating out with kids, especially if yours are the kind to suck up spaghetti with gusto. The noisy, casual atmosphere absorbs a lot of tantrums, and once you've got a table, service is prompt (if you can't move customers in and out quickly in the Theater District, you're done for). The original branch is on the Upper West Side (p. 98).

200 W. 44th St. (btwn Broadway and Eighth aves.). ☎ 212/221-3800. High chairs, boosters. Reservations after 6pm accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Family-style main courses (serve 2–3 people) \$17–\$53. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Mon 11:30am–11pm; Tues–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Subway: N, Q, R, S, W, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 to 42nd St./Times Sq.

**Carnegie Deli** DELI A classic delicatessen restaurant, straight out of Woody Allen's *Broadway Danny Rose*, the Carnegie Deli may borrow its name from nearby Carnegie Hall, but the atmosphere is anything but refined and stuffy. Every table has a little bowl of crisp dill pickles on it, and the sandwiches are piled so high you can hardly get your mouth around them—corned beef, pastrami, brisket, chopped liver, the works, with Russian dressing the condiment of choice. You can also get kosher dairy dishes like blintzes, pirogue, and matzo brei, or eastern European home-cooking like chicken paprikash, Hungarian goulash, and stuffed cabbage. The menu is as huge as the servings. Ya wanna know what New York was like in the 1940s and '50s? Come here; order an egg cream, borscht, or gefilte fish; and schmooze away.

854 Seventh Ave. (btwn 54th and 55th sts.). ☎ 212/757-2245. [www.carnegiedeli.com](http://www.carnegiedeli.com). High chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Breakfast \$2.95–\$12; sandwiches and main courses \$6.45–\$20. No credit cards. Daily 6:30am–3:30am. Subway: B, D, E to Seventh Ave.

**Ellen's Stardust Diner** ★★ DINER/ECCLECTIC This *Happy Days*-style diner is a block from my husband's office, and it's our kids' favorite place to eat when we visit Dad at work. Enter through what looks like a vintage red subway car, and you're in a nostalgic time warp—streamlined chrome trim, turquoise vinyl and Formica, vintage movie posters and ads, and a wall full of subway posters introducing a bevy of Miss Subways (owner Ellen Hart was herself voted Miss Subways in 1959). But what my kids like best are the model train zipping around on an elevated track above our heads and the TV monitors showing old black-and-white TV shows. The food—your basic grab bag of burgers and fries, salads, omelets, tacos, and club sandwiches—tastes decent and comes in good-size portions; Nick at Naters may get a kick out of the cutesy names for menu items, like Fred Mertz-arella Sticks or the Cesar Romero Salad. The waitstaff is supercongenial, and Wednesday through Saturday nights they even sing, as part of a slightly goofy dinner-hour floor show. They totally embarrassed my 9-year-old by making him stand in the spotlight while the whole place sang "Happy Birthday" to him—his older brother couldn't get enough of it.

1650 Broadway (at 51st St.). ☎ **212/956-5151**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted only for groups of 10 or more. Breakfast \$3.95–\$6.95; lunch and dinner entrees \$6.95–\$14. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to 50th St.

**ESPN Zone AMERICAN** It's definitely a theme-restaurant scene, with a line out front, a gift shop, multiple floors, an arcade upstairs, and big-screen TVs putting sports in your face everywhere you turn. But the streamlined blond-wood decor is not too cluttered; the noise level is tolerable; and the menu offers a decent range of standard dishes, with some salads and lighter food amid all the fried stuff that kids and jock types are expected to love. Meat is, however, a linchpin of the menu: steaks, ribs, chops, pot roast, cheese steak, burgers, and barbecued chicken, along with tailgate-party-worthy appetizers like chicken wings, queso chips, and cheese fries. Though the kids' menu is pretty standard, there are two unusual items—corn dogs and sliders (mini-hamburgers)—and maybe the best thing about the place is that the children's menu comes in a Viewmaster that you can hold up to the light and read at your table. That alone made it worth the visit for my kids.

1472 Broadway (at 42nd St.). ☎ **212/921-3776**. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Sandwiches \$5.25–\$11; main courses \$11–\$28; kids' menu \$5.25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight; Sun 11am–11pm. Subway: N, Q, R, S, W, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 to 42nd St./Times Sq.

**Hard Rock Cafe AMERICAN/BURGERS** Looking like it was rear-ended by a Cadillac, this brassy burger joint promotes its rock-and-roll theme with such memorabilia as a pair of John Lennon's wire-rims with a cracked lens, a broken guitar used in Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* video, and a rhinestone-studded jumpsuit actually worn by Elvis. Various trippy 1960s slogans pepper the place, scripted in neon or proclaimed on posters, but the target audience isn't baby boomers nostalgic for Woodstock: It's teenagers, who regard the place as a museum of their parents' goofy past. Despite its lowbrow Disneyland-ish cachet, the Hard Rock is really not so bad; the burgers and milkshakes are perfectly fine, the prices aren't out of sight, and there's something infectious about the blaring rock soundtrack. And if you've got teenagers in tow, the fact that the place is packed with callow teenagers might even be a plus. (Unless, of course, your teenager is too sophisticated for the place already.)

221 W. 57th St. (btwn Broadway and Seventh Ave.). ☎ **212/489-6565**. Reservations accepted for groups of 15 or more only. Main courses \$7.95–\$14. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight (open Wed and Sat at 11am; open Fri–Sat until 12:30am). Subway: N, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave.; B, D, E to Seventh Ave.

**Jekyll & Hyde Club AMERICAN** My young kids are terrified of this place—I can barely get them to walk past the entrance, where ghoulish skull heads dangle and there are always throngs of older kids lined up, dying to get in. Other theme restaurants have staid display cases full of memorabilia; Jekyll & Hyde delivers a thrill-ride experience, from the crashing ceiling in the vestibule to the creepy artwork that stares back at you from the walls. The waiters all look decked out for Halloween, and there's a continual floor show of ghastly figures telling even ghastlier jokes. As with the Village location (p. 125), the food is somewhat beside the point, but for the record, I'll tell you that they serve pop-corn shrimp, pizzas, veggie burgers, baby back ribs, and more; you can choose between the smaller Batty Burger or the Monster Burger, which comes topped with the works. The kitchen's general strategy seems to be to smother things with cheese if at all possible and to grill anything that's grillable.

1409 Sixth Ave. (at 57th St.). ☎ **212/541-9505**. Kids' menu. Reservations accepted for groups of 15 or more only. Main courses \$10–\$22; kids' menu \$9.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri 11:30am–1am; Sat 11am–1am; Sun 11:30am–11pm. Subway: F, N, Q, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave.

**La Bonne Soupe** ★★ ★ *Finds* FRENCH One rainy Sunday, we left the Museum of Modern Art, all five of us starving, not knowing where to go for lunch. (Yes, it happens to us, too.) We wandered into La Bonne Soupe simply because there wasn't much else open nearby on a Sunday, and it was one of the most pleasant discoveries we ever made. This is a cozy, charming bistro, French but not snooty, which truly welcomes *les enfants*. The quiches are splendid, as is the onion soup gratiné, and there are a few fine fondue dishes (talk about throwbacks). Omelets, salads, and filet mignon fill out the menu. My kids ordered from the kids' menu *steak haché*—aka chopped steak, aka hamburger—and were astonished when it arrived with no bun and no ketchup. But the accommodating waitress quickly sliced up French bread and discovered some ketchup in the kitchen, and *voilà!*—we were all set. There are two floors, the lower one softly lit and paneled, the cheery upper floor more like an Alpine chalet, checkered tablecloths and all. Service isn't speedy, but it's pleasant. A delightful change of pace.

48 W. 55th St. (btwn Fifth and Sixth aves.). ☎ 212/586-7650. Kids' menu. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9–\$20; kids' menu \$10. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–11pm. Subway: F, N, Q, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave.

**Mangia e Bevi** ITALIAN Graffiti-ish murals outside do their best to stop traffic on Ninth Avenue, drawing customers to this hearty Italian restaurant on the western edge of Midtown. *Boisterous* is the word to describe what goes on inside, with the small tables crammed together and speakers pouring out standard Italian music (we actually heard *O Sole Mio*). The decor is pointedly rustic, with rough white plaster, wood trim, and red-checked tablecloths, though no true Adriatic taverna would cover the tablecloth with paper and give diners Crayolas. But the southern Italian food is up to Manhattan standards—savory gourmet pastas, grilled seafood, and some of the best bruschetta I've ever tasted. Many pasta dishes are available in half orders to suit small appetites, but my three kids shared a pizza with a divinely thin, crispy crust and big splatters of fresh mozzarella, plenty big enough for three. Our waiter was a tad sullen but totally efficient, and everybody in the restaurant seemed delighted to have the kids there, even our 20- and 30-something fellow diners.

800 Ninth Ave. (at 53rd St.). ☎ 212/956-3976. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 4 or more only. Main courses \$9–\$18. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight. Subway: C, E to 50th St.

**Mars 2112** *Overrated* ECLECTIC This sci-fi theme restaurant has gone badly downhill since it first opened: The once-witty menu's been dumbed down and priced up, the space-station decor has become worn and grimy, and even the staff members' alien costumes are frayed and grubby. Worst of all, the kitchen has sunk to an amazing level of incompetence; I could scarcely eat my food the last time we went. Even the game arcade is a downer. If your kids insist you come here, know the drill: You enter through a simulator that gives guests an "interplanetary ride" to the lower-level restaurant (never fear, skittish kids and pregnant women can enter through a back door instead); the restaurant itself looks like a cavernous subterranean mining colony, weirdly lit with futuristic trappings. You can watch intraspace broadcasts on a giant screen, and "alien" staffers circulate among the tables, greeting guests in a desultory, if unthreatening, manner.

1633 Broadway (at 51st St.). ☎ 212/582-2112. www.mars2112.com. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$11–\$24; kids' menu \$8.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs noon–9pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight; Sun 11:30am–9pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 50th St.

## Pizza Etiquette

Sometimes it seems there's a narrow little neighborhood pizzeria on every corner in New York City (though, of course, when you really need one you may not find one for blocks). Most kids, even picky eaters, like pizza, and between the tomato sauce and the cheese, it actually makes a fairly well balanced meal. In most neighborhood pizzerias, a single slice of plain cheese pizza will cost between \$1.50 and \$2.50, with higher prices for additional toppings. But the New York preference for huge triangles of thin-crust pizza with satiny thin sauce can make it hard to eat without utensils. The local solution: Fold the triangular slice in half lengthwise, hold it by the thick end, and eat it like a sandwich from the narrow end up. Younger kids may need to have their pizza cut up, which is tricky when you're sawing away on a thin paper plate with a plastic knife. Try slicing it into long triangular strips.

**Texas Texas Restaurant and Saloon** AMERICAN/BARBECUE The fare at this handy Times Square spot—predominantly ribs and chicken, with some burgers and salads and sandwiches thrown in for good measure—is better than you'd expect, with good fresh bread and crisp coleslaw (never mind the unnaturally yellow corn on the cob). The barbecue sauce may not be authentic, but it's neither sugary nor too thick, and there are plenty of nonbarbecued choices as well. The choices on the kids' menu are predictable (burgers, chicken fingers, hot dogs) but taste more than decent, with very good nongreasy french fries. Big, well lit, and clean, the place has friendly, helpful waiters and a Western-themed decor that's not too hokey, plus large picture windows to take in the Broadway razzle-dazzle.

