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The front entrance to Legoland's newest addition, the Castle Hotel, is shown April 17 in Carlsbad, Calif. The hotel, still under construction, is scheduled to open in a few weeks.

Legoland's latest hotel in California is an interlocking wonder of a castle that will thrill the kids (and bring a smile to adults' faces, too)

**By LORI WEISBERG**OF THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

ARLSBAD, Calif.

— You might call it Lego on steroids.

From the moment young kids are greeted in the hotel lobby by a towering Lego wizard who stages a surprise light show to when they crawl into their bunk beds and gaze up to see a shooting star, they are transported to a medieval castle inhabited by more than 2,000 Lego-crafted characters.

And that's even before a visit to Legoland next door.

Last week, the Carlsbad theme park debuted the 250-room Castle Hotel, its second onsite hotel in five years. Conceived four years ago, the latest lodging project capitalizes on the broad appeal of all things Lego, from licensed films and video games to the brand's toy sets and its familiar swivel-armed brick characters.

Legoland's parent company, British-based Merlin Entertainments, is also embracing a savvy business strategy honed decades

ago by entertainment behemoth Disney: Build a hotel at your theme park and they will come.

Globally, Legoland has eight branded hotels, most of which opened over the last six years. By comparison, Disney boasts 37 that it owns and operates at its theme parks, with nearly half of those at Walt Disney World in Florida. In Anaheim, work is expected to start this year on a new 700-room luxury hotel, which will be the Disneyland Resort's fourth theme park hotel.

Universal, which for years did little to expand its hotel portfolio, has been ramping up development in recent years, while the SeaWorld-branded parks have no hotels of their own.

"As a professor of the industry, I've always thought the hotels made sense and not just for the reason it is copying the most successful competitor in the marketplace," said Martin Lewison, a theme park expert and business management professor at Farmingdale State College in New York. "Having a hotel makes the park feel more like a resort, which are popular because everything is taken care of you and you get all those characters in your room.

"And it's definitely worth noting you can charge a lot more for a room that has all the bells and whis-

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**ABOVE:** The main lobby entrance to the Castle Hotel in California, which is still under construction, is shown on April 17. It features a 5-foot tall Lego model of a bearded wizard and a spiral chandelier that lights up at the touch of an oversized button. **BELOW:** Lego sculptures are scattered throughout the lobby of the Castle Hotel including a Lego jester atop a piano. — PHOTOS BY Nelvin C. Cepeda of the San Diego Union-Tribune.



# **Knights, wizards and dragons**

**By LORI WEISBERG**OF THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

Here are some of the highlights of Legoland's new 250-room Castle Hotel, which boasts 2,100 Lego models crafted from more than 3 million Lego bricks.

# > Grand hall

Greeting guests in the lobby is a 5-foot tall Lego model of a bearded wizard standing atop a pile of Lego spell books. With the tap of an oversized button, a spiraling chandelier overhead lights up with colored and white lights, the wizard speaks and the spiraling fixture speeds up. Nearby

is a slide that carries kids from the first floor down to the lobby.

## > Rooms that tell a story

Knights and dragons:
The decor depicts the knights' mission to defend the king's castle and protect his treasure from the approaching bad knights and dragons. In the children's bedroom, a sign embedded in the carpet warns, "No feeding the dragons."

Cool feature: A menacing-looking red and yellow dragon model, standing 2 feet tall, is one of the most intricate Lego depictions ever created for a Legoland hotel.

Royal princess: Decorated in shades of lime green, magenta and blue with woodland animals and butterflies, the room is all about the princess joining forces with her friend the jester to sneak into the coming tournament and compete with the knights.

Cool feature: Headboard for parents' bed is a bright pink and green canopy that sparkles with twinkling lights.

Magic wizard: Imagery revolves around tournament preparations by the wizards as they get together and concoct fun potions and fireworks. Decorated in splashes of purple and gold, the room shows off a Lego owl family tree in the corner.

Cool feature: Headboard of the adult bed doubles as shelves filled with potion bottles and a magical bubbling cauldron illuminated with pulsing lights.

# > Dragon's Den restaurant and bar

Scattered throughout are impressive Lego models, among them knights delivering food for the royal banquet and a sleepy-eyed mom dragon splayed atop a fireplace mantel as she waits for her eggs to hatch below. Nearby is a self-playing piano.

# > Outdoor courtyard and play area

- Tented stage for live
- entertainment.Multiple play areas

segmented for different age groups, with slides and jungle gym-style equipment reserved for older kids.

- Resort-style pool with a water fountain and two water-filled tipping baskets that douse guests in the pool from above.
- Movie screenings on a giant LCD screen.

## > Laugh-inducing moments

- Royal throne masquerading as a whoopee cushion. Sit down and unexpected sounds follow, including a fart noise.
- Jester knock knock door. Positioned near the elevator, a door knocker activates the voice of a jester fond of telling knock-knock jokes: "Knock knock, who's there? Jest-er-minute, I'm still thinking."