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Immersion

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COVER PHOTO:
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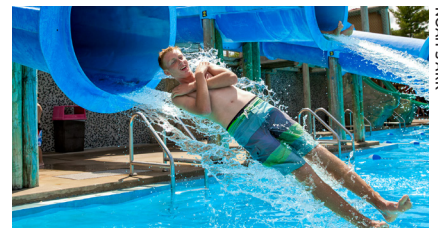
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Rope Drop

“So, You Wanted to See the Theater, Did Ya?”

As invited by the legendary Maestro himself, guests have flocked to Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, for the opening of Phantom Theater: Opening Nightmare.

The collaboration with Sally Dark Rides resulted in an updated, interactive take on the park's original Phantom Theater dark ride, which operated from 1992 to 2002. The Funworld team takes readers inside the attraction, as well as a peek behind-the-curtain at Sally's Jacksonville, Florida, robot factory, where skilled artisans sculpted 33 new figures for the "phan-tastic" refresh.

Watch a Funworld video report from Kings Island by scanning the QR code.



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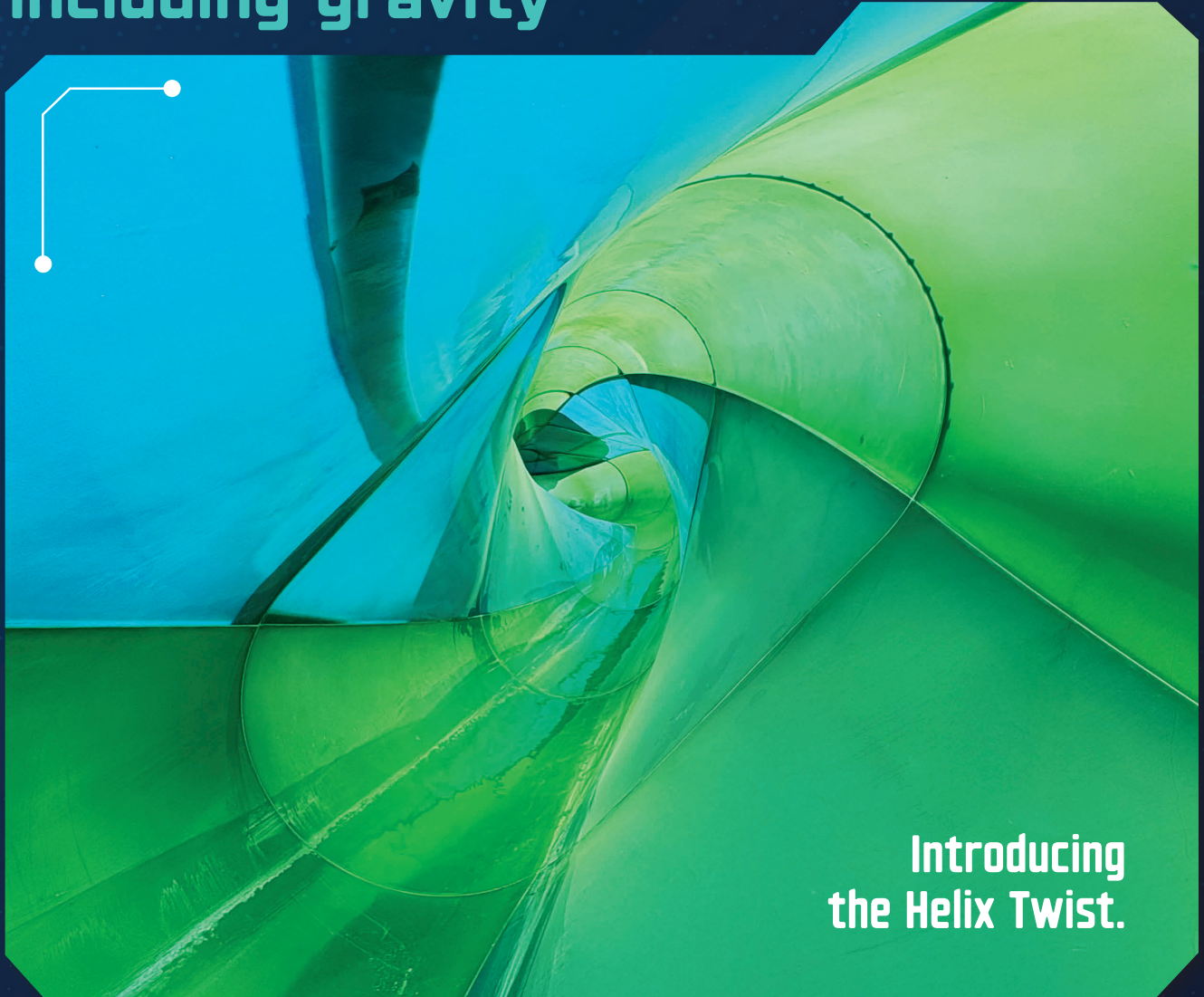


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Launch



HALLMARK

LICENSED EVENTS

Hallmark of Success

Wearing the entertainment crown, Hallmark steps into experiences

by Juliana Gilling

HALLMARK HAS LONG BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER through greeting cards and those heartwarming movies, celebrating holidays, seasons, and life's special moments. Now Hallmark brings audiences inside its world through its new branded experience division. The company aims to leverage its strong emotional connections with potential guests by creating destination events that are an attraction within their own right.

Experiences are a natural extension of Hallmark's mission. "Our brand is all about bringing people together, helping people make memories, and this is another way we're doing that," says Lindsey Roy, senior vice president of strategy and brand at Hallmark.

With the debut of the Hallmark Christmas Experience in 2024, the brand began a new holiday tradition for fans—the chance to be merry and find holiday magic at the Crown Center, right outside Hallmark's Kansas City, Missouri, headquarters.

"We did not start small," Roy explains. "We were very careful with our attention to detail." The goal was to create an experience that lived up to the Hallmark name and met audience expectations. Hallmark structured the seasonal experience around two core elements: an outdoor program and an indoor, ticketed offering at the Westin Kansas City at Crown Center Hotel.

The free-to-enter outdoor immersive environment captures the charm of a Hallmark movie town square, featuring a Christmas market, tree-lighting shows, card-sending and gift-wrapping stations, festive food and drinks, light walks, and holiday photo opportunities. The experience mirrors the cozy,

comforting style of Hallmark’s storytelling, with everything you’d imagine if “you walked into the set of a Hallmark movie,” Roy says.

Exclusive ticketed activities allow guests to see their favorite Hallmark stars, attend Hallmark artists’ and writers’ workshops, and enjoy premium dining experiences.

“We did a lot that first year. We took a big swing, but we worked tirelessly to make sure this was worthy of our brand and our beautiful fans,” Roy says.

Since then, Roy explains that fan feedback has shaped the event. “People told us, ‘We want more.’ So, we’ve added more Hallmark Stars shows and programming to our schedule. We’ve added a community room for people to connect with other fans. We made way more merchandise. We just keep adding because people have said, ‘If I’m flying in for the whole weekend, I want an entire weekend full of things to do,’ which is an amazing ask.”

