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## Kids can stay, play and eat for free in San Diego



### Mari's Moments

Making my way through motherhood, one moment at a time



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LA JOLLA, CALIF. — As a family of four, we're always looking for ways to save money.

In Texas, I've become a master of [finding deals](#) in which kids can eat and play for free. So, it was with great pleasure that I found that an entire city devotes a whole month for kids to eat, stay and play for free.

Each year, San Diego organizes [free deals for children](#) for the month of October. More than 100 restaurants, venues and hotels participate, which means big savings for a family vacation.

Gathered from [past jaunts to the San Diego area](#) and a recent trip to [La Jolla](#), here are my ways to get super savings during Kids Free San Diego month.

### Where to stay



The Grande Colonial Hotel is in the heart of La Jolla, a seaside community just north of San Diego. It's perfectly situated for families to enjoy a stroll through the bustling nightlife that includes art galleries, museums and restaurants.



Ninja player practices his hand movements outside the new 3D Ninjago the Ride at Legoland California. **Maricar Estrella** - Star-Telegram

On an evening stroll, we found the [Legends Gallery](#), which houses original and rarely seen artwork from the popular children's book author Dr. Seuss, aka Theodor Seuss Geisel. In 1948, Geisel purchased an observation tower in La Jolla, which became his primary residence for the remainder of his life.

Inside the gallery, where admission is free, you'll see some of the original artwork from Geisel's beloved children's tales as well as some "secret art" from the Seuss archives that includes whimsical depictions of La Jolla socialites.



Aside from the proximity to the La Jolla nightlife, the Grande Colonial offers luxurious rooms with breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean.

Did I mention the hotel may be haunted? Established in 1913, it is the oldest original hotel in La Jolla, and there have been rumors of paranormal sightings from guests and staff.

During our stay, we found a direct path to the lobby that felt like we were going through a secret passageway, down a flight steps, past the kitchen and through a barn-type door. Unfortunately, we didn't encounter any ghosts, just spirited staff members.

### Where to eat



The Grande Colonial also offers a great dining experience. Zagat-rated [Nine-Ten restaurant](#) has a children's menu that will appeal to all budding palates.

Speaking of the regular menu, my teenager and husband had the delectable jerk chicken, a nod to executive chef Jason Knibb's Jamaican roots. The chicken was surrounded by fresh vegetables including carrots, maitake mushrooms, Bloomsdale spinach, scallions, sweet habañero relish plantain, and yuzu puree.

I chose the pumpkin seed and sage crusted beef short rib, a delicious fall concoction tastefully served with a mixture of shredded and crispy Brussels sprouts, roasted pear, huckleberry gastrique and kabocha squash puree.

For casual fare, visit Old Town San Diego and dine outside in the courtyard at Casa Guadalajara. With purchase of an adult entree, kids can choose from Mexican fare that includes a bean-and-cheese burrito, cheese quesadilla or rolled taco.

### Where to play



My 6-year-old loves heading out to Grapevine to play at Legoland Discovery Center. So, it's no wonder that his first request when traveling to San Diego is to visit the "Big Legoland." Plus, kids get in free with each paid adult admission during October.

At Legoland California, a quick 20-minute drive from San Diego to Carlsbad, there are more than 60 rides and a water park. The recently opened Ninjago land and ride let ninjas-in-training test their skills at climbing, balance and fighting.

The 3-D Ninjago the Ride is a high-tech version of the shoot-em up Kingdom Quest Laser Ride in Grapevine. Instead of guns, you use hand movements to defeat the bad guys. It's an aerobic workout, for sure, and a great way to have some good, competitive family fun.



The new *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* Miniland model display includes new scenes and characters from the blockbuster film. Is that Rey rescuing BB-8? Why, yes, it is.

For big families, the [San Diego Zoo deal](#) during Kids Free San Diego beats them all. Up to 10 children get in free per each paid supervising adult admission. Families can explore the award-winning zoo, which is celebrating its 100th year, with a special Centennial Treasure Hunt that calls for listing all of the zoo's wildlife treasures for a prize.

You can also upgrade your child's experience for \$12 to get the guided bus tour, kangaroo bus and Skyfari aerial tram.

The aerial tram is my 6-year-old's favorite form of transportation at the zoo with its bird's-eye view of nearby Balboa Park. It's a nice respite for exhausted parents, too.