

# Keeping families front

There is a lot to think about for licensees when it comes to family-friendly dining. HospitalityGEM provides some top tips to help customers and their loved ones feel at home as Mothers' Day approaches

In order to capture a share of the lucrative family-dining market, publicans are faced with the difficult task of striking a delicate balance between young families and meeting the demands of the more mature diner.

This extends not just to the layout of the venue, but also the menu's content and the attitude of staff – get the combination right and you could be on to a winner.

This month we take a look at the increasing importance for pubs of being family-friendly, with a particular focus on Mothers' Day.

## Mum's the word

Mothers' Day is arguably the most important family-dining date in the calendar, presenting an opportunity for families to treat their mum to a meal to remember.

It's also a chance for publicans to don their Sunday best and get out the fine china as families descend on pubs and restaurants.

HospitalityGEM recently conducted a survey of a cross-section of diners – not just those who visit the pub – to gauge views on family dining, and Mothers' Day in particular, the results



Family occasion: most survey respondents would prefer to see smaller portions of the full menu for the children

of which could help licensees to ensure mums are not overlooked.

## Planning ahead

Almost 80% of survey respondents have already marked 10 March (Mothers' Day) in their diaries, with around 50% saying that they intend to visit a pub or restaurant to cele-

# 80%

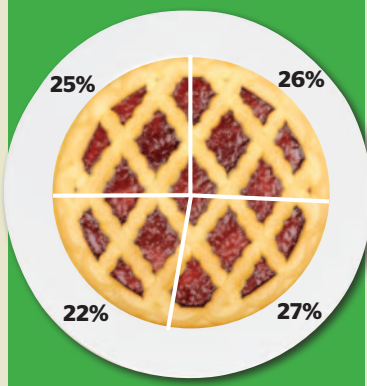
the proportion of respondents who have already marked Mothers' Day in their diaries

brate the special occasion.

Knowing the date far enough in advance is the most important thing. It may sound obvious, but people have already started booking tables, so it's important for publicans to know what will be on the menu on the day and not be caught unawares if faced with a customer enquiry.

## Which of these options do you think would best suit Mothers' Day?

Sunday roast/carvery	26%
Full menu	27%
Lunch menu	22%
N/A	25%



## Survey suggestions

Here we take a closer look at some of the suggestions from respondents and the recurring themes highlighted by our survey.

Two ideas were for pubs to "spruce the place up and mothers will be happier to come back", and also to "make the interior décor warm and inviting".

For many, dining out on Mothers' Day is a formal occasion, so expect many people to turn up in smart shirts and nice dresses. Similarly, your staff and venue should also look the part.

Other respondents suggested having flowers on tables or around the dining area to add

something special to the day.

In addition, some said "provide excellent customer service and make those mums feel special. Good value for money is always appreciated, but this is a special occasion, and she needs to feel special".

Others suggested that there could be little flourishes in pubs to wow the mums. Little things such as an indulgent dessert, free glass of bubbly or a rosé would make the day more memorable and no doubt be a talking point.



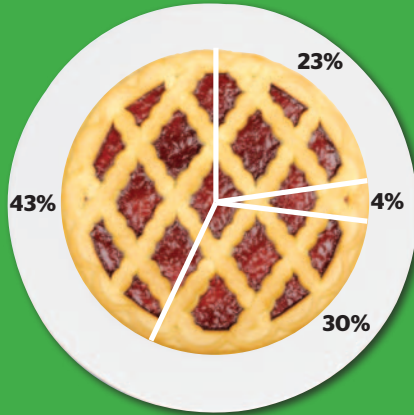
## Further observations included:

- Don't overbook! We never dine out on Mothers' Day now after a couple of very lengthy waits and cold food at normally excellent venues.
- Don't cram tables together. You need space if you have a family.
- Ensure you are set up to maintain quality standards.
- Take advantage of it being a special day. Customers who are put off by poor value and service won't return.
- It's not just about young families. I am 54, and my 52-year-old sister and I will be taking our 89-year-old

# of mind

Thinking about food options for children, which of the following would you prefer to see at venues?

Smaller portions from the main menu for children	23%
A children's menu featuring classic kids' dishes – for example, fish fingers, chips and peas	4%
Both options	30%
N/A	43%



**It's vital for publicans to know what will be on the menu and not be caught out by customers' enquiries**

Most customers will book tables of between two and four people, so it might also be worth considering this when arranging your furniture.

Whatever you do, make sure potential diners realise your pub is a great place to spend Mothers' Day.

Whether it's a simple A-board outside or a life-sized cut-out of Frank Spencer, now's the time to do it.

## Happy families

Overwhelmingly, only 4% of the survey respondents thought that the children's food menu should be one of the traditional types, featuring bangers and mash, or fish fingers and chips etc.

Instead, parents would prefer to see smaller portions from the full menu for the children to enjoy, with perhaps one or two 'safe dishes' for the fussier ones.

## Family fortunes

As we are well aware, financial constraints are still very much at the forefront of many people's minds, and will be for a long time yet, so when devising a menu to appeal to families bear this in mind, and include a few options that won't break the bank alongside more indulgent dishes.

mother out to lunch as always.

■ Please don't allow buggies in the seating area. Ask parents not to let toddlers roam around, it's dangerous and annoying to other diners. Try and seat families in one area, if possible.

■ Make some provision or area available for mothers with older children, somewhere that's not too hectic.

The key message respondents are getting across is: do not overbook. This is one of the biggest bugbears for customers.

While it may seem logical to make the most of one of the year's more money-spinning days, customers who are crammed in or face a long

wait for food will be less likely to return, whether that's for another family meal, a Christmas do or next Mothers' Day.

Don't forget that dining out with the family means different things to different people. Publicans with a Mothers' Day offering will more than likely see a wider age range, from newborns to centenarians, so put some thought into how families are seated.

Of course, it's not always possible to please all of the people all of the time, but a little consideration for your customers' requirements will go a long way.

## Make families feel relaxed and welcome

**Steven Pike, director HospitalityGEM (formerly The Mystery Dining Company)**



It's fair to say that dining out is more family-friendly than ever. The smoking ban changed the landscape for pubs and made them a viable alternative for people looking for something different to the run-of-the-mill family-friendly chains.

Certainly, pubs can offer individual and unique atmospheres, and, unlike some traditional family diners, be somewhere that's just as enjoyable for mum and dad as it is for the little ones.

That said, there is a certain skill to being family-friendly in a pub environment. As well as making sure that food and service are top notch, it's important for your staff to engage with children, and ensure your venue has some distractions for those with a short attention span.

Some colouring books and crayons can go a long way and,

while the kids are occupied, the parents might feel inclined to hang around and spend a bit more money.

Also, there is no point in claiming to welcome toddlers unless you have highchairs for them to sit in.

Some pubs prefer to implement a 'no children after 7pm'-style policy, which allows them to cater for both dining families and evening drinkers.

This approach is fine as long as it is clear from the outset, and you're not seating families down at 6pm expecting them to be finished and out the door within the hour.

Most of it is common sense, but you'd be surprised how many pubs get it wrong.

Give families a warm welcome, prompt service, good food and a reasonable bill, and they should be back for more.



**Families: if children are occupied parents are likelier to spend more**

About us: HospitalityGEM is the new business-to-business trading name for The Mystery Dining Company. HospitalityGEM helps restaurant, pub, hotel and catering businesses to grow sales, build brand reputation, analyse performance and develop people through a range of Guest Experience Management services and software. [www.hospitalityGEM.com](http://www.hospitalityGEM.com)