Roy and her team analyzed the overwhelming enthusiasm from Hallmark fans and have developed a third, all-inclusive ticket package for 2026 named Make Memories.

The event is slated to run on weekends from Thanksgiving to Christmas.


“In our first year, we had guests come from all 50 states and from 23 different countries. It was incredibly exciting to see how much our fans wanted to come and be a part of this world that we had built.” The event confirms demand and proves Hallmark can turn audience loyalty into visitation.

Anticipation is high for the entire 2026 event, with more stars attending and fresh content to spotlight—some with an attractions connection. New Countdown to Christmas movies, such as

“Holiday Ever After: A Disney World Wish Come True,” filmed at Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, will provide new opportunities to celebrate.

Outside the Christmas season, Hallmark has built a portfolio of experiences. The Hallmark Stars Live tour runs this summer, with the company taking part of its Christmas experience on the road with a Christmas in July live show. A Hallmark Christmas Cruise will set sail in October.

“We have lots of thoughts about inviting people in to help celebrate with us throughout the year, whether that’s Valentine’s Day, summer holidays, or Mother’s Day,” Roy says. “We have a roadmap full of ideas centered around bringing our fans together. Experiences are a growing way for fans to be a part of our Hallmark family. We want to meet multiple people in multiple places with multiple ideas multiple times of the year.”

Seeing fans experience Hallmark licensing is “an incredible opportunity,” she says. In those shared moments—among Hallmark stars, executives, and audiences—there is joy, connection, and community. 



Juliana Gilling, Funworld’s contributing editor, began covering the global attractions industry in 1994. She reports on innovative people, projects, and additions for Funworld and the IAAPA News Hub. Juliana lives in the U.K., where she is a freelance writer. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



1

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BRIGHT IDEAS

What's the coolest attraction you could create? **Silver Dollar City** asked children to think big—and share. Rooted in the Ozark Mountains, the theme park created the **Mini Miners Crew** for kids ages 5–12. Crew members shared ideas for future rides, new food items, and experiences at the park—without the need to buy a ticket. Selected recruits received a light-up helmet, personalized membership certificate, and T-shirt.

“At its heart, the Mini Miners Crew is about much more than what arrives in the mail,” says Brandei Clifton, senior publicity manager. “It’s about celebrating the spirit of creativity, craftsmanship, and family that built Silver Dollar City from the ground up.” Some young recruits may be invited to present their concepts directly to park leaders.



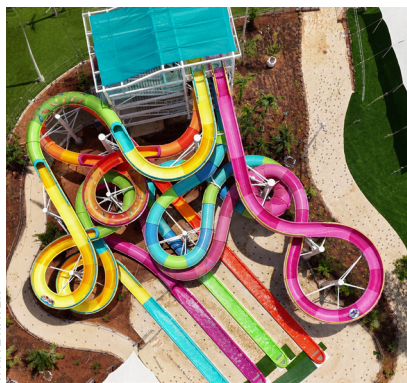
SILVER DOLLAR CITY

2

RIBBON CUTTINGS

SLIDING INTO ISRAEL

Call it a “sweet splash.” The new **Candy Slide** complex features four water slides at Israel’s **Shefayim Water Park**. Two of the tube slides boast a minimum height requirement of 107 cm, allowing children to safely slide with an adult. The park believes the family-friendly height requirement will allow children ages 4–5 to slide. WhiteWater built in colorful AquaLucent effects in the shape of candies that swirl over the heads of riders in the enclosed portions. The new complex by WhiteWater cost a total of NIS 15 million.



WHITEWATER

SPEEDY SOUTH KOREA

It’s pedal to the metal at the **Jangsaengpo Whale Museum**. South Korea’s whaling conservation museum opened a unique **CoasterKart** ride from **Wiegand**. Named Whales Kart, guests drive one of 10 themed vehicles through life-size whale exhibits. “The CoasterKart combines knowledge transfer with emotional driving experiences, creating lasting memories,” says a museum spokesperson. Electrically powered and individually controllable, the ride combines a roller coaster with an interactive vehicle.



WIEGAND

HAPPY IN CHILE

Smile. **Happyland** opened a new outdoor entertainment concept combining family-friendly attractions, adventure experiences, and thrill rides. Named **Happyland Park at Mallplaza Oeste**, the project expands Happyland’s offering beyond its traditional indoor facilities. Located within one of Chile’s leading retail and leisure destinations, the new development creates fresh opportunities for family time and shared experiences, reinforcing the vision of both Happyland and Mallplaza.



HAPPYLAND

3 SAFETY & SECURITY SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

With safety the No. 1 priority of the global attractions industry, **Dorney Park** encourages guests to play a role in security. The Allentown, Pennsylvania, operator displays signage sharing a dedicated number that guests may text should a guest see a situation warranting assistance. This sign in the queue for the **Iron Menace** roller coaster was designed to look distressed, matching the ride's aesthetic of an old steel mill.



SCOTT FAIS

4 MERCHANDISE GOODWILL TRACKING

Helping wild animals is easier thanks to inventive retail. The **Clearwater Marine Aquarium** in Florida offers a bracelet, that when purchased, allows the user to track the location of a manatee in the wild using their smartphone. Manufactured by Fahio, a purchase will unlock a QR code for scanning, with part of the price going to more than a dozen animal conservancies around the globe.



FAHIO

5 FOOD & BEVERAGE SPLASH OF SUSTAINABILITY

France's **Parc Astérix** took a sustainable leap by serving soft drinks in reusable plastic cups. Guest can keep the beverage container or return it for a €1 rebate. The operator partnered with **Bibak**, who says they've prevented 7.6 million disposable containers from entering Europe's waste stream. The vendor provides an automated kiosk (employee-free) that collects the cups and provides a rebate, before the cups are professionally washed and sanitized before reuse. *Learn more at bibak.fr*



SCOTT FAIS

6 GUEST SERVICE DIAPER DADS

Hands down: changing a baby diaper is NOT an attraction—especially in the middle of a movie. Realizing dad may need help, **FatCats Entertainment**—the chain of FECs in the western U.S.—offers parents complementary diapers, wipes, and personal hygiene items. Parents can cruise past the guest service counter in route to the restroom for a complimentary kit. There's no need to reach for a wallet to pay for the amenity when hands are full.



MIKE COSTELLO



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

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)

Story in Motion

WHO: Intamin

PRODUCT: Dynamic Motion Stage

HOW: At the core of the Dynamic Motion Stage sits an 18-meter 360-degree spinning platform that tilts 25 degrees while supporting vertical movements up to three meters. Using hydraulic technology, Intamin's massive platform can achieve heave speeds of up to 1.5 meters per second and drop three meters per second. Meanwhile, guests sit atop six independently rotating cabins.

When combined, the ride system fuses incredible motion with storytelling elements like scent, onboard audio, and seat-actuated vibrations (think “butt kickers”).

