



PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

Carlsbad's long stretches of open beach are the perfect playground for toddlers to search for buried treasure, shells and building sand castles.

CALIFORNIA

San Diego a toddler's playground

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SPECIAL TO THE SUN

My two-year old daughter already has a case of wanderlust.

She talks about hotels, planes and restaurants non-stop. I think it was San Diego that sealed the deal for travel.

Powder sand beaches, ocean-front resorts, wildlife parks and a land filled with Lego. If toddlers ruled the world, this would be our reality. With so many children's activities available, we divided our time between Coronado Island in the south and Carlsbad in the north.

Coronado is a sun-kissed visual feast. Quaint storefronts and colourful historic homes, with perfectly manicured gardens reflect a host of architectural styles, including Craftsman, Spanish Colonial and Italian Renaissance Revival.

While the island's picture-perfect beauty may have been lost on my daughter, the iconic Hotel Del Coronado made quite

the impression. The expansive Victorian style beachfront property looks like a seaside castle, and our suite — the Octopus — reflected this whimsical theme.

It's a kid's fairy-tale room, with ocean-inspired decor and a toy chest filled with games, puzzles and books.

Daddy and daughter combed the beach so that mama could hit The Del spa.

After my 80-minute Shell Coronado Facial and Goddess of the Sea body wrap, I barely made it out of the spa's infinity pool.

Just a short drive from Coronado, in downtown San Diego, is Balboa Park. Although it's home to the San Diego Zoo, we focused on the smaller attractions like the Miniature Railroad, historic carousel and Marie Hitchcock Puppet Theatre.

On our second night, we booked a babysitter through the hotel concierge and strolled along Orange Avenue to Chez Loma for dinner. Like many of the businesses in Coronado, the bistro is in a perfectly restored historical home.

From the name, I was expecting traditional French cuisine; however Chef Alejandro Martinez infuses the menu with a Mexican flair.

I went with our waiter's recommendation, the Ceviche 'Verde' with rockfish, tomatillo sauce and avocado. To date it's the best ceviche I've had.

From Coronado, we drove 45 minutes north to the Four Seasons Aviara in Carlsbad. The property is a residence club made up of villas with fully equipped kitchens and laundry facilities — ideal for families. As we were there for just three nights, I booked the bed and breakfast rate.

In-room dining is a lifesaver with small children and ordering breakfast to the room was a big hit. By Day 2, our daughter was asking when her pancakes would be arriving.

The highlight of her stay, however, was our in-suite Private Chef Dinner — a fantastic interactive dining experience for the whole family.

Next we went to California



Larger-than-life toys are on display for kids of all ages at Legoland California.

Legoland, only a 15-minute drive from the Four Seasons.

Our favourite activities were the Swabbles Deck splash park at Pirate Shores and the Duplo Village Playtown playground.

Anticipating our daughter's appreciation for anything water related, we brought a bathing suit, towel, change of clothes and lots of water, snacks and sunscreen.

The San Diego Zoo Safari Park is another home run for toddlers. In addition to gorillas, lion cubs, giraffes and other wildlife, there are two interactive water parks, a playground and a petting zoo.

We took the 25-minute Africa Tram ride, which is about the maximum amount of time a two-year-old will sit.

A stash of leftover pancakes from breakfast helped. Kids two and under are free and all money spent at the park supports wildlife conservation.

Nothing wears out a toddler like a day at the beach.

So on the morning of our flight home, we grabbed chairs, towels and toys from Aviara's concierge and hit the beach in Carlsbad.

Scouring for seashells and buried treasure, building sand-castles and running through the surf was just enough activity to produce a peaceful sleep on the plane ride home.

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