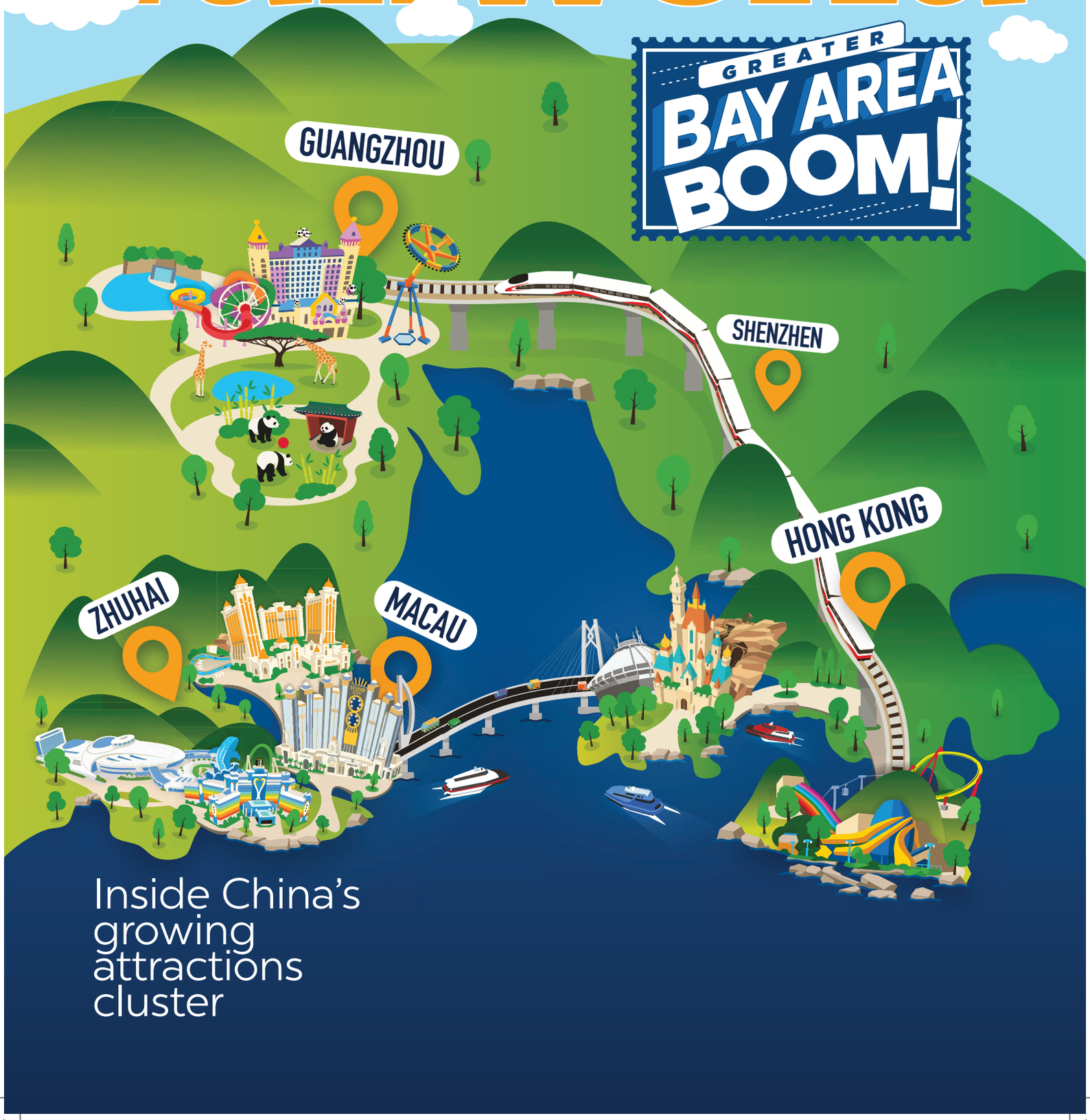
IAAPA NEWS

No Limit! Universal Studios Japan at 25 p. 58

F&B's Next Era p. 62

MAY/JUNE 2026

Funworld



Inside China's growing attractions cluster

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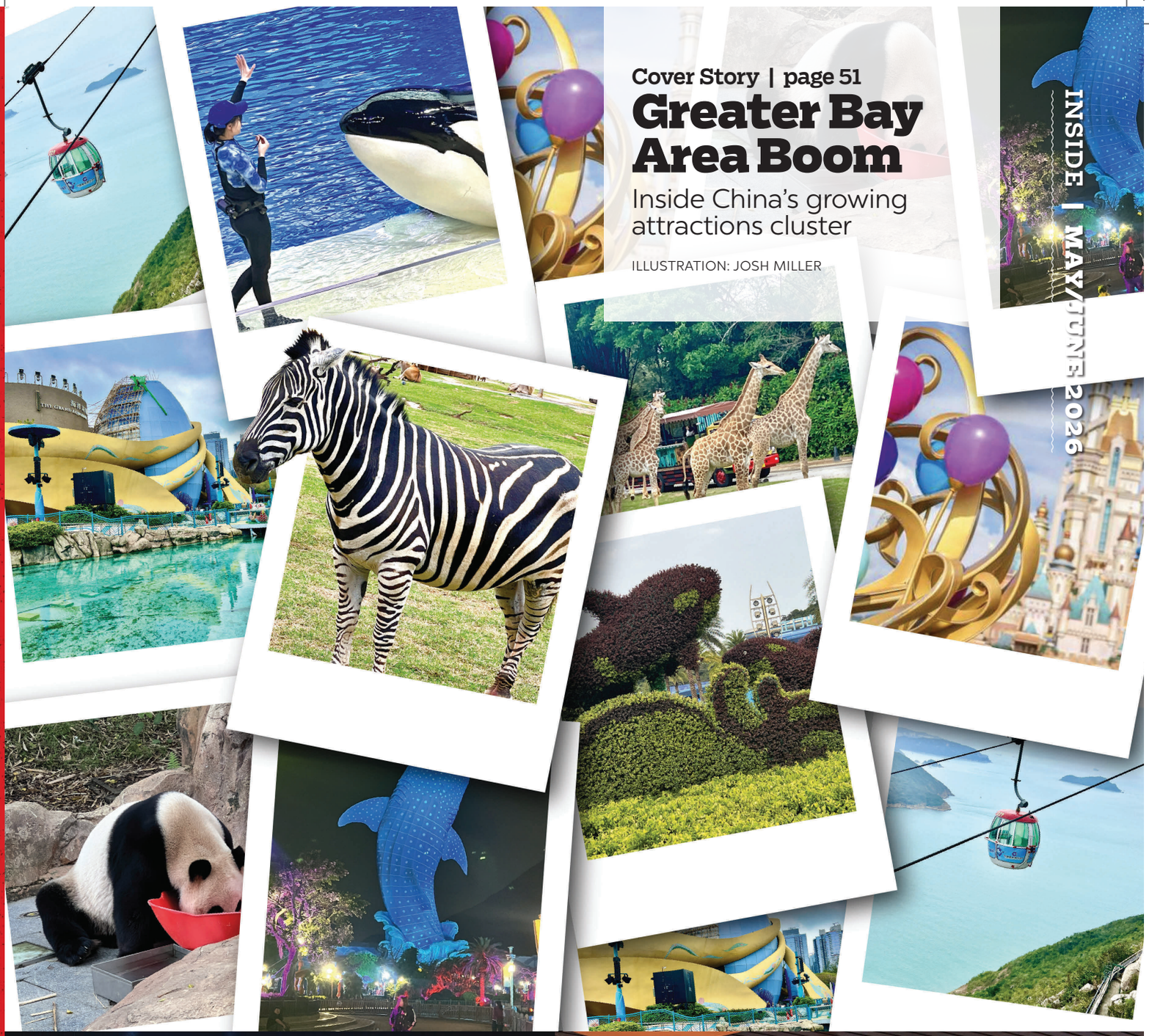

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Greater Bay Area Boom

Inside China's growing attractions cluster

ILLUSTRATION: JOSH MILLER



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Universal Studios Japan turns heads at 25



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How F&B's next era defines what's on the plate at zoos, aquariums, and museums

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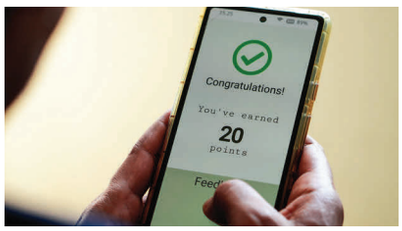

68 Friends for Life

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Rope Drop

FEC Growth Spurt

Singapore-based FEC chain Kiztopia cut the ribbon to open its newest facility located at the Toppen Shopping Centre in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. The milestone marks Kiztopia's third outlet in Malaysia and its 22nd FEC in the Asia-Pacific region.

PICTURED FROM LEFT: Li San, Kiztopia Malaysia; Heidi Tian, CEO and Founder of Kiztopia; Sergey Aristarkhov, Centre Manager of Toppen Mall; Su Wei, Kiztopia Malaysia; and Nicholas Yong, COO of Kiztopia.

KIZTOPIA

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Funworld (ISSN 08923752; mailed in Canada under IPM #0902179) is published bimonthly by IAAPA, 4155 West Taft Vineland Road, Orlando, FL 32837; phone: +1 321-319-7600. Periodicals postage paid at Orlando, FL, and additional offices.

The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization have not changed during the preceding 12 months.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Funworld, 4155 West Taft Vineland Road, Orlando, FL 32837. ©2026 IAAPA. No material or part thereof may be reproduced or printed without the written consent of IAAPA. Ride-along may be enclosed.

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Launch



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MARKETING

Dollywood Soars with New Airline Promotion

How the park established a winning partnership to generate buzz

by Juliana Gilling

AT DOLLYWOOD, 2026 IS POISED TO BE THE YEAR OF THE FLIGHT—whether it's soaring above the Great Smoky Mountains on the new NightFlight Expedition from MACK Rides, or touching down on a themed run with Allegiant airlines.

Allegiant and Dollywood have partnered to enhance the journey to the park with a new crossover experience originating in a competitive theme park market: Orlando.

This fall, Allegiant will take theme park travel to new heights with two fan flights to Tennessee. Flight #925: Destination Dollywood, a themed flight experience—named after Dolly Parton's famous working women's anthem—takes off from Orlando Sanford Airport to Knoxville, Tennessee, on Nov. 6. The first flight sold out, prompting Allegiant to add a second, Flight #2925, on the same day. Each Allegiant flight has a capacity of more than 180 passengers.

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Passengers will experience Dollywood's Christmas festival, known for live entertainment, specialty F&B, and more than 6 million lights.

DOLLYWOOD

"We're honored Allegiant asked Dollywood Parks & Resorts to partner with them for their first-ever themed flight for fans," says Eugene Naughton, Dollywood Parks & Resorts president. "Allegiant tells us the Dollywood-themed flight was one of the fastest-selling flights in their history."

Once at the park, passengers will experience Dollywood's famed Christmas festival featuring more than 6 million lights.

"For us, flying isn't just about getting from one place to another; it's about creating meaningful connections with the people, destinations, and experiences that matter most," adds Drew Wells, Allegiant's chief commercial officer.

Developing Value and Delivering Exclusivity

Passengers can expect a memorable journey, featuring fun celebrations at the gate, live entertainment from Dollywood, trivia, themed food and drinks, and exclusive merchandise commemorating the experience.

"We're planning a few unique surprises at both Orlando Sanford International Airport and McGhee Tyson Airport," explains Wes Ramey, public relations director for The Dollywood Company. He says both the theme park operator and the airline hold regular meetings to strategize on the special activities and offerings.

Once at the park, passengers will receive several behind-the-scenes activities, including exclusive ride time, reserved show seating, and special snacks. The flights were made available only on Allegiant's website. At press time in early April, tickets for Flight #2925 were still available and ranged from $75-$123 one way per person.

Widening Dollywood's Reach

The partnership is about more than just two flights from Orlando. As Dollywood grows, the facility aims to court audiences beyond its traditional demographic. "For us, Flights 925 and 2925 are about spreading the message that Dollywood Parks & Resorts are a convenient and affordable destination for families across the country—not just for those in Orlando," Ramey says.

Wells believes the fan-focused flights reflect the reputation of both the airline and the theme park.

"Partnering with Dollywood Parks & Resorts allows us to deliver a unique experience that reflects the best of both brands—great value, unforgettable moments, and the chance to create memories from the second you step on board."

Guests needed to book the flights directly through Allegiant's website.

"She's an eagle when she flies," Dolly Parton once sang. Now Dollywood is testing how far its fan flight concept flies—determining if the journey simply serves as a one-off activation or offers the potential to launch more themed travel experiences.

Could there be additional flights from other cities beyond Orlando?

"We weren't surprised with the flights' popularity, but it was nice to see the excitement our fans have for Dollywood Parks & Resorts," Ramey says. "The team at Allegiant is happy, and so are we, so there certainly is potential for future flights." FW

allegiantair.com
dollywood.com

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1 FOOD AND BEVERAGE
INFLUENCING **F&B**

This is sweet. European baking influencer Sally Özcan has jumped out of the digital space and into **Europa-Park** with a larger-than-life F&B location. The host of the "Sallys Welt" YouTube channel recently christened Sally's Café, featuring the celebrity's own recipes for freshly baked cakes and sweet treats, coupled with European coffees. The park strategically positioned **Sally's Café** in the Iceland themed section to fill a "culinary gap" between the Blue Fire and Wodan roller coasters. The café's interior design reflects Özcan's personality: modern, warm, and colorful. The close friendship between Özcan and Miriam Mack—a dedicated member of the park's owning family—served as a catalyst for the joint venture.



EUROPA-PARK

Baking Influencer Sally Özcan (left) joins Miriam Mack and Ed Euromaus at the opening of Sally's Café.

2 RIBBON CUTTINGS

SPLASHING INTO **EGYPT**

Bordering the Red Sea, **Aquamania Jungle Park** at Rixos Radamis Sharm El Sheikh opened with 28 water attractions, each designed to support the Egyptian resort's all-inclusive experience. The 35,000-square-meter park features a collection of **ProSlide** rides full of speed, helix turns, and panoramic sightlines. Aquamania Jungle Park reflects continued investment in water attractions across the Middle East, particularly at resorts.


PROSLIDE

FROZEN IN **FRANCE**

Anna and Elsa have come home to Europe. The recently rebranded **Disney Adventure Park** at **Disneyland Paris** welcomed the sisters as the new **Adventure Bay** area opened. The park's new World of Frozen land features the **Frozen Ever After** boat ride and **Raiponce Tangled Spin** circular ride based on Rapunzel. At the late-March debut, French-American singer Santa sang with a 10-year-old Make-A-Wish child at a snow-colored piano.


DISNEY

WINDING INTO **VIETNAM**

More than 30 new water attractions began making a splash along Vietnam's southern coastline in March. The new **Aqua Adventure Water Park** at **Sun World Vũng Tàu** features slides and equipment provided by **WhiteWater**. The 100-meter-long **Mini Blaster** is a water coaster for children, while the **Serpent's Aquarium** introduces adults in six-person rafts to lateral drifting sensations at nearly 20 meters off the ground.


WHITEWATER

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3 ATTRACTION DESIGN
COLOMBIAN SWITCHEROO

Out with the old, in with the new FEC. After sitting empty for a decade, the former **Cici Aquapark** in Bogotá is set to become an FEC adjacent to the **Salitre Mágico** amusement park. Developers have already filled in the pools as the facility is repurposed with sports courts and several children's play areas. The new venue is slated to open in late 2026.



SALITRE MÁGICO

4 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
HUNGRY FOR HOLLYWOOD



UNIVERSAL

Universal Studios Hollywood joined the ranks of attractions offering an "all day dining" option. Guests receive two entrées and four sides, snacks, desserts or beverages introductory priced at $59. Simply named **Dining Pass,** eligible menu items are identified by a logo displayed on corresponding menu boards. "It's very rewarding to watch our guests truly enjoy the menu we carefully curate," says Executive Chef Julia Thrash.

5 ACCESSIBILITY
SENSATIVE CELEBRATIONS

With a nod to inclusivity, global FEC chain **Chuck E. Cheese** launched **Sensory Sensitive Birthdays**. Thoughtful modifications prioritize comfort, flexibility, and individual needs, allowing operators to welcome children of all abilities. **CEC Entertainment** worked in collaboration with nonprofit Autism Speaks to design the Sensory Sensitive Birthdays. Customizable packages may include game play, food and drinks, collectible cups, **Dippin' Dots** ice cream, and a dedicated birthday party host among other options.



CEC ENTERTAINMENT

6 SPECIAL EVENTS
GO FOR THE MOON





NASA



NASA

3... 2... 1... Several attractions held watch parties to view the successful liftoff of Artemis II on April 1. The **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex** in Florida offered launch viewing packages and early access to a new exhibit, **Artemis II: Pathway to the Moon**, that showcases never-before-seen artifacts. **Space Center Houston** in Texas held a watch party and created special merchandise for the historic mission.

HAVE A DISPATCH FROM THE FIELD?

Have a Dispatch from the field for Funworld in 2026? Sure you do! Share your successes, wins, and innovations with IAAPA News. Send news, photos, and advancements to **SFais@IAAPA.org**

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Tech Turnstile

by Scott Fais

JUST LIKE THE SPINNING TURNSTILES found at attractions across the world, engineers and dreamers continue to turn out innovations and solutions. Funworld's Tech Turnstile showcases applied technology and the ingenuity found across the attractions landscape—and the manufacturers behind the breakthroughs.