The first Dynamic Motion Stage opened as Danse Macabre at Efteling.

intamin.com/product/dynamic-motion-stage/



INTAMIN

..... (2)

Face-Scanning Lockers

WHO: Smarte Carte Inc.

PRODUCT: SmarteLocke Locker

HOW: Tickets, wristbands, and PINs are a thing of the past. All Smarte Carte's new SmarteLocke Locker needs is a user's face. Powerful new photo validation software opens doors—literally within seconds. The platform connects to point-of-sale, ticketing, and mobile apps via API, enabling future upgrades without hardware replacement. Enhancements include an ADA-compliant access panel meeting all height, reach, and usability requirements, plus a phone jack for visually impaired guests to access audio prompts.

Smarte Carte calls the technology the attractions industry's “first fully integrated facial biometric locker solution.”

smartecarte.com/products/lockers/



SMARTE CARTE

KRISTALLTURM



..... (3)

Climbing the Alphabet

WHO: KristallTurm

PRODUCT: PlayLetter

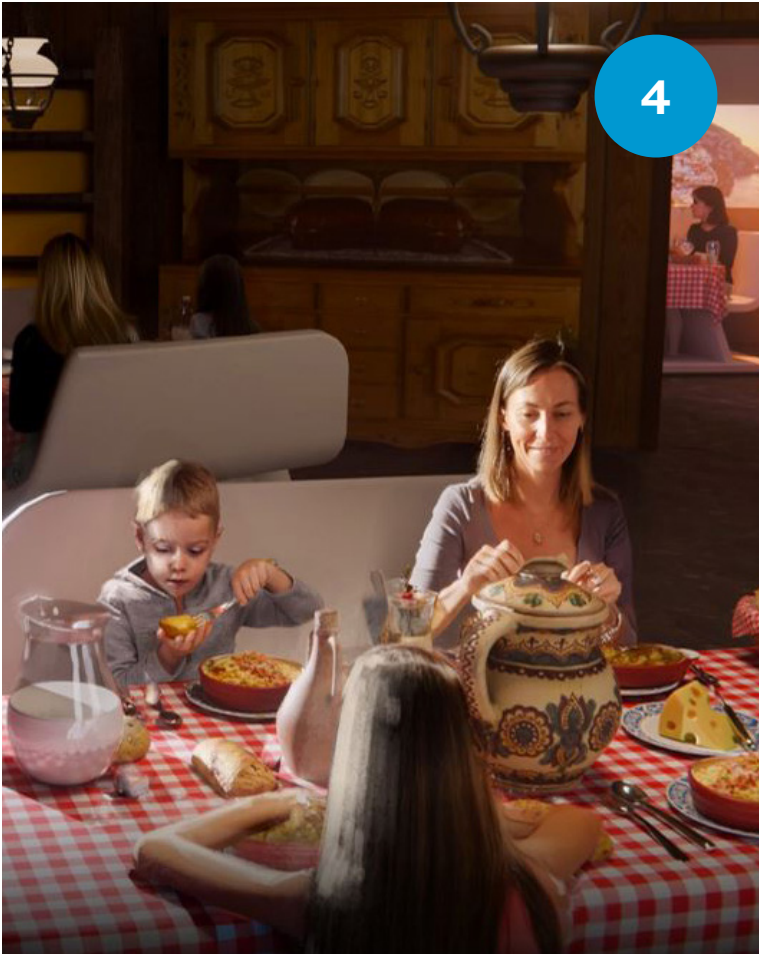
HOW: Winding paths, tunnels, slides, hidden nooks, and climbing adventures fit neatly inside a towering letter known as the PlayLetter. Soaring 8 meters tall, the letters invite children ages 3-15 to climb, crawl, and explore. The enclosed space eliminates fall heights, while the vertical design delivers a minimal footprint.

Developer KristallTurm says their biggest challenge was to create various letter shapes while complying with necessary playground standards, like escape routes, finger traps, and heights.

The first PlayLetter opened in April 2025 at Bavaria Filmstadt in Munich.

kristallturm.com/en/sports-play/playletter/

MACK RIDES



..... (4)

Food in Motion

WHO: Mack Rides

PRODUCT: EatX

HOW: Call it “Dinner and a dark ride.” Mack Rides’ new EatX combines a dark ride system with a multi-course culinary journey. Guests are seated at the FlowDiner, a floating table system that transports them through different scenes while they enjoy appetizers, main courses, and desserts, timed with the ride’s narrative.

Mack says operators can create their own narrative or integrate an IP to serve an estimated 840 guests per day using continuous loading. The modular design allows for integration into existing venues to open new revenue streams.

mack-rides.com/products/flowryde

Discover more technologies and innovations online. See the winners and second place finalists of IAAPA Expo 2025’s Best New Product Award by visiting IAAPA.org/BestNew2025

BRASS RING AWARD

Have an innovative new product? Share your news on Funworld’s Turnstile page! Send news and photos to FunworldWorks@IAAPA.org



ALTERFACE

Alterface Powers Interactive Technology for Netflix's 'Stranger Things' Experience

A new experience at Netflix House Dallas brings together Alterface and the streaming service to deliver the interactive technology used inside Stranger Things: Face the Dark. The company supplied 560 custom-designed devices, including headsets and 1980s-inspired flashlights, enabling a fully personalized, geo-location-driven guest journey. The system tracks visitors in real time and adapts audio and visual elements to their movements, creating a dynamic narrative. "Guests actually step into the world of 'Stranger Things' and interact with the story in a way that feels natural and alive," says Stéphane Bataille, CEO of Alterface.

alterface.com



MATTEL

Major Suppliers Named for Mattel Wonder Indoor Waterparks

The upcoming Mattel Wonder Indoor Waterparks will come to life through a collaborative effort among several suppliers. Operator American Resort Management will oversee day-to-day performance and guest-flow optimization of the parks. Martin Aquatic, whose portfolio includes Royal Caribbean's Perfect Day at CocoCay and Universal Orlando's Volcano Bay, will lead the concept-to-engineering design. WhiteWater will supply water slides and aquatic play structures. I-identity Group will craft themed signage and décor. And OpenAire will provide an all-weather, retractable roof enclosure.

americanresortmanagement.com



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LOTTE WORLD

Lotte World Seoul Opens MapleStory in South Korea

Lotte World Adventure in Seoul has opened Maple Island, a new permanent themed zone developed in partnership with Nexon and based on the popular MapleStory intellectual property. The area debuted in early April within Magic Island, the park's outdoor section.

Spanning approximately 2,000 square meters, Maple Island brings the fantasy world of MapleStory into a physical environment, recreating recognizable characters, settings, and story elements from the long-running online game. The new area features three rides supplied by Zamperla, including a

junior coaster, a Speedway 8 attraction, and a Sky Tower ride, alongside dedicated retail and food and beverage offerings designed to extend the narrative experience.

