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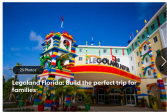


The coldest town in every state

Build the perfect Legoland Florida trip for kids and adults

Jerry Sovereignty, Special to USA TODAY

Published 8:05 a.m. ET Feb. 12, 2019



Legoland Florida: Build the perfect trip for families



My 6-year-old son is a huge Lego fan, so deciding on a Legoland Florida vacation was a selfless act of parenting, right? Putting my son's travel interests ahead of my own? Kind of.

Truth is, I also love Lego, reflexively offering assistance to my son whenever he begins a build. "Come on, the pieces don't sort themselves," I'm likely to say, requesting next to him at the kitchen table as I begin separating them by color.

My son, on the other hand, doesn't sort pieces by color. He prefers building in relative quiet, not while listening to my NPR podcasts, which he says make everyone worried, if not flugal. My being the grownup (and with my wife reminding me of the same), I always defer to my son's building preference, even if that means sweating hard when he liberally mixes themes, like Darth Vader playing with Duplo characters. For instance,

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So when my wife and I decided recently to surprise our son by taking him to Legoland, it was with the understanding, of course, that the trip would cater to his interests. And with the park marketing itself as targeting the 2-12 crowd, that would be the line option anyway, right?

"Right?" my wife demanded, her finger hovering over her computer's return key, waiting to finalize our online vacation package purchase.

"Of course," I whispered somberly. "Of course."

But with Turok and Calico taking a back seat to Legoland, I wondered whether grown-ups — Lego lovers or otherwise — could also experience a rewarding Legoland vacation.

The answer is a resounding "yes." Children are certain to enjoy their Legoland experience, but parents will find plenty of appealing travel options whether they're fans of the studded brick or not. It just takes a bit of careful, creative planning.



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Where

Located 58 miles west of Orlando in Winter Haven, Florida, Legoland occupies part of the former Cypress Gardens, a historical garden and theme park (1938-2007). Legoland Florida is a sprawling landscape of everything Lego including a theme park, water park, adjacent Legoland Florida Resort (hotel) and nearby Beach Retreat (bungalows).

What

While there are myriad non-Lego accommodations nearby, Legoland properties are inconceivably convenient and include generous park promotions.

The hotel features Lego-themed rooms, and its main level is a sprawling common area of free build areas, pure nirvana for the brick-building crowd. The activity remains frenetic for most of the day, though over-stressed parents, first noc. On the perimeter of the hotel's free build area sits a well-appointed bar where grownups can indulge while keeping an eye on the built-focused mesh pit of kids, which morphs into a boisterous dance party on most nights.



Swimmers seeking a seamless Lego-building experience, first noc. , lounge breaks are plentiful in the pool at the Legoland Hotel. (Photo: Chip-Edmond, Last + Long)

The beach retreat lies across the street from the park and features more than 100 duplex bungalows, a far more tranquil atmosphere but no less fun for kids. A lighthouse-themed common building features a restaurant, gift shop and bar, and the outside pool includes a fire pit where guests can lounge on late-night c'mones.

Both accommodations offer brilliant pool facilities (floating Lego bricks are a great touch), which were rarely used during park hours (hint, hint to parents desiring down time). The hotel also offers daily master build classes, which include a hands-on tutorial from an actual Lego master builder.

While the master builder classes fill primarily with the property's target audience, there are no shortage of grownups jockeying for the limited spots. "And what's your name," the instructor said to one dad, who had snagged a front-row seat, an infant sleeping soundly in his baby carrier. "She's Hannah," he replied, gesturing to his daughter. "Just helping her out with the build." I get it, I think to myself, being careful to avoid eye contact with my wife.

Fit bit

Both properties lack a fitness room, though I was able to get in 3-mile workouts each morning, running a handful of laps around the park's massive, empty parking lot, just steps away from our hotel. I know, it sounds pathetic and perhaps dangerous, but at 6:45 a.m., the lot was nearly deserted. Those seeking heavy resistance training will probably be left wanting, though if you're got younger kids, I suspect you'll get ample muscle burn tiring them around at the end of the day.