(1)

Hanging Around in the Dark

WHO: Vekoma Rides

PRODUCT: Suspended Dark Ride

HOW: Suspended from an above track and fortified with onboard tech featuring customizable audio, lighting, and interactive systems to support gamification, Vekoma's new dark ride vehicle also rotates 360 degrees. "The more we test it, the more we're convinced this is a game-changer," says Ricardo Tonding Etges, Vekoma's vice president of sales and marketing, Americas.

SeaWorld Orlando's new-for-2026 SeaQuest: Legends of the Deep attraction will be the first to utilize the new ride system that will blend multisensory storytelling and imaginative ride technology.

vekoma.com/suspended-dark-ride



VEKOMA RIDES

(2)

Not Your Mother's Jigsaw Puzzle

WHO: Breeze Creative

PRODUCT: Build Alive

HOW: What starts as a hands-on puzzle, ends in a fully animated, digital world. Breeze Creative's Build Alive puzzle table allows guests to handle physical shapes as they unlock puzzles that in return produce custom animations and stories following STEM-aligned lessons. Designed for museums, aquariums, FECs, and educational attractions, Build Alive is a turnkey attraction inspiring creativity. Breeze Creative offers an ADA-compliant wooden table, projector, gaming PC, sensors, and what the company calls "a little bit of magic" to bring the puzzles to life.

breezecreative.com/build-alive



BREEZE CREATIVE

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ELAUT GROUP



(3)

Sharpen Your Claws

WHO: Elaut Group

PRODUCT: E-Claw 2.0

HOW: With intelligent game controls, remote support capabilities, and real-time data reporting, Elaut Group's E-Claw 2.0 game is powered by breakthrough technology named E-CLAUT. The system delivers benefits like smart game management and player insight that allows a facility to fine-tune settings, optimize performance, and drive additional revenue. Built with premium materials, every component—from the precision glass screen to the durable wood panels—ensures sturdiness and longevity in a host of environments. For players, the value lies in a more engaging experience.

elaut.com/games/claw-machines

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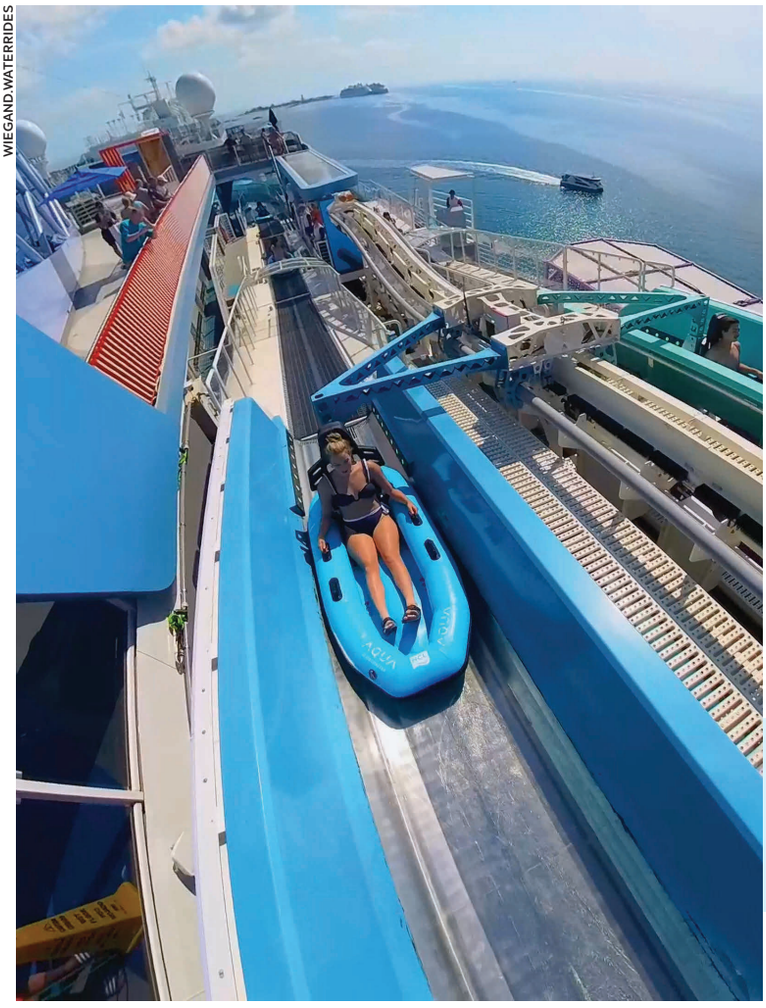

(4)

Slide Coaster Makes a Splash

WHO: Wiegand.Waterrides GmbH

PRODUCT: Wiegand Slide Coaster

HOW: The Wiegand Slide Coaster uses an LSM (linear synchronous motor) launch system—similar to a roller coaster—to propel two rafts simultaneously. Engineers positioned the powerful electric magnets on a piece of track (Wiegand's established alpine coaster track) where a catch car pushes the rafts into a pair of 600-foot-long slides atop the Norwegian Aqua and Norwegian Luna. Achieving the feat on the ground would prove impressive. Yet, Wiegand.Waterrides had to navigate all the requirements and restrictions found aboard a cruise ship.

wiegandwaterrides.de/en/products/raft-slides/slide-coaster/

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FLYOVER

Brogent to Acquire Flyover Attractions

Brogent Technologies has entered an agreement to acquire flying theater brand **Flyover** from **Pursuit Attractions and Hospitality** for approximately $78.4 million. The deal expands Brogent's offering from ride system engineering to facility owner, combining technology, creative development, and operations. Flyover operates locations in Iceland, Las Vegas, Chicago, and Vancouver, Canada, and has welcomed more than nine million guests. "This transaction brings together complementary strengths," says Chairman and CEO Chih-Hung Ouyang.

brogent.com



QUBICAAMF

QubicaAMF Adds Arco/Murray to OneSource Partner Network

QubicaAMF added **Arco/Murray National Construction's Sports and Entertainment** team to its OneSource partner network, which connects developers and operators with vetted specialists to support venue projects from planning through opening. The partnership expands services available to clients launching bowling and out-of-home entertainment concepts. "Our goal is simple—give our clients a smarter path from vision to venue," says Jody Pastula, director of new business development at QubicaAMF.

qubicaamfbowling.com



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MANDAI WILDLIFE RESERVE

Singapore's Mandai Wildlife Reserve Enters Virtual Realm with Minecraft

Mandai Wildlife Reserve in Singapore is home to the Asia debut of Minecraft Experience: Villager Rescue. The limited-time experience opened in April and runs through mid-September at the Green Canvas venue, a purpose-built event space within the Mandai precinct.

Developed by Supply + Demand in partnership with Microsoft, Mojang Studios, and Experience MOD, the attraction transforms the globally popular video game into an immersive experience where visitors collaborate in a one-hour story-driven quest to rescue a village.

Guests journey through eight Minecraft rooms, and each participant is equipped with a unique "Orb of Interaction" that allows them to influence the outcome of their adventure. The experience blends large-scale immersive projections, theatrical sets, motion-tracking gameplay, and experiential storytelling.

"We are thrilled to host Minecraft Experience: Villager Rescue as the first large-scale immersive travelling exhibition at Green Canvas ... showcasing the versatility of our new purpose-built event space," says Michelle Choo, vice president, indoor attractions and experiences, Mandai Wildlife Group.

minecraftexperience.com

Shanghai Disneyland Celebrates a Decade of Magic

A decade ago, retired Disney CEO Bob Iger first dedicated Shanghai Disneyland as a park that would be "authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese."

"With You, It's Magic+" (the name of the 10-year celebration) brings new décor, anniversary merchandise, and expanded live entertainment. New food selected from throughout China highlights the bond between the park and the community.

"To celebrate this 10-year milestone, our amazing cast members have spent the past two years pouring their hearts and energy into preparing a spectacular celebration," says Andrew Bolstein, president and general manager of Shanghai Disney Resort.

shanghaidisneyresort.com



DISNEY

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RIPLEY'S

Ripley's Redefines Reality with Trickd in Australia

The sandy shores of Australia's Gold Coast are home to Ripley Entertainment's latest concept: Trickd. Three themed zones take guests on an interactive journey through space and time—or at least that is what it may seem. Mixed reality, optical illusions, and seemingly impossible photo opportunities bend reality to create an immersive attraction.

"It really captures exactly what we aim to do with all of our attractions, which is about getting people together, and bringing quality time back to Surfers Paradise," says General Manager Kiki Pirika.

The Gold Coast attraction—located in the Surfers Paradise tourism center—is the first of Ripley's new Trickd concepts. The operator already has two other attractions in the market and felt Australia made sense to launch the new brand. From a marketing and strategic positioning standpoint, the Ripley's name is decidedly not in Trickd's name. The operator tells Funworld the goal is to see how the venue will perform without the overt association.

trickd.com.au/

Dreamworld Named Partner of Australian Olympic Team

Dreamworld, on Australia's Gold Coast, established a partnership with the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), becoming the official theme park partner of the Australian Olympic team.

The recent collaboration included support for the Australian Winter Olympic Team at the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games and the Australian Youth Olympic Team competing at the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games.

"As Australia's biggest theme park, we're proud to stand behind the green and gold and create experiences that inspire Australians to dream big," says Dreamworld CEO Greg Yong.



Dreamworld hosted a media and stakeholder event featuring an Olympic watch celebration with athletes and invited guests.

"The most pleasing element is that the sponsorship will bring benefits for Olympians, our member sports, and their communities," adds Mark Arbib, Australian Olympic Committee CEO.

The partnership aligns with the park's long-term strategy to expand entertainment offerings tied to national events as Australia looks ahead to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic Games.

dreamworld.com.au

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HANSA-PARK

Cornwall Coaster Coming to Hansa-Park in Germany

Cornwall, the English county famous for its coastline, cream teas, and pasties, is lending its name to a new roller coaster—in Germany. Hansa-Park will unveil its Cornwall Coaster in the park's Beautiful Britain themed area this year.

The Gerstlauer family coaster features elements new to Hansa-Park, including three forward and three backward launches. In addition, the coaster "will be perfectly embedded in our park and theming," explains Claudia Leicht, a member of the board of executives at Hansa-Park. The ride will start operating this season, with theming to be completed during the 2026-27 offseason. The project team aims to create an authentically Cornish experience by using specially composed music produced by Audiogazer—designed to capture the drama of Cornwall's coastline—and traditional building materials. The coaster's charming exterior will "enchant our visitors," Leicht says.

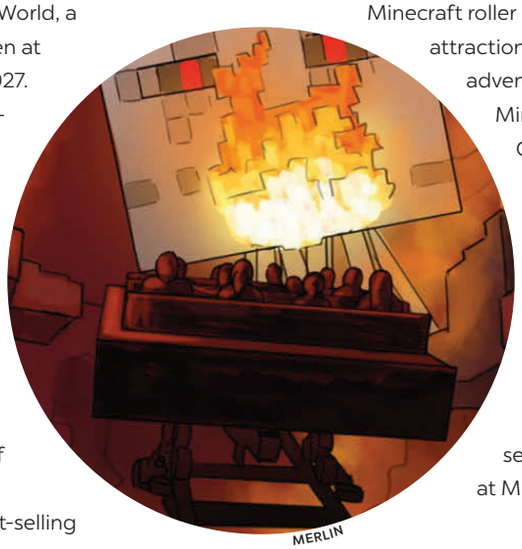
hansapark.de

Block Party for London: Minecraft World Heads to Chessington

Merlin Entertainments and Microsoft-owned Mojang Studios, Minecraft's creator, confirm Minecraft World, a fully immersive Minecraft land, will open at Chessington World of Adventures in 2027. The £50 million project will be the largest investment yet in the English theme park, situated close to London.

"Working closely together with Mojang Studios, we are meticulously creating an authentic world that the global community of Minecraft fans will want to immerse themselves in and experience the game in a whole new way," says Angela Jobson, senior vice president of global brand marketing at Merlin.

The operator plans to bring the best-selling video game of all time into the physical world. The first-ever Minecraft roller coaster will top the new lineup of attractions, which will include interactive adventures and playscapes inspired by Minecraft's distinctive building blocks. Guests can expect to see Minecraft mobs (both friends and foes), biomes, and items in Minecraft World. Themed retail and dining will complete the offering.



MERLIN

"Minecraft World represents a meaningful milestone in our ongoing journey to expand the Minecraft universe," says Torfi Frans Ólafsson, senior creative director of entertainment at Minecraft.

chessington.com/Minecraft

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by Marck Gutt (Don Viajes) and Roberto Bae



ORBIT BOWLING

Orbit Bowling Strikes Into Argentina's FEC Scene

Orbit Bowling has officially opened at the Boulevard Shopping center in Buenos Aires. Fully designed by Lago Studio, the venue reimagines the traditional American bowling alley through immersive, retro-inspired scenography, LED-enhanced lanes, and large-scale illustrated murals. A bold palette of deep blues paired with vibrant orange and magenta accents establishes a unique atmosphere that differentiates the space within the regional family entertainment center landscape.

Beyond bowling, the multi-experience format integrates pool tables and electronic games, broadening its appeal across age groups. A central bar anchors the layout as the social hub of the venue, supported by a flexible food and beverage program. Live music and curated programming further position Orbit Bowling as an adaptable destination for events, celebrations, and group bookings.

New Dinner Show at Mexico's VidantaWorld Nuevo Nayarit

Grupo Vidanta and Cirque du Soleil debuted Ludõ, a subversive new dinner show experience housed in a custom-built, 360-degree theater at VidantaWorld Nuevo Nayarit on Mexico's Pacific Coast.

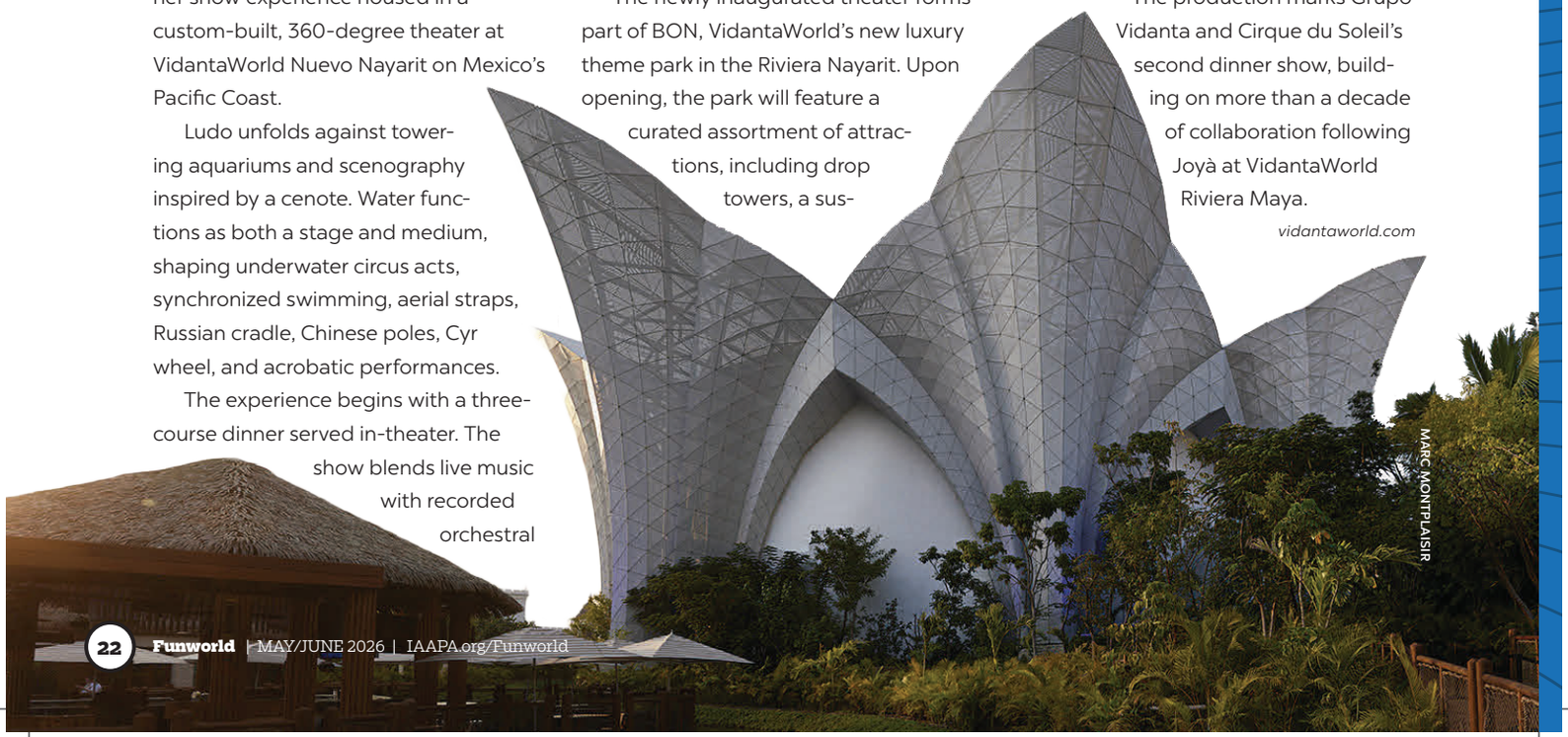
Ludo unfolds against towering aquariums and scenography inspired by a cenote. Water functions as both a stage and medium, shaping underwater circus acts, synchronized swimming, aerial straps, Russian cradle, Chinese poles, Cyr wheel, and acrobatic performances.