The project reflects Lotte World's ongoing strategy to integrate well-known entertainment IP into its attractions portfolio and broaden its appeal across multiple generations of visitors. MapleStory—first launched in 2003—remains one of Nexon's most successful franchises and continues to attract a global fan base.

adventure.lotteworld.com

Sun World Vũng Tàu Heads to the Beach in Vietnam

Creating a coastal destination, Sun Group debuted the Aqua Adventure zone at Sun World Vũng Tàu, a new large-scale beachfront water park in southern Vietnam. The addition marks a significant expansion to the country's growing leisure offering. Located within the broader Blanca City development, the project spans approximately 15 hectares and is positioned as a key anchor attraction.

The water park features 20 major attractions and nearly 100 water slides, including several dynamic rides and first-of-their-kind experiences in the region. Divided into four themed zones, Sun World Vũng Tàu integrates



storytelling elements inspired by Vietnamese culture with large-scale aquatic experiences designed for a wide range of audiences.

The development is a product of international collaboration with Mack Rides, ProSlide, and WhiteWater, reflecting the increasing role of global suppliers in Southeast Asia's expanding attractions market.

With its beachfront location and mix of record-breaking attractions, Sun World Vũng Tàu underscores Vietnam's ambition to position itself as a leading destination for leisure and tourism in the Asia-Pacific region.

sunworld.vn/en/vung-tau



LEOLANDIA

Roll Up, Roll Up for Leolandia’s Reversum in Italy

Leolandia’s new Reversum roller coaster will turn heads this season. With the debut of the Mack Rides spinning coaster—the centerpiece of a €30 million investment plan—the Italian theme park has set the stage for its 55th anniversary celebrations, which peaks in July.

The free-spinning ride is a first for Italy, and the cars’ unpredictable movements ensure every experience is different. Reversum’s addition completes Crazy Circus, a 20,000-square-meter themed area unveiled last summer. The roller coaster’s

scarlet and gold trains depart from a striped big top-themed station. As the storyline goes, riders become circus performers on an acrobatic adventure.

Giuseppe Ira, president of Leolandia, says the attraction sports “deep roots,” reflecting a long-term vision dating back to the park’s acquisition in 2007 to “create a major theme park dedicated to families.” The team sought to build one of Italy’s most thrilling family rides and Leolandia’s flagship attraction.

leolandia.it

U.K.’s V&A Grows the Family Tree with New London Museum

The V&A family of museums plans to expand again with the new V&A East Museum in London. This stylish new sibling to the V&A East Storehouse joins the V&A South Kensington, Young V&A, V&A Dundee, and the V&A Wedgwood Collection in welcoming visitors across the United Kingdom.

“Over 10 years in the making, we’re delighted to open V&A East Museum, a space created with and for our audiences, including young people and east Londoners,” says Gus Casely-Hayford, V&A East director. “Everyone is welcome at V&A East Museum. From The Music is Black: A British Story to our Why We Make galleries, New Work commissions, and live events and activities, we hope you see yourself,



V&A EAST MUSEUM © HUFTON+CROW

your stories, and experiences represented here.”

The V&A East Museum—designed by architects O’Donnell & Tuomey—sits on the East Bank within the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The inaugural exhibition, The Music is Black: A British Story, showcases the contribution of Black British music to U.K. and global culture. This immersive, multisensory experience highlights the brilliance, struggle, resilience, and joy of 125 years of Black music-making in Britain.

The museum includes displays coproduced with local artists and young Londoners, alongside an extensive events program, including The Music Is Black Festival this summer.

vam.ac.uk



PROSLIDE

Aquamania Jungle Park Debuts in Egypt

Guests made an early splash at Aquamania Jungle Park, newly opened at the Rixos Radamis Sharm El Sheikh resort in Egypt. ProSlide's collection of water attractions for the Red Sea facility features the MENA region's first Hive 20 and Switchback experiences. The 35,000-square-meter water park offers 28 attractions, along with children's areas, splash zones, and guest amenities to support a full-day experience.

"We're proud to support the opening of Aquamania Jungle Park with attractions that bring families and friends together through shared adventure," says ProSlide's Aaron Wilson, senior

vice president of business development for the EMEA and Latin America regions.

Wilson believes destinations like Aquamania at Rixos Radamis continue to raise the bar for integrated resort entertainment, as water parks evolve from secondary facilities into core resort attractions with strong storytelling and differentiated experiences that "drive occupancy, extend length of stay, and deliver long-term value."

proslide.com | rixos.com/hotel-resort/rixos-radamis-sharm-el-sheikh

Global Village Builds Momentum with Extended Run in Dubai

Dubai's Global Village extended its 30th season through May 31, which allowed visitors to enjoy Eid Al Adha festivities while building anticipation for new guest experiences for next season.

"Concluding the season during Eid Al Adha—a time that brings communities together—allowed us to celebrate alongside the families, residents, and visitors who have made this chapter so memorable," says Fernando Eiroa, CEO of Dubai Holding Entertainment.

"Season 30 marked a significant milestone for Global Village, reflecting three decades of growth, evolution,



and shared success," he says. "It has shown the strength of the destination, the dedication of our teams and partners, and the continued trust of our guests."

This season showcased more than 90 cultures across 30 pavilions, with 3,500 retail outlets, over 250 dining options, and nearly 200 attractions at The Carnival. Additionally, the destination hosted more than 40,000 live performances. Global Village provided end-of-season incentives to visit, including extended operating hours, promotional packages, and shopping offers.

globalvillage.ae



MOJANG - MICROSOFT - EXPERIENCE MOD

Minecraft Experience Brings Digital Realm to Mexico

Minecraft Experience: Villager Rescue opened in Mexico City, marking the immersive attraction's first appearance in Latin America. Presented at Forum Buenavista by MusicVibe, the large-scale interactive experience brings the world's best-selling video game into a physical, walk-through environment.

The attraction places guests inside a narrative-driven rescue mission inspired by the game's iconic environments and characters. Visitors move through multiple Minecraft biomes while completing collaborative challenges, constructing structures, and interacting with familiar mobs, including skeletons, spiders, creepers, pandas, and dolphins.

The hour-long experience begins in a forest setting before guests enter a village, where they receive their mission and join teams of fellow participants. The attraction concludes with access to a retail space featuring themed merchandise and commemorative items. Guests who complete the experience's rescue mission unlock a limited-edition digital cape for Minecraft: Bedrock Edition.