Main attraction

Legoland's park atmosphere is somewhat relaxed and even our 8-year-old with average leg stides could comfortably access most of the park's attractions in one day.

All guests will appreciate Miniland, a collection of Lego-built miniaturized cities comprised of more than 32 million Lego bricks. San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge in particular is stunning. I marveled at its construction for more than 40 minutes, trying to detect the slightest pixelation (I couldn't) before my wife finally pulled me away.



Miniland presents iconic landscapes from around the world, built out of millions of Lego bricks. (Photo: TripAdvisor, 2008 + 2012)

Other subparks (Duplo Valley, Lego Kingdoms, Lego Technic, Ninjago World, World of China) offer rides that vary in velocity and twistiness. All family members will love The Great Lego Race, a roller coaster enhanced by virtual reality. Try it with or without the VR mask; it's equally exciting either way. A new subpark, The Lego Movie World, will open this spring. Finally, there's a seasonal water park that offers hands-on Lego raft-building options, along with multiple water slides and rides.

Ride-free options

The well-preserved Cypress Gardens park offers an adrenaline break that's ideal for weary adults, who can sit in silence under its massive banyan tree, eating their kids' snacks while checking social media.

Continuing a Cypress Gardens tradition, there's a daily waterlogging show where expert skiers act out a family-friendly adventure story, incorporating human pyramids and other water stunts. We returned to the spot at night for a fireworks display, which was enhanced by 3D bursts of virtual Lego pieces.

The family that travels together ...

Legoland Florida may indeed be a haven for the age 3-12 crowd, but there's enough on hand for both kids and adults to enjoy a Lego-centric getaway, whether they possess pieces or not. And it's all in the context of an eminently rewarding family vacation.

If you go

Arrival: Winter Haven is less than one hour from both Orlando and Tampa. A [Legoland shuttle](#) operates daily from Orlando; reservations required.

Parking: Onsite parking at the hotel and beach resort is free for paying guests. Otherwise, parking abounds at the park and costs \$20.

Tourism information: Visit [legoland.com](#) and [winterhavenchamber.com](#) for detailed visitor information.

Lodging: Book reservations and stay-and-play packages for the Legoland Hotel and Beach Resort at [legoland.com](#) or call 888-680-5345.

Legoland tickets: Purchase tickets on the Legoland website. Tickets start at \$85.99 (adult) and \$80.99 (child). Though many inclusive packages and multi-day passes decrease these per-day costs.

Fast-track tickets allow you to bypass crowd lines – though during Christmas week, our longest wait was under 20 minutes.

U.S. service members with a valid military ID are admitted free to the resort and water park, no blackout dates. Non-active duty service members, veterans and their family members receive [discounted park admission and hotel rates](#).



Construction is underway for the Legoland Pirate Island Hotel, seen here in a rendering, which will feature 150 pirate-themed rooms spread out over five floors, a private pool and more. (Photo: Legoland Florida)

Coming soon, mateys!

Owing to its growing popularity, Legoland Florida Resort is adding another hotel to its campus, the Legoland Pirate Hotel. The overriding theme favorite as voted on by Legoland fans, the pirate-themed property will connect to the Legoland hotel and feature 150 pirate-themed rooms spread out over five floors, a private pool and more (available to the public).

Coming really soon

On March 27, Legoland Florida Resort welcomes the Lego Movie World to its expanding park campus. Integrating elements of its eponymous movie and sequel, the Lego Movie World will feature three rides: The Lego Movie Masters of Flight (featuring Emmet's Triple-Decker Couch), Unikitty's Disco Drop and the Battle of Bricksburg, with alien-like Duplo characters spraying water at riders.

In tandem with the subject's opening, The Legoland Hotel will renovate a number of rooms to incorporate Lego Movie-themed rooms. Designed with familiar scenery and characters from the movies, including a bar inspired by Emmet's bedroom, it will seamlessly integrate the movie experience from hotel and park visitors.