The experience begins with a three-course dinner served in-theater. The show blends live music with recorded orchestral textures synchronized to create a hybrid score.

The newly inaugurated theater forms part of BON, VidantaWorld's new luxury theme park in the Riviera Nayarit. Upon opening, the park will feature a curated assortment of attractions, including drop towers, a suspended coaster, and an alebrije (Mexican folk art sculpture)-inspired carousel.

The production marks Grupo Vidanta and Cirque du Soleil's second dinner show, building on more than a decade of collaboration following Joyà at VidantaWorld Riviera Maya.

vidantaworld.com



MARC MONTPLAISIR

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TANNER WILSON

Surf's Up at Saudi Arabia's Adrena

Now making a splash in Saudi Arabia: Adrena, a new adventure sports and entertainment district. Red Sea Global, the developer behind regenerative tourism destinations The Red Sea and Amaala, created the coastal destination. There are more than 20 land- and water-based activities for guests to enjoy, with Endless Surf's ES36 surf lagoon among the highlights.

"In a destination defined by regenerative luxury, Endless Surf brings something truly special: real saltwater waves with fully customizable profiles, right here at The Red Sea," says Paul Chutter, president of Endless Surf. The 215-meter-long Adrena lagoon leverages water sourced from the Red Sea for a true saltwater feel.

Adrena General Manager Jill Stienke adds, "With authentic saltwater waves and sessions suited for any skill level, the lagoon delivers an ocean-like experience that perfectly complements our park's ethos."

WhiteWater, Endless Surf's parent company, also delivered a FlowSurf stationary wave, slip 'n' fly slides, and an Aquaplay structure to Adrena. Other amenities include a wakeboarding lake, a skateboarding and BMX park, snorkel trails, cliff jumping, zip lines, rock climbing, obstacle courses, and areas for beach sports and relaxation.

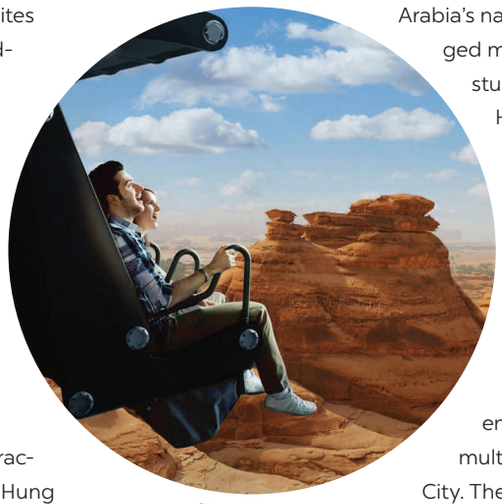
endlesssurf.com | redseaglobal.com

Flying Over Saudi Takes Off in Riyadh

An uplifting new attraction in Riyadh invites guests to soar across Saudi Arabia's landscapes—without ever leaving their seats. Brogent Technologies is the wind beneath the wings of Flying Over Saudi, one of the Middle East's largest flying theaters.

Brogent's I-Ride flying theater system is paired with a dedicated 8K projection system inside the 26-meter domed screen.

"The opening of Flying Over Saudi reflects the growing demand for premium, technology-driven immersive attractions across the Middle East," says Chih-Hung Ouyang, chairman of Brogent Technologies.



BROGENT

A seven-minute original film sends guests over Saudi Arabia's natural and cultural landmarks, from rugged mountain ranges and vast deserts to stunning coastlines and the ancient city of Hegra, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"Beyond its 8K visuals, the experience uses distinctive cinematography and multisensory storytelling to create a deep emotional connection to Saudi Arabia's landscapes," says Emad Aleisa, CEO of Takwenat.

Synchronized motion seating and environmental effects complete the multisensory flying experience at Boulevard City. The attraction can accommodate up to 90 guests per cycle.

brogent.com

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LOVELAND AQUARIUM

Utah's Loveland Living Planet Aquarium Opens New Science Center

Marking a major expansion that nearly doubles the facility's size, the Loveland Living Planet Aquarium in Draper, Utah, opened the Sam & Aline Skaggs Science Learning Center in February. The 120,000-square-foot addition is organized around a new habitat wing, an event venue, and expanded education facilities.

The Ford Expedition Asia gallery serves as the centerpiece of the expansion, featuring a quarter-acre immersive indoor cloud forest habitat with animal species and interactive exhibits.

The Mountain America Event Center includes a 15,000-square-foot venue overlooking aquarium exhibits, which can host up to 2,000 guests for conferences, galas, and special events.

The Education Hub features 14 classrooms and laboratory spaces designed for STEAM programming, seasonal camps, field trips, and research collaborations.

Aquarium leaders say the new facility is intended to expand hands-on learning opportunities, strengthen partnerships, and increase access to science education while supporting conservation.

livingplanetaquarium.org/learning-center/

Out-of-This-World Investment: US Legoland Parks Open Galacticoasters

Both Legoland Florida and Legoland California debuted indoor, interactive, space-themed roller coasters. The pair of Galacticoasters from ART Engineering reach speeds up to 40 mph while blending immersive storytelling with hands-on customization.

Riders on both U.S. coasts enter a cinematic queue, receive mission instructions from Chief Engineer Biff Dipper—the first animatronic Lego Minifigure at the park—and design one of more than 625 possible spacecraft combinations using interactive touchscreens. Each creation is stored on an RFID wristband and integrated into the ride experience, personalizing the journey through a galaxy filled with synchronized lighting and special effects.

"This is a next-generation ride for us," says Blake Boyter, who served as senior project manager at Legoland Florida. "We've never done something so immersive and so interactive," adding the project is the largest single investment in the Winter Haven, Florida, park's history.

www.legoland.com



MERLIN

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Movers and Shakers

by Coralie Juillet and Funworld Editors

Disney Promotes Several to Key Positions

The **Walt Disney Company** Board of Directors appointed **Josh D'Amaro** as CEO, effective March 18, succeeding Bob Iger. A 28-year company veteran, D'Amaro most recently served as chairman of Disney Experiences, overseeing global parks and resorts. **Thomas Mazloum** succeeds D'Amaro as chairman of Disney Experiences overseeing Disney's theme parks, cruise ships, resort hotels, expeditions and adventures, consumer products, and Walt Disney Imagineering. Most recently, Mazloum served as President of Disneyland Resort. **Jill Estorino** succeeds Mazloum as president of Disneyland Resort after serving as president of Disney Parks International, where she oversaw Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland, Shanghai Disney Resort, and Tokyo Disney Resort with the Oriental Land Company. **Tasia Filippatos** succeeds Estorino as president, Disney Parks International, overseeing the evolution of Disney's parks outside the United States.


D'Amaro
WALT DISNEY COMPANY


Mazloum
WALT DISNEY COMPANY


Estorino
WALT DISNEY COMPANY


Filippatos
WALT DISNEY COMPANY

CEC Entertainment Promotes Top Leader from Within

The parent company of **Chuck E. Cheese** appointed **Scott Drake** as president and CEO, succeeding David McKillips, who led the company since 2020. Drake joined CEC Entertainment in 2024 as chief financial officer and previously held senior leadership roles at Farmer Brothers Coffee Co., GameStop, and 7-Eleven. Board Chairman Joshua Acheatel cites Drake's contributions strengthening the company's balance sheet and driving strategic growth initiatives as rationale for the promotion.


Drake
CHUCK E. CHEESE

Topgolf International Names New Leader

Overseeing strategic vision and growth across more than 100 venues, **Topgolf International** appointed **David McKillips** as new CEO. McKillips brings nearly 30 years of experience in family entertainment, media, and theme parks. He'll also lead the Toptracer technology platform.


McKillips
TOPGOLF INTERNATIONAL

Monterey Bay Aquarium Appoints New CEO

The respected **Monterey Bay Aquarium** appointed **Dr. Jenny Gray** as its new CEO, succeeding Julie Packard, who led the institution since its opening in 1984 (Packard will remain on the board). Gray previously served in leadership roles at Zoos Victoria and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. She is recognized for her leadership in animal ethics, welfare, and conservation. "The opportunity to lead Monterey Bay Aquarium provides a platform for me to contribute to ocean conservation and steward another iconic institution," Gray says.


Gray
MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

Columbus Zoo and Aquarium Welcomes Two New Board Members

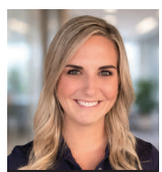
The **Columbus Zoo and Aquarium** appointed **Stacey Burbure** and **Jessica Mayer** to its board of directors, strengthening leadership as the wildlife conservation organization advances strategic priorities. Burbure serves as senior vice president of transmission regulatory engagement and compliance at American Electric Power. Mayer is chief legal and compliance officer at Cardinal Health.


Burbure
COLUMBUS ZOO AND AQUARIUM


Mayer
COLUMBUS ZOO AND AQUARIUM

VenueSumo Appoints Vice President

Responsible for leading expansion and supporting venue operators, **VenueSumo** appointed **Jamie Turnbow** as vice president, Americas. Turnbow previously held senior operational leadership roles at Altitude Trampoline Park and Sky Zone, overseeing multisite portfolios across the United States. "Jamie has lived and breathed the day-to-day realities of running large, high-volume family entertainment venues," says Alex White, director at VenueSumo.


Turnbow
VENUESUMO

Puremat ic Names New Director

Werner Dullmaier helms a newly created role focused on international expansion and long-term growth at **Puremat ic** as director of global business development and strategy. He brings more than 20 years of operational and strategic experience in theme parks and attractions, helping align technology with on-site needs. "With a scalable product, a rapidly growing team, and a clear strategic direction, we are laying the foundation for sustainable international growth," says Michael Post, Puremat ic CEO.


Dullmaier
PUREMATIC

Area Discovery Museum Welcomes New Officer

Supporting the institution's next phase of growth, the **Bay Area Discovery Museum** in Sausalito, California, appointed **Peter Koch** as chief revenue and marketing officer. Koch is charged with strengthening revenue strategies and expanding family engagement. He brings experience from leadership roles at other family destinations.


Koch
BAY AREA DISCOVERY MUSEUM

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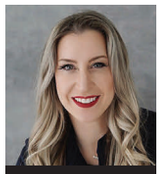
Vantage Appoints New Vice President


VANTAGE TECHNOLOGY LTD

Barnett

Dana Barnett will lead **Vantage Technology Ltd.**, a division of WhiteWater, as vice president, business development (global). She will focus on expanding partnerships and supporting growth across the aquatics and attractions sectors worldwide. Barnett brings experience in global business development and operational leadership within the leisure industry.

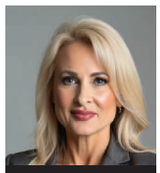
Karafun Group Names Chief Marketing Officer


KARAFUN GROUP

Abecassis

Bringing experience in marketing, entrepreneurship, and growth strategy, **Elodie Abecassis** will lead brand development as chief marketing officer at **Karafun Group**. Her new role includes strengthening marketing strategy and innovation as the group grows its music-based entertainment offerings. "Her strategic marketing expertise, growth-oriented vision, and innovative mindset will play a key role in taking the Karafun brand even further," says Mickael Pynson, director general of Karafun Group.

Andretti Indoor Karting & Games Hires New CMO


ANDRETTI INDOOR KARTING & GAMES

Vilbrandt-Gomez

Ready to lead marketing strategy that's focused on revenue growth, same-store sales, and brand equity, **Andretti Indoor Karting & Games** has appointed **Victoria Vilbrandt-Gomez** as chief marketing officer. She brings more than 18 years of senior marketing experience across consumer, retail, and omnichannel businesses. "Her proven track record of translating brand strategy into measurable business results will help elevate the Andretti brand," says Eddie Hamman, managing member.

France's Le PAL Names New Leader


LE PAL

Bennet

French animal theme park **Le PAL** has appointed **Charles Bennet** as president, succeeding his father, Arnaud Bennet, who led the park for 36 years. Charles Bennet will continue Le PAL's long-term development strategy by advancing animal habitats with enhanced theming and immersive experiences. The company will remain family-owned and independent.

KMI International Promotes New Chief Operating Officer


KMI INTERNATIONAL

Horn

Overseeing daily operations while strengthening service delivery across markets, **KMI International** has promoted **Drew Horn** to chief operating officer. Horn brings more than 30 years of experience in cost estimating, project management, and project controls. "KMI is stronger because of his vision and commitment to our clients and dedicated team," says John R. Manning, cofounder, CEO, and chairman of the board.

Falcon's Beyond Promotes From Within


FALCON'S BEYOND GLOBAL

Ali

Empowered to advance technology leadership, **Saham Ali** will advise **Falcon's Beyond Global** as the creative company's new chief technology officer. Ali—formerly executive vice president of technology—will implement technology strategy across real-time rendering, robotics, ride systems, extended reality, generative AI, and connected experiences. "Technology is the heartbeat of immersive storytelling," says Cecil D. Magpuri, CEO of Falcon's Beyond. Ali brings nearly 25 years of production and technology leadership experience to his new position.

Family Entertainment Group Advances Operating Leadership


FEG

Paris

Realigning its operating leadership, **Family Entertainment Group (FEG)** has promoted **Steve Paris** to chief operating officer, while Mark Nesfeder transitions into a newly created role focusing on new openings. Paris—previously senior vice president of strategic operations—will oversee operations across FEG's expanding portfolio of FECs and venue partnerships. Nesfeder will develop a playbook to support seamless site openings.

Two Industry Veterans form A.R.E. Leisure Consulting


A.R.E. LEISURE CONSULTING

van der Lingen and Kruithof

Ronald van der Lingen and **Edwin Kruithof** founded **A.R.E. Leisure Consulting**, a firm specializing in amusement ride maintenance, operations, and safety advisory services worldwide. Both bring extensive industry experience with organizations that include TÜV NORD, Walibi Holland, and Slagharen. The company will support projects, audits, training, and technical consulting for operators and manufacturers.

Alton Towers Resort Appoints New Vice President


MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS

Ebison

Merlin Entertainments veteran **Howard Ebison** is the new vice president of Alton Towers Resort. Ebison previously served as vice president at Chessington World of Adventures. He's held senior leadership roles in operations and business development across sectors like airports, shopping centers, and hospitality.

TEEG Names New Group Chief Product Officer

Bringing more than 30 years of experience across hospitality and entertainment venues, **TEEG** has appointed **Ron Mroz** as group

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Movers and Shakers

by Coralie Juillet and Funworld Editors

chief product officer. The move comes as Chris McGrath retires following 39 years with the Timezone Games brand. Mroz will help guide product strategy and interactive experience development across the company's portfolio. "Ron leads from the heart and brings deep expertise across multiple entertainment formats," says Group CEO Sonaal Chopra.


TEEG
Mroz

Ice-World International Welcomes New CEO


ICE-WORLD
Lek

Wilbert Lek will serve as CEO, succeeding Steven Bottema, who led the company for more than a decade. Lek brings international management experience across events, sports, and organizational development, including serving as CEO of Golazo Events Netherlands. "I have full confidence that he will guide **Ice-World** forward with care," Bottema says. Lek will help strengthen the company's international activities as it continues delivering ice rink experiences worldwide.

Miral Experiences Names New Director


MIRAL EXPERIENCES
Acevedo

Supporting destination and guest experience development, **Miral Experiences** appoints **Maria Acevedo** as director of projects. Acevedo brings project leadership experience in the attractions and entertainment sectors. "[I'm] looking forward to this new chapter and contributing to the development of world-class destinations and meaningful guest experiences alongside incredibly talented teams," she says.

In Memoriam

by Jim Futrell

Laura Berni


BERNI FAMILY
Berni

Laura T. Berni, 93, passed away on Feb. 8. In 1955, she married Anthony A. (Nino) Berni, Sr. and the couple began working at Palisades Park in New Jersey. In 1958, they partnered with the Captell and Ulaky families to purchase Canobie Lake Park in New Hampshire, which the families continue to own. Berni worked in the park's accounting department until she retired at 83, and she was inducted into the New England Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Hall of Fame in 2004. Predeceased by Nino, Berni is survived by three children and their families.

Elizabeth L. Bowen


BOWEN FAMILY
Bowen

Beth Bowen passed away on March 11 following a long illness. A Boston native, she married John Bowen, whose family owned Whalom Park in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Beth started working at Whalom Park in 1976, handling promotions, advertising, and public relations. She was named general manager in 1996. Bowen and John were inducted into the New England Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Hall of Fame in 2014. Bowen also served on IAAPA's Convention Awards Committee for many years. She is survived her husband and by three daughters, along with their families.

Jeff Collins

Jeff Collins, health and safety director at Legoland Florida Resort, passed away suddenly in March. Collins joined Legoland in June 2025 and supported the resort's readiness for the safe grand opening of Galacticoaster. Before that, he worked in numerous positions at Universal Destinations and Experiences over 25 years, most recently serving as assistant director of global safety operations. Known for his infectious energy and enthusiasm and his collaborative teamwork, Collins leaves behind his loving family.

