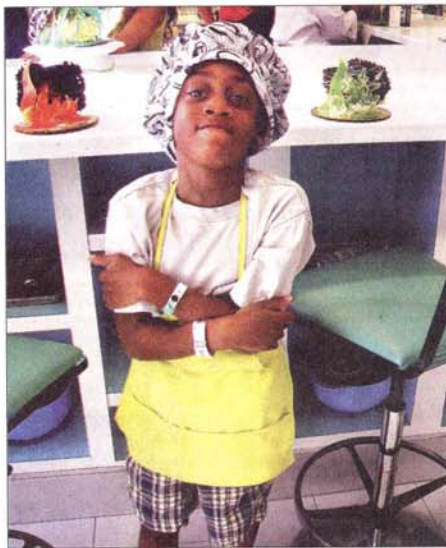


ALTERNATE ARRANGEMENTS



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATLANTIS
Kids get the chance to indulge just about every sense — and dream — in the Atlantis Kids Adventure Club where the rooms include the performance room, top left, gamer room, top right, and culinary kitchen. Even the bathrooms, above, are fantasy worlds.



HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS PHOTO

HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS—The blur of colour and giggles that zips past me as I enter the new Atlantis Kids Adventure Club isn't immediately recognizable.

It takes a few seconds before I realize that it was my 7-year-old son and by then he's long gone ... again.

From the moment I dropped him off at the Club — Sol Kerzner's 8,000-square-foot addition to the Atlantis Resort — I lost him.

Forget the mommy guilt and separation anxiety that can come from leaving your kids off while you take in some adults-only downtime on your vacation; here my son barely waved goodbye before being absorbed into a sea of specialists and activities.

When I picked him up, I was officially the best parent on the planet.

There's a Torontonian to thank for this. Ann Bada-Crema's company "Launch by Design" (www.launchbydesign.com) has been quietly wooing visitors at hotels around the world with innovative and imaginative designs for years, but the unveiling of the new Atlantis Kids Adventure Club is sure to garner her a whole new legion of fans under the age of 12.

Launched in January, the Atlantis Kids Adventure is so high-tech and so beyond your typical kids club fare that you'll wish you were 8 again.

Of course, you'll have to wish this from the lobby. The ladies manning the front desk are pleasant but clear: No one over the age of 12 gets past the candy-filled pillars and velvet rope guarding the entrance.

Cooking up some crazy fun for kids

Atlantis resort's innovative club gives young adventurers loads of high-tech hijinks — with no grown-ups allowed

JUST THE FACTS

AKA CLUB is open to kids aged 3-12 only. This summer families can book their kids in for a special five-day Lego camp adventure (\$425 per child excluding room cost). Camps run from July 12-16, July 19-23 and July 26-30. Space is limited. For more information visit www.Atlantis.com.

JETBLUE flies out of Buffalo direct to the Bahamas. Toronto-Bahamas flights are also available on WestJet, Air Canada and other carriers.

A video screen in the lobby offers parents a glimpse of what \$45 for a half-day will bring their little ones, but it pales in comparison to seeing it up close.

Six distinct zones separate the space and offer kids the opportunity to choose their own adventure:

- The Imagination Station is geared to pre-schoolers and includes a kid-sized grocery store complete with pushcarts and an attendant at the register; a kid-sized pink Victorian house completely outfitted (including its own grand piano, a Lego Construction centre and a wizardology room with a story-reading tree and wall nooks for curling up in.
- The futuristic Mac Lab — a pre-teen's dream space in hues of silvers and blues and more than a dozen iMac computers filled with software that lets them do everything from make fake magazine covers to play approved kid-friendly games.
- The Gamers room — which feels like you're inside Donkey Kong's Jungle — has a "Wii Tree" growing in its centre and walls that alternate Playstation 3 and Xbox consoles around the room.
- Culinary Kitchen — a fun open-concept cooking space with break-

fast-bar-like seating for 21 kids in a room filled with natural light and cooking tools means demos and hands-on lessons for kids (chocolate sculptures and candy-pizzas among them)

- The Performance Area — a green screen background turns dressup into magazine cover art, a Light-space Play floor has them chasing balls of light in games of dodgeball and jump rope and motion-detector-operated video games takes gaming to a whole new level.

- In the Craft room, kids can choose from a host of make-and-take art projects, create artwork on an itable (think iPad touch screen technology on a large craft table) and then turn it into a postcard that's then emailed to friends and family.

And every inch of it is Bada-Crema's creation — one year in the making from pen and paper to doors opening.

"Every single space was designed as a single space and then they were made cohesive," explains the graduate of CW Jeffries high school art program who credits her Canadian roots — and winters — as well.

"Being Canadian grounds me. I think that because we experience all four seasons and all the sports and all of the activities of those seasons. It allows you to move freely throughout life," she says.

It may have also given her the ability to instill a bit of ADD.

Every room, every wall, every floor offers an experience for the senses: From the wacky designs on the walls, to the smells wafting in from the kitchen to the sounds and lights in the theatre space and the walls that react to touch.

And everywhere you go you can

hear the delighted giggles and screams of kids who've found nirvana.

Even the bathrooms hold surprises that make little ones' jaws drop.

Little girls can choose from individual toilet stall themes including sports, jungle and, of course, princess. Girls who enter the Princess stall are greeted with a trumpet and do their work under a chandelier in the fully themed space.

Boys get similar treatment in their race car and superhero offerings.

In a genius move, the part of the centre I love the most, I know the least about: Wonka's adventure.

A tall version of the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* hero strides into the centre at one point gathering kids for his secret mission and heads off through a door.

About 15 minutes later voices are coming from another direction, but the giggles stop when the door opens to a cloud of dry-ice-induced smoke and a mock elevator door opening.

"What happened in there?" I ask my wide-eyed son who is holding a bag full of sugary treats behind his back.

"I can't tell you. I signed a contract."

It's true. Wonka makes them sign something swearing they won't tell their parents what they saw on the other side and not one of them would break the silence.

"Oh, and if you saw what I did in there!" says Bada-Crema smiling. "It's incredible."

It's also the mark of a designer who found her inner child and let it loose.

"I don't look at it as 'just design.' You're creating an experience," she says. "Not once did I stop thinking about the children — kids with learning disabilities, kids with physical disabilities, kids who were shy, kids who were active — they were always with me."

If there's a downside to the space, it's the fact that it doesn't take enough advantage of the 25 hectares of water space just outside its doors, meaning parents will have to choose between the club and having the kids fully experience the water parks and slides outside.

That could change. Kerzner says an expansion is already in the works.

"A year from now, we'll talk to you and it will be double the size."

If it doubles the excitement, parents' hearts may not be able to take it.

Heather Greenwood Davis is a freelance writer. Her trip was subsidized by JetBlue, Lego and Atlantis Resort.

