



No ruffled feathers on this family trip

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bright red Summer Tanagers and Black-cheeked Woodpeckers inching along the garden's branches with their dexterous claws. Costa Rica — and this region in particular — had a way of not just nudging, but shoving us into enthusiastic birding.

When we finally made it to Tenorio Volcano National Park, we were not disappointed. We hiked a kilometer through moss-covered tropical forest and then down 260 stairs to Río Celeste's stunning aqua waterfall. Over the next kilometer and a half of trail, we were rewarded with a blue lagoon, bubbling sulfuric pools and passage over rickety, one-person suspension bridges that left us feeling like Indiana Jones.

On our final morning in Bijagua, we were again late to leave, this time exploring our host's farm on a naturalists' treasure hunt we designed for the kids. For the requisite mammal on our list, Liam and Reid spotted a sloth and a troop of white-faced capuchin monkeys; termites, which they confirmed tasted like licorice, fulfilled the insect requirement; and a banana tree counted for the fruit.

Warm river swimming in Arenal

A two-hour drive from Bijagua brought us to the Arenal region, known for its volcano, active through 2010. Riding high from the birds in Bi-

jagua, we jumped out of bed each morning as soon as we heard the earliest roars of howler monkeys. Down a nearby farm road we were rewarded with a nesting colony of Montezuma Oropendolas, an eccentric black bird larger than crows, sporting an orange beak and yellow tail feathers. The females were busy weaving their huge, pendulous, teardrop-shaped nests, while the males, like living coo-coo clocks, provided outlandish cheerleading support with their bubbling calls, each one punctuated by a full upside-down flip.

With the constant tease of the volcano on the horizon, we spent one day hiking in Arenal Volcano National Park. Starting on the jungly Heliconias Trail, we wound our way along the 3½-kilometer path up to the periphery of an old lava flow. The kids hopped from one volcanic boulder to the next before we retreated to the shade of a giant Ceiba tree for our picnic lunch.

The real Arenal highlight for young and old was the abundant geothermal water. We made constant use of our hotel's soothing hot pool, but also ventured out to soak in Río Chollín, a free-access, warm river. Even my mom, a woman known to wear wool turtle-necks in June, was soon leaning back into the current with a smile on her face. The kids popped on their goggles and wriggled around in the pools, looking for fish, but their biggest find was a tiny green lizard, which ran



PHOTOS BY KATIE QUIRK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Collared Aracarís (far left) and a black-mandibled toucan (left) in Bijagua. Above, the writer's parents hike down to a waterfall in Tenorio Volcano National Park.

their eerie web of roots strangling host tree trunks, and wild avocado trees teaming with orchids, air plants, droopy moss and Tarzan-like vines. Much to our delight, we spotted a red-bellied Resplendent Quetzal with its fluffy green head and long tail feathers drifting in the wind. As always, we stopped just outside the reserve's gates at Café Colibrí to ooh and aah at the nine varieties of hummingbirds that frequent their feeders.

Yes, a Costa Rican beach-resort trip would have been easier to plan — and perhaps even more relaxing in the moment — but we emerged from our 10-day hiking and birding adventure with so many salient memories of shared discovery. I'd trade in a piña colada next to a pool for the excited passing-of-the-binoculars between my parents and their grandchildren any day.

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along the surface of the river, covering about 10 feet in three seconds.

Traipsing through the cloud forest

Our last stop was Monteverde, where the cloud forest drapes over the

Continental Divide, and where my husband, kids, and I were living for a sabbatical year. We led my parents along our favorite trail in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, peering up at giant tree ferns, ficus trees with

Legoland resort is for master builders of all ages

By Jerry Soverinsky
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Located an hour's drive west of Orlando in Winter Haven, Legoland Florida Resort occupies the former site of Cypress Gardens, a garden and theme park that operated from 1936 to 2009. Comprising a theme park, water park, and adjacent Legoland hotel, Legoland is an intimate campus of everything Lego. A new property, Legoland Beach Retreat, opened last year and sits across the street from the park.

While park visitors can opt for non-Lego lodging, generous promotions at the Lego properties diminish the economic appeal of those alternatives. So why go elsewhere?

The frenetic activity begins early each day, when the breakfast buffet (included in all room packages) opens to guests. There's no shortage of options.

Lego pits provide built-in fun for kids. A video room plays an endless loop of Lego movies, a quiet nook for parents and kids to unwind. Bedrooms at the hotel are Lego-themed and include bunk beds for kids, which are separated from the master living area.

Both the hotel and beach retreat offer large and inviting outdoor pools, which are fairly quiet during park hours, and therefore great for parents seeking some R&R. There are complimentary build classes at the hotel, taught by an actual Lego master builder. Participation tops out at a dozen or so participants, making preregistration essential. The classes fill primarily with kids, though adults jockey for the coveted classroom spots, too.

In contrast to Orlando parks, Legoland is not a mosh pit of Fast Pass-toting thrill-seekers. Its atmosphere is far more relaxed, with most attractions accessible in just a day.

As a first stop, caffeinate at the Market Coffee Shop, located steps away from the park entrance. Espresos help kickstart the day.

From there, you'll discover numerous mini-parks that cater to a variety of Lego-inspired interests. All ages will appreciate Miniland, a staggering collection of miniature cities and themes — New York, Star Wars, etc. — constructed with more than 32 million



CHIP LITHERLAND/LEGOLAND FLORIDA, MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS GROUP (HOTEL, WATER PARK, CYPRESS GARDENS LEGO BUILD)



Legoland in Winter Haven has (clockwise from top) a Lego-themed hotel, theme park rides, and a water park. Legoland has also features a botanical garden, a nod to its occupying the former site of Cypress Gardens.

Lego bricks. (Be sure not to miss the Golden Gate bridge.)

There are separate lands to explore (DUPLO Valley, LEGO Kingdoms, LEGO Technic, NINJAGO World, World of Chima) and a seasonal water park.



Embracing the park's Cypress Gardens connection, there is also a well-preserved botanical garden. The magical Banyan tree is a peaceful oasis for any parent. There's also a water show, in which human pyramids water ski

across a bay. At night, return to that spot for a fireworks display, enhanced by 3-D bursts of virtual Lego pieces.

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If you go . . .

Winter Haven is less than one hour from both Orlando and Tampa. A Legoland shuttle operates daily from Orlando and costs \$5 per person; reservations required. Call 877-350-5346 to book a spot. Onsite parking at the hotel and beach resort is free; parking at the theme park is \$25.23 plus tax (2018). Check out legoland.com and www.winterhavenchamber.com/visit.html.

Book reservations at the Legoland Hotel and Beach Resort at legoland.com or call 888-690-5346. Legoland offers hotel packages at its onsite properties as well as partner Winter Haven hotels: vacations.legoland.com/florida/booking/accommodation.html.

Otherwise, visit the Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce website for a list of area accommodations: web.winterhavenchamber.com/Lodging-Travel-Tourism.

Purchase tickets at legoland.com, with multiple packages available. Tickets start at \$79.99 (adult) and \$74.99 (child), though many inclusive packages lower these costs, including second-day-free park privileges.