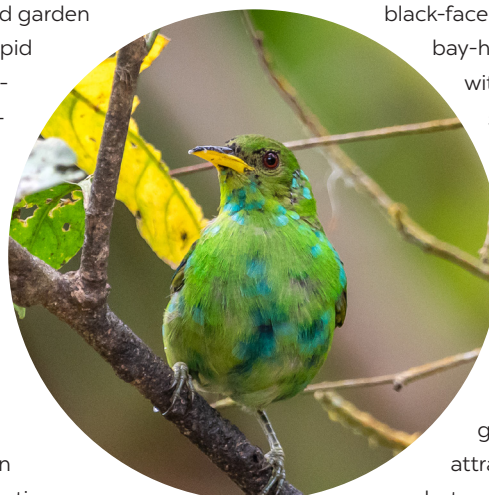
Minecraft Experience: Villager Rescue was first launched in Dallas in October 2024 and has since toured cities including Toronto, London, Riyadh, and Copenhagen.

minecraftexperience.com/mexicocity

Panama Expands Birding Tourism with Specialty Gardens

Visitors have flocked to a specialized bird garden near Panama City, capitalizing on the rapid global growth of ecotourism. These low-impact developments cater to a bigger-than-ever birding market. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's 2026 Great Backyard Bird Count drew a record 1.14 million global participants—a leap from 268,000 in 2020. Two new facilities of varying sizes opened in the past few months.

Comederos en las Nubes opened in Cerro Azul approximately 45 minutes northeast of Panama City. The attraction combines trails, gardens, and feeding stations. Approximately 80 species can be seen here, including



MARCK GUTT

black-faced antthrush, rufous-and-white wren, and bay-headed tanager. The site was designed with wheelchair-accessible paths and infrastructure, reflecting a broader effort to make birding tourism more inclusive. Meanwhile, Gamboa Garden operates inside a private residential garden in Gamboa. The site has registered more than 30 bird species, including toucans, honeycreepers, hummingbirds, and tanagers. Developed with guidance from Panamanian birding guide Mario Ocaña, the reservation-only attraction focuses on close-range viewing for photographers.

comederosenlasnubes.com



ONE NEW ZEALAND STADIUM

One New Zealand Stadium Debuts as Entertainment Destination

One New Zealand Stadium, in central Christchurch, opened in April, introducing a new multi-purpose entertainment venue designed for sports, concerts, community events, and premium guest experiences. The fully roofed stadium seats 30,000 for sports, including 25,000 permanent seats and 5,000 temporary seats, and can accommodate up to 36,000 spectators for major concerts and live entertainment events.

Located in the heart of Ōtautahi, the venue was approved in 2020 by the New Zealand Government and Christchurch City Council as part of a major city regeneration initiative. Construction began in April 2022, with the project now completed following final testing and commissioning.

Designed as a flexible, all-weather destination, the stadium will host rugby, football, esports, exhibitions, concerts, and

business events. Amenities include premium hospitality suites, terraces, and 23 food-and-beverage outlets highlighting regional products. Operators have also introduced digital wayfinding tools, accessibility-focused guest resources, and detailed pre-visit information designed to streamline the visitor experience from arrival to seating.

The venue's digital platform allows guests to navigate from their home directly to their seats while locating amenities, food vendors, and activations throughout the stadium. "One New Zealand Stadium is going to provide experiences like no other venue in the country, so it is important we make the journey to the stadium as seamless as possible," said Venues Ōtautahi Chief Executive Caroline Harvie-Teare.

onenewzealandstadium.co.nz

Expanding Dave & Buster's Reach

Dave & Buster's officially opened its first Australian location in Clarkson on May 16, marking a strategic step in the company's international expansion. The venue introduces an integrated entertainment and elevated dining model tailored to the Australian market, with a strong emphasis on corporate and group engagement.

For groups, the Clarkson location offers a scalable event solution featuring built-in AV capabilities, flexible meeting spaces and curated group packages designed to support team-building



DAVE & BUSTER'S

programs and corporate functions. The opening also aligns with Dave & Buster's broader global growth strategy, following recent launches in the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and India. "Perth represents an exciting opportunity in Western Australia. Clarkson is a thriving, growing community, making it an ideal location to introduce our unique experience to everyone," Antonio Bautista, president of international at Dave & Buster's, said in a press release.

daveandbusters.au



KENTUCKY KINGDOM

Flying Fox Takes Flight at Kentucky Kingdom

A new suspended family roller coaster with quite the backstory opened on May 18 at Kentucky Kingdom. Flying Fox, manufactured by Vekoma Rides, represents a \$14 million investment and brings the park's coaster collection to six. The coaster reaches speeds of 37 mph and features more than 1,300 feet of track, including a below-ground tunnel element.

The attraction is themed around Jeb Fox, a fictional

crop-dusting pilot inspired by Kentucky's agricultural heritage. Every aspect of the experience was designed by Herschend Creative Studios, the company's in-house creative team, with a red barn-inspired queue, hand-painted murals, and audio storytelling that reinforce the attraction's agricultural theme and family-focused narrative.

kentuckykingdom.com

Crystal Bridges Unveils Major Museum Expansion

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, opened a 114,000-square-foot expansion in June, marking the largest addition to the museum since its debut in 2011. Designed by Safdie Architects, the project adds new galleries, learning environments, and visitor amenities.

"By bringing art, architecture, nature, wellness, and education into closer dialogue across the campus, we are continuing to push the boundaries of what a cultural institution can be," says Crystal Bridges Board Chair Olivia Walton.

A new creative learning hub adds educational and community-focused amenities, while a new north entrance, a bridge gallery connecting the new spaces, and a café overlooking the museum's ponds, trails, and gardens round out the additions. The first exhibitions to open in the new gallery includes work from Keith Haring, Yayoi Kusama, and Teresita Fernández.

crystalbridges.org



CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Dominica Advances Landmark Cable Car Project

The Commonwealth of Dominica plans to open the Dominica Cable Car—a major tourism infrastructure project—this autumn. Positioned as a new gateway to the island’s UNESCO-listed Morne Trois Pitons National Park, the attraction will transport visitors to Boiling Lake in approximately 20 minutes while offering panoramic views of Dominica’s rainforest landscape.

Described by project developers as the world’s longest detachable mono-cable car system, the attraction is designed to expand access to one of the Caribbean’s most recognized natural sites. The design places an emphasis on environmental integration and will be partially powered by geothermal energy, aligning with Dominica’s goal of becoming the world’s first climate-resilient nation by 2030.

To date, tower installations and pylons are complete at multiple elevations, while construction continues on both terminal stations. According to project manager Victor Costa, the bottom station is nearing completion, with electromechanical equipment and garage facilities already installed.

The top station, located beyond Boiling Lake near the Valley of Desolation, remains the project’s most challenging construction zone. Materials are currently transported via a dedicated 4.5-kilometer material cable car.

dominicacablecar.com



DOMINICA CABLE CAR

Kgalagadi Initiative Strengthens Cross-Border Conservation and Tourism

Launched in May, a new conservation and tourism initiative is underway at Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, the vast protected desert landscape shared by Botswana and South Africa in the southern Kalahari region. The project aims to strengthen biodiversity management, tourism planning, and community resilience across one of southern Africa’s most significant cross-border conservation areas.

Early priorities include developing management plans for four wildlife management areas surrounding the park, a tourism development plan, and a broader community strategy intended to generate sustainable revenue from wildlife tourism and conservation activities.



MIKE DEXTER

Established more than 25 years ago, Kgalagadi protects an extensive ecosystem of red sand dunes, fossil riverbeds, and savannah habitats supporting wildlife adapted to arid conditions.