1600 Broadway (at 48th St.). ☎ 212/956-7427. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$25; kids' menu \$5.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1am; Sun noon–11pm. Subway: 1, 9 to 50th St.

**Virgil's Real Barbecue** ★ AMERICAN/BARBECUE Your cutlery is wrapped in a maroon hand towel atop the plastic tablecloth, which tells you all you need to know about Virgil's—this is barbecue, and you're expected to get messy eating it. Along with the wood-smoked barbecued specialties, you get sides of down-home stuff like turnip greens, a slaw made with mustard greens, and buttery cornbread, as well as more mainstream choices like french fries and coleslaw for folks whose home isn't below the Mason-Dixon line. Kids who can't handle ribs are offered some safer choices, like grilled cheese and hot dogs. The decor is roadhouse chic, with polished wood paneling, ceiling fans, and a cluster of vintage livestock photos. Casual and friendly as it is, Virgil's has a post-modern self-consciousness—come on, that woodpile inside the front door is not there just to stoke the barbecue. But you might as well play along with the game when the food is this good, this hearty, and this authentic.

152 W. 44th St. (btwn Broadway and Sixth Ave.). ☎ 212/921-9494. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$22; kids' menu \$4.95–\$5.95. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Mon 11:30am–11pm; Tues–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Subway: N, Q, R, S, W, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 to 42nd St./Times Sq.

**Won Jo** KOREAN Skip the Japanese sushi bar downstairs, and head straight upstairs for do-it-yourself barbecue, Korean-style. Each of the wooden tables has

### **Fun Fact Who's Ray & Why Does He Own So Many Pizza Joints?**

The overwhelming majority of pizza places in New York have the name Ray somewhere in the title: Famous Ray's, World Famous Ray's, Famous Original Ray's, Original Ray's, Ray's Famous, Ray's House of Pizza, Ray's Real Pizza. Most of these are trying to cash in on the enormous success of **Famous Ray's Pizza of Greenwich Village** (p. 127), where you'll often have to stand in line just to buy a slice to go. (Considering the equal popularity of the Village's **John's Pizza**, it could just as easily have been that every pizzeria in town was named John's.) Litigation has been useless in trying to convince these lesser Rays to change their names. Just for fun, ask your kids to keep a running log of Ray sightings as they ramble around the city—you may be surprised by how many they'll turn up.

a small built-in grill, and you choose what you want to grill on it—beef, pork, chicken, or mushrooms. The result is food that can be as simple as you want it and an experience that's fun for kids (the same kids who'd be bored to death watching you cook at home). Just make sure they're old enough to refrain from burning themselves on the grill. Other Korean specialties are kimchi (pickled vegetables), a variety of buckwheat noodle dishes, and broiled fish. There are a lot of authentic Korean restaurants in the immediate vicinity, but this one's a standout.

23 W. 32nd St. (btwn Broadway and Fifth Ave.). ☎ **212/695-5815**. High chairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.95–\$19. AE, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. Subway: B, D, F, N, Q, R, V, W to 34th St./Herald Sq.

## **INEXPENSIVE**

**Angelo's Coal Oven Pizza** ★★ PIZZA/ITALIAN Yet another claimant to the title of New York's most authentic pizza, with ties to the Patsy's dynasty, Angelo's (which is actually run by Angelo's nephew, John) is an upscale two-level pizzeria dishing up crisp thin-crust pies as well as calzones, salads, and pastas, which can be ordered in family-size servings to share. The glossy decor features wood trim, green marble-topped tables, and parchment yellow walls; you can't get a single slice of pizza here, but you can get a superb cannoli. I dragged my famished older son here during a shopping trip, and it completely won him over (it helped that the service is quick). I still wouldn't rate it as high as John's (see below), but it's an excellent choice for a Midtown meal.

(1) 117 W. 57th St. (btwn Sixth and Seventh aves.). ☎ **212/333-4333**. Subway: F, N, Q, R, W to 57th St./Seventh Ave.; B, D, E to Seventh Ave. (2) 1043 Second Ave. (at 55th St.). ☎ **212/521-3600**. Subway: E, V to Lexington Ave./53rd St. Pizzas \$13–\$15; main courses \$7.95–\$30 (individual or family-style). AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun noon–11pm.

**Comfort Diner** ★ DINER This chain diner (p. 123) is a great place to know about if you're visiting the U.N. or staying in one of the Midtown East hotels. The Comfort Diner certainly lives up to its name, with generous portions of satisfying diner classics—mac 'n' cheese, open-faced hot turkey sandwiches, chili, tuna melts, BLTs, and burgers, as well as a substantial breakfast menu served all day. The clean, cheery look is classic, too, with booths and banquettes and a long chrome-trimmed counter with stools; you almost expect the waitress to call you “honey.” Service is quick, and kids are welcomed with a joke-laden menu they can color. The kids' menu is wonderfully sensible, with PB&J sandwiches,

pancakes, buttered noodles (“with no green stuff”), and tuna fish sandwiches along with the usual burger/grilled cheese/macaroni and cheese stuff. Somebody running this place must have young children.

214 E. 45th St. (btwn Second and Third aves.). ☎ 212/867-4555. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$6–\$16; kids’ menu \$5–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–11pm; Sat–Sun 9am–11pm. Subway: S, 4, 5, 6, 7 to 42nd St./Grand Central.

**John’s Pizza** ★★ PIZZA As good as all the John’s branches are (p. 109 and 128), this one deserves special mention because it fills such a need in the Theater District for a quick, unpretentious, fabulous meal. The simple white-walled space is stunning, too, a two-story dining room converted from a church, with a stained-glass dome in its upper reaches. Pizzas slide out of the brick ovens with incredibly thin, crisp crusts; the satisfying green salads are huge enough for two; and the stuffed homemade rolls are a special treat. Okay, so they don’t take reservations, but even in the height of the pretheater crush, you might wait 20 minutes at most for a table, and service is prompt enough to get you out before your curtain.

260 W. 44th St. (btwn Broadway and Eighth Ave.). ☎ 212/391-7560. High chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$9–\$15, toppings \$1–\$2; pastas \$7–\$11. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11:30pm. Subway: N, Q, R, S, W, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 to 42nd St./Times Sq.; A, C, E to 42nd St./Port Authority.

**Manhattan Chili Company** AMERICAN/MEXICAN/TEX-MEX This bright and busy little Times Square restaurant welcomes kids with open arms, which is smart as can be, considering it’s right around the corner from the New Victory Theater and the Warner Bros. Studio Store. The first day we went, it was crowded with lunching office workers, yet my 5-year-old still felt totally at home, thanks to the friendly, attentive staff. There are two colorful cartoon murals of the city on the side walls, one of which is reproduced in the paper place mat they give kids to color—my son thought that was really cool. Kids who aren’t chili eaters still have plenty of choices; I like the kids’ menu because it includes grilled veggies as well as the standards. My chili was spicy and slightly bitter (heavy on the cumin), which I liked a lot as soon as my palate got accustomed to it, but besides the 11 chili varieties, there are lots of fajitas, quesadillas, nachos, and even a few burgers for those who don’t like Mexican. Noisy, festive, and clean as a whistle, this is definitely one of your better choices around Times Square.

500 Broadway (at 43rd St.). ☎ 212/730-8666. Subway: N, Q, R, S, W, 1, 2, 3, 7, 9 to 42nd St./Times Sq. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended for parties of 5 or more. Main courses \$9.95–\$15; salads and sandwiches \$4.95–\$11; kids’ menu \$6.95. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Mon 11:30am–11pm; Tues–Sat 11:30am–midnight.

**Ollie’s Noodle Shop** CHINESE The Midtown branch of this popular Upper West Side noodle shop (p. 105) does a brisk business in the Chinese standards Americans are most comfortable with—egg rolls, barbecued spare ribs, wonton soup, sweet-and-sour pork—with a nod to newer favorites like Mandarin noodle soups, a sizzling tofu platter, and a grilled tuna kabob with teriyaki sauce. At these prices, who could complain? Fast, noisy, casual, and dependable, it may work better for families if you can avoid the pre-theater madhouse.

200B W. 44th St. (btwn Seventh and Eighth aves.). ☎ 212/921-5988. High chairs. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$8–\$16. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1am; Sun 11:30am–11:30pm. Subway: A, C, E to 42nd St./Port Authority.

**Patsy’s Pizzeria** PIZZA A respected player in the decades-long rivalry for pizza supremacy in New York, Patsy’s has spread into several neighborhoods from its East Harlem original location. The pizzas are still superlative, as are

mouthwatering pastas, all at very reasonable prices and with a casual, family-friendly atmosphere. Not far from the Empire State Building, this branch of the great pizzeria chain (p. 124 and 128) makes a good lunch time choice for families especially in this less-touristy section of Murray Hill. The kids can feast on a small pizza while parents go for satisfying, if not fancy, pastas and salads.

(1) 509 Third Ave. (btwn 34th and 35th sts.). ☎ 212/689-7500. High chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$12–\$14; pasta \$8.95–\$15. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight. Subway: 6 to 33rd St. (2) 64 W. 74th St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 212/579-3000. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St. (3) 1312 Second Ave. (at 69th St.). ☎ 212/639-1000. Subway: 6 to 68th St. (4) 2287 First Ave. (at 61st St.). ☎ 212/534-9783. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.; N, R, W to Lexington Ave./59th St.

**Prime Burger** ★ *Finds* AMERICAN/BURGERS/DINER Behind an unprepossessing Midtown coffee shop facade is this amazing slice of the 1950s (Truman Capote mentions it in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* under its former name, Hamburg Heaven). The decor is all chrome and Formica and fake wood paneling, with a long counter and spinning stools. Food is served on melamine plates; drinks, in plastic tumblers; and your order gets to your table unbelievably fast, all of which makes this great for young ones. But what my kids remember best are the seats at the front, which have wooden trays you swing in front of you in lieu of a table; they insist on waiting for these, even if there's room at the counter. The hand-formed hamburgers are small—maybe 5 inches in diameter—which I find a welcome relief from most diners' too-big-to-finish wads of ground beef. French fries are crisp, tasty, and perfectly salted. The menu has many other offerings—chicken in a basket, BLTs, club sandwiches, grilled cheese, omelets, even retro choices like canned peaches with cottage cheese—but burgers—and the seats with the trays—are the main event.

5 E. 51st St. (btwn Madison and Fifth). ☎ 212/759-4729. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 6am–7pm; closed Sun. Main courses \$5–\$9.95. Subway: 6 to 51st St.

**Route 66** ★ AMERICAN The open-road murals and the clutter of artifacts decorating this place give it a nice, breezy, Southwestern feel; the food is contemporary casual stuff, some of it with a Southwestern accent (a little jalapeño thrown in here and there), but nothing too contrived or exotic. Grilled tuna, spinach ravioli, and steamed mussels all sound good, but somehow we always end up with burgers and the Popeye salad (spinach, naturally), or one of the omelets. We like it for Sunday brunch, after soccer games, or before plays at Theatreworks USA. Tables are set close together, and the noise level is . . . well, lively, but everybody seems happy and relaxed.

