

Legoland!

Entertaining and Safeguarding Your Children



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I am the proud grandmother of two fabulous grandsons. Of course it is cliché to wax romantic about the virtues of grand parenting so suffice it to say that seeing the chain of life continue into a new generation erases any remnants of pessimism rambling around an aging soul.

With the advent of spring comes a certain maternal instinct that makes you long to plan a family retreat complete with sons, daughters-in-law and those marvelous grandchildren. We took the whole brood to Legoland. Four generations of men came along for the adventure- my husband, the 16-year old “heavy metal” lover, the thirty-something father/son, and the two toddlers. Could the thrill of a perfectly proportioned, interlocking, primary-colored, plastic block entertain all of these men simultaneously? The family put Legoland to the test.

One might imagine that I would write about the fun of the new Wild Woods Golf attraction or, maybe, the Knight’s Tournament, the first robo-coaster in North America, or, perhaps, the first model construction of New York’s Freedom Tower build entirely out of Legos. All of these attractions are worthy of both mention and praise but there was something special and very unexpected about our trip to Legoland, something that surpasses the theme park experience and allows me to recommend it as an outing for any family, regardless of their ages.

What is this cutting-edge, adrenaline-powered, entertainment, you might ask? Much like the essence of the entire Seinfeld television series, it was nothing or rather, the absence of everything you expect in a theme park. The walking lanes were wide-open spaces lined by beautifully manicured gardens. Many of the attractions were powered by the energy of parent and kid in tandem. The pace was almost serene allowing kids to play with abandon, adults to saunter peacefully and teen-agers to while away hours in the Imagination Zone challenging their engineering skills with Lego Mindstorms and Technics. There was enough quiet to allow for conversation without the interruption of blasting mechanized sound. There were nooks of low-tech play areas where a parent felt invited to join their small children in a sand pit or an aqua zone. There were healthy restaurants with organic salads, wood-fired pizza, homemade soups and Granny’s Apple Fries.

To my surprise, a day at Legoland with the entire family felt like a vacation in Europe, complete with the serenity of gardens, light music in the air, good food and a respect for the quality of an experience. As opposed to the pressured frenzy of fast-paced attraction cruising through a sugar-driven, energy-spiked day, this was a cherished memory.

The park was reasonably priced. The drive from Los Angeles takes you along the southern California coast and into the tulip fields of Carlsbad- two locations that only serve to remind all of us of our privileged status as Californians. Next time you wish you could afford to take the WHOLE family on a trip to Europe just pack up the car and head for Legoland. It promises the experience of Europe on a shoestring budget.

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A product or service is only a product or service until you marry it with a lifestyle, then you’ve bred a brand. Brands are not unlike babies. Once birthed by a good idea and a generous dose of passion, they require nurturing, guidance and an overall master plan towards realizing adulthood. Joining our oldest son, his wife and our 2 grandsons, we recently carpooled to Legoland. Located in Carlsbad just a few leisurely hours drive south of Los Angeles, it’s a splendid trip for a spring day.

What does Legoland have to do with a brand? The LEGO spirit comes from the Danish words “leg godt” which means to “play well.” Kids around the world understand building blocks, and Legoland pushes the concept of the basic building block to the max.

Remember the saying, “the building blocks of life?” – you get it, and so does LEGO.

Fortunately for us, before Legoland opened to the public in the spring of 1999, Suzanne and I were invited to take a private park tour with Karl, Legoland’s uberbrick brand manager at the time. With his eagle eye for detail, nary a brick missed Karl’s scrutiny. As we strolled through the park with its pre-opening paint still drying, he enthusiastically pointed out every minute and larger-than-life architectural project that represented the life of the LEGO brick.

Our grandsons, now 2 and 4 years old could have exclusively played the day away at the IMAGINATION ZONE, a free-play area with plenty of tables, buckets and storage bins full of LEGO bricks to build whatever the imagination conjures. Understanding that kids are competitive, raked race tracks like those of the pine box derby type are provided. We had to literally pull the grandkids away from this simple but interactive attraction to get on with our day.

Want to see how an actual LEGO brick is made? A trip to the FUN TOWN Factory has an actual working brick machine that presses plastic bricks in real time. It’s neat to watch the process from the injection mold to how each brick gets placed in its package. This same area also offers a pint-sized driving school where kids learn to drive and earn their first driver’s license. Watching your young ones behind the wheel of even a toy car, this attraction will fast forward the life of any young parent into their child’s teenage fantasy world!

Upon entering the park, one is immediately transported to a world on a child’s scale.

My first impression of Legoland was how fanciful, colorful and clean it was. The park’s overall ambiance is refreshingly low key and calm compared to the higher adrenaline coaster parks geared for speed addicts. The main restaurant in FUN TOWN offers a wide variety of healthy food including fresh salads, sandwiches and soups. Fear not – Legoland also offers a fair share of finger licking, sugarcoated foods to keep the tooth fairy busy (the deep-fried apple fries are exceptional).

Legoland’s landscaping is mature, full of flowers and flowing water from park entrance to exit. Beyond the food, a pleasing spirit of treacle pervades throughout this park – personally speaking, in these days of needing to be socially defensive and always on the alert to danger, what could be better than playing in a kettle of kindness for a day with your kids?

Above it all, Legoland exudes a sense of protecting its own proverbial baby – the integrity of its LEGO brick. Take courage parents - they do a great job of entertaining and safeguarding your babies too!