Botswana’s minister of environment and tourism, Wynter Boipuso Mmolotsi, says the initiative is expected to support community-based tourism across the region. African Parks CEO Peter Fearnhead added that the project will strengthen park management, protect biodiversity, and deliver long-term benefits for surrounding communities.

africanparks.org

**More than 150 Towers
installed worldwide!**

INTERACTIVE FAMILY RIDES

From individually themed attractions to overall concepts



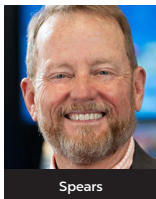
Topgolf Reshapes Leadership Team

As part of the “next chapter of growth and transformation” at Topgolf, the operator initiated a comprehensive slate of leadership appointments. **Erin Chamberlin**—formerly COO—becomes president and COO. Chamberlin served as interim President since October 2025 and led Topgolf’s transition process from Callaway Golf Company to Leonard Green Partners. **Jay Spears** joins Topgolf as chief information officer. Previously, he held roles at CEC Entertainment, Six Flags, and Urban Air Adventure Parks. **Jason Weatherford** is the new vice president of in-venue services. Weatherford brings more than 35 years of experience, working previously at Palace Entertainment, Six Flags, and Cedar Fair. **Susana Arevalo** moves from senior vice president of finance and U.S. CFO to Chief Financial Officer, where she now oversees all finance and accounting. **Amanda Lily Lam** is the new vice president

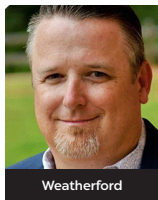
of golf marketing for Topgolf and Toptracer, leading partnerships across both brands.



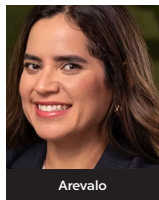
Chamberlin



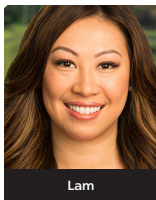
Spears



Weatherford



Arevalo



Lam

accesso Ready for New Chapter

accesso Technology Group has appointed **Lee Cowie** as chief executive officer following a planned leadership transition. Cowie joined the company as chief operating officer 18 months ago and brings more than 15 years of technology leadership experience in the leisure and hospitality sectors, including seven years at Merlin Entertainments. Cowie succeeds Steve Brown, founder of the accesso business.



Cowie

Area15 Prepares for Next Growth Phase

Las Vegas immersive entertainment district **Area15** has appointed **Bonnie Weber** as president. Weber brings more than 30 years of leadership experience in the industry, most recently serving as chief operating officer of Palace Entertainment, where she oversaw 22 entertainment venues across North America and Australia. Her career also includes leadership roles at Six Flags Entertainment and Warner Bros. Consumer Products.

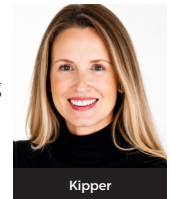


Weber

CenterEdge Strengthens Executive Leadership

CenterEdge Software has appointed **Natasia Kipper** as chief operating officer. Kipper brings more than 20 years of

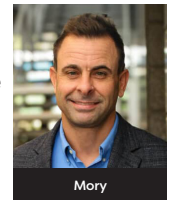
leadership experience and spent over a decade at QubicaAMF Worldwide, most recently serving in a leadership role focused on strengthening prioritization, decision-making, and execution as the organization scaled. Earlier in her career, she led operations for a multi-attraction entertainment center, gaining firsthand experience with the operational, guest experience, and revenue challenges faced by entertainment venue operators.



Kipper

Gateway Ticketing Systems Strengthens Leadership Team

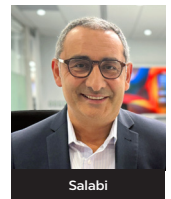
Gateway Ticketing Systems has promoted **Chase Mory** to vice president of operations. Mory joined the company more than 15 years ago, most recently serving as director of operations.



Mory

ProSlide Expands Commercial Leadership

ProSlide Technology has appointed **Gabi Salabi** as chief commercial officer. He brings extensive experience in international market development, commercial strategy, and leading high-performing teams across the global attractions industry. In his new role, Salabi will work closely with the company’s global sales, master planning, and marketing teams to support continued growth and strengthen ProSlide’s commercial strategy across key international markets and partner relationships.



Salabi

Six Flags Reshapes Board Leadership and Reintroduces Park Presidents

Six Flags Entertainment Corporation has appointed **Richard “Dick” Hadrill** as executive chairman of its board of directors. Hadrill brings extensive leadership experience, including roles as CEO of Bally Technologies and executive vice chairman of Scientific Games.

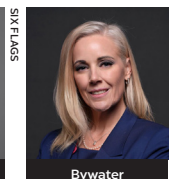
Six Flags also reintroduced the role of park president at 10 of its parks as part of a broader effort to empower local teams and support faster decision-making. The appointments include **Christopher Mortensen** at Canada’s Wonderland, **Bridgette Bywater** at Carowinds, **Colleen Brady** at Cedar Point, **Tony Carovillano** at Kings Island, **Raffi Kaprelyan** at Knott’s Berry Farm, **Mike Fehnel** at Six Flags Great Adventure, **John Krajnak** at Six Flags Great



Hadrill



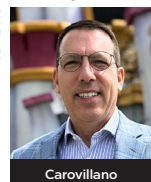
Mortensen



Bywater



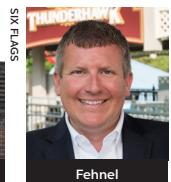
Brady



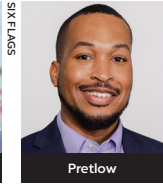
Carovillano



Kaprelyan



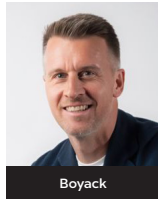
Fehnel



America, **Brian Oerding** at Six Flags Magic Mountain, **Richard Pretlow** at Six Flags Over Georgia, and **Pete Carmichael** at Six Flags Over Texas.

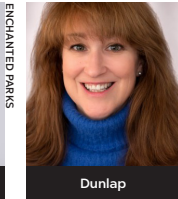
WhiteWater Expands Leadership

WhiteWater has appointed **Peter Boyack** as executive vice president, business development for the Middle East, India, and Africa. Boyack brings more than 20 years of experience across EMEA, including the past six years leading regional growth strategy for Event Lab in Dubai. He has worked with clients across theme parks, water parks, resorts, and sports.



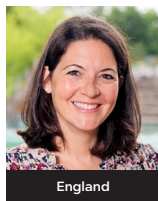
Enchanted Parks Builds Leadership

Enchanted Parks USA has appointed **Franceen Gonzales** as chief operating officer and **Catherine Colton Dunlap** as vice president of lodging as the company expands its portfolio. Gonzales will oversee operations across the growing park portfolio, while Dunlap brings experience in attractions and hospitality. The appointments come as Enchanted Parks now operates multiple former Six Flags properties under a long-term agreement with EPR Properties.



