

How to Feel Like a New York City Family

In those first few grim weeks after the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center, just about every family we knew asked themselves The Big Question: Does it still make sense to live in New York City? Not that we hadn't asked ourselves before—that always goes with the territory. New York, and especially Manhattan, is expensive, crowded, and hard to navigate even if you know all the secrets. In those haunted months of late 2001, it was awfully hard to remember why we had always answered The Big Question with a resounding “Yes.”

And yet no one I knew moved out. If anything, New Yorkers' collective outpouring of kindness, generosity, and community spirit in the tragedy's aftermath made us feel more rooted than ever. (That image of NYC as a cold, heartless urban jungle? Blown forever.) The T-shirt motto that started appearing everywhere says all you need to know: I STILL ♥ NY. More than that: We still think it's the greatest place on earth to raise children.

It goes without saying that this is a city of unparalleled cultural richness, but what isn't so widely known is how much of it is accessible to families. In my New York years BC—Before Children—I did all the things folks think Manhattanites do: I went downtown to CBGBs to hear head-banging new bands; I did the standing-room thing at the Met and Carnegie Hall; I saw experimental theater pieces in dingy alternative spaces way downtown; I stood in line all day to get free tickets to Shakespeare in the Park. After my husband and I had our first baby, I thought my life as a Manhattanite was over. If we wanted to stay out late, we had to pay a fortune to a babysitter, and if we ordered tickets to anything in advance, we'd end up giving away our seats when the baby came down with an ear infection. We went out to eat as a family, but only at pizza, Chinese, and burger joints, where baby wails and spilled Cheerios would be tolerated.

Well, we've got three kids now, and I've come full circle. I feel as though I never really got to know Manhattan until I began exploring it with children. We actually talk to passersby now—there's no better way to strike up conversations with New Yorkers than by the simple virtue of having a baby strapped to your chest in a Snuggli. (Alec Baldwin actually stopped *me* to have a chat when he spotted my week-old daughter, Grace.) Taxi drivers, most of them immigrants from far-flung lands, teach our kids about their native countries and coach them to speak words in their own languages. Deli clerks slip them tidbits; greengrocers pop extra strawberries into our pint cartons. When we pass fire stations, they're allowed to go inside and climb onto the hook-and-ladder truck, not to mention pat the firehouse dog.

I used to rush around the city underground, crammed into subway cars at rush hour; now we take buses at off-peak hours, peering out the windows as the city rolls past, or we stroll across Central Park, stopping frequently to feed ducks or watch horses on the bridle trail. We still go to museums, but we go to the same ones over and over; I've been to the American Museum of Natural History at least 100 times, and I'm ready to go again today if the kids so choose. After much trial and error, we know which restaurants are kid-friendly and still manage to have palatable food for adults. (Along the way, I've learned to accept that a toddler will be just fine if he or she eats only bread or french fries for one night.) We started our kids early with children's theater and puppet shows and dance concerts; and now they're happy to go with us to Broadway musicals, Philharmonic concerts in the park, and even the Metropolitan Opera. They're just about ready to see the head-banging bands at whatever grungy downtown clubs have replaced CBGBs—but I'm afraid they'll have to do that on their own.

Many families we know ditch the city every weekend to flee to a country house in the Hamptons or Connecticut, but we're rarely free to visit them. If we haven't got a soccer or baseball game in Central Park (or Riverside Park or out on Ward's Island), we have tickets to a show or concert or ballgame. En route, we may wander through a street fair, join a nature walk in Central Park, ride along the Hudson River bike path, or thread our way through the glitz and glitter of Times Square. On weekends we take the kids on subways, which they happen to love—what's not to love about whooshing through a dark underground tunnel in an air-conditioned stainless-steel bullet?—because that's the best way to get out to the Bronx Zoo, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, or Shea Stadium.

