

# The SLIME of Your Life

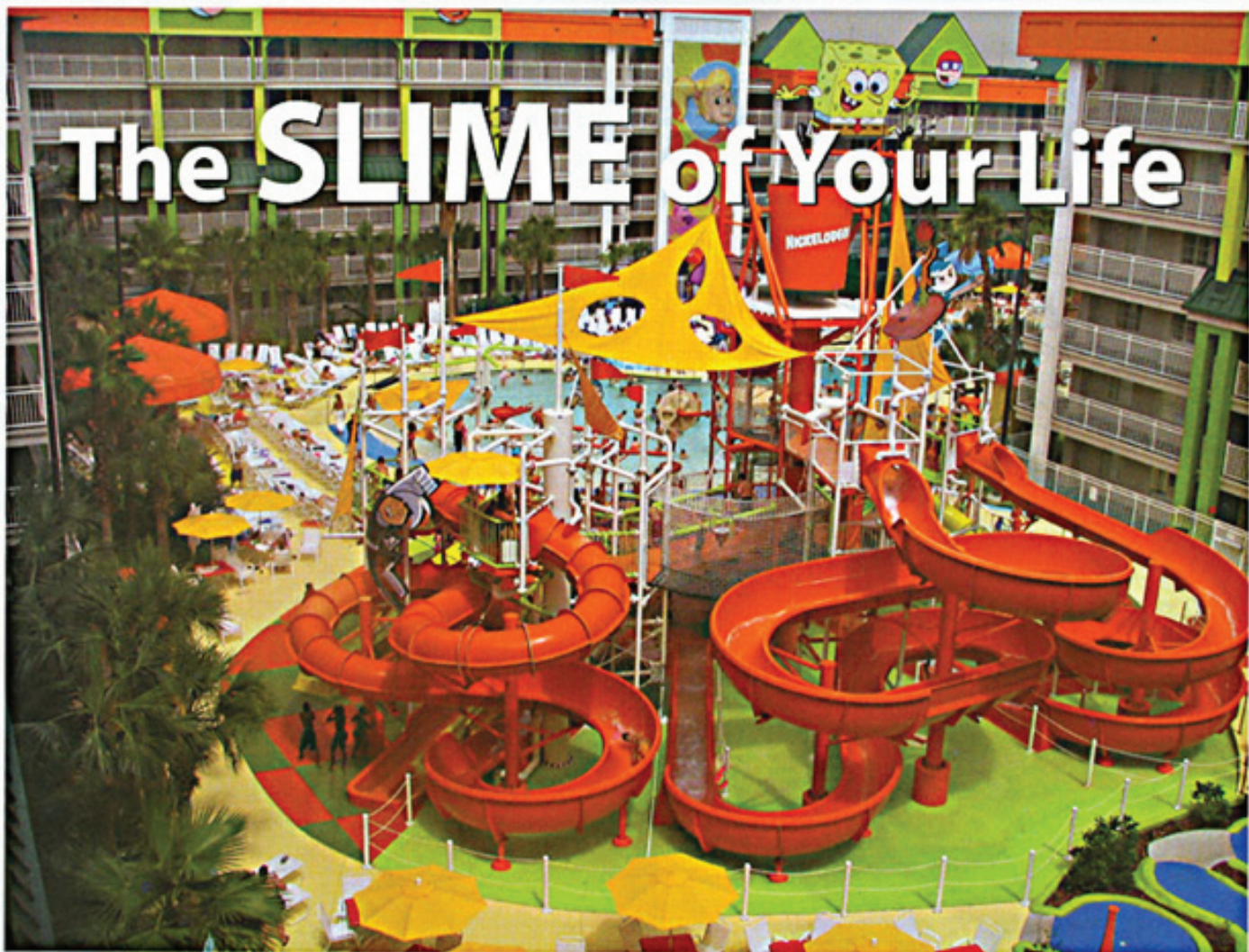


PHOTO: THOMAS RHEIN

## Don't be such a Squidward—the Nickelodeon Hotel caters to kids of all ages

By DINA SANTORELLI

ANY PARENT WORTH HER SLIME KNOWS A THING OR TWO ABOUT SPONGEBOB, Dora the Explorer and the rest of the Nickelodeon Channel's headliners. (Personally, I could probably recite dialog from *SpongeBob Squarepants* episodes the way most people do *Seinfeld*.) So when my husband and I decided it was finally time to take a trip down to Orlando—our first family vacation, the five of us on a plane—we thought we'd try the Nickelodeon Hotel, or, to be exact, the Nickelodeon Family Suites by Holiday Inn.

