



Enter a world of books, toys and creative fun

The picturesque colonial bungalow with its cozy garden exudes an ambience of relaxing warmth. Mothers and fathers stroll through the store, browsing the toys, books and other knick-knacks, or sit down to a steaming cup of coffee and slice of cake while children run in the garden or clamber through the playhouse. Milk is a place where young families can spend a few hours shopping, playing and sampling the delicious wares of the health food oriented café.

Words Ayesha Inoon **Photographs** Damith Wickramasinghe

With its theme of promoting creativity, education, a love of reading and a healthy lifestyle, Milk provides a unique shopping experience for its patrons. The carefully selected range of books includes well-known classics for babies and toddlers such as The Gruffalo series, Goodnight Moon, The Very Hungry Caterpillar and other titles by Eric Carle. Books by renowned authors such as Roald Dahl, Rod Campbell, Michael Morpurgo and Julia

Donaldson and books featuring characters such as Maisy and Thomas the Tank Engine appeal to older children while parents can choose from a variety of parenting, lifestyle and cookery books.

The selection of toys at Milk are specifically aimed at promoting development and creativity in young children. The locally made wooden toys - puzzles, blocks, farm and zoo sets, boards and rolling pins for play-doh and more - are made to international safety standards and will provide hours of stimulating play for toddlers. Educational science kits, art and craft kits, board games and a range of V-tech toys in addition to the popular Ravensburger puzzles and Orchard toys, will keep parents returning to Milk each year to replenish their growing child's toy collection. A select choice of clothes for young children as well as Zoggs swimwear and accessories are also available.

Being agents for Philips AVENT, the store also features an AVENT showroom with the full range of their mother and baby care products, from breastfeeding, bottle feeding and toddler feeding products to baby monitors. Custom made nursery furniture and linen from Elegant Smockers invites young parents to put together their entire ensemble for their little one here.

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While shopping for family and friends is a wonderful experience at Milk, there are those who come here just to visit the café, 'Milk and Honey', where nutritious and healthy meals and snacks come in the form of mouthwatering dishes. The café serves only vegetarian food, with a number of options for special dietary requirements such as vegan and gluten-free items. Light lunches such as whole wheat wraps stuffed with vegetables, cheeses, hummus, falafels and more, Focaccia sandwiches, whole wheat pasta and salads served with pesto or hummus toast, are a tasty and healthy way to banish a midday slump. All the wraps and sandwiches contain seeds, nuts and sprouted pulses for added nutrition while the spreads, pesto and hummus are made fresh at the café.

The fact that desserts do not necessarily mean extravagant calories is reinforced in the delicious cakes, cookies and breakfast bars at the café, where the sweetness and flavour comes mainly from fruit rather than refined sugar. These sweet treats such as the carrot and orange cake, date and oat bar and a range of muffins are made with oats, whole wheat, red rice or kurakkan flour to ensure a slow release of energy rather than the quick high and low of a customary sweet made with refined flour.

The fruit juices and smoothies are a refreshing option on a hot day with combinations such as Apple, Carrot and Beet or Melon, Orange and Ginger, aiming to boost your energy, vitality and immunity. While organic fruits are used whenever possible, a range of spices such as turmeric, cinnamon, lemon grass and ginger have been added not just for an extra zing factor but also for their powerful anti-oxidant properties and other health benefits. For those who need their caffeine, Milk offers Cappuccino, Latte, Espresso, Iced Coffee or just a plain brew of hot coffee as well as a range of organic teas, which are best enjoyed with the delectable snacks.

Stroll into Milk on a weekend or the school summer holidays, and you will often find a group of kids enjoying activities organised by Milk such as book readings, cookery sessions, storytelling, puppetry, origami, creative writing or numerous other workshops that encourage learning and creativity. Occasionally they also host children's birthday parties in the garden, with art and craft activities as opposed to other traditional party themes.

"Milk was started with the concept of promoting healthier lifestyles from the time families are young," says Pri Ratnayake, Director of Milk as she emphasised on the concept behind this special store. It is a place where children and their parents can shop, play and enjoy a healthy and tasty meal with friends in a peaceful and welcoming atmosphere.

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