The pulse and tempo of New York City can be dizzying at first if you're not used to it—I'll grant you that—but once you attune yourself, you'll find it tremendously exciting, even for youngsters. When my kids return to the city after an idyllic 2 weeks at the beach, they stride down the sidewalks and look around eagerly, glad to be back in a place where there's something happening every few yards. They love the fact that when they go to a playground, there's always someone else to play with. World-class museums are their after-school classrooms, where they encounter more art, science, and history than I'd been exposed to by the time I graduated from college. Central Park is their backyard, all 840 acres of it, and it provides them with nature ponds, tennis courts, horseback riding, ice-skating, and on and on and on.

Serendipity is the name of the game in New York City, all the more so if you've got kids. So many things come at you all the time, you can't help but stumble upon something interesting. Let me tell you about one Sunday we spent. Right after breakfast, from our own apartment windows, we heard via loudspeakers the pope—the *pope!*—saying mass in Central Park. Walking outside afterward, we saw legions of the faithful trooping home, festooned with pope pennants and memorabilia. As we rode the subway downtown, we were explaining who the pope is and why so many people wanted to see him—that is, until we changed trains and got distracted by the guy who plays electric harmonica on the N, R platform in Times Square. We went on to a SoHo furniture store where we saw performance artist Eric Bogosian trying out the rocking chairs (my kids weren't impressed, but my 5-year-old admitted that Bogosian's young son's leather jacket was pretty cool). When we ran into Bogosian and Bogosian, Jr., minutes later down the street at the Fire Museum, we all smiled at one another with recognition. ("Your kids bugging you to buy souvenir fire engines, too?" Bogosian's

weary chuckle seemed to say to us.) Then, on the subway ride home, we sat next to Sarah Jessica Parker, who kept sneaking eye contact with our baby. By the time we got home, it was too late to cook, so we ordered in Chinese food; my older son, aka the Bok Choy Boy, snarfed down Buddhist Delight with his chopsticks like an old pro, while our toddler delicately dismantled an egg roll on her plate and smeared her face with cold sesame noodles. A whole family of satisfied customers.

We've come to realize that Manhattan isn't one monolithic city but a palimpsest of different cities sharing the same space. Just as the Alternative Art New York is worlds apart from the Wall Street New York, so is New York with Kids a quite different place from Singles New York—a sort of parallel universe, like in *A Wrinkle in Time* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It just takes time to scout out the turf. I've been scouting it for nearly 18 years now, and yet there's always something new for me to discover—some fresh reason to proclaim I STILL ♥ NY.

1 Frommer's Favorite New York City Family Experiences

- **Watching One of the Parades of All Nations:** Every one of the many nationalities that share New York City gets its own day in the sun—generally a national holiday celebrated with a parade down Fifth Avenue. St. Patrick's Day is the biggie—it's celebrated more festively here than it is even in Ireland—but there are scores of others, from the German Steuben Day Parade in September to the Puerto Rican Day Parade in June, complete with floats, marching bands, and loads of costumes from the old country. Scout out the uptown parts of the parade route (some parades get rowdy once they near Midtown). If crosstown traffic seems tied up on a fair-weather Saturday, hurry on over to Fifth—chances are there's a parade in progress. See "Kids' Favorite New York City Events," in chapter 2.
- **Taking the Ferry Ride to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island:** In many ways, the boat ride over is the best thing about this de rigueur sightseeing excursion—out on the sparkling waters of New York Harbor, with the wind in your hair and the seagulls shrieking overhead, you'll see the Manhattan skyline in all its glory. Even if there's a bit of a wait for the ferry at Battery Park, there are usually street musicians on hand to entertain you. Ride on the upper deck if you really want a dose of salt air and sun. See "Getting Around," in chapter 3.
- **Eating a Piece of New York Pizza:** Thin-crust pizza may have been invented in Naples, but New Yorkers know it was brought to perfection right here: oversize triangles with flat, crisp crusts, dripping with tangy tomato sauce and sloppy melted mozzarella. Even the most basic corner pizza stands usually have a couple of tables where you can sit and often feature open glass counters where kids can watch the pizza being made—toss the dough, smear the sauce, scatter on some cheese, fling on a few rounds of pepperoni, and presto! For some suggestions, see chapter 5.
- **Spending a Sunday Afternoon at the American Museum of Natural History:** Weekends are definitely family time at this magnificent big museum on the Upper West Side, but the more, the merrier—these dim, cool, high-ceilinged halls never seem too crowded. We never even bother with extra-charge activities like the planetarium show or the IMAX film; we head for back corners where there are old-fashioned dioramas we know