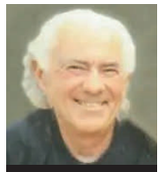

COLLINS FAMILY
Collins

Kevin Naughton


NAUGHTON FAMILY
Naughton

After graduating from college, **Kevin Naughton**, 69, began his career at Naughton Insurance, specializing in insuring the attractions and motorsports industries. As the third generation to work in the business, Naughton was active in the New England Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions. He joined the board in 1992 and served as president in 2001 and 2002, working to broaden its membership base. He is survived by his wife Joanne, two children, and a granddaughter.

James F. Patten III


PATTEN FAMILY
Patten

James F. Patten III passed away on Jan. 30 at the age of 80. After marrying Jilda Shaheen in 1967, he joined his father-in-law by working at Shaheen's Fun Park in Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts. Patten served as general manager for 25 years until the attraction's closure in 1985. He was active within IAAPA, serving on the global board of directors and water park committee while also chairing the amusement park safety & standards committee. He is survived by his wife, three children, and their families.

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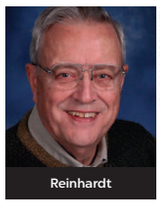
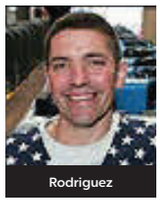
Jerry Reinhardt


REINHARDT FAMILY
Reinhardt

Jerry Reinhardt passed away on Feb. 21 at the age of 93. Following a career in the United States Navy, Reinhardt, a lifelong woodcarver, began creating miniature carousel horses, which led to restoring full-size horses. He served as president and director of the National Carousel Association and went on to help found the CW Parker Carousel Museum in 2005 in Leavenworth, Kansas. He is survived by his two children and their families.

Richard Rodriguez


BLACKPOOL PLEASURE BEACH
Rodriguez

Richard Rodriguez, who became known in the industry for his roller coaster marathons, passed away in June 2025. An educator by trade, he set his first endurance record in August 1977, riding the Coney Island Cyclone for 103 hours and 55 minutes. Over the next 35 years, he accumulated a total of 17 endurance records, many recognized by Guinness, often using the events to raise funds for juvenile diabetes and muscular dystrophy.

Roger Tofte


ENCHANTED FOREST
Tofte

Roger Tofte, founder of the Enchanted Forest in Salem, Oregon, passed away on Feb. 13 at the age of 96. While still employed full-time at the state highway department, he began working in his spare time to make his dream a reality, building every structure and storybook character. Enchanted Forest opened in August 1971 after six years of construction and continues to grow—three generations of the family joined him in the business. Tofte is survived by his four children, as well as grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and other extended family.

Carol Ann Wisdom


WISDOM FAMILY
Wisdom

Carol Ann Wisdom, 68, passed away on Jan. 5. As a child, Wisdom worked on her family's midway until it was sold in 1969, and the family transitioned into full-time ride manufacturing. Following college, she joined the family business, now known as Wisdom Rides of America, working alongside her parents and brother. Wisdom was involved in numerous local nonprofits and is survived by her brother, two children, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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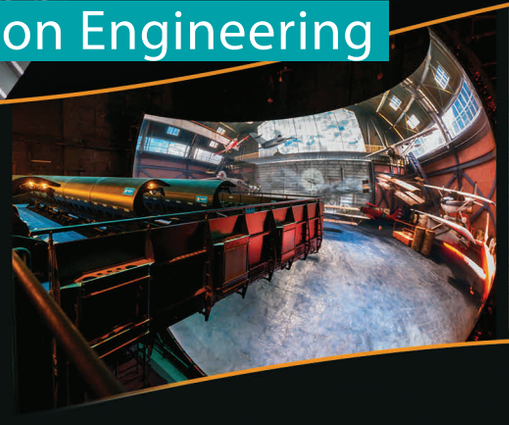



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HEXaFLITE® mini

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Industry Insights



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by Mike Funyak, Director of Operations at DelGrosso's Park & Laguna Splash

Team Member Satisfaction

Getting back to the basics reaps rewards

The attractions industry is always evolving, shaped each year by new trends. Industry professionals routinely seek the right formula to recruit and retain great team members. It's important to ask, "What can a company do to become a better place to work?"

As a leader, it's crucial to also ask yourself, "What more can I do, and what more can leadership do?" Fortunately, there are many ways that industry leaders can develop their teams.



DELGROSSO'S

1. Make Fun of Yourself

I don't consider myself particularly funny or tech-savvy. I know I'm not always up to speed on the latest TikTok trends. Sometimes I lean into that knowledge gap, which allows younger team members to teach the boss something new. It builds connection, lowers barriers, and brings laughter. Once, a ride operator showed me a photo of Sabrina Carpenter, and I replied, "I didn't know Taylor Swift changed her hair."

2. Tell Them They Will Be Great

I consistently remind our DelGrosso's team members that they can—and will—be great. Everyone comes from different backgrounds, and sometimes all an individual needs is encouragement. Being a positive influence in someone's life can have a lasting impact beyond the workplace. I frequently stop by our break area during the day to check in on team members. Listening and letting them tell me about their day builds trust and encouragement to perform their job to a high standard.

3. Thank Them—Every Day

When team members arrive for their shifts, they are greeted not just by me, but by the entire DelGrosso's leadership team. We make it a daily goal to welcome them and thank them for coming to work. At the end of each shift, we thank them again, often using simple but meaningful phrases such as, "Your presence makes all the difference."

4. Give Meaningful Compliments

Each day, leadership aims to give at least one sincere compliment for a job well done. Sometimes this includes reward cards; sometimes, it's simply verbal recognition. When a ride operator receives a written guest compliment, I print it (with the guest's contact details removed), personally present a reward card, and give an "Applause Card"—a recognition that can only come from me.

5. Acknowledge and Smile

Every day is an opportunity to acknowledge someone by name. When I walk around the park, I acknowledge every team member who works in the department I oversee. Whether it's stopping by a ride to say hello or simply waving and smiling, these small actions help team members feel seen, heard, and valued.

6. Love What You Do

Lead with passion. Love what you do. Once you show humility and determination that nothing will stop you from achieving results, others will begin to follow and do the same. With true passion and love, people stay together and aim to achieve the same shared goals. FW



Mike Funyak has worked in the attractions industry for more than 10 years. Starting as a ride operator, he worked in various capacities and roles, learning and developing skills to become a confident industry professional while promoting safe, memorable experiences. Connect with him on LinkedIn

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by Robert Bosken, Risk Manager, Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

Complacency: The Risk We Don't See Coming

Don't allow safety to fade into the background



MICHAEL COSTELLO

In safety and risk management, the biggest dangers aren't always the loud, obvious ones.

More often, it's complacency—the quiet, comfortable feeling that everything is under control. It tends to creep in when things are going well: strong safety records, experienced teams, clear procedures. Ironically, those successes can make us less alert.

When familiarity replaces vigilance, even solid safety systems can start to crack.

Complacency isn't about people cutting corners on purpose—it's human nature. When you've done the same job countless times without an incident, confidence naturally builds. Over time, that confidence can turn into assumptions. "Nothing's ever gone wrong before," or "I already know the risks." The problem is, risk doesn't disappear just because it has not presented itself lately. People aren't being careless; they simply stop actively looking.

Routine and repetition make hazards feel less threatening and warning signs fade into the background. Checklists turn into mental shortcuts. Safety gear starts to feel optional instead of essential. And when something changes—a worn tool, a new coworker, bad weather, a long shift—warning signs can be missed. Those small changes might not seem like a big deal, but they're often exactly where incidents begin.

After an incident, the story is often familiar. The hazard was known. There was a procedure. Proper training took place. What fell apart was focus in the moment. Someone skipped a step, made a quick assumption, or thought someone else had already handled it. These aren't dramatic failures, but they can have serious consequences—injuries, damaged equipment, lost productivity, and shaken trust among teams.

The good news? Complacency can be managed. The key is to treat safety awareness as something living and ongoing, not a one-and-done program. Operators should refresh training so it stays relevant. Talk openly about near misses and lessons learned. Involve employees in spotting hazards and improving processes. Each will allow facilities to stay sharp throughout the season and all year long. FW



Robert Bosken is the risk manager at the Santa Cruz Seaside Company in California. He plays a crucial role in ensuring the facility runs safely and smoothly. As a manager on duty, he ensures the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is not only memorable for guests, but all facets of the operation remain safe. Connect with him on LinkedIn

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by Ylva Linder, IAAPA Global Sustainability Director

Turning Sustainability Into Action

IAAPA launches sustainability strategy

Sustainability is an increasingly important topic across the attractions industry. For many facilities and suppliers, the challenge is not whether sustainability matters; it's where to start and how to make meaningful progress.

At IAAPA, we recently launched our first Sustainability Strategy. The strategy focuses primarily on IAAPA's own journey as a global trade association while continuing to support members in their own progress. The study provides a clear roadmap to strengthen our work across environmental, social, and governance areas. Our ambition is to move IAAPA toward stronger sustainability leadership by setting clear goals, measuring progress, and communicating transparently.

The strategy focuses on several key priorities, including reducing climate impact, improving resource efficiency, strengthening employee and member engagement, and building effective sustainability governance. The initiative also includes expanding sustainability education and sharing industry good practices. While IAAPA continues to strengthen its own efforts, supporting members remains a central part of this work.

The Starting Point

Many organizations begin by reviewing their current operations and identifying areas where improvements can be made. This often includes energy use, water consumption, waste management, employee engagement, and community impact.

Practical actions might include improving energy efficiency, strengthening recycling programs, working with responsible suppliers, or encouraging employees to participate in sustainability initiatives.

The important part is to begin, which builds progress over time. Sustainability does not require a perfect starting point—it develops through practical actions and continuous learning.

IAAPA Sustainability Resources
Download IAAPA's Sustainability Strategy and discover a collection of sustainable tools for IAAPA members:
IAAPA.org/about/sustainability

Find Resources

IAAPA offers several resources that can help members develop their sustainability approach.

One example is IAAPA's vast online Sustainability Fundamentals. This free member course introduces sustainability and builds awareness. Online, members can access industry insights, case examples, and good practices that highlight how attractions around the world are addressing sustainability challenges and opportunities.

In addition, IAAPA continues to grow a sustainability community. Members can connect with peers, exchange ideas, and follow discussions through our digital platform, IAAPA Communities. Joining is simple through the IAAPA website by logging into your account and selecting "My Membership." We welcome more members to join the conversation and share experiences.

IAAPA Communities
Connect with other members, ask questions, get answers with IAAPA Communities
IAAPA.org/IAAPA-Communities

Sustainability at IAAPA Events

Integrating sustainability into IAAPA's events and expos is now more important than ever. As part of our Sustainability Strategy, we have started working toward sustainability certification for IAAPA Expo Europe 2026, with plans to expand this approach to other regions in the coming years. The certification process is comprehensive and includes environmental, social, and governance criteria, along with structured improvements, documentation, and third-party audits.

IAAPA Expos are an important platform for visibility and industry collaboration. By strengthening sustainability practices at these events, we aim to reduce potential negative impacts while demonstrating leadership and sharing solutions across the attractions community.

Moving Forward Together

Every organization's sustainability journey is different. What matters most is taking the first step and continuing to build progress over time. IAAPA is committed to supporting members along the way by providing knowledge, tools, and a community where the industry can learn and grow together.



Ylva Linder, Executive MBA, MSc Environmental Management, Chemical Engineer, brings 25 years of expertise in sustainability, including a decade dedicated to the attractions industry. As IAAPA's first-ever sustainability director, she leads the organization's sustainability strategy, initiatives, and programs, driving positive change. Connect with her on **LinkedIn**:

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by Ken Losch, Account Manager, Amusement Advantage

Driving Repeat Visitation

Creating a powerful guest experience strategy

While new rides and technology capture attention at attractions, repeat visitation is driven by how the experience makes guests feel. Guest experience is the industry's most powerful asset and a shared responsibility across all departments—shaping perception, loyalty, and revenue from the first digital interaction to departure.



Why Small Details Matter

Emotional experiences are built through operational details, including smooth queues, clear signage, shaded areas, cleanliness, and effective communication during ride downtime. Items staff may overlook, such as a broken bench or overflowing trash, often stand out to first-time guests. Transparent updates and interactive queues turn potential frustrations into understanding and positive brand impressions.

Leveraging Team Member Empathy

A polite greeting, a calm response to an upset guest, or genuine excitement from a team member can make or break a guest's visit. Behind these micro-moments lie a more profound truth: guest experience reflects the internal culture. When leadership models care, collaboration, and accountability for the team, those values ripple through every layer of the operation. "A strong employee experience is sensed by guests, even if they can't see what happens behind the scenes," says Josh Liebman, founder of Liebman Leisure Group, a guest experience strategy firm. "When recognition and leadership behaviors are aligned with guest experience goals, the impact on employees doesn't stop with well-being—it shows up directly in how guests are treated."

Prioritizing Inclusivity

Attractions that consider accessibility and sensory needs go beyond compliance to expand emotional reach through features like adaptive ride vehicles, quiet rooms, and visual guides. A thoughtful, inclusive guest experience broadens audience appeal, demonstrates empathy in action, and strengthens both reputation and revenue. Regular audits—reviewing long-term ride plans and using mystery shopping programs—help ensure experiences meet the needs of diverse guests. The connection between guest experience and measurable outcomes is clear.

"Minor improvements in guest satisfaction correlate with significant increases in repeat visitation and word-of-mouth advocacy," says Scot Carson, CEO of Amusement Advantage, a company he founded with the goal of providing mystery shopping services to the attractions industry. "Happier guests don't just return; they invite others, defend the brand online, and spend more across food, merchandise, and premium experiences."

Guest experience, therefore, isn't an expense; it's a strategic investment and should be considered part of the overall budget, not an add-on later.

In an era of demanding guest expectations and intense competition for discretionary spending, caring about the guest experience is essential. Every department, including maintenance, marketing, and beyond, plays a role in shaping the guest experience.

Guests have many places to spend their money—be sure to draw guests in and focus on bringing them back.



Ken Losch is focused on improving guest experience excellence within the attractions industry, using data-driven insights, feedback improvement, and education. He supports business owners through customized mystery shopping and meaningful partnerships. In addition, Losch serves as an IAAPA young professional mentor and community volunteer. Connect with him on LinkedIn.

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by Tony Hansen, Principal Lighting Designer/Project & Product Specialist, Techni-Lux

The Importance of Lighting

Elevating outcomes beyond expectations

As a lighting designer with more than 40 years of experience, I've specialized in themed attractions. A question I am frequently asked is whether a project truly requires a lighting designer. The straightforward answer is no—it does not. A lighting designer is not strictly necessary, much like a hairstylist, a chef, or a DJ is not essential for an event. However, these professionals exist to elevate outcomes beyond what most individuals can achieve independently.

While many of us are capable of cutting our own hair, preparing a meal, or selecting music, the involvement of skilled professionals typically results in a far more refined and impactful experience. The same principle applies to lighting design. A trained and experienced designer brings a critical eye and technical expertise that can reveal more effective and creative ways to illuminate a space—quite literally presenting a project in its best possible light. Moreover, thoughtful design often leads to greater efficiency, which can translate into cost savings over time.

Lighting is fundamentally integral to perception. What we see is the result of light reflecting off surfaces, and the quality of that light directly shapes how objects are perceived. Effective lighting design can enhance form, texture, and color, significantly influencing the overall visual experience. Conversely, poor lighting can render even the most well-crafted elements flat, unappealing, or even misleading.

In my work, I remain attentive to evolving technologies and industry trends, but my primary focus is on leveraging these advancements to create tailored, distinctive solutions for each client. For example, LED technology allows for greater discretion in fixture placement while also introducing considerations such as Color Rendering Index (CRI), which measures a light source's ability to accurately reveal colors. Proper control of the light spectrum ensures that colors appear as intended, enabling designers to emphasize or de-emphasize elements, guide attention, and create dynamic visual effects.



One of the menacing characters found inside Volkanu Quest For The Golden Idol dark ride at Lost Island in Waterloo, Iowa, showcases the importance of proper show lighting.

SALLY DARK RIDES

Lighting is fundamentally integral to perception. What we see is the result of light reflecting off surfaces, and the quality of that light directly shapes how objects are perceived.

I often emphasize to clients that lighting is as essential as any physical component of a project, whether it be scenic design, costuming, or architecture. None of these elements can be fully appreciated without proper illumination. In many cases, I have transformed entire attractions through lighting alone—demonstrating that, at times, relighting can be more impactful than repainting or rebuilding.

Modern lighting systems also offer remarkable flexibility. A single environment can be adapted to serve multiple purposes through changes in lighting alone. With the press of a button, a space can transition seamlessly from one function or mood to another. When executed thoughtfully, lighting design has the power to significantly enhance both the aesthetic and functional success of a project. FW



Tony Hansen has more than 40 years of experience in the lighting industry. He focuses on the design and implementation of advanced lighting solutions for architectural environments, houses of worship, and live events, with a strong focus on themed entertainment, combining creative vision with deep technical expertise. Connect with him on LinkedIn:

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by Kelly Repass and Elaine Mathis

REGIONAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

IAAPA Economic Impact studies are biannual reports analyzing the attractions industry's contribution on a regional level. They provide data-driven insights on revenue, jobs, taxes, attendance, and overall performance, making them an essential resource for policymakers, investors, developers, and industry leaders.