858 Ninth Ave. (btwn 55th and 56th sts.). ☎ 212/977-7600. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted except for weekend brunch. Main courses \$10–\$18. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–midnight. Subway: 1, 9, A, B, C, D to 59th St./Columbus Circle.

**Stage Deli** DELI Doggedly trying to compete with the Carnegie Deli up the street (p. 114), the Stage Deli promotes more of a theatrical connection; besides the requisite black-and-white glossies of stars plastered all over the place, near the door there's a large display case of Polaroids taken of more recent stars (I use the term loosely for folks like Pauly Shore and David Faustino, along with reliables like Dom DeLuise—who, judging from the numbers of pictures posted in restaurants around town, must've eaten everywhere). On many factors—the overstuffed sandwiches, dill pickles on every table—the Stage Deli competes head-to-head with its rival, and there are some who even claim its corned beef is better; the cheesecake here is smooth as satin and of heroic proportions. The menu is more limited than Carnegie's, sticking mostly to sandwiches. On the



whole, the Stage Deli is less atmospheric than the Carnegie, if ambience is what you're after. Lunch and pretheater hours are crazed, which may mean impatient service, something you don't need when you're with kids.

834 Seventh Ave. (btwn 53rd and 54th sts.). ☎ 212/245-7850. Kids' menu, high chairs. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches \$7.95–\$15. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6am–2am. Subway: B, D, E to Seventh Ave.

## AFTERNOON TEA

**Palm Court** CONTINENTAL The classic choice for a special-occasion outing with grandparents or godparents, the Plaza Hotel's elegant lobby cafe is at its best in the afternoon, with the discreet clink of china teacups and the rustle of shopping bags mingling with soft classical music. The desserts are as ornate as the 19th-century decor, all curlicued gilt and creamy marble. Kids should be on their best behavior; I once saw, honestly, a 5-year-old boy dressed in a sailor suit (let's hope he was European), which tells you what you need to know about the target clientele. The dress code is business casual or dressier—don't try to show up in skimpy shorts.

In the Plaza Hotel, 768 Fifth Ave. (btwn 58th and 59th sts.). ☎ 212/546-5350. High chairs. Reservations not accepted for tea. High tea \$29–\$35. Tea served Mon–Sat 3:45–6pm; Sun 4–6pm. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Subway: N, R, W to Fifth Ave./59th St.

## ICE CREAM & SWEETS

At the Times Square branch of **Cold Stone Creamery**, 253 W. 42nd St., between Seventh and Eighth avenues (☎ 212/398-1882), expect long lines, rich ice cream, a host of mix-ins to choose among, plus a perky staff that bursts out singing whenever anyone leaves them a tip.

## THE CHAIN GANG

**Houlihan's** has locations at 162 W. 34th St., between Seventh Avenue and Broadway (☎ 212/630-0348), and 729 Seventh Ave., at 49th Street (☎ 212/626-7316). There's a **Jackson Hole** fairly near the Empire State Building at 521 Third Ave., at 35th Street (☎ 212/679-3264). **Dallas BBQ** has a toehold in Midtown at 132 W. 43rd St., at Sixth Avenue (☎ 212/302-1870). A hipper and healthier alternative may be **Blockhead's Burritos**, which has three Midtown locations: 499 Third Ave., between 33rd and 34th streets (☎ 212/213-3332); 954 Second Ave., between 50th and 51st streets (☎ 212/750-2020); and 322 W. 50th St., in the plaza between Eighth and Ninth avenues (☎ 212/307-7070).

## FOOD COURT

The **Grand Central Dining Concourse** is definitely a smart option, even if you're not taking a train into or out of the city. There's loads of seating under the cool marble arches, and a few of the participating restaurants, like **Two Boots** (pizza and Cajun food), **Zocalo** (trendy Mexican), and **Junior's** (classic deli), have sit-down table-service areas as well as carry-out. The globe-spanning assortment of vendors aren't the usual tired food-court chains but respected New York restaurants coaxed into this high-profile location, so expect to eat well.

## 5 Chelsea, the Flatiron District & Gramercy Park

### MODERATE

**America** ★★☆☆ AMERICAN/ECCLECTIC A giant American flag hangs over the entrance and a Statue of Liberty presides over one end of the raised bar area, while figures of Washington and Lincoln hold a confab at the other end. From Albuquerque nachos to New York Waldorf salad, this USA-themed restaurant

assigns every item on the menu a hometown, some of which seem far-fetched—why should alphabet noodle soup belong to Kalamazoo, Michigan; a tuna melt to Minnesota; or the Reuben sandwich to Nebraska? But why quibble with such a big, fun menu, especially when so many selections are kid-pleasers, even for kids too young to get the geography gimmick. Even picky eaters should find something they like, whether it's a Georgia peach pancake, a Fluffernutter sandwich, macaroni and cheese, or a trio of tiny Velveeta-topped slider hamburgers; meanwhile, parents can sample exotic items like Puget Sound wild-mushroom ragout, Creole jambalaya, or air-dried duck salad. And surprisingly, the kitchen does a pretty good job with nearly everything. The big dining room's cool minimalist decor will flatter older kids into thinking this is a grown-up restaurant, but never fear—America attracts lots of younger diners and is used to dealing with them.

9 E. 18th St. (btwn Fifth Ave. and Broadway). ☎ **212/505-2110**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.95–\$20; salads and sandwiches \$3.95–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

**Empire Diner** DINER The enduring popularity of this Deco-ish chrome diner, stretching like a waiting limo along Chelsea's far west Tenth Avenue, is no doubt because it stays open until all hours of the morning—the club-happy crew that tramps through here at 5am is a sight to behold. There's only one booster seat in the whole joint, which tells you how little they value family business. But if your kids are older and have developed some restaurant smarts, this is a dependable choice in a neighborhood that doesn't offer many places to eat. The whimsically footnoted menu is big on omelets, burgers, meatloaf, and the like, which won't threaten a youngster's palate, but you can still find chic dishes like grilled portobello and goat-cheese salad or linguine with smoked salmon. One thing you can be sure of—you'll feel like you're in Manhattan.

210 Tenth Ave. (at 22nd St.). ☎ **212/243-2736**. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9.95–\$19; salads and sandwiches \$4.50–\$13. DISC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. (except closed Tues 4–8am). Subway: C, E to 23rd St.

**Friend of a Farmer** *(Finds)* AMERICAN Like a little piece of upstate New York plunked down just south of Gramercy Park, rustic low-ceilinged Friend of a Farmer does the country cafe thing right—fresh-baked breads and muffins, hearty soups, filling casseroles, and potpies on a menu that also offers steaks, roast chicken, pastas, and salads. Young farmhands can choose from macaroni and cheese, chicken with pasta, grilled cheese, or PB&J. Casual and low-key it may be, but the wooden tables are small and set close, service can dawdle a bit, and the lunching neighborhood folks may look askance if rowdy juveniles shatter the usual calm. All the same, I keep coming here to get the kind of home cooking I never have time to do at home.

77 Irving Place (btwn 18th and 19th sts.). ☎ **212/477-2188**. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Lunch \$7–\$9; dinner \$8–\$17; kids' menu \$6.25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8am–10pm; Fri 8am–11pm; Sat 9:30am–11pm; Sun 9:30am–10pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Chat 'n' Chew** ★ *(Finds)* AMERICAN Are they serious about that name? Of course not, and neither should you be. Something about this cozy place just makes me smile as soon as I walk in the door. Maybe it's the (nudge, nudge) “down-home” decor—red-painted floors, dark-stained wood, farm implements and road signs on the walls—or maybe it's the casual, friendly way they treat

you. The menu's fun to read, with names like the Cesar Romero Salad, Uncle Red's Addiction (honey-dipped fried chicken), 110% Veggie Chili, and the Holy Cow (a 9-oz. hamburger); the fried catfish po' boy is especially moist and delicious, and the meatloaf comes with "skin-on" smashed potatoes. Kids get offered a fairly standard menu of favorites, but the names will intrigue them: Monster Burger, Flying Saucer Pancakes, Mars Fried Chicken (two pieces of mutant chicken with alien fries). Tongue-in-cheek it may be, but it's not too hip to welcome families; the Greenwich Village location is equally friendly (p. 127).

10 E. 16th St. (btwn Fifth Ave. and Union Sq. W.). ☎ 212/243-1616. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8.25–\$14; salads and sandwiches \$7–\$11; kids' menu \$3.95 at brunch, \$4.95 at lunch and dinner. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–midnight; Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 10am–10pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

**Comfort Diner** ★ DINER Right next to Madison Square, this satellite of Midtown's Comfort Diner (p. 118) brings diner classics to the Flatiron District. Besides a range of burgers, sandwiches, and salads, there's an all-day breakfast menu and some more creative lunch choices like pecan-crusted catfish or a spicy jerk-chicken wrap. The retro diner look is cheery and sassy, and kids feel at home here.

25 W. 23rd St. (btwn Fifth and Sixth aves.). ☎ 212/741-1010. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$6–\$16; kids' menu \$5–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–11pm; Sat–Sun 9am–11pm. Subway: 6 to 23rd St.

**Duke's** BARBECUE/SOUTHERN Yet another haven for transplanted Southerners, this roadhouse-style hangout believes in huge portions, a steady noise level, and friendliness to kids. Expect a rock-and-roll soundtrack, vintage clutter on the weathered-looking walls, and Tennessee-style barbecue (ribs, chicken, fish) that's not terribly authentic. The kids' menu consists of your usual burgers, chicken fingers, and the like, but meals include a drink and a hot fudge sundae, which makes it a decent deal. It doesn't have quite the kitschy sense of fun as Chat 'n' Chew (above), but we thought the food was a half notch above Rodeo Grill (see below), with a similar down-home atmosphere.

99 E. 19th St. (btwn Park Ave. S. and Irving Place). ☎ 212/260-2922. www.dukesnyc.com. Kids' menu (noon–4pm only), high chairs, boosters. Reservations required for groups of 6 or more. Main courses \$7.95–\$18. AE, MC, V. Sun–Wed noon–11pm; Thurs noon–midnight; Fri–Sat noon–1am (in summer, opens at 4pm week-ends). Subway: N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

**Flight 151** AMERICAN This relaxed neighborhood hangout is a welcome spot for families at lunch and early dinner, before the drinking crowd settles in for the night. Vintage plane memorabilia decorates the space, an added plus for aircraft-loving kids. The food is middle-of-the-road standards—burgers, pastas, crab cake sandwich, steak, chicken Marsala—with chicken fingers, hot dogs, grilled cheese, and penne on the kids' bill of fare. Service is friendly and blessedly tolerant.

151 Eighth Ave. (btwn 17th and 18th sts.). ☎ 212/229-1868. Kids' menu, boosters. Lunch \$3.95–\$7.95; dinner \$5.95–\$14; brunch buffet \$6.95; kids' menu \$2.95. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am. Subway: A, C, E, to 14th St.; L to Eighth Ave.

**Le Gamin** FRENCH The vintage Parisian look of this corner cafe—faded yellow walls, dark wood trim, a chalkboard menu, wicker cafe-style chairs—perfectly suits a place whose specialties are crepes, croque-monsieur, and quiches. Tell your kids that a croque-monsieur is an open-face grilled cheese with ham, and they should go for it, though they may be more interested in the delicate crepes, which are really only stuffed pancakes, right? Tables are tiny and set fairly

close together, but hey, it's atmospheric. (Never mind that the atmosphere isn't New York at all.) So long as you don't expect to make this a long, leisurely meal, you should do very well.

