

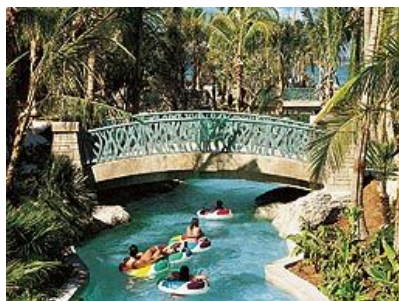
# Atlantis like Vegas for kids

## Family Mega-resort has something for everyone - even Justin Bieber

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### **A 2.2-km-long lazy river winds its way through Atlantis, the mega-family resort in the Bahamas. (Peter Barrett/Courtesy of Atlantis)**

BAHAMAS - It's no wonder Justin Bieber loves this place.

Atlantis, the extraordinary resort on Paradise Island, Bahamas, is Vegas for kids. Its mind-spinning action - 13 pools, snorkelling lagoon, Mayan temple with waterfalls and slides, swim-with-dolphins program, 56-hectare waterpark, teen hangout, oasis of tropical fish and five Bahamian beaches - plays like a high-octane video game, one that never shuts off and requires the energy of Red Bull from morning to night.

Bieber, the constantly mobbed Canadian 16-year-old singing sensation, is a fan. He shot his hit video Never Let You Go in the resort's aquarium, and will resurface at Atlantis this spring for a live concert.

But you don't need the frenzy of a Justin Bieber crowd to liven up Atlantis. The resort's relentless vim is a guaranteed magnet for any kid aged two to 20. Even parents have a good time - though if you are a parent, be warned: A weekend in this part of otherwise tranquil Bahamas is anything but tranquil.

Built at the close of the excessive '90s by Kerzner International, this hotel rises like a massive hulk of pink coral out of the impossibly clear turquoise waters of the Atlantic. You may have seen it in movies, including After The Sunset with Pierce Brosnan and 007's Casino Royale. Ringed by a white-sand beach, the hotel is perched on Paradise Island, a bridge away from Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas.

Despite its tropical surroundings, the hotel is actually a wonderland of simulated fun. Think of its kid-friendly attractions - nearly too numerous to list - as a "ginormous" waterpark, sport centre and arcade all rolled into one. There's a Vegas-like casino for adults that's absolutely huge, yet the casino's action is drowned out by the more child-friendly waterpark fun.

Most visits begin with a tour of The Dig, the mind-bending Atlantis aquarium that snakes through the underground of this monstrous resort. A maze of subterranean passageways offer intimidating views of piranhas, barracudas, stingrays, sharks, squids, turtles and tropical fish. It's the largest open-air marine habitat in the world (50,000-plus marine animals), and it's in the basement! The Dig also simulates the fabled underwaterworld of Plato's The Lost City of Atlantis, which some scholars claim was located nearby, off the Bahamian island of Bimini.

Before you even check into your Atlantis room, you'll likely get totally lost exploring Aquaventure - 13 pools, slides with names like The Drop, The Surge and The Falls, and a 2-km-long lazy river loop that includes whitewater rapids. Smaller kids (under 54 inches) get their own waterpark called Splashers. And there are five beaches, including one with a buzzing display of personal water craft and parasailors.

But it's the opportunities for kids to interact with sea life that makes Atlantis remarkable. Dolphin Cay lets you swim with both dolphins and sea lions. You can sign up as a Trainer For A Day to work with the animals. And you can snorkel and

dive with tropical fish through the (simulated) ruins of Atlantis.

Inside is Atlantis Kids Adventures, a kids' facility (ages three to 12) straight out of the spaceship in the film Wally. It's videogame heaven, with one room full of giant-screen Mac computers for gaming, plus another with touch-screen walls, table and floors. There's gigantic child-friendly kitchen for baking, a Lego room, and a mini castle for little ones to play in, plus a studio/theatre combo for producing kids' television shows.

Teens are not forgotten. The Climber's Rush outdoor rock-climbing facility is tough, and Club Rush nightclub for teens includes gaming, movies, a lounge and a nightly DJ. Plus, there's a pottery studio, a speedway, a library, a marina full of yachts. Like I said, the attractions are too numerous to mention.

Again, parents be warned: Little is all-inclusive at Atlantis. While access to the waterpark is included in the hotel's nightly rate, nearly everything else costs extra. It's easy to rack up a big bill with a simple swipe of a room key. Also, Atlantis' sheer mass means you're walking constantly. Guests need to pack a beach bag in the morning and be careful not to forget anything - it's a long way back to your room for forgotten sunscreen. Bring strollers for toddlers.

Hotel rooms are simple, clean and quiet, but hallways are noisy. For a more low-key vacation, check into Atlantis' sister hotel, The Cove - very Zen, with a near-empty beach and a pool that's adults only.

While Atlantis isn't known as being budget-friendly, it does offer frequent deals specifically for Canadians. It pays to check the website, [atlantis.com/specials](http://atlantis.com/specials). The current deal is a four-night package for the price of three nights for travel through Sept. 30. It starts at \$499 if booked by May 31. Travel by Dec. 22 to be eligible for a free companion airfare. Both Air Canada and WestJet fly direct from Toronto to Nassau. Four days is probably enough for a family Atlantis vacation.

As for Justin Bieber, he'll be back at Atlantis June 12 playing in the Imperial Ballroom.

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