Full reports are available to members at: *https://iaapa.org/research/economic-impact-study*

2025 IAAPA Latin America & Caribbean Economic Impact Study

(Analysis of 2024 Calendar Year)

Total Attraction Facilities: 12,020

- Amusement/ Theme Parks: **113**
- Water Parks: **499**
- Entertainment Centers: **2,983**
- Zoos/ Aquariums: **519**
- Museums/Science Centers: **5,186**
- Historical/Cultural Attractions: **773**
- Natural/Adventure/ Eco/Scenic Attractions: **1,945**

Total Attendance: 396.2 million

Total Revenue Impact: $34.8 billion

Total Employment (Jobs): 1,048,400

Total Labor Income: $7.9 billion

Total Taxes Paid: $3.6 billion

COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN STUDY:

- Argentina
- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Cayman Islands
- Chile
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Puerto Rico
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Uruguay
- Venezuela

2025 IAAPA Middle East & Africa Economic Impact Study

(Analysis of 2024 Calendar Year)

Total Attraction Facilities: 6,695

- Amusement/ Theme Parks: **160**
- Water Parks: **217**
- Entertainment Centers: **2,823**
- Zoos/ Aquariums: **348**
- Museums/Science Centers: **1,669**
- Historical/Cultural Attractions: **732**
- Natural/Adventure/ Eco/Scenic Attractions: **746**

Total Attendance: 738 million

Total Revenue Impact: $40 billion

Total Employment (Jobs): 833,400

Total Labor Income: $10.3 billion

Total Taxes Paid: $2.9 billion

COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN STUDY:

- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Egypt
- Ghana
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kenya
- Kuwait
- Morocco
- Nigeria
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Tunisia
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates



Kelly Repass serves as IAAPA's vice president of global research. Her interest areas include strategic assessment, primary and secondary research, data analytics, and actionable insights to drive business performance and growth. Connect with her on LinkedIn:



Elaine Mathis, Ph.D. is IAAPA's manager of global research, where she helps IAAPA members leverage research to improve their businesses and explore consumer personalization through co-creation and the experience economy. Connect with her on LinkedIn:

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ONE GUEST JOURNEY. ONE CONNECTED PARK.

Your guests experience your park as a single journey, not a frustrating collection of systems.



VANTAGE UNITES:

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- Cashless and e-commerce transactions
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- Loyalty and personalisation
- Multi system data

ENCHANTED PARKS

REGISTER:

Tie touchpoints together around your guests so everything works reliably, securely, and seamlessly. **Integration is simpler than you think with Vantage.**

Discover how Enchanted Parks see connected guest experiences, powered by Vantage, as the future.

To learn how, tune into the IAAPA Education webinar **'Building a Connected Park: The New Standard for Guest Journeys'** on June 4th.

IAAPA EDUCATION

VANTAGE

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Pursue the Wonder at IAAPA Expo Asia 2026

Hong Kong to serve as backdrop to dynamic event

POSITIONED ON THE PICTURESQUE VICTORIA HARBOUR and situated in a city that never sleeps, the beautiful Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre stands ready to welcome global professionals to IAAPA Expo Asia 2026.

A global hub for innovation, creativity, and world-class attractions, Hong Kong will serve as the global attraction industry's Asia-Pacific gateway for IAAPA Expo Asia 2026. From June 9-12, decision makers from around the globe will gather for a dynamic event featuring state-of-the-art exhibitors, valuable EDUSessions, and unlimited possibilities. From June 10-12, the trade show floor will feature hundreds of exhibiting companies eager to make connections and present products designed to harness untapped potential.

"With its international reputation as a center of commerce and style all its own, the diverse culture and bright lights of Hong Kong make this the perfect place to invest in the future of your business," says Jack Chan, IAAPA Asia-Pacific vice president and executive director.

From cutting-edge safety features and artificial intelligence advancements to immersive design and sustainable operations, IAAPA Expo Asia for will spotlight the products and investments driving growth across theme parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, museums, zoos, aquariums, resorts, and more.

"We look forward to inviting the world back to Hong Kong for IAAPA Expo Asia for the first time since 2018," says Jakob Wahl, IAAPA president and CEO.

IAAPA NEWS



Insightful EDUSessions

IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 is set to shine with an always-impressive slate of EDUSessions built to empower attraction industry professionals as they navigate a rapidly changing marketplace. Participants can dive into focused training through the IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals, learning directly from seasoned experts who understand the challenges and opportunities shaping the field.

These EDUSessions span an exciting mix of topics—from weaving AI and sustainability into attraction design and elevating guest experiences, to strengthening day-to-day operations. Industry leaders will unpack the newest trends in immersive entertainment,

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accessibility, and strategic marketing, offering practical insights that drive real business impact. Hands-on workshops will also dig into AI-driven tools, global IP developments, and the emerging technologies redefining the future of attractions.

Thought Leadership Speakers

A host of speakers will inspire, educate, and captivate attendees, from Rosalyn Woo, vice president, operations at Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, to Lena Lee, executive vice president, attractions and destination experience at Resorts World Sentosa, and Masako Taguchi, senior vice president, human resources, Universal Studios Japan.

The influential Su Zhigang, founder and chairman of Chimelong Group and 2025 IAAPA Hall of Fame inductee, will headline the Expo's prestigious Leadership Breakfast. The dynamic Women's Leadership Luncheon will unite female voices from across the attractions sector for authentic conversation and idea-sharing. These exclusive gatherings of senior executives from across Asia and the global attractions community will feature insights from the industry's most visionary leaders.

Onsite EDUTours

"Hong Kong is the perfect place to 'inspire the wonder' of what's new, next, and innovative," says Chan. Education extends beyond the convention center through IAAPA's signature EDUTours, offering exclusive behind-the-scenes access to innovative attractions and developments across Hong Kong.

Attendees have the opportunity to explore conservation and sustainability initiatives at Ocean Park Hong Kong; experience the rapid growth of the family entertainment center Kidztopia; tour Kai Tak Sports Park, Hong Kong's landmark sports and entertainment development; and celebrate the industry at the Opening Reception hosted at Hong Kong Disneyland Resort.

From June 13-14, an optional post-tour to Qingyuan Chimelong International Forest Resort offers participants additional insight into a large-scale integrated resort development in Mainland China.

IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 provides value in global knowledge via expert-led workshops, innovation exposure through cutting-edge exhibitors, practical insights from behind-the-scenes tours, unparalleled opportunities for business growth, and global collaboration in one of the world's most dynamic entertainment markets. "IAAPA Expos have the reputation of providing transformation—whether that's in your business or your career," says Christy Spahn, IAAPA vice president of Expo sales and operations. Join IAAPA in Hong Kong this June 9-12 to be transformed! FW



IAAPA NEWS

"There's nothing else like an IAAPA Expo to bring our industry together. From the dynamic trade show floor to educational opportunities and networking events, IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 is not one to miss."

— Jakob Wahl, IAAPA President and CEO.

IAAPA EXPO ASIA

Register for IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 today at **IAAPA.org/Expos**



IAAPA NEWS

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Inspiring Change, Empowering Leaders: The IAAPA Women's Task Force



IAAPA values and celebrates the strength, resilience, and achievements of women around the world. In the spirit of that commitment, IAAPA is proud to highlight the accomplishments of the IAAPA Women's Task Force. Since its launch in 2024, the task force has built a strong foundation and delivered meaningful results in 2025. The group of dedicated female leaders work together with a shared purpose—to elevate women across the attractions industry through connection, education, and representation. Task force members include:

- **Geneieve Norris-Brown** *(Chair)*, chief operating officer and general manager of Seabreeze Amusement Park, whose passion for leadership development and industry advocacy anchors the group's mission.
- **Gina Claassen, ICAE**, vice president of operations at Herschend
- **Heather Barnes, MA**, founder and CEO of Improv @ Work LLC and faculty member at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management
- **Lauren Crosby**, fourth-generation owner and director of entertainment and events at Holiday World & Splashin' Safari
- **Marah Rodriguez, ICAE**, regional vice president of sales at Mobaro
- **MJ Brewer,** vice president of American Specialty Insurance & Risk Services, Inc.
- **Sharon Parker**, director of marketing and sales at Universal Kids Resort.

In 2025, The IAAPA Women's Task Force hosted two successful live chats, including "Listen, Learn & Engage with Women on the IAAPA Global Board of Directors," which featured members of the IAAPA Board and created an open forum for dialogue and insight.

Another session, "Breaking Barriers: How an Empowered Woman Found Her Multiphasic Success in the Attractions Industry and Beyond," featured Jane Cooper, former president and COO of Herschend Family Entertainment, who offered a candid and inspiring look at leadership, resilience, and career evolution.

At IAAPA Expo 2025, the Women in the Industry Networking Lunch scored exceptionally well, placing in the top 25% of all Expo education offerings. Attendance grew from 244 attendees in 2024 to 301 in 2025, marking a 23% year-over-year increase.

The work of the IAAPA Women's Task Force not only honors the progress made, but it also paves the way for continued growth, leadership, and opportunity for women across our industry.



Monica Bejarano developed an early love for the attractions industry. while working for The Walt Disney Company while still in high school. What started as a first job quickly became the foundation for a deeper connection to an industry. Today, Monica is a champion for the power of education and supporting the next generation of leaders. Connect with her on LinkedIn:

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Passports with Purpose: IAAPA Members Extend the Magic with Give Kids The World Wish Families

IAAPA ARCHIVES



From 1994 (Left to right): Henri Landwirth, founder of Give Kids The World and IAAPA Hall of Fame inductee; Susan Mosedale, former IAAPA executive; and Ted Crowell, IAAPA 1994 Chairman of the Board are joined by mascot Mayor Clayton at Give Kids the World Village in Kissimmee, Florida.

For more than four decades, Give Kids The World Village (GKTW) has delivered weeklong, cost-free vacations to children with critical illnesses and their families. Located in Kissimmee, Florida, the colorful nonprofit resort removes the logistical and financial burdens that often accompanies travel. GKTW provides transportation, lodging, meals, entertainment, theme park tickets, and accessible attractions in one coordinated experience.

"When families come to Give Kids The World, they are surrounded by kindness, fun, and positive memories," says GKTW President and CEO Caroline Schumacher.

That spirit extends beyond central Florida through the IAAPA World Passport for Kids Program. The initiative ensures that positivity created during a wish trip does not end when families return home. Upon departing the Village, each wish child receives an IAAPA World Passport for Kids certificate along with a list of participating attractions. The passport provides complimentary admission for the wish child and their immediate family to a registered IAAPA member attraction within one year of their GKTW visit.

"Through the generosity of IAAPA member attractions, wish families continue to have something to look forward to when they return home," Schumacher explains.

Families coordinate directly with the attraction they wish to visit and follow that facility's individual booking guidelines. While each attraction establishes its own procedures, all participating partners agree to provide complimentary admission for the wish child and their immediate family.

Many IAAPA members expanded on the commitment—offering additional amenities, like complimentary parking, wheelchair or stroller rentals, and meals—further easing barriers to access and enhancing the guest experience.

For families, the impact of such generosity is deeply felt. "We went to Holiday World & Splashin' Safari in Santa Claus, Indiana," shares the Chappell family of Kentucky. "It had been several years since we had been there, and it was a favorite place for our boys. We had two great days there, and they gave us a pass to skip lines if we needed to. It was a great bonus to our GKTW stay."

Others describe the program as an opportunity to create experiences that would otherwise be out of reach.

"We used our passport at Canada's Wonderland, the Niagara Falls Ripley's and Guinness Book locations, Darien Lake, Knoebels, and Hersheypark," shares the Burt family of New York. "All of these were experiences we could have never afforded with all the medical expenses we had."

The program allows IAAPA member attractions to leverage existing capacity to deliver meaningful guest experiences.

Since 1994, IAAPA's partnership with GKTW has generated millions of dollars in support through member-donated experiences, products, services, and special events. Through the program, that original spirit of collaboration continues—one memory at a time. FW

IAAPA members interested in joining the World Passport for Kids Program can do so by completing and submitting the Partner Contact Information form:

Questions regarding enrollment can be directed to **GKTW@IAAPA.org**

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IAAPA MENA: IAAPA Taps 2 to Expand Middle East Region

Like the rapid development in the region itself, IAAPA too mirrors the growth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The association is excited to reveal two firsts in the region: the appointment of the first Middle East regional advisory chair and the hiring of the association's first vice president and executive director of the Middle East.



Dr. Neil Dwyer
Regional Advisory Board Chair, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Dr. Neil Dwyer brings more than 20 years of international experience in theme park operations and strategic leadership. He currently serves as vice president of operations at Six Flags Qiddiya City, where he shapes one of the world's most ambitious entertainment destinations.

Throughout his career, Dr. Dwyer has held leadership roles at Blackpool Pleasure Beach, IMG Worlds of Adventure, and Global Village.

"The Middle East is a strategic focus for IAAPA, and we will be working to strengthen its profile on the global attractions stage, while setting the foundations for long-term success," Dr. Dwyer says. His initial priority will be to bring IAAPA's education, standards, research, safety and security focus, industry connections, and wider resources closer to the region to best support IAAPA members. "I encourage everyone in the region to reach out anytime," Dr. Dwyer enthusiastically tells Funworld.

Mike Rigby
IAAPA Vice President and Executive Director, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Mike Rigby brings more than 15 years of international leadership experience in the leisure, hospitality, and entertainment sectors.



Based in MENA's Dubai office, Rigby has a strong track record of driving market expansion across the Middle East, Africa, and India, leading teams and securing large-scale partnerships.

"IAAPA's significant commitment to establish and expand its presence in the MENA region will allow our members—existing and future—to showcase their projects in front of a global audience," Rigby tells Funworld. "This expansion will encourage enhanced learning, education and networking, and will reinforce the MENA region as a global pioneer in the attractions and leisure sector." Rigby's appointment as the association's first vice president and executive director of the Middle East will position the region for the future. "I look forward to spearheading this growth building on the fantastic work of the existing IAAPA EMEA and IAAPA global teams, and the exciting partnership with MENALAC."

In March, IAAPA announced IAAPA and MENALAC—the trade council that represents leading leisure and attractions companies across the MENA region—will join forces to launch IAAPA MENA (Middle East North Africa). Rigby will be based at IAAPA's new regional office in Dubai.

"This expansion marks an exciting new chapter as IAAPA continues to expand its global footprint," confirms Michael Shelton, IAAPA chief operating officer. The new MENA region official debuts on July 1.

Morgan's Inclusion Institute Expands Accessibility Training to IAAPA Members

Learn more about how to become an IAAPA Education Contributor:

IAAPA members now have access to disability inclusion training through a new partnership with Morgan's Inclusion Institute, an educational initiative rooted in the inclusive mission of Texas theme park Morgan's Wonderland. The training will be offered as part of IAAPA's Education Premium Contributor program.

"Morgan's Inclusion Institute is proud to become IAAPA's exclusive provider of disability and inclusion training, while also joining the Pre-Approved Provider list to support member organizations in advancing inclusion," says Enzo Piscopo, president of Morgan's Inclusion Institute.

Through this collaboration, Morgan's Inclusion Institute will deliver specialized accessibility education via IAAPA's professional development platform, giving member organizations expanded access to expert-led training aimed at fostering more inclusive attractions. The program equips operators with practical tools to enhance accessibility, elevate the guest experience, and implement meaningful inclusion practices.

"As a global association, IAAPA is committed to helping our members create attractions that are welcoming and accessible to all," shares IAAPA President and CEO Jakob Wahl. "Partnering with Morgan's Inclusion Institute as an Education Premium Contributor expands access to expert-led disability inclusion training and provides our members with practical tools to advance inclusion across the attractions industry worldwide."

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Explore the New IAAPA Learning Library: Unlock Learning Anywhere



To learn more about the IAAPA Learning library, log in:



Aviva Ezring is IAAPA's senior director of professional development and education. She brings more than 20 years of experience in theme parks and resorts, leading live entertainment and learning and development initiatives, to her work supporting professional growth across the global attractions industry. Connect with her on LinkedIn.



Professional development in the attractions industry is now more accessible than ever. The IAAPA Learning Library, launched in February 2026, delivers a modern, streamlined learning experience through a custom-built platform powered by Study Academy USA.

Designed to support professional growth across roles, departments, and industry segments worldwide, the platform makes it easier for professionals to strengthen skills, expand knowledge, and grow their careers. At the same time, organizations can support employee development and retention by investing in meaningful, industry relevant learning opportunities.

Access On-Demand Educational Resources

The IAAPA Learning Library provides convenient, on-demand access to a growing catalog of industry-focused courses, recorded webinars, and recorded Expo EDUSessions from around the world. This flexible format allows members to learn when it fits their schedules and at their own pace.

Key content areas include operations, safety, leadership, guest experience, and more. Each course is intentionally designed to deliver practical, actionable knowledge that can be applied immediately in day-to-day roles across the attractions and entertainment industry.

A Seamless User Experience

The reimagined platform offers a simple, intuitive user experience within a centralized learning hub. Members can easily browse available courses, search for specific topics, and track their learning progress all in one place.

Using existing IAAPA.org login credentials, members gain access to engaging, relevant, and cost effective learning solutions. The IAAPA Learning Library helps organizations maximize their IAAPA member benefits while investing wisely in employee development.