183 Ninth Ave. (at 21st St.). ☎ **646/486-3000**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$5–\$10. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–midnight. Subway: C, E to 23rd St.

**Patsy's Pizzeria** PIZZA A few blocks east of Chelsea Piers, this branch of the stalwart pizzeria chain (p. 119 and 128) makes a dependable place to refuel, especially for kids who won't go much beyond pizza and plain pasta. A casual meal that won't take too long.

(1) 318 W. 23rd St. (btwn Seventh and Eighth aves.). ☎ **212/486-7400**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$12–\$14; pasta \$8.95–\$15. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight. Subway: C, E, 1, 9 to 23rd St. (2) 64 W. 74th St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ **212/579-3000**. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St. (3) 1312 Second Ave. (at 69th St.). ☎ **212/639-1000**. Subway: 6 to 68th St. (4) 2287 First Ave. (at 61st St.) ☎ **212/534-9783**. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.; N, R, W to Lexington Ave./59th St.

**Rodeo Grill** BARBECUE/TEX-MEX Someone had a lot of fun decorating this bi-level space, with the feed-grain silo on the upper landing and the huge stuffed bison on a ledge above the bar. The weathered-wood walls are hung with old highway signs and lots of animal horns; Western music twangs, and a basket of taco chips arrives on your table in a flash. Children are a welcome part of the mix—on Monday night they even eat free. The menu is heavy on burgers, steaks, barbecue, fajitas, and burritos, but there are a fair number of vegetarian items and a short list of salads as well. French fries come piled high, which made my kids very happy. I found the salsa and hot sauce pretty acrid, but our family enjoyed our meal nevertheless, which just goes to prove that dining out with kids isn't about eating good food.

375 Third Ave. (at 27th St.). ☎ **212/683-6500**. High chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$5.95–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2am. Subway: 6 to 28th St.

## AFTERNOON TEA

**T Salon** ECLECTIC This cozy spot is full of artistic types brooding over cups of fragrant brew (herbal as well as caff and no-caff) chosen from a list as long as the wine list at most restaurants. Low ceilings, soft lighting, and settees and armchairs covered in William Morris-y dark brocades complete the look of boho British gentility. Besides tea, the bill of fare has a refreshingly low pastry component, leaning more toward soups, salads, sandwiches, and delicate crepes. Twelve-year-old girls who love Jane Austen movies should eat this place up.

11 E. 20th St. (btwn Fifth Ave. and Broadway). ☎ **212/358-0506**. [www.tsalon.com](http://www.tsalon.com). Boosters. Main courses \$12–\$24. Afternoon tea \$31. \$10 minimum per person on weekends. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–8pm (closed Mon in summer). Subway: N, R, W to 23rd St.

## FOOD COURT

Definitely the coolest place to eat in Chelsea is at the **Chelsea Market**, 75 Ninth Ave., between 15th and 16th streets (entrance also on Tenth Ave.), a rambling series of food shops set in a rehabbed Nabisco factory. Older kids with a sense of style will appreciate the industrial chic look, with scrubbed brick walls, exposed pipes, and utilitarian light fixtures; the focal point is a ripped-open water main gushing into a crumbling brick cavity in the floor. Among fish stores and produce stalls, you'll find hip little takeout eateries like Amy's Bread, Sarah's Bakery, Bimmy's Sandwiches, the Juice Factory, and Hale and Hearty Soups, all with tiny cafe tables nearby where you can enjoy the food.

## THE CHAIN GANG

The **Dallas BBQ** at Eighth Avenue and 23rd Street (261 Eighth Ave.; ☎ 212/243-2080) is good to know about in a pinch.

## 6 Greenwich Village

### MODERATE

**Arturo's Restaurant-Pizzeria** ITALIAN/PIZZA Crowded, dimly lit, and busy, this vintage hangout right on the border between the Village and SoHo—near the Italian part of the West Village, around Father Demo Square—serves some very good thin-crust pizzas; they're slung on your table fresh from a coal-fired oven, so hot the mozzarella could burn the roof of your mouth. You can get various pasta dishes, too (go for the baked stuff like ziti and lasagna), or even surf and turf, though that seems a bit beside the point here: Pizzas are the thing to order. Several notches above storefront by-the-slice pizzerias, it's still a casual sort of place where drinks come in plastic tumblers and side salads come in plastic fake-wood bowls, which bodes well if you've got kids in tow. You may have to wait in line, though, and at particularly frantic mealtimes, it can be hard to get your waiter's attention. There's live jazz every night, which may make waiting easier. Arturo's is certainly as authentic as any place officially in Little Italy—and a good deal less touristy.

106 W. Houston St. (at Thompson St.). ☎ 212/677-3820. High chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted on weekends. Pizzas \$12 and up; main courses \$8–\$22. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 4pm–1am; Fri–Sat 4pm–2am; Sun 3pm–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to Houston St.

**Cowgirl Hall of Fame** ★ TEX-MEX Think the Old West motif of this West Village theme spot is corny? You're darn tootin' it's corny, and that's why kids get into it. Cowboy hats, boots, and lassos adorn the walls; steer horns poke from the mirrors and antlers from the chandeliers; younger customers are handed crayons to color a paper Indian headdress. Passable barbecue, hearty chili, and a mess of fried catfish are included in the menu round-up; kids' options feature some offbeat items such as corn dogs and Frito pie along with the obligatory chicken fingers. The operation's a little too perky for my tastes, but kids are easily taken in by all the kitsch.

519 Hudson St. (at 10th St.). ☎ 212/633-1133. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Lunch entrees \$6.95–\$12; dinner entrees \$8.95–\$21; kids' menu \$4.25–\$5.50. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to Christopher St./Sheridan Sq.

**EJ's Luncheonette** DINER Yet another in this trio of popularissimo retro-1950s diners (p. 99 and 107), the Village EJ's follows the same drill: From French toast and flapjacks to meatloaf and mashed potatoes, it's the kind of comfort food your mom used to make (or the kind you wished she had).

432 Sixth Ave. (btwn 9th and 10th sts.). ☎ 212/473-5555. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Breakfast specials \$4.95–\$7.50; lunch specials \$7.50–\$11; dinner specials \$9.95–\$16. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 8:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 8:30am–11pm. Subway: A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.

**Jekyll & Hyde Pub** AMERICAN The original outpost of this horror-themed restaurant, the Village's Jekyll & Hyde is slightly more casual than the Midtown spot (p. 115), in a dining room that opens right onto Seventh Avenue South, and waiting in line is less of a factor here. The menu is slightly different but still features a fairly standard range of burgers, salads, pizza, pasta, fish, and steaks, gussied up with hokey names. And it has its own repertoire of spooky special effects, with an ongoing floor show that definitely goes for corny punch lines.

Boasting an extensive range of international beers, plus exotic drinking vessels to quaff your brew from, Jekyll & Hyde shoots for an adult crowd, which is all the more reason why adolescents think it's cool.

91 Seventh Ave. S. (btwn Barrow and W. 4th sts.). ☎ 212/989-7701. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches \$8.95–\$16; main courses \$11–\$18. AE, DC, DISC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–2am; Fri–Sat noon–4am. Subway: 1, 9 to Christopher St./Sheridan Sq.

**La Belle Epoque** ★ *Finds* CAJUN/CONTINENTAL/ECLECTIC This gorgeous upstairs restaurant, with its vintage pewter-top bar, stained-glass peacock, iron Paris Metro signs, and painted tile floor, shrieks elegant dining; what a pleasure, then, to discover that even little kids are welcome. Although the food may seem exotic—last I checked, shrimp remoulade, blackened chicken, and lobster ravioli weren't part of my children's regular diets—the kids' menu compensates, with things like macaroni and cheese, hot dogs, and chicken fingers to suit immature taste buds. Creole food isn't as spicy as Cajun, but you can always ask for a bottle of Tabasco sauce to liven it up even more. Saturday and Sunday brunches are especially popular, with a prix-fixe buffet that allows kids to go back for extra helpings of beignets and French toast. (Monthly baby brunches are designed specifically for parents with wee ones.) There's usually entertainment on tap, too, everything from jazz to zydeco to tango; check the website for schedules.

827 Broadway (btwn 12th and 13th sts.), 2nd floor. ☎ 212/254-6436. www.bellepoquenyc.com. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Sun 5pm–midnight; Sat–Sun brunch noon–4pm; check website for schedule of other special events. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

**NoHo Star** ★ AMERICAN/CHINESE Just a block above Houston Street, this airy loftlike space has a very SoHo-ish feel, with brightly painted columns and an arty tile mural of a newspaper (the fictional NoHo Star). Burgers, pastas, and very good omelets are winners for lunch and brunch; the dinner menu goes upscale with items like seared sea scallops, steak frites, a top-drawer Caesar salad, and a range of superb, zestfully spiced Chinese dishes. The best time to come, though, is at breakfast, when it's quiet and never crowded—kids can dive into a stack of pancakes while parents nurse a cup of good coffee. The atmosphere is always relaxed and relaxing, and the waiters are totally friendly to kids.

330 Lafayette St. (at Bleecker St.). ☎ 212/925-0070. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8am–midnight; Sat–Sun 10:30am–midnight. Subway: 6 to Bleecker St.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Anthony's Pizza Café** ITALIAN/PIZZA Though there are lots of pizza restaurants in the Village, this one has its own student-y, almost bohemian aura. Maybe it's the health-conscious whole-wheat pizza crusts (optional, of course) or the deep window seats and homey decor. Maybe it's the fact that its oven maestro, Anthony Mazzeo, grew up in the neighborhood and has named every pizza, hero, panini, pasta, and salad on his menu after some friend or relative. Whatever it is, this is a place where kids fit in and families can be well fed.

230 Thompson St. (btwn Bleecker and W. 3rd sts.). ☎ 212/477-6562. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Small pizza \$10–\$14; large \$14–\$18. Reservations accepted. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. Subway: A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.

**Benny's Burritos** *Value* MEXICAN Casual, cheap, and often crowded, Benny's is the kind of little Village joint everyone drifts into sooner or later. If you can't get a table, hit the takeout shop across the street at 112 Greenwich or the East Village location (p. 131). Though there's no kids' menu per se, you can

order several items on the regular menu in smaller portions—which is a relief when you see how gargantuan the burritos here can be. The menu also offers salads and fish as well as the more traditional quesadillas and tacos.

113 Greenwich Ave. (at Jane St.). ☎ 212/727-0584. High chairs. Main courses \$7–\$13. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 14th St.; L to Sixth Ave.

**Brothers Barbeque** BARBECUE Set on a corner where Greenwich Village begins to fade into TriBeCa, this is a top downtown spot for falling-off-the-bone tender barbecue. For the record, Brothers subscribes to the North Carolina school of barbecue, with its peppery vinegar sauce; the pulled pork sandwich is a standout, which is great since that happens to be my older son's favorite barbecue dish. The decor is your usual faux-roadhouse clutter, and the music gets cranked up as the evening wears on, but if your kids are barbecue lovers, this is a fun option.

