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A CLUB FOR EVERYONE

After Cultivating A Loyal and Enthusiastic Following, Citibabes Has Plans To Bring The Rest Of The City Into Its Orbit
By Hannah Rubenstein



The elevator doors slide open and you are enveloped in laughter and light. You step out and enter a large room filled with sunshine streaming through tall glass windows. To your right is a row of parked strollers; in front of you, booths and low round tables are surrounded by child-sized lime green chairs. Parents and caretakers stand at a café holding infants and ordering turkey meatballs and spinach squares. Children place shoes in small cubbies before entering a rainbow play area filled with slides and rope climbs, while down the hall, parents run on treadmills in a state-of-the-art fitness center. You have entered [Citibabes](#), a membership-based club in Soho for families of all shapes and sizes: "For we parents and wee children," as the motto reads.

Citibabes is "the ultimate resource for modern parents and families," says founder Tracey Frost. Much more than its physical locations (it also has an outpost in Scarsdale), Citibabes is a "a community that watches children grow up and develop" from infancy. And it's expanding. What began as a meeting place for parents and children has become a hub of activities, events and entertainment both material and virtual. Its offerings now include a variety of

educational classes and workshops, charity events, a weekly Citiscoop newsletter, Citibabes magazine,

camp, a vacation destination partnership with luxury hotel chain Parrot Cay, and "Citibabes-To-Go" services like tailored birthday parties and Susie's Supper Club delivery. Soon, the club will launch a network of blogs, as well as a series of online "How-To" videos featuring cooking demos and other projects for parents and kids to do together. And while no plans have been confirmed, Citibabes has its eye on an Upper East Side location.

Frost began Citibabes after moving from Sydney to New York 15 years ago, meeting her husband, and giving birth to her daughter Natasha in 2005. Living in an apartment in Tribeca, she explains she was "intrigued by how people were having kids without any extended family support network" in the city, and wanted to provide what she calls "a community aspect to families" that was lacking, despite the crowdedness of the city. Drawing on her background in finance, Frost developed a comprehensive business plan.

In November of 2005, Citibabes' doors opened; today, the club claims 700 members between its two locations—a number that is growing every day.

Although Citibabes offers families everything from treadmills to tomato soup, Frost maintains that the club's real focus is on education, beginning with prenatal classes for expecting mothers. Babies as young as three months can take part in classes like Baby Rockers and Baby Beats; 12-18-month-olds can enroll in Music Makers and French for Tots. All classes emphasize socialization, motor skill development, and spatial knowledge: what Frost calls the "building blocks" of the education program.

Once a child reaches 18 months, she is eligible for Citischool: a preschool beginning with Citischool Jr. and continuing up to age five. Citischool is an arts-based, experiential program whose philosophy falls somewhere between traditional and progressive theories of education. "The children's programs are incredibly innovative," Frost says. "We're constantly pushing the envelope...it's very New York. We like to consider it cutting-edge; we're constantly reinventing ourselves." Current class offerings are unique and varied, including Kids in Space, Myth Makers, Under the Big Top, Abracadabra and more. In addition, children can choose to enroll in music classes that rely on the innovative Suzuki method. The program even offers an after-school alternative called CitiBoys: classes that are tailored specifically to recent research detailing differences in the ways boys and girls acquire literacy skills.

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Citibabes clubs are not just for children, but for parents and caretakers as well. In addition to a café that offers kid and grown-up food, there are adult offerings such as parenting seminars, cocktail parties, trunk shows, Pilates, yoga, spinning, personal training sessions and a gym. Parents can also take advantage of the two-hour free babysitting service to work out, or even leave the club and run errands or meet friends for lunch. Nannies have a go-to rainy-day destination, and kids always have a fun place to play and learn.

Gently placing his 20-month-old daughter, Samantha, in her stroller, father of three Matt Wadley talks about the benefits of being a Citibabes member: "In New York City, you need a space that's not your apartment to take your kids to before they reach school age. It's a one-stop place for parents and nannies." Caroline Forsling, mother of two small boys, agrees. She comes to the club to eat in the café, work out and watch her sons play. The boys are also enrolled in the preschool program. "It's a community," she says.

And one that will continue to expand and grow. Frost's hope for the club is that more families will come to love Citibabes as much as she does. "I've met so many friends and learned so much," she says. "I can't imagine my life without it."

Citibabes, 52 Mercer Street, 3rd Floor, 1-800-697-0107, citibabes.com.