New York City Dateline

- 1524** Sailing under the French flag, Italian Giovanni da Verrazano is the first European to enter what's now New York Harbor.
- 1609** Henry Hudson sails up the Hudson River, exploring for the Dutch East India Company.
- 1626** The Dutch settle in Nieuw Amsterdam and make it a fur-trading post; Peter Minuit, governor of Nieuw Amsterdam, buys Manhattan Island from the Algonquin Indians for trinkets worth 60 florins (about \$24).
- 1664** English invaders take Nieuw Amsterdam from the Dutch (wooden-legged Peter Stuyvesant is the Dutch governor).
- 1673** The Dutch take back Manhattan.
- 1674** Under the Treaty of Westminster, the Dutch finally give Nieuw Amsterdam to the English, who rename it New York after James, duke of York.
- 1776** American colonists topple the statue of King George on Bowling Green on July 9, but by year's end New York becomes a British stronghold for the rest of the American Revolution.
- 1783** Victorious Gen. George Washington bids farewell to his troops at Fraunces Tavern in Lower Manhattan.
- 1789** Washington is inaugurated as the first president at Federal Hall in New York City, the first capital of the new United States.
- 1790** Philadelphia deposes New York City as the nation's capital.
- 1792** The first U.S. stock exchange is founded in New York City, making it the country's financial capital.
- 1811** The city north of 14th Street is laid out, using an orderly grid system.
- 1853** The World's Fair is held in New York's Bryant Park.
- 1858–73** Central Park is laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.

and love (Asian Peoples and North American Woodlands are two faves) or stop by the Natural Science Center in the early afternoons for hands-on puttering with plants and live animals (for ages 4 and older). See p. 143.

- **Watching Sea-Lion Feeding Time at the Central Park Wildlife Center:** Check out the feeding schedule as you walk in the front entrance—the Sea Lion Pool is the centerpiece of this tidily landscaped little gem of a zoo, and an audience starts to gather well in advance. Claim a spot on the top steps where short people can most easily view the frisky sea lions. Don't expect fancy tricks, but there'll be

enough barking and diving and splashing to satisfy everybody. See p. 153.

- **Hanging Out at Rockefeller Plaza:**

The sunken plaza beneath the golden Prometheus statue truly is a locale for all seasons: In winter it's a tiny ice rink lively with the clash of blades and the tinny blare of piped-in music; in summer it's an open-air café with big umbrellas. In December it's an especially thrilling holiday sight, with the city's biggest Christmas tree (a real doozy) twinkling with lights. A railing surrounds the plaza at street level, where onlookers hang over and take in the scene; overhead, colorful flags