225 Varick St. (at Clarkson St.). ☎ 212/727-2775. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$11–\$15; kids' menu \$6–\$7. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–1am. Subway: 1, 9 to Houston St.

**Chat 'n' Chew** ★ *Finds* AMERICAN/ECLECTIC This second branch of the Flatiron District favorite (p. 122) sticks with everything that made its sister restaurant a winner—goofy names for its dishes, a cluttered funky decor, outgoing staff, and a tried-and-true selection of diner favorites and comfort food. Everyone in your family will feel welcome.

470 Sixth Ave. (btwn 11th and 12th sts.). ☎ 212/243-8226. High chairs. Reservations not accepted. Main courses: \$9.95–\$15. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–11:30pm; Sat 10:30am–11:30pm; Sun 10:30am–10pm. Subway: F, V to 14th St.; L to Sixth Ave.

**Corner Bistro** *Finds* BURGERS Here are your choices: hamburger, cheeseburger, bacon cheeseburger, or chicken sandwich; only recently have they expanded the menu to include grilled cheese, chili, and BLT. No doubt about it, this place is a bar, and a dark and smoky one at that, the kind where people huddle in wooden booths and initials have been carved into the tabletops. Which is precisely why some kids will think it's totally cool to come here; others will simply dig into the thick, juicy burgers and piles of fine fries. And if that's not enough, there's a pretty darn good jukebox. Though the Corner Bistro can get full of drinkers later in the night, at midday or in the early evening, it's wonderfully mellow, and kids aren't out of place.

331 W. 4th St. (btwn Jane St. and Eighth Ave.). ☎ 212/242-9502. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$2.75–\$5.75. No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–4am. Subway: A, C, E, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 14th St.; L to Eighth Ave.

**Elephant and Castle** AMERICAN Like a holdover from the 1970s, this mellow-eats parlor continues to churn out good burgers and crepes, fluffy omelets, and other grub kids will generally accept, while parents can get a little more gourmet with stuff like smoked chicken salad or a roasted portobello-mushroom sandwich. A cheery, well-lit space, it's best for leisurely brunches; bring a few toys for your offspring and a copy of the *Sunday Times* for you to browse through. Though it isn't inherently child-oriented, E&C is informal and friendly enough that families blend right in.

68 Greenwich Ave. (at 11th St.). ☎ 212/243-1400. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$6.50–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8:30am–midnight; Sat–Sun 10am–midnight. Subway: 1, 2, 3, 9 to 14th St.; L to Sixth Ave.

**Famous Ray's Pizza of Greenwich Village** PIZZA Definitely the most renowned corner pizzeria in town is Famous Ray's—the Ray's that all those other ersatz Ray's Pizzas around town are hoping you'll confuse them with. Set right



in the midst of the Village's prettiest town-house streets, Ray's is easy to spot by the lines snaking out onto the sidewalk, with all sorts of people hungry for a slice to go. Many pizza lovers rave about the extra-cheese pizza here; I find it a bit excessive, but I do like the plain pizza's chewy crust and tangy sauce. All sorts of designer toppings are also available—pesto, eggplant, lettuce, even pineapple and ham (say it ain't so, Ray!)—but why mess around with a classic?

465 Sixth Ave. (at 11th St.). ☎ 212/243-2253. Reservations not accepted. Pizza \$2.25 (slice), \$15 (pie). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–2am; Fri–Sat 11am–3am. Subway: F, V to 14th St.; L to Sixth Ave.; A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.

**Johnny Rockets** BURGERS As chains go, this is one that doesn't feel plastic: The 1950s soda shoppe look is executed smartly, with lots of gleaming white tile and chrome, and the menu really works for kids. You get perfectly fine burgers, creamy milkshakes, good fries that aren't too greasy—and get this, a jukebox at every table (though our waiter confessed to me that they don't always work, and it's a pain to find mechanics who can fix them). With \$4.25 kids' meals and menus to color, this is a good bet to please most kids. The staff seems cheerful enough, at least at lunchtime, and the NYU crowd hasn't taken over (not grungy enough for students, I suppose, and the music on the jukes is too old-fashioned).

42 E. 8th St. (at Greene St.). ☎ 212/253-8175. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Burgers \$4–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight. Subway: N, R, W to 8th St./NYU; 6 to Astor Place.

**John's Pizza** ★★ PIZZA This is the kind of place that's often described as having no ambience, when in fact it has plenty—classic no-frills pizzeria ambience, with harsh lighting, worn linoleum, cheap paneling, bare wooden booths, and an open view of the brick ovens where the pizzas are baked. Folks in the Village and at the chain's other spots (p. 109 and 119) always lament that John's doesn't sell pizza by the slice, but families should have no problem polishing off a whole pie. The crust is crunchy thin, with savory tomato sauce, bubbly melted mozzarella, and a host of fresh toppings to pick among (nothing too trendy, though). After eating at John's, you can say you've truly sampled New York pizza at its best.

278 Bleecker St. (btwn Seventh Ave. and Morton St.). ☎ 212/243-1680. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$10–\$25; pasta \$8–\$10. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun noon–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to Christopher St./Sheridan Sq.

**Patsy's Pizzeria** PIZZA On this restaurant strip just north of the New York University campus, this branch of the Patsy's chain (p. 119 and 124) finally gives Village pizza lovers a good alternative if their legs are too tired to walk west to the original John's Pizza on Bleecker Street (see above). Boasts a classic pizzeria look and an informal atmosphere that works great with kids.

(1) 67 University Place (btwn 10th and 11th sts.). ☎ 212/533-3500. High chairs, boosters. Pizzas \$12–\$14; pasta \$8.50–\$15. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Subway: N, R to 8th St./NYU; N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq. (2) 64 W. 74th St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 212/579-3000. Subway: B, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to 72nd St. (3) 1312 Second Ave. (at 69th St.). ☎ 212/639-1000. Subway: 6 to 68th St. (4) 2287 First Ave. (at 61st St.). ☎ 212/534-9783. Subway: 4, 5, 6 to 59th St.; N, R, W to Lexington Ave./59th St.

**Peanut Butter & Co.** *Finds* AMERICAN Born of owner Lee Zalben's obsession, this is a quirky little store/restaurant that serves mostly, you guessed it, peanut butter. Peanut butter memorabilia decorates the golden-hued little cafe, and jars of the house brand are for sale, along with jam and marshmallow Fluff and other suitable accompaniments. The menu's a hoot, with items like Ants on a Log (a celery stalk coated with peanut butter and raisins), your traditional Fluffernutters, and the Elvis (grilled peanut butter sandwich with bananas and

honey). If you really must, you can also get a grilled cheese, a tuna-fish sandwich, or a baloney sandwich, you spoilsport you. But the peanut butter is superb, freshly ground from high-quality peanuts with only enough oil to make it spreadable, just like Mom used to make (honest, my mom used to make it just like this, in her Waring blender). Every sandwich is served with potato chips and carrot sticks, and they'll even cut off the crusts for you. You should be drinking milk with your PB&J, but Welch's grape juice is also available, as are fountain treats such as egg creams, black cows, and a cherry lime rickey. And for dessert, what else but peanut butter cookies or chocolate peanut butter pie?

240 Sullivan St. (btwn Bleecker and W. 3rd sts.). ☎ 212/677-3995. [www.peanutbutterco.com](http://www.peanutbutterco.com). High chairs, boosters. Sandwiches \$4–\$7. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–9pm; Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight. Subway: A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.

**Pizza Box** (Value PIZZA) The hippielike scruffiness of this stretch of Bleecker Street reminds you that you're close to a major university campus (NYU), but among the cheap ethnic hole-in-the-walls lies this pleasant and unpretentious pizza spot, worth noting for its restful back garden, open in fair weather. The pizza is perfectly fine, though connoisseurs may want to head west to John's (see above). Pizza Box's advantage is that you don't have to buy a whole pie, as you do at John's, and it has waiter service at tables, unlike Famous Ray's (see above). If you've OD'd on pizza, but your child is clamoring for it, you can indulge him or her here while you have pasta or a hero and enjoy the garden.

176 Bleecker St. (btwn MacDougal and Sullivan sts.). ☎ 212/979-0823. Reservations not accepted. Pizza \$2.25 (slice), \$14 (pie). No credit cards. Daily 11am–midnight. Subway: A, B, C, D, E, F, V to W. 4th St.

## ICE CREAM & SWEETS

The West Village has a branch of New England's top ice cream vendor, **Emack & Bolio's**, 56 Seventh Ave., at 14th Street (☎ 212/727-1198), starring flavors like grasshopper pie, cosmic crunch, and vanilla bean speck. Pastry hounds should find happiness on the traditional Italian strip of Bleecker Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues, where next-door neighbors **Rocco's** (243 Bleecker St.; ☎ 212/242-6031) and **Pasticceria Bruno** (245 Bleecker St.; ☎ 212/242-4959) prove that competition can be very healthy. Decide the local debate over which is better: Get a cannoli from one and a napoleon from the other, and compare for yourself.

## THE CHAIN GANG

The first **Pizzeria Uno** branch in the city was the bustling one at 391 Sixth Ave., at 8th Street (☎ 212/242-5230). There are two **Lemongrass Grills** in the Village, one at 74–76 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker Street (☎ 212/242-0606), and another at 80 University Place, at 11th Street (☎ 212/604-9870). The **Dallas BBQ** down the street, at 21 University Place, at 8th Street (☎ 212/674-4450), caters largely to a budget-conscious NYU student crowd.

## 7 The East Village

### MODERATE

**Cloister Café** CONTINENTAL The main reason to come here is for the courtyard garden, with umbrella-shaded tables set out on crooked paving stones and a tiny fountain trying its best to gurgle. The menu's rather predictable fare runs a tired range from salads (the avocado salad isn't bad) to pastas (cheese ravioli, linguine with clam sauce) to veal, chicken, and seafood dishes (grilled red snapper, shrimp scampi). The lemonade is refreshingly sour; kids may want to

add their own sugar. Service can be slapdash at times, but the garden is a treat, day or night, and things are plenty casual enough to come here with kids.

238 E. 9th St. (btwn Second and Third aves.). ☎ 212/777-9128. Reservations for groups of 7 or more only. Main courses \$5–\$25. No credit cards. Daily 10:30am–2am. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.

**Old Devil Moon** ECLECTIC/SOUTHERN The junk-shop decor of this urban Love Shack is a little out of hand, though it's often too dark inside to see all the stuff on the walls. Younger kids may be overwhelmed, but for preteen would-be hipsters and for anyone who appreciates Southern home cooking, it's a worthy stop. Not that this is traditional Southern cooking—no Mississippi mama would dream of putting andouille sausage in with the macaroni and cheese, let alone whipping up a batch of chicken fried tofu (c'mon, where did that idea come from?). But hey, you're in the East Village, so get over it. The catfish, jerk chicken, and po' boy sandwiches are plenty satisfying, and the jambalaya and greens 'n' beans taste like they've been simmering on the stove for hours, swapping their juices deliciously around. Best of all are the pies for dessert (the chocolate pecan pie will require several days of penance afterward). Come here on weekends, too, for breakfasts of country ham, grits, and fresh-baked biscuits. *Whoo-eee!*

511 E. 12th St. (btwn Ave. A and Ave. B). ☎ 212/475-4357. Boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.50–\$21. AE, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Subway: L to First Ave.