Earn Continuing Education Units

Learning completed through the IAAPA Learning Library earns Continuing Education Units (CEUs) toward certification renewal for both IAAPA Certified Attractions Professionals (ICAP) and IAAPA Certified Attractions Executives (ICAE), supporting ongoing professional growth and credential maintenance.

Leverage the IAAPA Learning Library

The IAAPA Learning Library can also be used as a powerful tool for structured employee development. Leaders can assign courses and monitor team progress through the new self service Group Dashboard, making it easier to build training programs and foster a culture of continuous learning.

By expanding access to professional education and training, the IAAPA Learning Library helps attractions professionals remain competitive in a rapidly evolving global industry while empowering individuals and teams to learn, grow, and succeed.

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Making the Most of IAAPA Membership

IAAPA stands dedicated to helping its members connect, grow, and succeed. Attractions professionals who become part of the community gain access to a global network of industry peers and a suite of valuable resources—providing operators a competitive edge.







IAAPA NEWS

Insights to Stay Ahead

Understanding guest expectations and industry trends is critical. IAAPA provides members with research, reports, and data-driven insights that support smarter decision-making.

These resources help members anticipate shifts in consumer behavior, evaluate performance, and identify opportunities for growth—grounding strategy in real-world data.

View IAAPA Research Resources:

Media Visibility Opportunities

Membership also opens the door to industry visibility. Member manufacturers, suppliers, and service providers can share news releases for IAAPA News Daily via the **IAAPANewsDaily@IAAPA.org** email address, potentially reaching a broad audience of industry professionals.

Funworld magazine offers both print and digital editions, along with an online archive of articles and case studies. Together, these platforms provide opportunities to stay informed and contribute to industry conversation.

Visit the IAAPA News Page:

Learning at Every Level

Professional development is a core part of the IAAPA membership experience. Members receive discounts on IAAPA certification programs and Institutes, along with access to EDUSessions at Expos.

Explore IAAPA's Education Opportunities:

Webinars, live chats, and on-demand content help members stay current on trends and best practices, while supporting ongoing skill development across teams.

Tools for Safe Operations

Safety remains a priority across the attractions industry. IAAPA supports members with resources designed to help them prepare for and respond to challenges.

This includes a 24/7 crisis hotline, customizable crisis communications templates, and operational guidance through facility manuals and best practices. These tools are designed to be practical, accessible, and ready when members need them.

Access Safety Resources:

Advocacy Efforts for Attractions

IAAPA also represents the interests of its members through advocacy efforts around the world. By engaging with policymakers and industry stakeholders, the association works to support a safe, sustainable, and growing attractions industry.

Learn about IAAPA's Advocacy Impact:

Moving the Industry Forward

At its core, IAAPA membership is about helping individuals and businesses do their jobs better—through connections, knowledge, and shared experiences.

More information on membership benefits is available at IAAPA.org, or by emailing IAAPA@IAAPA.org. As the industry continues to evolve, IAAPA remains committed to supporting its members every step of the way. FW



Tim Swengros is a membership engagement and sales representative for IAAPA North America. With more than 15 years of experience in the attractions industry, he enjoys and oversees all aspects of the membership journey while supporting IAAPA members with questions about membership benefits, IAAPA events and expos, and the association's mission and vision. Connect with him on LinkedIn:

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Where the Leaders of Tomorrow Learn from the Leaders of Today

Email **YoPro@IAAPA.org** with questions about the program. Learn more and fill out an interest form for the 2027 program here:



IAAPA is dedicated to developing the next generation of industry innovators by providing tools and resources for young professionals to achieve their dreams and gain practical insights into the attractions industry while accelerating career growth. The IAAPA Mentorship Program serves this mission and facilitates meaningful connections between today's leaders and tomorrow's rising talent.

Where Mentors and Mentees Connect

The IAAPA Mentorship Program creates opportunities for established industry professionals to share their experience and perspective, aiming to guide the next generation of attractions leaders. According to the IAAPA Research team, young professional and student membership is IAAPA's fastest-growing segment. By investing in this growing community, IAAPA can help build a strong pipeline of future professionals. "The [program] is one of the most direct and impactful ways for leaders to give back to our industry and help shape its future," shares 2025 mentor Jes McAdam-Sellers, general manager of Great Wolf Lodge in Sandusky, Ohio.

Flexible Modes of Connection

The program is available for student and young professional members across all regions and is designed with flexibility in mind. Mentors and mentees can meet virtually or in person, with a commitment of just one meeting per quarter. Matches are based on the mentee's career goals and interests, along with the mentor's areas of expertise. Participants also receive resources designed to help them make the most of each meeting with their mentor.

New Program Perks to Come

The 2026 mentorship program includes more than 100 mentor/mentee pairs, a 46% increase over the prior year's participation. With continued growth in mind, new program features will debut soon, including exclusive mentorship participant webinars, an IAAPA Expo mentorship meetup, and IAAPA Expo badge ribbons for current program mentors.

Reflections on Value

Reflecting on his experience in the 2025 program, mentee Ivar Eichelsheim shares, "It is because of IAAPA that I have arrived where I am today. I am now closer to my goals than I ever could have imagined, and I will always be grateful for the mentorship program and for my mentor's guidance." Mentees also achieve personal development. "I had an eventful year in my professional life and am extremely grateful for [my mentor's] guidance through it all," mentee Genevie Kent states. "He helped me build my confidence and learn a lot more about myself and my goals."

How to Participate

Applications open in July. An active IAAPA membership is required for mentors and mentees to participate.



Frank Hamedl is IAAPA's program manager, Global Professional Development, leading efforts that support leadership growth and career advancement for passionate young professionals and future leaders across the global attractions industry. Connect with him on LinkedIn:

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This is a partial listing of upcoming IAAPA events. Event details are as of April 5, 2026, and subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, visit **IAAPA.org/Events**

MAY

IAAPA Safety Institute
6 | Orlando

IAAPA Meetup: IAAPA HQ
6 | Orlando

IAAPA | HONORS
12-14 | Playa del Carmen, Mexico

IAAPA Meetup: Ignite Your Career
20 | Orlando

JUNE

IAAPA Water Park Forum
4 | Wavre, Belgium

IAAPA Presents: Walibi Belgium
5 | Wavre, Belgium

IAAPA EXPO ASIA
9-12 | Hong Kong

IAAPA Presents: Karls Erlebnis-Dorf Elstal for Young Professionals
23 | Elstal, Germany

IAAPA Meetup: Harley-Davidson Museum
25 | Milwaukee

JULY

IAAPA Meetup: Bolder Adventure Park
14 | Grand Prairie, TX

IAAPA Meetup: Netflix House Philadelphia
28 | Philadelphia

AUGUST

IAAPA Meetup: Ignite Your Career
5 | Orlando

IAAPA Summit: Entertainment Centers 2026
18-19 | Buenos Aires, Argentina

SEPTEMBER

IAAPA EXPO EUROPE
21-24 | London



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Linking China's growing attractions cluster

by Scott Fais

TRAINS ROCKETING ACROSS FARMLAND. Boats with jet engines slicing through whitecaps. And autobuses that seemingly glide over one of the world's longest bridges. Today's Greater Bay Area—defined by Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai—are connected better than ever before in China's history. Travel fueled by multiple transportation options have allowed residents and visitors alike to move freely, benefiting attractions of all sizes. The cluster of cities, with their water vistas and lush landscapes, are home to 86 million people—making this region one of the most populated in the world.

Funworld shares how the region's newfound movement has impacted attractions growth in a way operators never dreamed of at the start of the millennium.

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Watch Macau's Courtesy Campaign
Produced by the Macau Government's Tourism Office, this video promotes a courtesy and service mindset for employees at attractions and resorts.

MACAU'S GLOW UP

There's currently a transformation underway in Macau. The SAR (special administrative region) government's second-phase Master Plan outlines six major areas and 74 action plans—many rooted in tourism—aimed for progressive implementation by 2030. Macau is vigorously developing into a city hosting sporting events and entertainment. The action plans aim to create everything from gastronomy events to customer service training.

Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes confirms visitor arrivals to Macau surpassed 40 million in 2025. The number of international visitors from Europe saw a double-digit increase.

One driver for the increase spans to Hong Kong, literally. The new Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macau Bridge (HZMB) is a 55-kilometer bridge and tunnel system connecting the communities. A network of bridges span the Pearl River Estuary in the South China Sea, crossing four manmade islands and dipping into an undersea tunnel. Built at a cost of ¥127 billion, the HZMB is designed to last for 120 years.

Meanwhile (at press time), a government-proposed ban would prohibit all forms of gambling advertising. The reform targets both traditional media, along with digital and influencer marketing. The goal is to align Macau's image as a tourism, leisure, and attractions destination. And Macau stands ready with several world-class attractions.

Studio City in the Spotlight

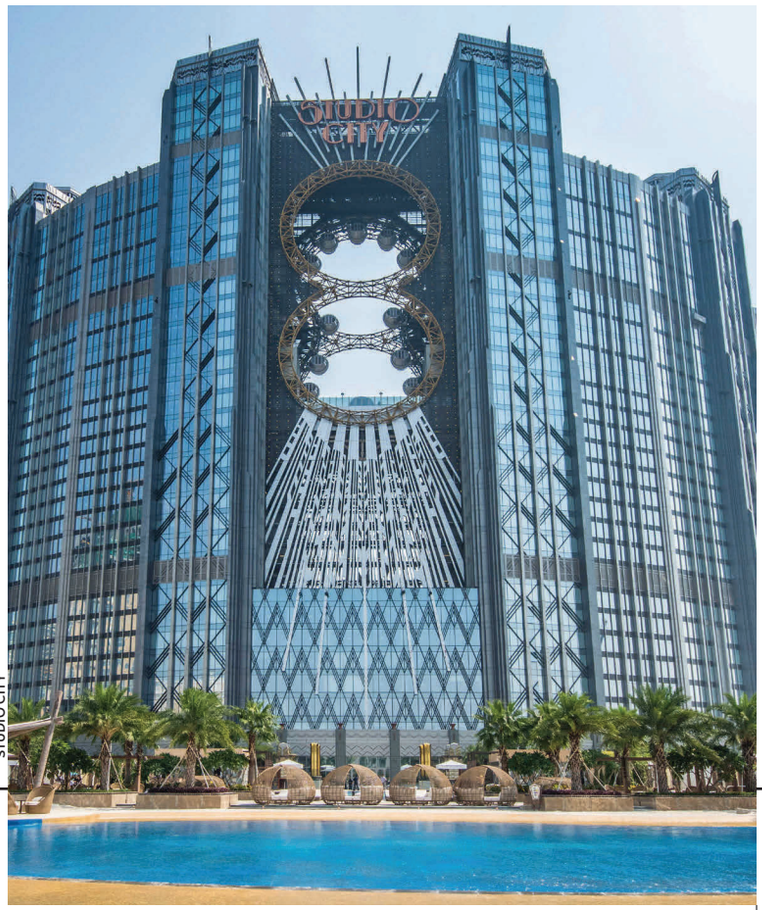
The glitzy Hollywood-themed Studio City Macau is an integrated resort that continues to grow. In 2023, the property expanded with the new W Hotel and Epic Tower (an in-house managed brand). Today the complex includes 3,000 hotel rooms and numerous attractions, along with IP-based activations.

"It's a place where entertainment, hospitality, and family experiences come together—and you never need to leave," says Melissa Chung, executive director of leisure and spa at Studio City.

The futuristic Studio City Water Park, an indoor-outdoor facility opened in 2020. Spanning roughly 10,000 square meters, the park features 16 water slides, two distinctly different wave pools, a 250-meter action river, and relaxation zones. The temperature-controlled indoor environment hovers around 30°C (about 86°F), allowing guests to experience summer year-round. The consistent temperature is a key operational choice suited to regional guest preferences.

"It took time to change perceptions, especially in winter," explains Chung. "People would say, 'I don't want to play in the water; it's cold,' even though the indoor park is warm. Now, guests understand it." The average visit lasts six hours.

After guests dry off, FECs of epic proportions awaits. Stacked vertically, the multi-level Super Fun Zone combines soft play,



STUDIO CITY

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climbing, slides, and bridges. A permanent skate park doubles as both a community amenity and an international competition venue. Outside of major skating events and tournaments, Studio City opens the park free of charge to local families.

"Everything we build is about the family playing together. Parents and kids can experience the attractions at the same time," shares Rachel Cheng, senior manager of entertainment operations.

Rising above the skate park is the resort's iconic figure eight Ferris wheel, a 130-meter-tall-attraction whose shape carries a cultural significance tied to prosperity and good fortune.

To correspond to the Lunar New Year celebration, Studio City created their own ride: a Steeplechase-like attraction where guests could saddle-up atop a man-made horse and ride around a track. The ride celebrated 2026 as the Year of the Horse.

This spring, Studio City partnered with Disney to create a pop-up event strategically positioned at the resort's arrival points. Interactive game booths, character meet-and-greets, selfie stations, and hands-on workshops began in late April. Cheng says the goal is to transform public areas into an environment that feels more like a theme park experience than a traditional hotel lobby. The partnership with Disney follows a successful Toy Story activation in 2025.

STUDIO CITY



STUDIO CITY



Galaxy Shines

Galaxy Macau continues to reposition itself from a gaming-dominant destination to a balanced, family-friendly integrated resort. Significant investments in water attractions, accessibility, and events are designed to inspire multigenerational travel, VIP guests, and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) business—while maintaining a strong casino presence.

"They still want to gamble, but now they also want their family to enjoy the resort—food, attractions, cinema, and concerts," says Yik Ho, Galaxy's assistant vice president of resort and recreation during Funworld's recent tour of Galaxy's attractions.

The integrated resort's tropical paradise features a massive wave pool incorporated with a stage for a live DJ. Simultaneously, shady nooks exist for guest seeking tranquility.

Two new offerings slated to open this summer include transforming the lazy river and adding a new splash pad.

"This is no longer a lazy river—this is an adventure river. We increased the pump power by more than 50%," Yik shares while standing on a bridge overlooking the construction progress. "Every 20 to 30 seconds, guests [will] experience something new, feature after feature."

A new splash pad—designed to be 10 times larger than a previous pad—will give families a reason to visit.

GALAXY MACAU



GALAXY MACAU



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HONG KONG'S THEME PARK EVOLUTION

A center of commerce and business, Hong Kong is rooted in history and culture. Used historically by fishermen and traders, Junk rigged sailboats—complete with their distinctive battened sails and flat-bottomed hulls—share Victoria Harbour with sleek modern water taxis using marine waterjets that ferry passengers to Macau in under an hour.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) announced 14.31 million visitors—representing a 17% year-on-year increase—visited in the first quarter of 2026.

Dr. Peter Lam, HKTB chairman, told a crowd assembled for the Hong Kong Tourism Overview 2026 event in March, that the SAR city stands ready to create business opportunities that "highlight Hong Kong's strengths and attract more high-value overnight visitors to Hong Kong, thereby maximizing the economic benefits of the tourism industry as we embrace a future full of opportunities." Both of Hong Kong's major theme parks stand ready to do just that.

Ocean Park Hong Kong Poised to Grow

Just ahead of its 50th anniversary, Ocean Park Hong Kong continues to reinvent itself. Opened in 1977, the attraction takes advantage of its mountainous terrain offering a world-famous gondola ride that straddles a hillside over the picturesque South China Sea.

The modern facility, rooted in conservation and education, blends animals with a collection of family and thrill rides. So far in 2026, Ocean Park reported a year-over-year increase of more than 20% in overseas visitors between Dec. 2025-Feb. 2026, while mainland Chinese visitors grew by around 15%.

The gains follow a robust 2025 where combined visitor numbers for Ocean Park and neighboring Water World water park rose by 10% year-over-year to 3.46 million. The reason for the growth? Call it the "panda effect."

The addition of four giant pandas—including the birth of the first pair of giant panda twin cubs, Jia Jia and De De, in August 2024, and the arrival of a third pair of giant pandas gifted by the Central Government to Hong Kong—has created a giant panda craze.

"The presence of six giant pandas of three generations has not only amplified our conservation and education efforts—and empowered us to connect with a broader audience—but it also



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creates unprecedented opportunities for business growth," Pong says. "As a non-profit organization, Ocean Park Corporation's steady enhancement in operating performance enables us to dedicate resources to advancing vital conservation and education initiatives for society and nurturing future generations."

Cross-border learning opportunities where the park hosts study tours for students in the Greater Bay Area jumped 10% the first three months of 2026. The students primarily come from Guangdong and Shenzhen, with some as far away as Shanghai, greater than 1,600 km to the northeast.

Next, Ocean Park plans to redevelop its North Pole Encounter into a new marine mammal conservation center. Opening in 2027, the new exhibit will integrate insights from Ocean Park's extensive marine mammal research and rescue efforts. Interactive zones and immersive learning space will allow guests to explore marine mammal behaviors and understand challenges facing ocean ecosystems, like plastic pollution.

In 2028, Ocean Park plans to leverage the park's topography and vistas when opening Adventure Zone. Situated on the developed hillside of the upper park, Adventure Zone will feature an alpine coaster, two zip lines and three dry slides featuring steep slopes and sharp curves. In a sustainable move, a new ropes course will reuse the dome-shaped arch found on the retired Mine Train roller coaster. In addition, twin bungy and twin giant swings will be part of an outdoor playground, complete with water play areas and climbing walls.



