



Macau MISCINI for minis



More than just a playground for grown-ups, this nearby city presents a quick and easy destination for family fun, no visas required, writes *Nicole Webb*.

Since it's appropriately nicknamed "Las Vegas of the East", you'd be forgiven for thinking Macau is no more (or less) than a glitzy gambling mecca – the perfect playground for keen punters and party-goers.

And you wouldn't be completely wrong. Home to 36 casinos (and counting) and earning more revenue than Las Vegas, this tiny pocket in Asia's South East is a force to be reckoned with.

But, it's not all about poker machines and blackjack. The kids can get in on the action, too, without even mentioning the "G" word. This former

Portuguese colony is on a mission to reinvent itself as a place not just for high-rollers, but for those who like a bit of forward-roll action, too.

Family fun

If you want somewhere away from the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong for a quick, revitalising escape, there's potentially more to Macau than meets the eye. In fact, as a mum to a hyped-up three-year-old, until last month I'd never actually been to Macau on an adults-only trip.

It's been one of our destinations of choice since Ava was just two months old. Outfitted with our Baby Björn, we

enjoyed the fact that a one-hour boat ride was far less taxing on both bub and us than battling a wave of airport chaos and an unpredictable plane ride.

You can catch a ferry from Hong Kong to Macau around the clock and, unless it's a holiday, there's usually no need to book. Ferries run from the China Ferry Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui and from the Shun Tak Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan. At both, you'll find a myriad of kiosks selling tickets for around \$160 (prices vary slightly depending on the time of day). Although you won't need a visa to travel to Macau, you will need your passport, unless you are a Permanent Resident.

Don't be bamboozled by the number of ferry ticket offices, but do make sure you know whether your hotel is nearer the Macau or Taipa terminal so you choose the most efficient ferry for you. But, even if you get that mixed up, both terminals have complimentary shuttle busses to and from most hotels.

Hotel options abound

Speaking of accommodation, if you want to spend your days lazing around a luxurious hotel pool, you'll be spoiled for choice in Macau. Being married to an hotelier, we usually go with Starwood options, but that hasn't stopped me from checking out the competition.

These days, it's all about the Cotai Strip. Across town from old Macau in Taipa, this hotspot is buzzing with enough energy for the whole family. Most of the hotels in this area are completely geared up for kids.

I've spent time at the Sheraton Macau – one of the largest hotels in the world, with just under 4,000 rooms. Upon check-in, you could be forgiven for thinking you'd arrived at an airport. The kids will love the vibrancy of this humming resort. Think of it as a theme park on steroids!

Step inside, though, and all is calm. With three outdoor pools flanked by private cabanas, you'll be hard-pressed to want for more (cocktails, anyone?). On the weekends, kids can enjoy poolside movie nights and a Shrekfast character breakfast





with photo opportunities for the kids to get up close and personal with their favourite friends. Even if you're not staying at the Sheraton, this is available to all guests staying on the strip.

There's also a DreamWorks character parade each day at 3pm, which winds through the massive complex that makes up the Sheraton, Conrad and Holiday Inn.

Opposite that collection of resorts, you'll find the Italian-inspired Venetian, with its grand canals and gondolas weaving through a lavish shopping centre. Emerging from the rubble next door is the Parisian. Standing tall will be a replica of the Eiffel Tower, predicted to be half the height of the real thing. This French-themed hotel complex will also have an interactive pool/play area, which promises the works. But you'll have to wait: the opening is currently scheduled for December 2015.

Then there's the Westin Macau perched at the very end of the Cotai Strip on Hac San Beach. With young children, it's always been my pick, where you can step out of the neon spotlight and into a Mediterranean hideaway. Yes, it's definitely a little frayed around the edges – don't expect modern chic – but all that can be overlooked when your room has a balcony the size of a large patio.

There's a golf course, the Westin Kids Club, an outdoor playground on lovely green grass, and swimming pools surrounded by deckchairs – perfect for kid-spotting.

The famous Portuguese restaurant Fernandos is just a stroll down the beach – a beach which may be a little disappointing if you're expecting a white, sandy stretch, but is nonetheless a tranquil spot.

All about the kids

While the casinos are notably present, they're not to be outdone by several playrooms for the small people. The Venetian houses the Qube – a kids' play zone that's open from 9:30am to 9:30pm. Qube has something for kids of all ages, including teens, who will enjoy video games and a pool hall. Up the road, City of Dreams has Kids' City, which re-opened last year after a revamp, with an interactive indoor playground and entertainment area. It could also be worth stopping by the Vquarium while you're there, where wee ones might enjoy watching the giant virtual mermaids swim by.

Just between you, me and the gatepost, my well-connected sources tell me the Sheraton, Venetian, Conrad, Holiday Inn and soon-to-open St. Regis are developing a "KidZania". If you're unfamiliar with KidZania, Google it to learn about

these amazing mini adventure lands, and stay tuned for details.

You can't leave Macau without seeing what's been lauded as one of the best shows on earth. *The House of Dancing Water* is simply breathtaking from start to finish. While I wouldn't recommend it for the littlies, kids over ten will be mesmerised along with Mum and Dad.

The Macau Science Centre gets a thumbs up, too. It's interactive and great for both parents and children. The location at Fisherman's Wharf is not bad either. And if you're keen to inject a bit of history into your Macau adventure, the A Ma Temple is the city's oldest and most revered temple. Let the kids explore to their heart's content.

I've also uncovered a secret spot from my local insider – mum's the word, OK? Located at Cheoc Van Beach in Coloane, tucked away from the chaos, kids can play freely and parents can eat at La Gondola, an open deck restaurant with the kids a stone's throw away. Bookings are essential, as locals like it, too.

Who said you can't bet on Macau as a family holiday destination? A one-hour ferry ride, accommodation options for all kinds of travellers and budgets, and lots of kid-friendly attractions make this the perfect quick escape. 📍