## Hot Dog!

The ubiquity of the New York hot dog may be due to the century-old Coney Island frankfurter shrine of **Nathan's Famous**, 1310 Surf Ave., Brooklyn (☎ 718/946-2202), site of the annual world hot-dog-eating contest. But a recent crop of East Village hot-dog emporiums have been standing Nathan's franks on their ends. **Dawgs on Park**, 178 E. 7th St., near Avenue B (☎ 212/598-0667), has a dog-centric theme, posting photos of customers' dogs; its signature offering is the deep-fried chili dog (beef, turkey, or tofu franks). Its rival is **Crif Dogs**, 113 St. Mark's Place, between First Avenue and Avenue A (☎ 212/614-2728), which has wacky slogans scrawled on the walls and offers over-the-top treats like a deep-fried bacon-wrapped hot dog topped with avocado and jalapeños. The frankfurters dished out at Chelsea's **F&B**, 269 W. 23rd St., between Seventh and Eighth avenues (☎ 646/486-4441), put a European spin on the standard hot dog; a few dollars will buy you beignets and pommes frites along with specialties like the Great Dane (a hot dog with remoulade, roasted onions, and cucumber slices).

Uptown, your hot doggy choices are more limited and less retro-chic. **Gray's Papaya**, 2090 Broadway, at 72nd Street (☎ 212/799-0243), may not tempt youngsters with its milky, sweet, refreshing papaya juice (there's also fruit punch and soda), but you can't complain about the plump, succulent hot dogs, which still cost about a buck. Gray's Papaya's Upper East Side counterparts are **Papaya King**, at the north-west corner of 86th Street and Third Avenue (☎ 212/369-0648), and **Papaya World**, 1161 Second Ave., at 61st Street (☎ 212/308-6052). It's an absurdly quick and cheap meal, eaten stand-up at the counter or on the go as you walk on down the street.

**Second Avenue Deli** DELI Once upon a time, Second Avenue was the Yiddish equivalent of Broadway (look for the brass stars embedded in the sidewalk outside the restaurant, commemorating great stars of the Yiddish theater). Though the old theaters down the street have been taken over by off-off-Broadway productions, this great kosher deli survives. It may look like just an ordinary coffee shop, but the food is flavorful and authentic, served in generous portions—you haven't tasted chopped liver till you've tried it here, and the chicken soup with matzo balls can cure more than the common cold. There's plenty on the menu to satisfy plain-eatin' kids, including bagels and omelets and sandwiches stuffed fat with cold cuts. The waiters are famously grumpy; don't worry that your kids are annoying them—they treat everybody that way. Go figure.

156 Second Ave. (at 10th St.). ☎ 212/677-0606. www.2ndavedeli.com. Main courses \$11–\$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7am–midnight; Fri–Sat 7am–3am. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.

**Telephone Bar & Grill** ★ AMERICAN/BRITISH Instead of East Village grunge, what you get here is an ersatz British pub, as signaled by the red phone box out front. This place has been around for years, serving Stuyvesant Square squares more than Tompkins Square hipsters; its very middle-of-the-roadness is the key to its survival. There are several sidewalk tables, or you can go inside for brick-walled coziness. The shepherd's pie and the fish and chips are quite decent, and you'll get them on the kids' menu as well, along with hamburgers and grilled cheese sandwiches. The rest of the adult menu covers all the American bases, from salads to burgers to steaks and seafood. Weekend brunch is popular here; the restaurant also serves a proper Irish breakfast every morning, with oatmeal and Irish bacon.

149 Second Ave. (btwn 9th and 10th sts.). ☎ 212/529-5000. www.telebar.com. Kids' menu, high chairs. Lunch \$9–\$15; dinner \$10–\$20. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11:30am–1:30am; Sun 10:30–midnight. Subway: 6 to Astor Place; N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6 to 14th St.; L to Union Sq.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Benny's Burritos** *Value* MEXICAN Monster-size burritos and other hearty, healthy Mexican fare are dished up at this East Village branch of the Greenwich Village Benny's (p. 126).

93 Ave. A (at E. 6th St.). ☎ 212/254-2054. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7–\$13. AE, MC, DISC, V. Daily 11am–midnight. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.

**Kiev** *Finds* DINER/UKRAINIAN Prowl around the East Village, and you'll find, beneath the hipster surface, a neighborhood that's still the heart of New York's Ukrainian immigrant community (particularly along 7th St. between Second and Third aves.). Of the handful of restaurants hereabouts catering to that clientele, Kiev is the most accessible and family-friendly. It carries off a balancing act between the old and new East Villages, serving omelets as well as pirogues (dumplings filled with potatoes or cheese), burgers as well as feather-light blintzes and robust borscht, in a modern coffee-shop–like setting. Kiev's eastern European specialties certainly taste wonderful, and it's an added pleasure to be able to sample them at a place where my kids can have omelets and fries, too.

117 Second Ave. (at 7th St.). ☎ 212/420-9600. High chairs. Sandwiches \$3–\$6.50; main courses \$6–\$12. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–5am; Fri–Sun 9am–2am. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.

**Mitali East** INDIAN Though there are good Indian restaurants all around Manhattan, my kids get a special kick out of visiting the “Little India” on East Sixth Street, where several mostly Bengali restaurants compete side by side for diners' attention. On a summer night, when waiters stand outside the lit-up

entrances beckoning customers inside, there's a definite bazaarlike flavor to the street. One of the most dependable choices is Mitali East, a cozy downstairs spot where Indian fabrics drape the walls, a water fountain splashes at the back of the dining room, and recorded sitar and raga music weaves through the air. The casual-yet-exotic ambience seduces my two youngsters who don't really like Indian food (their older brother adores it); they sink into the upholstered booths and fill up on rice, breads (nan, poori, and buttery paratha), grilled meat appetizers, and maybe even the *murgha tikka*, boneless chicken pieces cooked in a tandoori oven. *Rayta* (yogurt with cucumber chunks) makes a refreshing contrast to the savory dishes, and the *papadoms* (thin, crisp lentil wafers) are downright addictive. The rest of us share more adventurous entrees, sampling spicy curries, *biryani*s (meats and vegetables mixed with rice), masalas, and succulent tandoori dishes. Mitali even offers a few Indonesian specialties. Because this is Bengali cooking, the menu includes beef, but no pork, with plenty of seafood and vegetarian alternatives. Service is leisurely, the atmosphere low-lit and hushed, yet somehow it's kid-friendly, too, and a pleasant place to chill.

334 E. 6th St. (btwn First and Second aves.). ☎ 212/533-2508. Appetizers \$5–\$8; entrees \$9–\$15. AE, DC, MC, V. Reservations accepted. Daily noon–midnight. Subway: 6 to Astor Place; F, V to Lower East Side/Second Ave.

**Pommes Frites** FRENCH Not really a restaurant but a narrow storefront takeout joint, with a bill of fare that's pretty straightforward: nothing but thin, crispy, Belgian-style french fries, with all manner of sauces to dip them into. Considering that my children often eat nothing but fries anyway at sit-down restaurants, this isn't such a bad option for a lunchtime pit stop.

123 Second Ave. (at 9th St.). ☎ 212/674-1234. French fries \$3.50–\$6.50. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–1am; Fri–Sat 11:30am–2am. Subway: 6 to Astor Place.

**Two Boots** ★★ PIZZA/CAJUN/ITALIAN This dandy East Village restaurant couldn't be better for kids. To start, you've got witty junk-shop decor (strings of Christmas lights shaped like red chiles, old movie posters, and a pair of cowboy boots hanging on a pink wall); then when you're seated, the kids are handed coloring books. You know these people are used to dealing with kids when you see that the milk is served in plastic cups; grown-ups get their drinks in glass mugs shaped like boots, which our boys find hilarious. Kids eat free on Monday, and with each entree you receive a free ticket to a Tuesday performance at the Pioneer Theater next door. The service can be pretty casual, but the waitresses relate to kids instantly, which always seems to make my children behave better. The kids' menu has a little originality: spaghetti; chicken fingers; fish sticks; or a Pizza Face, a kid-size individual pizza with vegetables arranged to form eyes, nose, and grin. My boys, who normally refuse any toppings at all, adore Pizza Faces. Bigger pizzas are served on cake stands, which is also a kick. I opt for a spicy Cajun sandwich on good chewy bread, a po' boy—the kind of food I can't normally get in the kinds of restaurants my kids like. We all walk out with smiles on our faces.

(1) 37 Ave. A (at 2nd St.). ☎ 212/505-2276. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more only. Main courses \$7–\$14; pizzas \$5.50–\$21; kids' menu \$4.95. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5–11pm; Fri–Sat 5pm–midnight; Sun 5–10pm; brunch Sat–Sun noon–5pm in winter. Subway: F, V to Lower East Side/Second Ave. (2) 74 Bleecker St. (btwn Broadway and Crosby St.). ☎ 212/777-1033. Subway: B, D, F, V to Broadway/Lafayette St. (3) 200 W. 11th St. (at Seventh Ave.) ☎ 212/633-9096. Subway: 1, 9 to Christopher St./Sheridan Sq.

## Kosher Restaurants

Even if you don't maintain a kosher diet, New York offers the best kosher family dining outside of Israel. The important thing to remember is that a kosher restaurant will be meat, dairy, or pareve (*pareve* means the food doesn't contain either meat or dairy products)—you won't find a cheeseburger or chicken parmigiana on any menu unless either the meat or the cheese is really an imitated product. This may sound restricting, but restaurants have learned to make do and become extremely creative in the process.

In Midtown, **Kosher Delight**, 1365 Broadway, at 36th Street (☎ 212/563-3366; meat), is the kosher answer to McDonald's and Burger King. Grilled burgers and chicken sandwiches are standard, but you can also choose from a small Chinese menu and Middle Eastern specialties like falafel. Kosher Delight also has free delivery to any location in Manhattan (although it's not guaranteed your food will arrive hot or within a reasonable amount of time). The **Great American Health Bar**, 35 W. 57th St., between Fifth and Sixth avenues (☎ 212/355-5177; dairy), proves that healthy food doesn't have to be boring and flavorless, offering a varied menu from salads to vegetarian chili to pastas. There are wonderful fresh-fruit health shakes blended with milk and yogurt, and kids may get a kick out of the pita pizza—tomato sauce, melted cheese, and vegetables baked on top of pita bread. Unlike most of these restaurants, the Health Bar also serves breakfast, opening at 8am; it's also the only one of these restaurants that doesn't close Friday night and Saturday for the Sabbath.

The West Side's popular **Dougie's BBQ and Grill**, 222 W. 72nd St., between Broadway and West End Avenue (☎ 212/724-2222; meat), offers crayons on all tables to keep kids occupied while they're waiting for their food. The service is fast-paced and friendly. Burgers and hot dogs are popular items, but the ribs and pasta dishes shouldn't be passed up.

**Note:** Because of the Sabbath, most kosher restaurants vary their hours on Friday and Saturday, depending on when sundown is on Friday night and when the Sabbath ends on Saturday night. (Some simply close all day Fri.) Call ahead to be sure when they'll be open if you plan to dine on Friday or Saturday.

