

"Meet me at my club"

Clubs for the whole family

By roving reporter Sarah Husselmann



The Purple Dragon

Becoming a parent instantly makes you part of a new club – the parent club. How many times have you given a knowing look to the mum in the park with a screaming baby? Or received the sympathetic smile of a wise grandparent when your toddler is having a tantrum in the supermarket? Being a member of the parent club can be overwhelming and it can feel like all other activities are off limits. If you were used to fine-dining and meeting friends in fashionable and luxurious surroundings, being abruptly thrown into the world of child-friendly cafés and activity classes in church halls, can be a shock to the system.

In South West London, parents' desire to spend time with their children in more salubrious surroundings has been responded to with an increasing number of private clubs.

Cupcake in SW18 is a member's club for mums, mums-to-be and their families. Members pay a one-off joining fee and monthly membership costs from £26 per week. Facilities include a crèche, café, spa, and sleep pod—15 minutes in the pod is equivalent to 2 hours deep sleep. Cupcake's weekly timetable provides up to 40 different classes from Baby Massage to Pilates. Membership gives you free access to classes, a number of treatments, and reduced rates at the crèche. You don't have to be a member to use the facilities but you do need to pre-arrange your visit. I left my son at the crèche whilst I had a massage.

At the heart of Cupcake is Mimi's Café; seating is comfortable and lovely smells waft from the kitchen. Above the crèche and café, is the Balinese-style spa. It didn't take long for the dim lighting and soft music to help me switch off. After my massage, I had lunch whilst feeding my son and easily found everything I needed. Although, Cupcake runs family events and

Daddy Disco is a regular class, it's really about indulging and supporting mums. The staff made every effort to ensure that I felt relaxed and welcome. After my relatively short visit I felt like I'd been in a lovely mummy bubble, and was now ready to take on the world again.

Purple Dragon in SW11 is a private members club for children. Don't worry, Mum and Dad can go too! The club, for children aged 0—12, offers a safe environment to play, attend classes and hang out with friends. There is a wet play area reminiscent of the downstairs room at The Science Museum, a dressing up corner, a well equipped music room and a science lab. The ballroom is used for regular classes, the messy play area is well stocked and naturally there's a Wii and other computer stations. Whilst the kids are enjoying themselves, Mum and Dad can spend time in the lounge browsing a wide selection of newspapers, books and magazines.

Once you've worked up an appetite the adjoining restaurant provides good quality food. Dragon Handlers (qualified carers) are on hand to look after the children, so little ones can roam whilst Mum and Dad enjoy a peaceful lunch.

To busy parents, I'm sure this sounds like bliss and it is, if you can afford the £2,500 a year membership (that's for the first sibling; fees for additional siblings are reduced). When you see the facilities, it's surprisingly easy to start justifying the cost. Following our visit, I briefly contemplated what life would be like being a

member and recalled how it felt, getting to the end of a conversation with my husband. Then reality bit, and I'm not sure that this is for everyone. If you spent that sum of money, wouldn't you feel that you ought to visit all the time? I mean daily? Just like its cyber-world branding, the club could become a child's virtual world. Purple Dragon offers fantastic facilities and an impressive range of classes. It is certainly somewhere to check-out if private clubs are your thing, but if you like more variety in your family life, I expect the cost will be prohibitive.

The Westover is a private health clinic in SW18 and The Little Westies is their offering for pre-school children. The Little Westies contains The Playbarn, a farmyard themed soft play area, a Hamptons-style café and a stylish room hosting a broad timetable of classes. Most classes, such as Boogie & Bubbles and Rembrandt's Revenge, are for pre-schoolers. A great deal of care has been taken to ensure that the facilities are comfortable and the specially designed soft play area, with small ball pool, large building blocks and rockers, is safe and welcoming for toddlers. I found the entrance a little tricky with a pushchair so recommend leaving time before a class to manoeuvre. Once inside, there are stairs and the café is separate to The Playbarn so don't expect to sup your coffee whilst the little ones amuse themselves. There is seating around The Playbarn but drinks need to be left downstairs. The Little Westies has a home from home feel and if you live nearby it could be a great place to hang out or visit when you feel like trying a new class. Members of the clinic use The Playbarn and café for free and get reduced prices on classes. For non-members, the flexibility is appealing. To use The Playbarn you can buy a book of tickets (£30 for 10) and use a ticket per visit. One NCT group shares a book of tickets, meeting regularly for coffee and play. Classes are £10 per class or £90 for a book of ten. It makes a refreshing change not to have to sign up for an entire term and worry about make-up classes following sickness or holidays. The Little Westies can also be hired out for parties.

Cupcake



Fact File

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- **Purple Dragon**
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www.thewestover.com/the-clinics/the-westover-wandsworth/little-westies.html
The Little Westies can also be found at The Westover, Chiswick