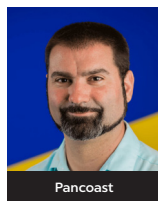
ZSL Names New Chief Executive

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has appointed **Kathryn England** as chief executive officer following a period serving as interim CEO. England becomes the first woman to lead the organization in its 200-year history. She first joined ZSL more than a decade ago, bringing experience in veterinary care, wildlife health, and operations while supporting the organization's continued focus on conservation and public engagement.



Dronisos Expands U.S. Business Development Leadership

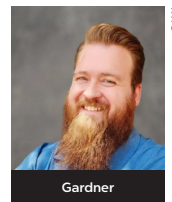
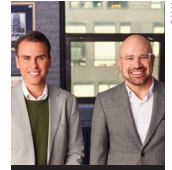
The expansion of **Dronisos** in North America will now be supported by the appointment of **Jeremy Pancoast** as vice president, U.S. business development. Pancoast brings more than 20 years of experience in the themed entertainment industry, including leadership roles at Merlin Entertainments



and United Parks & Resorts. In his new role, he will focus on strengthening client partnerships and expanding the integration of Dronisos' motion-controlled technologies across destination and live entertainment environments globally.

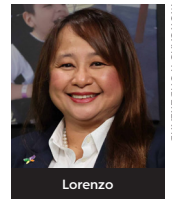
RWS Global Restructures Leadership

The next phase of growth across **RWS Global's** entertainment and sports portfolio will be led by the company's reorganized team. The company has announced a leadership transition, with founder **Ryan Stana** moving to executive chairman and **Jake McCoy** (formerly chief operating officer) transitioning to interim chief executive officer. McCoy will lead the company's next phase of growth across its global entertainment and sports portfolio. The company also named **AJ Gardner** as general manager of its new Middle East headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Gardner previously held roles with major regional operators, supporting expansion across key international markets.



Morgan's Wonderland Names New Park President

Catherine "Cat" Lorenzo was appointed as park president of **Morgan's Wonderland** following her tenure as interim leader. Lorenzo joined the organization in 2025 as director of operations and brings more than 30 years of experience in the attractions industry. Her background includes leadership roles at SeaWorld San Antonio and the San Antonio Zoo. In her new role, she will oversee park operations and support continued development of the organization's inclusive guest experience.



Therme Group Singapore Appoints Chief Executive

Therme Group has appointed **Tan Boon Khai** as chief executive officer of Therme Group Singapore. He brings more than 30 years of experience across Singapore's public and private sectors, including leadership roles at JTC Corporation, the Singapore Land Authority, CapitaLand, and Ascott. In the new role, he will lead the development of Therme Singapore, a SG\$1 billion urban wellbeing resort at Marina South set to open in 2030.

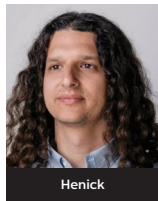


TEEG Names Group Managing Director

The **Entertainment and Education Group (TEEG)** has appointed **Anhul Chauhan** as group managing director. Chauhan brings experience leading large-scale organizations across Asia in food and beverage, QSR, and consumer goods. He most recently served as global managing director of Minor Food Group. In his new role, he will oversee TEEG's continued growth across its portfolio of location-based entertainment brands in the Asia-Pacific region.

Meow Wolf Appoints Chief Executive

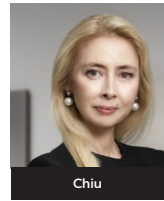
In April, Meow Wolf named Matthew Henick as chief executive officer following a year-long search. Henick joins from The Trade Desk, where he served as senior vice president of consumer products. He previously led Deep Voodoo as CEO and held roles at Epic Games, Meta, and BuzzFeed. In his new role, he will lead the company's next phase of growth.



MEOW WOLF
Henick

Guggenheim Names New Director

Melissa Chiu will step down as director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden to become director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Chiu has led the Hirshhorn, part of the Smithsonian Institution, since 2014, overseeing a period of growth, expanded public engagement, and strengthened fundraising.

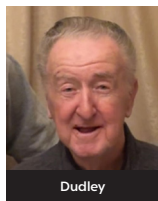


HIRSHHORN MUSEUM
Chiu

LAUNCH **In Memoriam** by Jim Futrell

Daniel Dudley

Daniel Dudley passed away in February at the age of 87. Hired as Maryland's first ride inspector in 1972, Dudley later became an independent ride inspector. In the 1980s, he was a cofounder of the National Association of Amusement Ride Safety Officials (NAARSO), remaining involved into the 2020s. In 2010, Dudley received AIMS International's first Red Wood Award, which recognizes the most outstanding contributions to amusement ride inspection and midway safety.

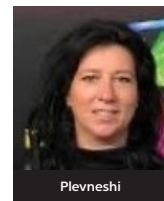


AMBROSE FUNERAL HOME
Dudley

In 1961, the pair created Les Poupees de Paris, which played at World's Fairs in Seattle and New York, and later, they produced puppet shows for Six Flags, Coney Island (Ohio), and Kings Island. In 1976, the brothers opened the short-lived indoor theme park, The World of Sid and Marty Krofft, in Atlanta.

Elvis Plevneshi

Elvis Plevneshi passed away suddenly in January at the age of 50. A native of Albania, she was a long time executive at leading Turkish games distributor Meridyen Spor. Remembered as a trusted business partner eager to embrace new challenges.



INTERCARD
Plevneshi

Rolf Döpmann

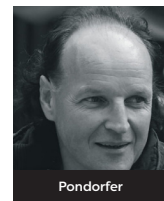
Rolf Döpmann passed away in March at the age of 71. For more than 30 years, Döpmann served as CEO of FAB (Freizeit-Anlagen-Bau S.a.r.l., later FAB Luxembourg S.A.). Cofounded with Helmut Schreiber, FAB is a Luxembourg-based distribution partner of rides and attractions.



DÖPMANN FAMILY
Döpmann

Walter Pondorfer

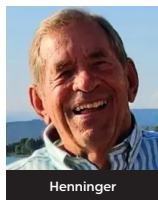
Walter Pondorfer, founder of Austria-based Funtime and an entrepreneur at the Vienna Prater, died in a small aircraft crash in Croatia on June 4 at the age of 64. Originally trained as a church roofer, Pondorfer developed his first attraction at the Prater in 1995 before founding Funtime, maker of the towering Star Flyer ride. Pondorfer is survived by his family, including daughter Viola, who continues operating attractions at Vienna's Wurstelprater (Prater).



PRATER
Pondorfer

Harry Henninger

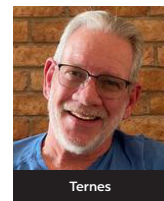
Harry "Henny" Henninger Jr. passed away on June 2 at the age of 80. Henny joined the family business at Kennywood in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania, working his way up from locker room attendant at the pool to CEO of Kennywood Entertainment. He's remembered for creating the Steel Phantom roller coaster (and its subsequent transformation into Phantom's Revenge), the Lost Kennywood land, developing the Sandcastle water park, and acquiring Idlewild Park, Lake Compounce, and Storyland before retiring in 2007. In addition, Henny twice served on the IAAPA Board of Directors.