## ICE CREAM & SWEETS

Two family-owned Italian pastry shops have held on in the East Village for a century, vestiges of an earlier immigrant community—and there's a reason they've survived. The better-known one is **Veniero's**, 342 E. 11th St., between First and Second avenues (☎ 212/674-7070; [www.venierospastry.com](http://www.venierospastry.com)), a spiffed-up dessert cafe that's open until midnight to accommodate crowds of people craving after-dinner delights from cakes to cookies to cannoli, plus cappuccino and espresso that put Starbucks to shame. With kids, come in the afternoon, when you'll have no trouble getting a table. A more relaxed local crowd

skips the lines at Veniero's and drifts over to **DeRobertis Pasticceria**, 176 First Ave., between 10th and 11th streets (☎ 212/674-7137), which gives its around-the-corner neighbor a run for its money, serving creamy cannoli and cheesecake along with anise cookies and fruit tarts. The back room, with its pressed-tin ceiling and small marble tables, feels as authentic as any place in Little Italy. It shuts down completely for 2 weeks in July—hey, a family's got to take a vacation.

## THE CHAIN GANG

Beatniks must be turning in their graves to see St. Mark's Place, that bastion of bohemian hipness, invaded by **Dallas BBQ** at 132 Second Ave. (☎ 212/777-5574). Next thing you know, **Pizzeria Uno** will be moving in around the corner . . . oops, it already has, at 55 Third Ave., between 10th and 11th streets (☎ 212/995-9668).

## 8 SoHo

### INEXPENSIVE

**Fanelli's** *(Finds)* AMERICAN This 19th-century saloon claims to be the second-oldest drinking spot in the city, being descended from a grocery store that opened on this site in 1847 and soon had a good side business as a “porter shop” (saloon); it became a speakeasy after Michael Fanelli bought it in 1922. Atmospheric Fanelli's still has the requisite carved mahogany bar, pressed-tin ceilings, beery smell, and filtered light, but the fare is refreshingly simple pub grub—burgers, omelets, quiches, pastas, fried chicken, shepherd's pie. Families gravitate to the back room, which is a little sunnier and quieter, for casual lunches and early dinner; later on, it might be hard to compete with the drinking scene. The service is friendly and laissez-faire.

94 Prince St. (at Mercer St.). ☎ 212/226-9412. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$15. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–2am; Fri–Sat 10am–4am; Sun 11am–2am. Subway: N, R, W to Prince St.

**Kelley & Ping** *(★)* PAN-ASIAN With its pressed-tin ceiling and wooden factory floor, Kelley & Ping looks very SoHo, but its friendliness to kids is unusual in this hyper-urban-chic neighborhood. It started out as an Asian grocery store but soon added an open kitchen in the center of the room; there are still stocks of bottled sauces and woks for sale along the walls. The noodles, stir-fries, and grilled meats (Vietnamese crispy duck, Thai grilled shrimp) go down well with children, though some dishes can be superspicy—ask for your waiter's guidance.

127 Greene St. (btwn Houston and Prince sts.). ☎ 212/228-1212. www.kelleyandping.com. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Lunch \$3.95–\$9.50; dinner \$6.50–\$18. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11pm. Subway: N, R, W to Prince St.; B, D, F, V to Broadway/Lafayette St.

**Tennessee Mountain** AMERICAN/BARBECUE The setting is a farmhouse dating from 1807 (back when this part of town was country, long before all the cast-iron architecture went up), which from the outside looks very historic and sedate. Inside, though, the exposed-brick walls and simple wooden tables host casual crowds looking for Southern barbecue, served with sides of yams, fries, coleslaw, and whatever. Rib purists, who can be a very critical crowd, tell me this isn't the world's best barbecue, but it seemed plenty tasty to me—what do I know? If barbecue isn't your thing, there's also chili and plenty of blander choices like quiches, salads, and seafood. The kids' menu covers a good range with BLTs and tuna salad sandwiches as well as the usual burgers, chicken



fingers, and ribs; they do give kids crayons and a white paper chef's hat, which helps buy parents time to chow down.

143 Spring St. (at Wooster St.). ☎ **212/431-3993**. Kids' menu, boosters, sassy seats. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$20; kids' menu \$4.95. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Subway: N, R, W to Prince St.; C, E to Spring St.

**Vesuvio Bakery Café** *(finds)* AMERICAN When SoHo starts feeling too trendy for words, here's a refuge: a tiny brick-walled cafe at the western edge of the artsy district where you can rest your feet briefly at one of the few tiny tables while fortifying yourself with a salad, wrap, panini, muffin, or omelet. You'll be in and out fast, with a minimum of fuss. The bakery part has been here since the 1920s, and it's still owned by the same family.

160 Prince St. (btwn W. Broadway and Thompson St.). ☎ **212/925-8248**. Reservations not accepted. Sandwiches: \$6.50–\$9. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 7am–10pm; Fri–Sat 7am–11pm. Subway: N, R, W to Prince St.

## 9 Little Italy

### EXPENSIVE

**Sal Anthony's SPQR** ITALIAN Lots of bustle and brightness define this big, high-ceilinged dining hall, where people on all sides are happily digging into Italian food: High-gloss as it is, you can tuck your napkin into your collar here with no fear. Despite the brick walls and potted plants, the look is modern, not vintage trattoria. But what it lacks in coziness and atmosphere, it more than makes up in efficiency, big portions, and party spirits; it seems there are always a few large tables occupied by extended families, bonding over fusilli and linguine. Pastas are consistently good, as are the hearty meat dishes, especially the macho veal chop. A first-rate place to celebrate a special family event.

133 Mulberry St. (btwn Grand and Hester sts.). ☎ **212/925-3120**. [www.salanthonys.com](http://www.salanthonys.com). High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. 2-course fixed-price lunch \$14; dinner \$25. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–11pm; Fri–Sat noon–midnight. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

### MODERATE

**Angelo's of Mulberry Street** ITALIAN This crowded, crowd-pleasing Little Italy favorite, which has been around since 1902, turns out an incredibly long list of southern Italian pasta dishes with zestful flavor, most around \$13. Make a reservation so you won't get stuck in the line of tourists waiting to get in, but don't be dissuaded by the place's low-brow popularity—this is Little Italy, after all, where tourists flock to eat, and no restaurant here that's any good would be without a line. Order anything with garlic, or anything with tomato sauce. If your kids like their pasta plain, as mine do, even they'll benefit from the fresh homemade quality of the food.

146 Mulberry St. (btwn Grand and Hester sts.). ☎ **212/966-1277**. Sassy seats. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$17. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Thurs and Sun noon–11:30pm; Fri noon–12:30am; Sat noon–1am; closed Mon. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

**Caffé Napoli** ITALIAN Though there's a string of more renowned "fine-dining" restaurants to the north on Mulberry Street, for a leisurely dinner out with family I'd rather go to a place like Caffé Napoli and its annex, **Trattoria Canta Napoli** (☎ **212/226-8705**). The food is upscale enough to feel like a treat, with seafood alongside the pasta dishes (Naples is a seaport, remember); specialties include the stuffed veal chop and the pasta *malefemmina*. The softly lit dining

room has been tastefully decorated—Neapolitan pictures and artifacts are strewn about, but there's no attempt to make it look like “the Old Country.” Diners are encouraged to linger over their meals; waiters are attentive but not intrusive. And families are definitely welcome—they'll cheerfully do half portions of pasta for kids.

191 Hester St. (at Mulberry St.). ☎ **212/226-8705**. High chairs. Reservations accepted for groups of 6 or more weekdays only. Lunch prix fixe \$6.50 or \$12; dinner entrees \$11–\$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

## INEXPENSIVE

**Il Fornaio** *Value* PIZZA The sign outside is explicit: KIDS WELCOME. And it goes without saying, no one will get too upset about spills or crying or food left on the plate in this unpretentious cafe. It's small enough that you can't miss the shouted exchanges between waiters and cooks, but the pizza here has a long-standing reputation for excellence, so don't be surprised if you have to wait a few minutes for a table on a weekend. (And once you get in, don't be startled if you're hustled back out again fairly soon—not a bad thing if you're with kids.) Pizza, pasta, calzones, and muffulettas—the menu has many kid-friendly choices, so who needs a chicken-fingers-and-burgers kids' menu?

132A Mulberry St. (btwn Canal and Hester sts.). ☎ **212/226-8306**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$5.95–\$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10:30pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

**Lombardi's Pizza** PIZZA Claiming to be a resurrection of New York's first pizza restaurant, which opened at 53 Spring St. in 1905—and where all the other pizza maestros learned their trade—the new Lombardi's is owned by a grandson of the original Gennaro Lombardi, and it does have an authentic coal oven, taken over from an old bakery. It's a bit far north from the main Little Italy strip along Mulberry Street, but the look is nice and atmospheric, with the obligatory red-checkered tablecloths, brick walls, and white tiled floor. Its wonderful pizzas more than hold their own among the top contenders (John's, Patsy's, Angelo's), with lightly charred thin crusts and totally fresh ingredients. The clam pie is so good that it actually justifies the weird idea of putting seafood on a pizza. Don't expect to just pick up a slice: Sit your family down in a booth, and apply yourselves to consuming a whole pie.

32 Spring St. (btwn Mott and Mulberry sts.). ☎ **212/941-7994**. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$12–\$21. No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Subway: 6 to Spring St.

## ICE CREAM & SWEETS

In the heart of shrinking Little Italy, a pair of venerable pastry shops still convey the flavor of the old neighborhood. With its hexagonal-tile floors and tiny wrought-iron cafe tables, **Caffé Roma**, 385 Broome St., at the corner of Mulberry Street (☎ **212/226-8413**), is a great place to duck into for cannoli, those ricotta-filled roll-ups of sweet crisp pastry. Kids can drink frothy hot chocolate or chilled lemonade while parents indulge in cappuccino or espresso, made the classic way (no half-café mocha double latte here). Follow Mulberry down to Grand Street, and you'll find the somewhat larger and brighter (and more crowded) **Ferrara**, 195 Grand St., between Mulberry and Mott streets (☎ **212/226-6150**), its refrigerated display cases crowded with mouthwatering pastries to go or to stay. If your kids want to sample Italian gelato (ice cream), this is a good place for that, too.

## 10 Chinatown

Finding a place to eat in Chinatown isn't difficult—just stroll along Mott or Mulberry streets south of Canal Street, or along Bayard Street between Mott Street and the Bowery, and you'll pass dozens of decent restaurants with menus posted outside so you can check out what's on offer. They may not accept credit cards, and communicating with your waiter may require lots of menu-pointing and sign language, but so long as you order prudently, the food should be good. These restaurants depend on the tourist trade and have every incentive to please you. The following are some tried-and-true options.

### MODERATE

**Tai Hong Lau** CHINESE With its chandeliers, carpeting, and white tablecloths, Tai Hong Lau is much more dignified than the other places listed here and therefore should be saved for special occasions with older children. If you don't want to splurge on the Peking duck, you can still dine well on a number of Cantonese specialties such as boneless chicken with lemon sauce; the menu is strong on seafood and bean-curd dishes, so vegetarian teenagers may be pleased. The restaurant is open for dim sum until late afternoon, but be prepared: It's very hard to keep track of how many of those tempting-looking delicacies you've chosen from the little carts being wheeled about, and the price can mount up fast.