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Water World Ocean Park, the park's water park, reopens on May 16 with a seasonal calendar full of special events. From grad nights to the "Get! Splash! Tonight!" evening party, the park will feature DJs, neon lights, and glowing lazy river cruises. The water park boasts nine slide complexes, two rivers—one peaceful and the other fast moving—for a total of 27 attractions total.

IAAPA EXPO ASIA

Go behind-the-scenes at Ocean Park at IAAPA Expo 2026
From operations to education and animal care to mission-driven design, this EDUTour allows visitors to learn from Ocean Park leaders. To register, visit **IAAPA.org/Expos**

Hong Kong Disneyland Continues Development

Following the resort's 20th anniversary celebration, a multi-year expansion will support the facility's long-term growth strategy.

Construction on an Avengers-themed attraction featuring Spider-Man that reportedly will utilize the same elevator-style drop ride system found on the Tower of Terror at Disney's Hollywood Studios (Orlando), Disney Adventure World (Paris), and Tokyo DisneySea (Japan). An original story includes Spider-Man's formidable foes creating havoc while chasing new technology at Stark Industries. The new attraction will be the third pavilion to open at Stark Expo in Tomorrowland, joining the Iron Man Experience (2017) and Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle! (2019).

Across the park, a new theater is under construction that will feature an original Pixar entertainment presentation. The new theater—positioned between Toy Story Land and World of Frozen—will feature immersive technology.

As a good neighbor, Hong Kong Disneyland also builds community. Following the devastating high-rise fire at the Wang Fuk Court apartments in Hong Kong's Tai Po District in Nov. 2025, Disney committed more than HK$10 million in cash and in-kind donations to support those affected by the blaze.



DISNEY

"We stand in with our community in the wake of this tragedy and remain committed to supporting Hong Kong as it heals," says Tim Sypko, managing director of Hong Kong Disneyland.

Since its opening in 2005, the resort has attracted more than 1000 guests from mainland China, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

IAAPA EXPO ASIA

Experience Hong Kong Disneyland at IAAPA Expo 2026
The Opening Ceremony will be full of Disney magic on Wednesday, June 10. Attendees will experience an enchanting evening full of networking and exclusive access to the World of Frozen realm. To register, visit **IAAPA.org/Expos**

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CHIMELONG: REDEFINING GUANGZHOU AND ZHUHAI

The high-speed Guangzhou–Shenzhen–Hong Kong Express Rail Link connected Hong Kong to the rest of China's rail network for the first time in Sept. 2018. The station at Hong Kong's West Kowloon Station now serves as a gateway to the rest of China, where high-speed trains can accelerate up to speeds of 350 kilometers per hour—linking Hong Kong and Guangzhou in under an hour.

In Guangzhou, Chimelong has exceeded expectations and defines what a modern attraction can be. The Chimelong Tourtist resort includes Chimelong Paradise theme park, Chimelong Safari Park, Chimelong Water Park, Chimelong Birds Park, and the Chimelong International Circus, and three resort hotels. The Safari Park is home to more than 500 species. A drive-through attraction provides up-close looks at zebras, giraffes, and hippos. The walk-through portion of the park includes an extensive panda habitat with more than a dozen panda bears on display at a time. Educators and animal specialists are available to answer questions and serve as ambassadors. The Chimelong brand is the vision of Su Zhigang, known for his seamless integration of conservation, innovation, and entertainment. Mr. Su was inducted into the IAAPA Hall of Fame in Nov. 2025, making history as the first Chinese inductee to receive the prestigious honor.

To the south in Zhuhai, Chimelong has created a kingdom all its own. Anchored by the famed Chimelong Spaceship, the Zhuhai resort includes the futuristic modern marine life facility, Chimelong Ocean Kingdom theme park, four resort hotels, and a circus theater, with greater expansion planned in the years ahead. Chimelong Ocean Kingdom includes one of the world's largest aquariums at 22.7 million liters with whale sharks and giant manta rays that glide past guests. Educational orca presentations at Chimelong Spaceship include live music and piloted dirigibles soaring overhead. FW

SCOTT FAIS



SCOTT FAIS



IAAPA EXPO ASIA

Learn from Chimelong Chairman Su Zhigang
Start the day with insight and inspiration at IAAPA Expo Asia's Leadership Breakfast for the keynote address featuring Chimelong Chairman Su Zhigang. This rare opportunity takes place on Thursday, June 11, 2026 at 8:30 a.m. To register, visit **IAAPA.org/Expos**

Watch Ocean Kingdom's Evening Water Spectacular
After the sun sets, Chimelong Ocean Kingdom's parade, followed by a water pageant—complete with drones in the sky and fly boarders flipping below—captivate audiences. See Funworld's video of the evening entertainment at **IAAPA.org/NightOcean**

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Mike Sheldon, Owner
River Club Glen Arbor, Glen Arbor, MI

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Kamiya Woodard, Director of Recreation
Orlando World Center Marriott, Orlando, FL



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Former Director – Procurement Strategy
Great Wolf Resorts, Inc.



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NO LIMIT!

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS JAPAN TURNS HEADS AT 25

by Scott Fais

THE PHRASE NO LIMIT IS MORE THAN A SLOGAN at Universal Studios Japan—it's a mantra. At age 25, Universal Studios Japan (USJ) is just getting started. As one of the world's best-attended theme parks, the property has developed a reputation for overtly friendly employees and installing significant capital investments from parent company Universal Destinations & Experiences first (Super Nintendo World, Donkey Kong Country, and the upcoming Pokémon attraction), while maintaining an aura all its own.

"Being trusted to launch new experiences first creates a positive cycle of pride and momentum," shares Hironobu Kurokawa, chief marketing officer at USJ.

In April 2025 at IAAPA Honors, USJ won the coveted Liseberg Applause Award—the attractions industry's oldest and most prestigious award.

"It's a world class park in terms of leadership, quality, service, innovation, and application of technology. But what makes it really stand out is the fact that the park in many ways is



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combining the best of the best elements of Universal parks around the world with a distinct regional character," says Andreas Andersen, a member of the Applause Award board of governors and chairman of Liseberg in Gothenburg, Sweden.

How does the park continue to surprise and delight? Funworld was provided with an inside look at how Universal Studios Japan continues to make a name for itself.

Creating Stardust

The 25th anniversary décor placed around USJ's iconic studio arch is bright and bold, foreshadowing in nature of the way the crew (USJ's name for its 15,000 members of staff) proactively interacts with guests. Crew members are insistent on waving—traditionally using two hands—for everything from saying hello, to arriving and leaving.

"Crew is our number one attraction," Kurokawa shares. The friendly exoskeleton is a visual representation of a framework leading to operational excellence.

Kurokawa says it initiates with a guest-first mindset. Every decision begins by understanding what guests want—and expect. To gather this, the park employs extensive quantitative and qualitative research, third-party market studies, and constant feedback from front-line crew members.

"We speak with crew members who are in touch with our guests to confirm what kinds of experiences they are seeking," he affirms.

Next, Kurokawa says just meeting expectations is not enough. Thus, USJ focuses on fully immersive experiences that transport guests into the worlds of the park's ample stable of characters, from Universal IP to Sesame Street and Peanuts, like Snoopy. "When guests look around and think, 'Wow, this is amazing,' we consider that true immersion," says Kurokawa.

In addition, the operator believes it's essential to keep the experience fresh. This is a theme park that's

Watch: The No Limit! Parade: Discover U
To view highlights of the new 25th anniversary parade at Universal Studios Japan, scan the QR code below for the Funworld video recorded onsite in Japan. Watch it at **IAAPA.org/USJ25**



The No Limit! Parade: Discover U takes over the streets of Hollywood.

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USJ

not afraid to evolve. Older attractions such as Backdraft, Back to the Future The Ride, The Amazing Adventures of Spiderman, Terminator 2 3D, Shrek 4D, and The ET Adventure were retired in favor of new experiences, some unique to the region and characters that are wholly Japanese.

"To encourage repeat visits, we must continuously deliver new updates," Kurokawa confirms to Funworld.

Beyond major attraction launches, the park operates a "five-season" model, with special events and menus for the cooler months, spring, summer, Halloween, and holiday season. Kurokawa says with 80% of guests are classified as repeat visitors, with frequent new offerings proving critical when building long-term loyalty.

Finally, the No Limit spirit fosters a culture of challenge, collaboration, and integration across all departments. "Sometimes around a hundred people come together to ensure everything is aligned, integrated, and immersive," he says.

Oshi-Katsu Retail That's Authentically Japanese

During Funworld's visit in late winter, more than half of the park guests in attendance had adorned their noggins with headbands sporting the park's characters. Snoopy, Woody Woodpecker, Minions, and even a shark from the classic Jaws ride—complete with cloth teeth—stood ready to appear as if they were trying to nibble on a guest's cranium. Call it oshi-katsu, which means wearing one's favorite character.

"We define merchandise enjoyed by wearing it inside the park as 'in-park merchandise,' and initially launched dedicated projects to strengthen this category," says a park merchandise manager.

The act of "dressing the part" while visiting is prevalent for guests of all gender identities.

"Taking headwear as an example—beyond the desire to fully embody a character or coordinate matching items within a group—we design products for mainly targeting young females who desire to look as cute as possible in a pictures that they take for social media," the merchandise manager says.

For students and inbound tourists, USJ offer's unique items with playful gimmicks. For fans of USJ's IPs, the park has designed items that allow for customization. For example, recently, the park introduced shoulder-sitting plush. "In-park merchandise has now become a core park-exclusive product category and continues to evolve," the manager says. The park has also seen an increase in demand for plush keychains to attach to purses and backpacks.

The development process begins when a team of 20 merchandise designers explore the worldviews of characters and their stories, keeping in mind a theme park is a unique environment all its own. Thus the team finds value in creating a surprise—making guests think, "I didn't see that coming."

Additionally, USJ offers coordinated product assortments, such as matching headbands and T-shirts, or earrings and bags. Sharing outfit ideas comes alive through in-store displays. "This allows us to communicate the fun of coordinating in-park merchandise to our guests," the merchandise manager says.

Another trend includes seal collecting, where guests gather stickers to decorate items and trade with friends. With approximately 92% of Japan's 22 million citizens living in urban areas (Osaka is home to roughly 2.7 million), space constraints define daily life. Yet, gift giving remains a part of highly structured culture in Japan, displaying respect for relationships and social harmony. Thus, several



SCOTT FAIS

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USJ



retail locations along the park's Hollywood Boulevard exclusively feature decorative tins and lavishly designed canisters holding prepackaged cookies and baked treats.

"We think of our merchandise as attractions that fit in the palm of your hand," says merchandise planners.

Elevating Food and Beverage

The park's F&B managers use food as an opportunity to continue unique storytelling using flavors as characters.

"We focus on quality that appeals to all five senses—not only taste, but also texture, aroma, and visual presentation. By doing so, we are able to deliver a dining experience that is truly unique to Universal Studios Japan," says a representative from the park's F&B team.

In the Jurassic Park section, the TRex GarlicTomato Beef Burger Meal is a smorgasbord resting between a black bun. A beef patty joins shaved roast beef and fried onion blossom, all smothered in a spicy garlic tomato sauce. Accompanying the dish are french fries and nacho chips. The behemoth meal retails for JPY ¥4,500. To entice guests, photos of the meal are positioned prominently on signage found inside the land.

SCOTT FAIS



New meals are introduced on a seasonal basis, with chefs browsing social media to stay ahead of trends, along with dining at restaurants outside the park. The process of launching a new menu item begins in the park's test kitchen, followed by creating a proposal based on a concept and the story chefs hope to tell.

"From there, our chefs develop the menu, and the item goes through internal approval within the food department as well as licensor approvals before moving into development," says a source in the food and beverage department.

Just as important as quick service dining locations, USJ's food offerings are found at strategically placed carts and kiosks. The park's popcorn program fuses Japan's love of popcorn and novelty merchandise. The park currently offers four different flavors of popcorn—each distributed in a different location. When married with a popcorn bucket that doubles as art—such as the Super Star Popcorn Bucket (which lights up and comes with a shoulder strap, similar to a purse)—the bucket becomes a fashion accessory. Other examples include the Nezuko Demon Slayer Popcorn bucket and the Godzilla x Evangelion popcorn bucket, both harnessing a popular IP with a highly detailed character. USJ's best-selling flavor is caramel. By blending sweet-and-savory cravings with gourmet artisanal flavors, USJ has created a status symbol. The reigning No. 2 walkable food item is turkey legs.

What can other facilities learn from this award-winning gem in Japan?

"Know your audience. Be proud of your IP, but don't be afraid to adapt it to a regional context. Something unique and magical can be created in combining cultures and traditions," affirms Andersen. FW

SCOTT FAIS



"When USJ grows, Osaka grows—and eventually, Japan grows as well."

—Hironobu Kurokawa, CMO, Universal Studios Japan

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TRENDING ON THE





How F&B's next era defines what's on the plate at zoos, aquariums, and museums

by Dawn Allcot

CHEF-DRIVEN DISHES, HEALTHY INGREDIENTS, FRESH HERBS, AND CREATIVE MOCKTAILS are all trending at cultural attractions across the world. The upgrades come as costs for virtually everything continue to rise. Also rising, the buying power of the next generation. Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is defined by their food-loving nature—and an expected global spending power of $12 trillion by 2030 according to NielsenIQ. In fact, in the U.S., 71% of Gen Z say they are excited for new food and drink trends. (That's markedly more than 59% of Baby Boomers, according to Datassential.)

When food and beverage programs support attractions, they add a cohesive element that elevates the facility.

"We always try to partner with what the museum is doing so we can tie into their exhibits," says Chef Jason Dady, whose restaurant, Tre Trattoria, operates at the San Antonio Museum of Art. "It makes the experience more tangible for the guest."

The same can be said for zoos and aquariums.

"Most people don't think about high-quality food when they think about going to a zoo. That's one of the things we're changing right now. It's higher quality food as opposed to just high-volume orders," says Benjamin Garcia, general manager at SSA Group, which supports dining, retail, and admissions at zoos, aquariums, and other cultural attractions across the U.S.

Funworld explores how zoos, aquariums, and museums are trending with what's on the palate.





Storytelling at Zoos and Aquariums

Top chefs have increasingly designed menus to enhance the attraction experience through elevated presentations, regional flavors, or exhibit-inspired dishes.

"It's definitely a trend we're seeing on the aquarium side, being able to elevate the experience that guests are having," Garcia from SSA Group says.

At the Texas State Aquarium, the Canopy fast-casual dining area gave the SSA Group an opportunity to get creative with theming and menu offerings. Dining with a view of the Caribbean Jungle Overlook, guests can choose from Tex-Mex favorites like walking tacos, flautas flojo, or elote cups, all served on "nice dishware" instead of paper baskets that people often expect from quick service concessions.

Mkutano House in the San Diego Zoo's Denny Sanford Elephant Valley is, perhaps, one of the most awe-inspiring examples. The name Mkutano means "gathering with purpose" in Swahili. The food, drinks, and décor reflect this philosophy, while every detail evokes the vibe of an African safari. With a menu designed by Chef Grant Toraason, the restaurant serves appetizers and main courses that are meant to be shared.

At the San Antonio Zoo, the restaurant in the Flamingo Flats area features Timothy's Tasty Torta, named after the exhibit's resident hippo. "The messaging behind what we serve and how we serve it is really important," Garcia says.

The menu also includes quesadillas and mini street tacos, all crafted with fresh ingredients like avocado crema, pico de gallo, and queso fresco—all nods to local cuisine.

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Regional and Thematic Influences in Museums

Just as menu items at the San Antonio Zoo and Texas State Aquarium lean heavily toward Tex-Mex, The Kitchen's design, décor, and menu reflect Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's (MCASD) location on the Pacific coast.

"You're literally looking out at the ocean from the dining room, so we keep the food lighter," says Executive Chef and Partner Tim Kolanko of The Kitchen. "The design of the restaurant reflects the contemporary art, and the plating and plateware tie back into that. All of those things are very intentional."

The philosophy and theme of San Diego's Mingei International Museum shapes how dishes are presented at Artifact. "It's not a fancy art, so our cooking there reflects that as well. It's not overly fussy—it's very real and homey," Kolanko explains.

The Artifact menu often has a direct correlation with the art exhibits. "We look to whatever's happening in the museum to see if we can draw inspiration from it. When there was an Oaxaca exhibit, we did some Oaxacan dishes," Kolanko says. "There's a greens

Taking a Bite Out of the Data

Research groups share trends for 2026 and beyond

by Scott Fais

The National Restaurant Association in the U.S. and London-based consumer forecaster WGSN have made several predictions as to what flavors and food items diners will seek—and spend on. Here are the highlights:



Booze Takes the Backseat

WGSN says with Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) seeking less alcohol-heavy beverages (as served in nightclubs), gathering spots outside a bar have become popular. Thus, enter the cafes as a community hubs era. Attractions can harness "cafe culture" by serving mocha or tea. What's hot (besides the coffee)? Creamy foam toppings or adding boba flavor balls.



Nostalgia Proves Comforting

What is old is new again, according to the National Restaurant Association. Dishes that transport diners to a favorite memory can score. Examples: Smashed burgers with global personality; Caribbean curry bowls that hit flavorful notes; and instant noodles—like ramen—that have the potential to become a chef-crafted specialty.



