Legoland hotel in California offers glimpse of Florida plans

By Sara K. Clarke, Orlando Sentinel

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A hotel taking shape across the country could give a glimpse into what lies ahead for Legoland Florida.

Construction has started on the first Legoland Hotel in the U.S., at the Legoland in Southern California. With its themed rooms, kooky Lego sculptures and family-friendly suites, the hotel could provide insight into what Merlin Entertainments has planned for Legoland Florida in Winter Haven.

Since the Florida park's opening last fall, Merlin has made it clear the theme park will eventually add a hotel. Though details on Legoland Florida's hotel plans are scarce, California's property promises brightly colored Lego decor and rooms themed after popular Lego play sets, such as Pirate, Kingdom and Adventure.

Rooms will have Lego wallpaper, models made of Legos and a treasure chest. Public areas have design elements such as a river of Lego bricks running through the lobby floor, a display of Lego mini-figures behind the front desk and an outdoor patio decorated with Lego palm trees.

The 250-room hotel in Carlsbad, Calif., slated to open summer 2013, already has revealed the first Lego model built for the property, a 6-foot-tall bellhop built out of more than 37,000 bricks.

"There's just too much to do within the resort in just one day, so by staying at the hotel, guests can now enjoy everything we have to offer and take their time while doing so," said Julie Estrada, a spokeswoman for Legoland California.

Merlin executives said last fall they expect the Legoland Florida hotel to open in 2014 or 2015.

"A hotel is most definitely in our future. It's part of our commitment to evolve into a resort destination and create a multi-day experience for our guests," said Adrian Jones, general manager of Legoland Florida. "Right now, we're focused on opening our water park attraction May 26 and meeting the high demands of our first summer. Needless to say, we can't wait to start the planning process."

The timeline makes sense to Peter Ricci, director of the hospitality-management program at Florida Atlantic University.

"By then they'll have at least two full cycles of attendance," Ricci said. "They can see the impact on the existing hotels [in Winter Haven]."

In the meantime, Legoland has partnered with local hotels that pay a fee to be part of its "Bed & Brick" referral program. But — provided the park draws enough people — a hotel specifically tied into the park's theme could do well, he said.

"They're going to have synergy. The marketing team of the park, the collateral, the brochures … everything will direct people to their hotel," Ricci said.
The two existing Legoland hotels — in Windsor, England, and Billund, Denmark — include similar themes as the California project. They, too, have rooms based on the franchises that have thrived as Lego toys. Three-dimensional elements emerge from Lego wallpaper, with the theme carried through with the bedding, carpets and other areas of the hotel room.

Work has already begun on the fourth Legoland Hotel, beside the Legoland Malaysia theme park in Nusajaya, Johor. That park is slated to open at the end of this year, with the hotel opening in 2014.