70 Mott St. (btwn Bayard and Canal sts.). ☎ 212/219-1431. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.95–\$19, except for Peking duck (\$38, but only \$18 on Mon). AE. Mon–Fri 10am–11:30pm; Sat–Sun 9am–11:30pm; dim sum daily 10am–3:30pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

### INEXPENSIVE

**HSF** CHINESE Unprepossessing from the outside, this slightly rundown spot with hand-lettered signs in Chinese taped on the walls is one of the best dim sum places in town. They start wheeling out the carts as early as 8am to satisfy regular customers; tiny dishes with all kinds of delectable dumplings and skewers and rolls are laid out on the carts, and diners choose whatever looks good to them. At the end of the meal, they count up your dishes and tell you how much you owe. You don't have to read a menu or communicate with the staff to choose yourself a meal full of wonderful surprises; in fact, you may never learn the name of certain mouthwatering dishes. Eating dim sum is a novel experience that can be loads of fun for older kids who are willing to blindly sample new foods, though no item is really that far from standard Chinese dishes. The only problem may be discovering how high a bill you've run up, taste-testing all those tempting morsels. Lovers of Chinese barbecue (that's my kids) may also want to check out the annex, **Yummy Noodles**, right across the alley at 48 Bowery (☎ 212/374-1327), a neater and more modern-looking spot that features roast meats and noodle dishes.

46 Bowery (near Canal St.). ☎ 212/374-1319. Boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.95–\$17. No credit cards. Daily 8am–midnight; dim sum daily 8am–5pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

**Lin's Dumpling House** ★ CHINESE Though my kids aren't dumpling fans (foods aren't supposed to touch each other, you see), a lot of kids do like them, and this is the place to come for very succulent dumplings. The pork-with-leek dumpling is especially delicious. Other recommended dishes are the sesame shrimp; the romantically named Romeo and Juliet (prawns and flank steak with peppers and water chestnuts); and the Chicken Delight, which is chunks of chicken fried with vegetables. But face it, you won't get kids to try the pig's

intestine with sour cabbage. This place is a good choice for families who are put off by the hole-in-the-wall look of most of the other restaurants in this price category: It's a soothing, respectable setting, with lots of dark wood, etched glass panels, and green tablecloths.

25 Pell St. (btwn Bowery and Mott sts.). ☎ 212/577-2777. Main courses \$6.50–\$24; dumplings \$4.25–\$6.25. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

**New York Noodletown** *Value* CHINESE Noodles are one Asian food that even picky-eater kids can often be persuaded to try, and the noodles in this bustling Chinatown spot are delectable, simmered in broth or coated with various savory sauces; a wide range of menu choices mix 'n' match the noodles with grilled or roasted meats and stir-fried veggies. Be prepared to elbow your way in and endure hurried service; smaller kids may have to sit in your lap, as there are no boosters or high chairs.

28½ Bowery (at Bayard St.). ☎ 212/349-0923. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$3.25–\$15. No credit cards. Daily 9am–4am. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

**Nha Hang** VIETNAMESE The first Vietnamese restaurant interloper in Chinatown, Nha Hang made it easier for the others to follow because its popularity spread the word. The space is bright, modern, and simply decorated, with lightly varnished wood furnishings—nothing too exotic, until you taste the food. Less sauce-driven than Chinese food, Vietnamese cooking is big on spices and grilling, so watch out for those red stars on the menu if you don't like hot foods (there are plenty of soothing noodle soups for those who prefer to play it safe, as well as more subtly spiced dishes). My kids like both spring rolls and barbecued beef, so the dish that combines the two of those on vermicelli noodles was a hit; there are also a fine green papaya salad with beef and a curry shrimp with string beans and coconut milk over rice that'll really clear your sinuses.

73 Mulberry St. (btwn Bayard and Canal sts.). ☎ 212/233-8988. Boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$5–\$15. AE, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–10:30pm. Subway: N, Q, R, W, 6 to Canal St.

## 11 TriBeCa, Lower Manhattan & Brooklyn

### MODERATE

**Odeon** ★ AMERICAN The mellow Art Deco look of Odeon, with its wooden blinds and comfy banquettes, helped make it one of TriBeCa's first hot spots way back in the early 1980s. Standards have been kept up surprisingly well into the 21st century, and now it's not too hip to welcome families. The brasserie menu is inventive and constantly changing, but there's always simple classic food like burgers, roast chicken, steak frites, and pastas. On past visits, I've enjoyed a seared tuna sandwich with arugula and wasabi mayonnaise, as well as a grilled stuffed chicken breast with melted Gruyère cheese. This is also a good place to make a meal of two appetizers, with some excellent salads and a fine country pâté available. While there's no kids' menu, kids' options are available upon request. There's very little attitude and a lot of smart cooking going on here—no wonder Odeon has survived.

145 W. Broadway (at Thomas St.). ☎ 212/233-0507. High chairs. Reservations recommended. Brunch \$10–\$19; lunch \$10–\$20; dinner \$11–\$24. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:45am–2am; Sat–Sun 10am–2am. Subway: A, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to Chambers St.

### INEXPENSIVE

**Bubby's** ★★ AMERICAN “Homey” is the word for this comforting TriBeCa restaurant, with its wooden chairs, soft recorded jazz, and kitschy clutter. The

food is comforting as well, with sandwiches, burgers, pastas, and a great selection of pies—not to mention breakfast food served until 4pm, good to know if you've got kids who like scrambled eggs and French toast for lunch. There are also more upscale salads and chicken and fish dishes to please adults. It's the sort of place that understands that kids may like their spaghetti with butter and Parmesan instead of tomato sauce and that cooked carrots go down better if you drizzle maple syrup on top. Service may dawdle a bit, but the laid-back ambience somehow makes children willing to linger. The Saturday and Sunday brunch tends to be very popular, so come instead for Saturday or Sunday night dinners, when kids eat free.

120 Hudson St. (at N. Moore St.). ☎ 212/219-0666. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended; no reservations accepted for weekend brunch. Lunch \$8–\$15; dinner \$10–\$15; kids' menu \$2–\$4. DC, MC, V. Mon–Wed 8am–11pm; Thurs–Fri 8am–midnight; Sat 9am–midnight; Sun 9am–10pm. Subway: 1, 9 to Franklin St.; A, C, E to Canal St.

**Chevy's MEXICAN** This Mexican chain restaurant, located in the base of the Embassy Suites hotel (right around the corner from the new Regal Cineplex) offers families a decent option in a neighborhood where restaurants are all too often geared to Wall Streeters. The menu is fairly standard: burritos, quesadillas, fajitas, chimichangas, occasionally with a little Texas-style barbecued chicken thrown in. Some safer alternatives show up on the kids' menu, to take care of little gringos who don't do spicy food—stuff like burgers and chicken fingers. Expect a rock soundtrack, roadhouse decor, and some rowdy spirits, especially at happy hour.

102 North End Ave. (entrance on Vesey St. between West St. and North End Ave.), in Battery Park City. ☎ 212/786-1111. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$9–\$20. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am. Subway: E to World Trade Center.

**Edward's AMERICAN** The brasserie menu at this retro diner is reminiscent of that at its more famous neighbor, Odeon (see above): burgers, omelets, roast chicken, grilled tuna, steak frites. The kids' menu isn't much more adventurous, but it does throw in salad with the fish sticks, chicken nuggets, and hot dogs, and there is a pizza offering. Brunch is served Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. Informal and totally kid-friendly, Edward's allows parents to feel like hip extras from *Sex and the City* while their children loll happily on the Naugahyde banquettes.

136 W. Broadway (btwn Thomas and Duane sts.). ☎ 212/233-6436. Kids' menu, high chairs, boosters. Lunch \$8–\$15; dinner \$8.50–\$22; kids' menu \$5. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 9am–midnight. Subway: 1, 9 to Franklin St.; A, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to Chambers St.

**Ellen's Café & Bake Shop DINER** Though it caters largely to the Wall Street lunch crowd, this downtown branch of Ellen Hart's diner empire is now open evenings as well, which is very handy for the greater numbers of people who have come to live downtown. The look is more saloonish than Ellen's Stardust Diner (p. 114), but the atmosphere is 100% kid-friendly. The wide-ranging menu includes omelets, salads, burgers, and sandwiches, not to mention a brimming display case of yummy baked goods by the front door.

270 Broadway (at Chambers St.). ☎ 212/962-1257. Boosters, sassy seats. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7am–midnight; Fri–Sat 7am–1am. Subway: R, W, 4, 5, 6 to City Hall; 2, 3 to Park Place; A, C to Chambers St.

**Grimaldi's PIZZA** Yet another contender for the title of Best Pizza in New York, Grimaldi's lays legitimate claim to honors in the coal-oven category, with gooey homemade mozzarella and chunky tomato sauce topping a wonderfully

thin but not tough crust. Like its rivals Anthony's and Lombardi's, it doesn't serve slices, and there are often lines out the door on summer evenings waiting for a table. Persevere: The line moves quickly enough, and you'll have views of the Manhattan skyline to entertain yourselves while you wait. (Better yet, come in the late afternoon, when there's no crush.) Inside, just as you'd expect, the tables are covered in red-checked cloths, and Sinatra and Pavarotti dominate the jukebox as well as the photos on the walls. If your kids are into pepperoni, be sure to order some on your pizza—Grimaldi's uses the best in town. Make a Grimaldi's pizza your kids' reward for walking over the Brooklyn Bridge (it sits right underneath the bridge, by the old Fulton ferry landing), and top it off with a post-pizza ice cream cone down by the river at the Brooklyn Ice Cream Works.

19 Old Fulton St. (btwn Front and Water sts.). ☎ 718/858-4300. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Pizzas \$12–\$14, \$2 for extra toppings. No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11:30am–11pm; Sat noon–midnight; Sun noon–11pm. Subway: A, C to High St.

**Kitchenette** ★ AMERICAN This artfully weathered little cafe looks like it belongs on Cape Cod or in upstate New York, not in the shadow of downtown skyscrapers. Farmhouse-style breakfasts, featuring things like blueberry pancakes and buttermilk biscuits, start out weekdays; the lunch menu starts to drift toward hipness with choices like goat-cheese sandwich, or Tuscan tuna salad alongside your standard grilled cheese, B.L.T., and tuna melt. The house-special turkey meatloaf with mashed potatoes is really, really good. It's the best of both worlds: The kids eat happy, you can eat upscale, and everything's copacetic.

80 W. Broadway (at Warren St.). ☎ 212/267-6740. High chair. Breakfast \$3.75–\$7.75; main dishes \$12–\$18. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–10pm; Sat–Sun 9am–10pm. Subway: A, C, 1, 2, 3, 9 to Chambers St.

## THE CHAIN GANG

If you're at South Street Seaport, and your kids hate fish, head for that old standby **Pizzeria Uno**, 89 South St. Seaport (☎ 212/791-7999). If you're nearby Battery Park, there's a **T.G.I. Friday's**, 47 Broadway, at Morris St. (☎ 212/483-8322).

## FOOD COURTS

On the top floor of the **Pier 17** pavilion at South Street Seaport, a sparkling big food court enjoys the kind of picture-window river views normally reserved for the toniest restaurants. The various food vendors whose booths surround the public seating include several ethnic varieties; there's often live music as well. The food court in the **World Financial Center** in Battery Park City features a cluster of sit-down, table-service restaurants, but the ambience is casual enough for kids, and there are takeout options, including a Cosi sandwich shop.