

Future Travellers

With their own specially prepared menus, designer spas and hotels, *Rachael Oakes-Ash* finds that today's young travellers are being groomed for a life of pampered journeys

Little Miss and Mister Travel-a-lot are savvy creatures. With their designer carry-on luggage, specialised menus and allocated recreation room in the airline club lounge, junior travellers today are worth mega dollars to the travel industry.

The decision-makers in the industry know that today's heirs and heiresses will come into their own trust funds come adulthood, and a well-trained traveller will spend that cash with the brands they have come to love. Translated: get them while they're young.

It's just not good enough for today's demanding junior diva to accept a hotel roll-out bed and a crossword mid-flight. Airlines now offer tailored in-flight service to minors at the pointy end of the plane, preparing them for a life of pampered travel.

Personal chefs are *de rigueur* for children up front on Singapore Airlines. Discerning palates can pre-order their meals from the Yummy Menu selection of kiddie favourites 24-hours before departure.

Children requiring butler service fly Gulf Air and make the most of the personal Sky Nanny on offer. While adults take time out, the Sky Nanny takes care of meal times, sleep times, play times and everything in-between, ensuring flying is a pleasant experience for both adult and child.

Emirates offer fashionistas a colourful meal box that comes with its own sport divers watch so jetlagged juniors can reset to local time. It's not a Rolex but when the food is gone, the meal box doubles as a stylish attaché case.

British Airways, meanwhile, have reintroduced their log book signed by the captain so every flight can be recorded and air miles compared in the school yard. Those flying Leer jet can just get Daddy to sign.

The heavily scheduled lives of affluent "tweens" (kids between childhood and teens) who run from school to dance to soccer to



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maths tutor to birthday party mean children are experiencing higher stress levels. It's hard to win the academic medal, the popularity contest, the attention of the boy in the soccer team and to look good while doing it. Enter the kiddie spa for anxiety ridden ankle biters.

Little Miss Precious can't possibly be seen in First without the appropriate mani, pedi and coiffure and the global Spa Industry has taken note with specifically designed spa menus. Princess can soak in a tub of a thousand bubbles in double fudge chocolate, wild strawberry or mango at the Conrad Bali's Jiwa Spa. Or perhaps Missy would prefer a soothing back massage with lullaby or paint-on foot mud bath?

Not to be outdone, the Novotel at Twin Waters on Australia's Sunshine Coast grooms future spa addicts with the Little Miss Precious

package. Girls under 12 can indulge their inner Mary-Kate and Ashley with a manicure, toe polish, mini facial and hair braid with some advice on skin, nail and hair management techniques. All for US\$55 – Monopoly money not accepted.

Most hotels offer children's clubs or adult-supervised entertainment programmes to keep children happy and out of parents' hair. Some hotels, however, have taken it one step further creating accommodation specifically for the little ones. Carnival Cruises have their exclusive O2 club, show identity to prove you're under 18 or be left at the door. It's the youth who rule here, the parents are just along for the ride.

Kid's television channel Nickelodeon opened their Nickelodeon Family Suites Hotel in Orlando, Florida, late last year. There's a water park with four-storey water tower, poolside entertainment and an emphasis on the Nick Hotel being a space for kids to have time out from the adults.

Rugrats can't travel without baggage. Luggage manufacturer Samsonite have designed a Sammies range of luggage sets specifically for kids. Featuring ladybird, giraffe, turtle and penguin carry-ons, suitcases, bum bags and backpacks so little miss or master frequent flyer can do it in style.

Then there's the host of computer games from Nintendo, Sega and Sony. Have Game Boy, will travel. Digital cameras designed for kids to indulge the Herb Ritts within, portable DVD players for back seat travel, and websites such as call4ally.com created for juniors wanting info on "where to be seen" in their destination of choice.

It's only a matter of time before Little Miss or Mister are demanding upgrades, taking over the lounge, flashing frequent flyer cards, hosting travel shows and launching their own airlines and hotel chains. Move over, Branson, you're being usurped. Trump? You're fired. □