Welcome 'Brinner:' Beyond Breakfast Hours

WGSN suggests operators consider making breakfast foods available all day to reflect Gen Z's interest in having a pastry in hand. (French music producer Louis Bekk recently spun a pop-up DJ set in an Antwerp, Belgium, bakery.) The research group says bite-sized pancakes, miniature waffles, and cereal snack mixes can allow guests to snack while queuing for a ride.



Baking in Health, Wellness, and Value

Call it a power trio. The National Restaurant Association says diners want to feel great—and feel good about what they spend. Thus, attraction operators can jump on the trend of offering bowls packed with fresh ingredients and protein-boosted everything.







A mix of small bites, mocktails, and full meals are increasingly offered at attractions.

exhibit currently, and we did a whole menu based on greens for a special dinner to honor that exhibit."

Dady agrees, noting that he might introduce Spanish flavors to honor a Spanish artist whose work is currently on display, or add seafood items if the art center is based upon the ocean.

Elevating Expectations

In addition to immersive experiences that fit a theme, guests today also expect healthier, high-quality, locally sourced ingredients.

"We're working closely with local farmers for produce and protein and supporting community businesses," Garcia says.

Urban Kitchen Group also emphasizes fresh, locally sourced ingredients. MCASD leans toward chef-designed dishes based on seasonal ingredients.

"We went through a lot of different iterations," Kolanko recalls, before settling on a theme that would work at The Kitchen in MCASD. "We finally settled on aromatics and spices; that ties everything together from an experiential standpoint."

In April, The Kitchen hosted an ingredient dinner based on peas and fava beans, while fall brings recipes using squash and cruciferous vegetables.

Lighter Options and Mocktails

The experts agree that elevated doesn't have to mean formal or fancy.

While restaurants in museums may host evening events or dinner hours, daily museum visitors still expect lighter, faster lunches that allow a brief break from browsing exhibits. "Salads, small sandwiches, maybe thin-crust flatbreads or pizza … really resonate with the lunch crowd," Dady says.

Often, this fare pairs well with sweet mocktails. "When you're going to a museum, you're not really going there to catch a buzz. You're there to take in the gallery, and a mocktail with a light lunch still gives you that feeling of having a special experience," Dady says.

At the Mingei Craft Café, Kolanko explains that specialty iced teas and colorful drinks elevate the mood. "If you look at what people are doing in café culture, it would be the same for us."

Adding a Touch of Star Power

For operators looking to elevate their facility's dining options, Dady suggests decision makers look for an executive chef or partner with a built-in relationship with the community. "That's important, but totally overlooked at times," he says.

Finding a chef with this type of relationship can drive traffic to the attraction (see an example from Europa-Park on page 10). A chef with a connection to the community is likely to know what will appeal to guests in terms of menu items and plating. It also makes sourcing local ingredients easier.

Dady also emphasized that an attraction shouldn't consider the restaurant as a primary source of revenue—instead treating it as an enhancement to the guest experience.

"If you can create a revenue-generating, successful restaurant that is financially feeding the museum, everybody wins," Kolanko concludes.





Dawn Allcot is a seasoned freelance writer with more than 20 years experience. Her work has appeared in TheStreet, CNET, MSN, and Nifty50Plus. A theme park and roller coaster enthusiast, Dawn also shares her favorite travel tips at GeekTravelGuide. Connect with her on LinkedIn:

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Screen Support

How attractions manage the complex world of digital deployments

by Nick Dauk

THE SURGE OF DIGITAL INTEGRATION into the attractions industry comes as no surprise.

From roadside billboards to fast-food restaurants, digital signage, display monitors, and ticketing kiosks have firmly established themselves as familiar resources in daily life. But, engaging with a touchscreen at an airport isn't the same as interacting with screens as a guest on vacation.

As more of these digital resources are incorporated into facilities, attraction operators and owners face a number of obstacles that could disrupt the guest experience. But those who lived through the transition say that shouldn't hold operators back.

"Most stakeholders who are new to digital signage are concerned about budgeting for day one and forget to focus on what happens from day two onward," says Jay Leedy with Videri, Inc., a digital interface and activation company.

Even zoos and FECs that have adopted simple digital menus or arcade card kiosks can encounter challenges related to the safety, security, and unification of screen systems.

The Challenges vs. Financial and Operational Benefits

Parker Vogt, general manager of Langer's Entertainment Center in Oregon, saw an exponential increase in his weekly Trivia Brunch Buffet—all because his team swapped printed signage (often called "static" in the sign industry) for dynamic displays on digital menus.

"Sundays used to have six or eight trivia players; now we regularly get 40 to 50," he says. "We average between $1,000-$1,500 in revenue on those days … putting these rotating advertisements on our screens was well worth the effort."

Alex Novy, chief operating officer of Kokomo Joe's Family Fun Center in Missouri, has also seen an increase in revenue through the addition of self-serve kiosks.

"The upsell conversion rate is around 50%, which is higher than the upsell conversion rate when guests make purchases from our employees," Novy admits. "One or two dollars added onto every transaction really boosts the bottom line at the end of the year."

"The most successful digital signage deployments have a range of stakeholders who are educated with the infinite dimensions in terms of messaging and direction," says Leedy, Videri's senior vice president of strategic alliances. He highlights a digital menu board can be programmed to simply list menu options—or it can be optimized to drive excess inventory, promote seasonal sales, and inspire guests to explore other on-site amenities available.

SCREEN SAVVY

Digital solutions may bolster financial sheets immediately. But operationally, adding screens requires careful planning and consistent management.

Some forms of digitalization are best viewed as augmentation, not as a replacement for traditional static methods. For example, major theme parks incorporate both self-serve ticket kiosks and employee-manned admission booths. The former reduces guest wait times and employee staffing, while the latter ensures that guests still have a face-to-face resource available.

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Printing or Pushing Electronic Messages

Tony Green, director of partnerships for the Digital Signage Federation and vice president of business development for Snap Install, Inc., points out printing and hanging signs can now be done with the click of a mouse in an office.

"Employees who [used to] walk around for hours replacing static signage can instantly adjust all digital signage across the park," Green says. "Unlike a print strategy that is very expensive to recalibrate, you can adjust and redeploy a digital strategy countless times."

SCREEN SAVVY

A dynamic CMS—operated in-house or remotely—can act as a central hub for all of the screens at a facility. A push by a single user can deploy digital updates to the entire network.

Vogt at Langer's Entertainment Center agrees.

"I don't know how many times we've printed out dozens of menus that have a spelling error," admits Vogt. "Instead of reprinting and replacing paper signs, I just click a button to update the spelling on all digital signs."

For smaller operators, Green recognizes that uploading content via a USB stick could still be considered a labor-intensive process.

"Some third-party companies will build content for you and manage it remotely," Green says. "There are different content management systems (CMS) that you can control and integrate AI or managed services into."

Don't Skimp on Safety

The most important consideration when it comes to safety is the installation team. These professionals should be licensed and certified to complete the job for safe and accessible utilization. While physical safety is a nonnegotiable, many operators aren't aware of the virtual security risks inherent in digital technologies. Vogt noted that PCI (payment card industry) compliance and Wi-Fi access points should always be updated and maintained to prevent digital intrusions.

"Our managers use multifactor authentication on all 45 of our [television] screens because we've had guests come in with their own remotes and take them over," Vogt cautions. This is especially important if the screens are used for widespread emergency announcements at a large amusement park. Software platforms can also be programed to integrate with governmental emergency notification systems for inclement weather or public safety emergencies.

The Digital Signage Federation can suggest to attraction operators which integration methods are better suited to a specific aquarium, science center or FEC.

Collaborate and Customize

Kokomo Joe's had a professional team install an LED wall above the bowling alley at their FEC, but chose to manage the content in-house. Other companies can leverage automated workflows and third-party content management services to achieve their vision.

SCREEN SAVVY

Ideally, attractions should aim for a unified system that allows for multiple hardware and software products to work together—seamlessly.

"It's more than just a screen; it's more than just content; there are a lot of pieces that come into play to get a digital solution activated," Green says. "You have to decide, first and foremost, what you're trying to accomplish with this digital integration."

Collaboration between attraction stakeholders and digital solutions providers can identify unique ways to navigate the complex world of digital displays and arrive at an effective option that prioritizes the guest experience—without compromising the budget, operational efficiency, or employee comfort. FW



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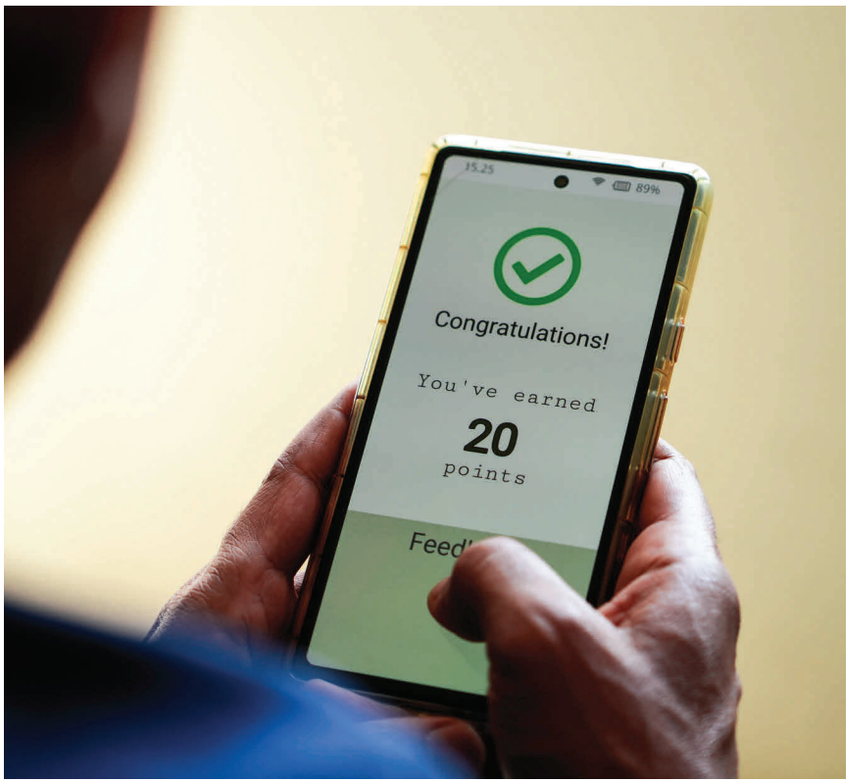

Successful rewards programs should be available to guests at their fingertips. Empowering mobile devices to share rewards information can result in repeat visits.

Friends for Life

FEC loyalty rewards and membership programs

by Dawn Allcot

PUNCH CARDS, SEASON PASSES, MEMBERSHIPS, and other rewards programs aren't new in the world of attractions. But today's attractions operators are taking a more cohesive—and high-tech— approach to their offerings.

"Disney and Six Flags spent decades demonstrating that members become habitual visitors and brand advocates," says Andrew Farage, founder and chief operating officer of RPM Raceway, operating locations across the Northeast United States. "Family entertainment center operators can now replicate that model without enterprise-level infrastructure. Modern POS (point of sale) and CRM (customer relationship management) tools make it manageable even at a smaller scale; the technology to execute it is now accessible."

Immediate Value

Rather than waiting for guests to generate points through repeat visits before offering discounts or freebies, Farage believes the best loyalty programs start delivering value during the first visit.

He says this was important to him in structuring the Race Pass annual membership, which provides visitors with two races on the day of purchase, a $5 arcade card, an "add-on" activity, and discounts for the year.

"As consumer spending gets more selective and the experiential entertainment space gets more competitive, we're doubling down on bundle development to make membership a no-brainer," he shares.

RPM also has a one-day Play Pass that includes everything guests need to race, plus two "add-ons," which can be activities or merch. "Both tiers are priced to deliver immediate value on a member's first visit, covering racing, arcade play, and exclusive perks," Farage says.

Generating Value

Farmingdale, New York-based Adventureland, a local amusement park now in its 64th year, has offered season passes for more than a decade, according to Adventureland manager Jeanine Gentile. She says the passes pay for themselves after roughly three visits, but the perks start right away.

In mid-March, Adventureland held "season pass validation days" prior to the regular season, allowing guests to skip long lines to validate passes purchased online and earn a $10 arcade card for each passholder.

Adventureland restructured its pricing in recent years. The park used to be a free admission facility where riders would buy tickets or a pay-one-price bracelet. Now, everyone pays admission to enter the park, although guests over 24 years old pay a discounted rate. The season passes can alleviate some of the financial sting, allowing families to visit more frequently after paying one price for the season.

Season passholders also get two discounted "bring-a-friend" tickets, along with discounts on merchandise and season drink cups. These are standard benefits for season passholders, but FECs and other attractions are beginning to embrace similar programs.

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Multi Attraction Passes

As FECs and amusement parks seek to be more competitive in their value-added offerings, companies like Go City offer discounts for bundling multiple attraction tickets within a city.

While the standard attractions offered through these passes include tourist sites like museums and famous observation decks, FECs and regional amusement parks are also getting in on the action. For instance, a Chicago Go City pass could include days at Legoland Discovery Center, the 10pin Bowling Lounge, and Forge Adventure Park—an outdoor natural attraction that includes archery, rope climbs, zip lines, and paddlesports.

While locals may also take advantage during staycations, multi-attraction passes give FECs the benefit of providing cost savings to tourists who won't want to invest in a season pass or membership.

"It really is a loyalty program; the more you buy, the more you save," says Darren Colledge, Go City affiliate lead. "Maybe someone was going to do two or three attractions in a city. When someone buys one of our passes, they'll save money. So maybe they can do four or five attractions now."

Smaller FECs and other attractions get the added benefit of Go City's massive marketing machine. "We have a database of millions that we remarket to," Colledge says.

The Technology Behind Today's Best Memberships

More theme parks and FECs are moving toward digital memberships. While Adventureland still uses physical passes, the park website advises passholders to take a photo of the bar code; if guests ever lose or forget their pass, they can use the bar code to enter the attraction. (The bar code is tied to a photo of the guest to prevent fraud or sharing passes.)

RPM Raceway passes are entirely digital. "On the operational side, a digital membership is superior," Farage explains. "No physical card to remember, no punch fraud, and no redemption exceptions at the register."

Likewise, Go City passes work through a cellphone app, making them easy and convenient to track, while enabling retargeting efforts, including geotargeting.

More than ever, guests need a seamless experience, and digital passes are one step in that direction. There's another benefit to digital tracking, even for operators who opt to provide guests with a physical card for convenience.

"The system knows who the members are when they walk in, so our guest service representatives can layer on personalized offers and re-engagement triggers," Farage shares.

Benefits of Growth Through Loyalty

Farage believes operators need to harness the tremendous benefits of memberships and loyalty programs.

"The retention economics are hard to argue with," he says. "Acquiring new customers is expensive, and a member who pays a predictable, recurring fee visits significantly more often and spends more on food, arcade games, and add-ons than a casual walk-in. Predictable recurring revenue also smooths out the seasonal swings that kill FEC margins in slow months."

For a local park or attraction, a season pass program also means getting to know guests, which takes loyalty to a whole new level.

"We see a lot of the repeat season pass customers, weekend after weekend, and even season to season. We get to know them; we chat with them on the Midway," Gentile says. "For a local park like us, it's just really nice." FW



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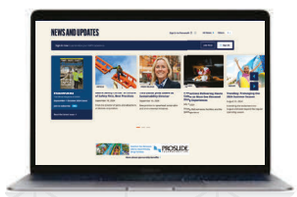

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by Jack Chan

Transform Your Business at IAAPA Expo Asia 2026



IAAPA NEWS

WE'RE EXCITED that IAAPA Expo Asia preparation is nearly complete and we will welcome visitors June 9-12. IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 will be held in Hong Kong SAR, the home of our regional head office, making this convention and trade show particularly meaningful for the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.

We are pleased to announce several new activations at IAAPA Expo Asia, led by the Connections Hub and the Women's Leadership Luncheon. Attendees will find a dedicated space for our facility members to showcase their organizations and the guest experiences that set them apart. The Women's Leadership Luncheon will offer a platform for distinguished speakers to share their career journeys and insights.

Safety, security, and sustainability remain priority areas for the APAC region. Our Safety & Security Committee has expanded its outreach to raise awareness across the industry; committee members will share their expertise at the Safety Corner gathering during IAAPA Expo Asia, and several related topics will be addressed in EDUSessions. We encourage attendees to participate to deepen their understanding of these critical issues.

The regional team is committed to delivering more tailored services and meaningful opportunities for our membership.

Beyond the Expo, the APAC team will host a range of events throughout this year, culminating in the IAAPA APAC Summit Sept. 2-3 in Nagoya, Japan.

Our Sustainability Task Force has also developed guidance to strengthen the APAC team's engagement on sustainability initiatives. We look forward to receiving feedback and implementing the task force's recommended actions.

The rest of 2026 promises significant activity and engagement for APAC members. The regional team is committed to delivering more tailored services and meaningful opportunities for our membership. FW

Jack Chan is the vice president and executive director of IAAPA Asia-Pacific. He previously held roles with industry technology companies and in the healthcare sector in Shanghai, New York, and Iowa. Jack looks forward to welcoming all to the festivities awaiting attendees in Hong Kong. Connect with him on LinkedIn:

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