- 1883 The Brooklyn Bridge is completed, linking Manhattan and Brooklyn.
- 1885–86 The Statue of Liberty is erected in New York Harbor.
- 1892 Ellis Island opens as an immigration station.
- 1898 The newly consolidated New York City incorporates all five boroughs.
- 1904 Construction begins on the New York City subway system.
- 1929 The stock market crashes on October 29, sending not only Wall Street but also the entire nation into an economic tailspin that results in the Great Depression.
- 1939 New York's second World's Fair is held in Flushing Meadows, Queens.
- 1964–65 New York's third World's Fair is held in Flushing Meadows, Queens.
- 1970s New York nearly declares bankruptcy.
- 1973 The World Trade Center opens.
- 1983 South Street Seaport's restoration begins.
- 1986 The Statue of Liberty's centennial is celebrated in gala style.
- 1990 Ellis Island reopens as a museum after a spectacular 6-year renovation.
- 1997 The restored New Amsterdam Theater launches the rehabilitation of West 42nd Street.
- 2001 Terrorists fly two 747s into the World Trade Center, laying waste to the site and killing thousands. Rescue and recovery efforts continue for months, with people from all across America rallying to New York City's support.
- 2004 On July 4, the cornerstone is laid for the new Freedom Tower, on the site of the former World Trade Center.
- 2005 Throughout February, tourists from around the world stroll through Christo & Jeanne Claude's *The Gates*, an immense celebratory artwork that fills Central Park with orange draperies fluttering from temporary arches.

flap from a rank of tall flagpoles. You really feel at the heart of the Big City. See "Midtown" in chapter 7.

- **Doing the Times Square Hustle:** With kids? Yes, indeed, because the panhandlers and hookers have been displaced by theme stores and restaurants, and the neon is more brilliant than ever. The Toys "R" Us store, the Hard Rock Cafe, Madame Tussaud's New York, the ESPN Zone, a picture window into the MTV studios, or David Letterman's antics up the street—it has an only-in-New-York energy and excitement you won't get anywhere else. See "Midtown," in chapter 7.

- **Heading to a Playground on a Weekday Afternoon:** Choose a neighborhood playground, pack a picnic lunch, and head for the sandpits, swings, and slides where New York kids hang out. Mornings are when parents with infants and toddlers congregate; preschoolers arrive after lunch; and the bigger kids hit the ground at 3 or 4pm, when schools let out. In summer many playgrounds have sprinklers that help youngsters cool off without getting all wet. See "The Playground Low-down," in chapter 8.
- **Enjoying a Sunny Afternoon at a World-Famous Ballpark:** You've got

two choices in New York: Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, where the Bronx Bombers play; and Shea Stadium in Flushing, Queens, where the Mets play. Both are handy to the subway, and unless there's a full-blown pennant race in swing, you can usually buy tickets that day, at least in the upper-level "nosebleed" sections (bring

your mitt in hopes of high foul balls). Nobody minds if your kids make noise, you can leave early if they get tired, and there's plenty of food available—especially the overpriced hot dogs that are so much a part of the experience. See "Spectator Sports" in chapter 10.

2 The Best Hotel Bets

- **Most Family-Friendly:** The **Doubletree Guest Suites**, 1568 Broadway (☎ 800/222-8733 or 212/719-1600; p. 72), not only provides standard two-room accommodations sleeping four or six, but also kitchenettes, baby equipment, childproof rooms, and a super toddler playroom. The Upper East Side's **The Mark**, 25 E. 77th St. (☎ 800/843-6275 or 212/744-4300; p. 70), offers kids all sorts of amenities with its weekend packages, and **Le Parker Meridien**, 118 W. 57th St. (☎ 800/543-4300 or 212/245-5000; p. 73) has special welcoming packets for young guests; concierges at both of these hotels are full of great tips for kids visiting NYC.
- **Best Suite Deals:** The **Doubletree Guest Suites**, 1568 Broadway (☎ 800/222-8733 or 212/719-1600; p. 72), is a sensible family option, sleeping the whole crew in one unit for a relatively easy price. The **Embassy Suites Hotel**, 102 North End Ave. (☎ 800/EMBASSY or 212/945-0100; p. 83), offers some very favorable rates on weekends for its roomy, sleek suites.
- **Most Peace & Quiet:** It's all relative in New York, of course, but the **Excelsior**, 45 W. 81st St. (☎ 800/368-4575 or 212/362-9200; p. 64) is buffered by Central Park and the park surrounding the Natural History, and

the **Gracie Inn**, 502 E. 81st St. (☎ 212/628-1700; p. 72), is tucked away on an Upper East Side street near the East River. Even in Midtown you can find residential quiet at the **Millennium U.N. Plaza**, 1 United Nations Plaza (☎ 800/222-8888 or 212/758-1234; p. 80), and the **Holiday Inn Midtown 57th Street**, 440 W. 57th St. (☎ 800/HOLIDAY or 212/581-8100; p. 75).