On word of our decision, the kids went wild. "There's a TV in every room," yelled my seven-year-old daughter, mimicking the television commercials. Great, I thought—television was exactly the thing we were trying to get away from. But there we were in Orlando, in the middle of May, in the middle of a heat

wave, driving our rental minivan toward that great, big orange-and-green building—television heaven on earth.

In addition to offering multiple round-the-clock viewing, the Nick Hotel is conveniently right down the road from Disney World, and it also has two massive water complexes, which figured heavily in our decision to stay there. The other cool thing is that all the rooms are suites; because my parents were joining us on our Floridian journey, we booked the three-bedroom accommodations, which also had two bathrooms, a kitchen with a fridge and microwave, counter, dining area and living room. Really nice.

Also, when I booked my trip I was sure to reserve seating for the Nickelodeon character breakfast in the Nicktoons café the morning after our arrival. Since I had been unable to secure any type of character dining experience at

Disney—those die-hards start reserving months in advance!—I wanted to be sure that the kids would be guaranteed to see *somebody* that they knew *somewhere*.

Actually, the Nick character breakfast turned out to be one of the highlights of the trip. I had been a little concerned that my four-year-old son might be afraid of the life-sized characters, but we had to pry him away from kissing Wanda of *The Fairly Oddparents* on the lips! And he couldn't stop laughing when Patrick, SpongeBob's dim-witted best buddy, shook his butt while he danced. My mom still talks about it.

Of course, all this dining fun comes at a price—nearly 20 bucks per eater—but we only did it once, and the rest of the non-character buffet breakfasts and dinners seemed like bargains, with up to four children eating for free from a selected menu for every full-paying

adult. And we also tried to be smart: The day we arrived we took a trip to a nearby Wal-Mart and stocked up on goodies for the room as well as sandwich supplies, including Ziploc bags, for our travels around the Disney grounds.

Although we spent lots of time visiting the various Disney theme parks, we also set aside time to spend at the hotel, where each day there were Nick-style games, contests and challenges hosted by the hotel's Recreation Team. (Since we had a rental car, we didn't take advantage of the hotel's complimentary scheduled transportation to all four Disney World Resort theme parks.) There were audience-participation games and slime fests at the pool complexes throughout the day, and each evening there was live entertainment provided in the Nick studio—all free for registered guests.

Our room was located right by the Lagoon pool area, which featured a four-story interactive water tower, replete with water slides, climbing nets and water jets. As luck would have it, though, the area was under repair two of the days we were there (although one day it rained), but when all was repaired, it

truly was a veritable water paradise for the kids, who didn't know what to do first and ran in different directions.

My four-year-old wasn't quite old enough to play with the big kids on the water tower, so for him there was an interactive wet play area by the Lagoon pool and a sand play area with a slide over by the Oasis pool at the other side of the hotel. He also enjoyed the zero-depth entry pool, which allowed him to run and cackle his way into the pool water without stopping.

A 400-gallon dump tank, located at the top of the water tower, poured water on unsuspecting bathers below every three or so minutes (my husband actually timed it), entertaining the moms and dads sunning themselves on the lounge chairs. And there was also the old standby—mini-golf—which was also free to guests, who were required to wear brightly colored wristbands as a security precaution when visiting the pool area.

On selected nights, the hotel showed "dive-in" movies on a large screen by the pool, and the "mall" kept the kids busy both day and night—there was an arcade, as well as fast food, such as Pizza

Hut and Subway, for those late-night cravings, and manicures, pedicures, hair-wrapping and hair-braiding and airbrush tattoo services at a kids-only spa, where, unfortunately, the services were not free, and I departed \$40 poorer.

The spa, the shops, the pool—it was all clean, and the staff was courteous and friendly—even when my four-year-old fell flat on his nose over by the kiddie pool area, a staffer with a first-aid kit was on the scene within minutes. However, despite all there was to do, I clearly remember lying in bed exhausted one night after a long day of traipsing around Disney and watching a *Law & Order* rerun on TBS, while my oldest son watched Nick GAS in his bedroom, my daughter watched *Full House* on Nickelodeon in the living room, my little guy watched the security precaution information (over and over again) on the Nick Hotel channel in the dining room/kitchen, and my dad watched the NBA playoffs in his bedroom.

We managed to have all five televisions on at the same time, after all. And I'm proud to say that it didn't bother my inner Squidward one bit. ♡