- **Best Views:** Two downtown hotels feature dynamite New York Harbor views starring Lady Liberty and Ellis Island: The **Ritz-Carlton New York**, 2 West St. (☎ 800/241-3333 or 212/344-0800; p. 83), wins hands-down for its glorious open westward views from a majority of guest rooms, but there are several rooms with great harbor views also at the **Marriott New York Financial Center**, 80 West St. (☎ 800/228-9290 or 212/385-4900; p. 85). Central Park panoramas are worth requesting at **The Mark**, 25 E. 77th St. (☎ 800/843-6275 or 212/744-4300; p. 70).
- **When Price Is No Object:** My vote goes to **The Carlyle**, 35 E. 76th St. (☎ 800/227-5737 or 212/744-1600; p. 69), for its dignified East Side calm; its well-nigh-perfect service; and the spaciousness of its designer-decorated rooms, which really deserve to be called apartments. Spring for a suite with a Central Park view and a

grand piano. The **Four Seasons**, 57 E. 57th St. (☎ 800/332-3442 or 212/758-5700; p. 77), has a stylish Midtown address, sleek if somewhat small rooms (but then, you can afford a suite, right?), fabulous service, and a surprisingly kid-friendly gourmet restaurant.

- **When Price Is Your Main Object:** You can't go wrong with the **Travel Inn**, 515 W. 42nd St. (☎ 800/869-4630 or 212/695-7171; p. 76), which delivers roomy, clean, fairly quiet motel rooms, plus a huge pool and free parking, for around \$150 to \$200 a night. Families willing to sleep in bunk beds and forgo en suite bathrooms should pounce on the very clean and safe, if somewhat spare, **Vanderbilt YMCA**, 224 E. 47th St. (☎ 212/756-9600; p. 81) and **West Side YMCA**, 5 W. 63rd St. (☎ 212/875-4100; p. 68).
- **Best Lobby:** You've gotta love the classic Art Deco lobby of the **Waldorf=Astoria**, 301 Park Ave. (☎ 800/WALDORF, 800/HILTONS, or 212/355-3000; p. 78), with its marble-faced pillars, deep carpeting, ornamental plasterwork, the magnificent Park Avenue entry chandelier, and

that amazing clock near the front desk.

- **Best Pool:** The pool at the **Millennium U.N. Plaza Hotel**, 44th Street and First Avenue (☎ 800/222-8888 or 212/758-1234; p. 80), has it all: views, cleanliness, handsome tile-work, and not much of a crowd.
- **Tops for Toddlers:** When all is said and done, the **Hotel Wales**, 1295 Madison Ave. (☎ 212/876-6000; p. 71), wins for its Carnegie Hill location, friendly staff, breakfast buffet, residential calm, and Puss-in-Boots theme. The **Doubletree Guest Suites**, 1568 Broadway (☎ 800/222-8733 or 212/719-1600; p. 72), scores big here, too, for its suite convenience and toddler playroom.
- **Tops for Teens:** Budding bohemians may want to be in Greenwich Village at the **Washington Square Hotel**, 103 Waverly Place (☎ 800/222-0418 or 212/777-9515; p. 82), while trend-setters will gravitate to the way-cool decor and hipster cachet of **The Paramount**, 235 W. 46th St. (☎ 800/225-7474 or 212/764-5500; p. 75), or the art-jazzed vibe of the **Gershwin Hotel**, 7 E. 27th St. (☎ 212/545-8000; p. 82).

3 The Best Dining Bets

- **Most Kid-Friendly Service:** Kudos to these family favorites, where every waiter and waitress I've ever encountered is friendly, uncloying, and unflappable: **American Girl Café**, 609 Fifth Ave. (☎ 877/247-5223; p. 112); **Two Boots**, in the East Village at 37 Ave. A (☎ 212/505-2276; p. 132); and **Ellen's Stardust Diner**, just north of Times Square at 1650 Broadway (☎ 212/956-5151; p. 137).
- **Best Kids' Menu:** To most Manhattan restaurants, a kids' menu means burgers, chicken fingers, and spaghetti and meatballs, with maybe a hot dog

or a grilled cheese sandwich thrown in. But **Gabriela's**, 688 Columbus Ave. (☎ 212/961-9600; p. 101) makes kids' tacos and roast chicken that are wonderfully savory and free of spicy sauces. **Friend of a Farmer**, near Gramercy Park at 77 Irving Place (☎ 212/477-2188; p. 122), adds some comfort foods like macaroni and cheese and chicken with pasta; and the publike **Telephone Bar & Grill**, at 149 Second Ave. (☎ 212/529-5000; p. 129), includes such English-nanny favorites as shepherd's pie.

- **Best Views:** The **Rock Center Café**, 20 W. 50th St. (☎ 212/332-7620; p. 115), features a movie-perfect view of Rockefeller Plaza's lower plaza—in winter you can watch ice-skaters through the windows, and in summer you can dine at tables set out on the plaza. Uptown, the **Boat Basin Café**, West 79th Street at the Hudson River in Riverside Park (☎ 212/496-5542; p. 104), gives you a glorious river horizon, along with houseboats bobbing charmingly in the foreground.
- **Most Fun Decor:** The East Village's funky **Two Boots**, 37 Ave. A (☎ 212/505-2276; p. 132), litters the dining room with a goofy collection of cowboy boots in every shape, color, and size; the Western motif at **Cowgirl Hall of Fame**, 519 Hudson St. (☎ 212/633-1133; p. 126), is lively too, though a little more packaged. While there are plenty of retro diners in town, Midtown's **Prime Burger**, 5 E. 51st (☎ 212/759-4729; p. 121), is the real thing: a 1950s coffee shop that time has passed by. Kids love the seats with the lift-up wooden trays.
- **Best Burgers:** My favorite just might be the perfectly grilled burgers at the Upper East Side's **Luke's Bar & Grill**, 1394 Third Ave. (☎ 212/249-7070; p. 109), though a close runner-up would be the succulent O'Neal burger served not only at **O'Neal's**, 49 W. 64th St. (☎ 212/787-4663; p. 101), but also at its fair-weather park satellites, including **Boat Basin Café**, West 79th Street at the Hudson River (☎ 212/496-5542; p. 104). Village burger lovers have enshrined the **Corner Bistro**, 311 W. 4th St. (☎ 212/242-9502; p. 126), for its big and meaty hamburgers. If you're partial to "sliders," those moist miniburgers steamed with onions, know that **Sassy's Sliders**, 1530 Third Ave. (☎ 212/828-6900; p. 112), puts the White Castle version to shame.
- **Best Breakfast:** TriBeCa's **Bubby's**, 120 Hudson St. (☎ 212/219-0666; p. 137), welcomes kids for breakfast until 4pm daily; the weekend brunches are especially popular. At **NoHo Star**, 330 Lafayette St. (☎ 212/925-0070; p. 126), breakfasts are blissfully relaxed and uncrowded. If it's lox and bagels you're after, the place to go is the famous **Barney Greengrass**, 541 Amsterdam Ave. (☎ 212/724-4707; p. 103).
- **Best Brunch:** **Elephant and Castle**, 68 Greenwich Ave. (☎ 212/243-1400; p. 126), is a longtime Village favorite for leisurely weekend brunches that won't break the bank.
- **Best Milkshakes:** In Midtown, head for **Route 66**, 858 Ninth Ave., (☎ 212/977-7600; p. 121), which has a great variety of shakes and smoothies. The **Lexington Candy Shop**, 1226 Lexington Ave. (☎ 212/288-0057; p. 111), has perfect classic milkshakes and malts in an authentic vintage coffee-shop setting. On the Upper West Side, my older son is partial to the shakes at **Homer's**, 487 Amsterdam Ave. (☎ 212/496-0777; p. 105), though his brother is addicted, and I mean *addicted*, to their blue raspberry slushies.
- **Best Chinese:** While many Chinatowners roll out the dim sum carts only on Sunday, **Jing Fong**, at 18 Elizabeth St. (☎ 212/964-5256; p. 135), makes every day a dim sum day, offering small servings of dumplings, skewers, rolls, and other delectables right at your table. Outside of Chinatown, **Ollie's Noodle Shops**, at 2315 Broadway (☎ 212/362-3111; p. 106), 1991 Broadway (☎ 212/595-8181; p. 106), and 200 W. 44th St. (☎ 212/921-5988; p. 120), are can't-miss choices for

not-too-exotic but still delicious Chinese fare.

- **Best Pizzas:** I'm treading on controversial ground here, in this pizza-loving city, but I'll have to give the nod to **John's Pizza**; the original Greenwich Village location, at 278 Bleecker St. (☎ 212/243-1680; p. 127), is still the best, but the branches at 408 E. 64th St. (☎ 212/935-2895; p. 111) and 260 W. 44th St. (☎ 212/391-7560; p. 120) serve up thin-crust brick-oven pies that are pretty darn close to perfection. I'm also partial to Midtown's **Angelo's Coal Oven Pizza**, 117 W. 57th St. (☎ 212/333-4333; p. 119) and 1043 Second Ave. (☎ 212/521-3600. Our neighborhood favorite is another thin-crust pie, on the Upper West Side at **Pizzabolla**, 654 Amsterdam Ave. (☎ 212/579-4500; p. 106).
- **Best Pastas:** Forget Little Italy: The best Italian pastas I've found, outside of a couple of expensive places I could never take kids, are at **Mangia e Bevi**, 800 Ninth Ave. (☎ 212/956-3976; p. 117), and sleek but casual **Bella Luna**, 584 Columbus Ave. (☎ 212/877-2267; p. 99).
- **Best Chicken Fingers:** Here's the lowdown from my son Tom, who's been seriously researching chicken fingers around the world for the past several years: the hands-down best in Manhattan are at **Artie's Delicatessen**, 2290 Broadway (☎ 212/579-5959; p. 103).
- **Grandma's Favorites:** For every dressed-up special meal, linen and china and all, I'd pick **Petaluma**, 1356 First Ave. (☎ 212/772-8800; p. 107). Afternoon tea couldn't be cozier than at the whimsical **Alice's Tea Cup**, at 102 W. 73rd St. (☎ 212/799-3006) or 156 E. 64th St. (☎ 212/486-9200).
- **Grandpa's Favorites:** At 42 Central Park S., **Mickey Mantle's** (☎ 212/688-7777; p. 114) celebrates the sports stars Granddad has actually heard of—plus it's handsome, the food's pretty darn good, and there are lots of big TVs so you won't miss the big game. Granddads also get a kick out of burgers and pig-out ice-cream sundaes at fun and friendly **Serendipity 3**, 225 E. 60th St. (☎ 212/838-3531; p. 109).
- **Most Fun Menu:** I love the wacky names of various dishes at **Chat 'n' Chew**, 10 E. 16th St. (☎ 212/243-1616; p. 123).
- **Best Floor Show:** Most waiters in Manhattan are really actors waiting for their break; the guys and gals at **Ellen's Stardust Diner**, 1650 Broadway (☎ 212/956-5151; p. 137), get to belt out their favorites to a karaoke machine in this Times Square café's weekend dinner shows. But for my sons, the flying knives of the teppanyaki chefs at **Benihana**, 47 W. 56th St. (☎ 212/581-0930; p. 113), are pretty hard to beat.