NEID FUNERAL HOME
Henninger

Patrick J. Ternes

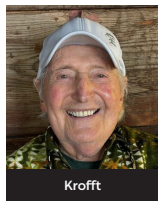
Pat Ternes passed away in April at the age of 65. He began his career with BRC Bearing before joining Chance Rides Manufacturing as a customer service troubleshooter in 1987. He retired in August 2025 after 38 years with the company. Ternes became known not just for his technical knowledge and reliability, but for the relationships he cultivated and the integrity he brought to his work.



EBERSOLE MORTUARY
Ternes

Sid Krofft

Sid Krofft passed away peacefully on April 10 at the age of 96. A lifelong puppeteer, Krofft was known at the artistic half of the Sid and Marty Krofft partnership, which created several children's television shows in the 1960s and 1970s.



SID KROFFT
Krofft

Industry Insights



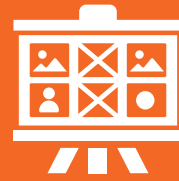
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Elevating Aquatic Safety

Making drowning prevention our foundation

WATER IS THE UNIVERSAL DRAW OF OUR INDUSTRY, offering thrills, relaxation, and relief from the summer heat. Yet, for aquatic operators, the presence of water demands an uncompromising commitment to guest wellbeing. Drowning prevention cannot simply be a standalone protocol; it must be the foundation upon which every successful water park and aquatic facility operates.

The statistics surrounding water safety are a sobering reminder of why our vigilance matters. Globally, drowning claims approximately 230,000 lives each year, according to the World Health Organization. In the United States, recent data from the Centers for Disease Control shows drowning deaths are unfortunately on the rise, with more than 4,500 fatalities annually. It currently stands as the leading cause of death for children ages 1-4, and over half of all U.S. adults have never taken a formal swimming lesson. Almost all drownings are preventable, with most occurring when there is a lapse in supervision or lack of physical barriers.

As the attractions industry evolves, so must our approach to aquatic safety. Proactive drowning prevention requires a multi-layered strategy that integrates rigorous training, facility design, and relentless public awareness, elevated by modern best practices.

These actions can bring a continuous awareness to both staff and guests:

- **Zone Validation & Auditing:** Regularly validate lifeguard zones of protection and conduct unannounced “drop drills” by using submersible mannequins and silhouettes. Test your team often to keep responders ready and alert. Train leadership to identify when lifeguards are not acting attentively and stand ready to address issues immediately.
- **Active Guest Education:** Clear signage, strictly enforced height requirements



and raft weight limits, and mandatory life jacket rules for non-swimmers are critical administrative controls. Operators should consider introducing interactive life jacket fit stations at the front gate to proactively educate parents upon entry.

- **Empowering the Frontline:** Foster a culture where lifeguards feel entirely empowered to blow their whistles, enforce rules, and halt unsafe guest behaviors before they escalate into emergencies. Consider rewarding good behavior for staff with incentive programs, such as rewarding tokens (beads, stickers, points) immediately for specific desired behaviors, which staff can later exchange for rewards. It is a behavioral modification system that can increase performance, morale, and engagement by providing tangible recognition of work-related accomplishments.

World Drowning Prevention Day

Summer presents a prime opportunity for operators to champion these initiatives on a broader scale. July 25 is recognized globally as World Drowning Prevention Day, serving as a vital moment to highlight life-saving solutions.

World’s Largest Swimming Lesson

Coinciding with this on July 25 is The World’s Largest Swimming Lesson (WLSL). We highly recommend that facilities sign up to be a host location. Participating in the WLSL is a phenomenal way to bring crucial water safety awareness directly to your local community.

Ultimately, drowning prevention is an ongoing journey. By anchoring our operations in these core safety themes, we ensure our facilities remain places of joy, thrill, and lasting positive memories. **FW**

Water Parks can register to participate in **The World’s Largest Swimming Lesson (WLSL)** on July 25 at wsl.org

Webinar: Drowning Prevention—July 22
IAAPA.org/event/drowning-prevention-north-american-water-parks



Joey Baumer serves as the chairman of the IAAPA Water Park Committee, a CPO instructor with the PHTA, and has served on multiple World Waterpark Association Committees, including the WWA Safety Committee and the WWA Resort Committee. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).





Advancing Sustainability in the Attractions Industry

Five essential lessons

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY CAN TAKE ON MANY FORMS, but it's clear that minimizing our environmental impacts is a growing expectation of guests, staff, surrounding communities, financial backers, and even regulators of the industry. IAAPA is committed to leading a sustainable transition, and while many member organizations are somewhere along the path, many others have not truly started their journey.

Here are five lessons that are useful to any organization, whether they are already industry leaders in environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability or just getting started.

Lesson No. 1 | Learn from Peers

The attractions industry is full of success stories. Any facility can draw on precedents from other organizations to guide their own sustainability goals and identify ways to implement them. Zoo and aquarium groups have published green guides, handbooks for single-use plastic reduction, and retail sustainability. The Green Sports Alliance has playbooks on topics like decarbonization and reducing food and packaging waste. IAAPA itself also has a collection of resources. It makes sense to tailor goals and strategies to an organization's specific goals, but facilities don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Lesson No. 2 | Prioritize Progress Over Perfection

When it comes to setting sustainability goals, it's easy to get stuck in a debate about which goals to set and how best to achieve them. Years spent in ideation is time not spent advancing a sustainability strategy and accomplishing real-world good. A mix of short and long-term goals allows an organization to build toward major future achievements while also notching early wins. But don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good—just commit and take the first steps.

Lesson No. 3 | A Sustainability Plan Is a Living Thing

Measurement and re-evaluation should be fundamental parts of sustainability planning. It's important to pair goals with performance metrics that are tracked and reported. But an organization, its physical campus—even entire industries—can look very different within a few years. Don't be afraid to adjust targets based on new information along the way.

Lesson No. 4 | Green Design Is Good Design

Sustainable buildings benefit both owners and occupants. Energy and water efficiency save money as well as protect the environment, and features like improved indoor air quality and access to natural light mean healthier spaces for staff and guests. Pursuing third-party standards for design and operations ensures accountability and maximizes marketing potential.

Lesson No. 5 | Plan for a Changing Climate

Studies show that the nature of climate risks vary across regions, and identifying localized hazards is increasingly relevant to business planning. Whether it's diminished attendance due to extreme heat or cold, damage to facilities from stronger storms, or trickle-down effects that impact supply chains, organizations should plan now for a changing climate. Sustainable practices are an effective means to increase organizational resilience. **FM**



Interested in engaging with other industry professionals about sustainability? Visit IAAPA Communities:



Colley Hodges is an architect who leads the Houston Zoo's sustainability program. He was awarded top honors for sustainability by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in 2024. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





Building Operational Excellence Around People

Doha Quest shares three lessons in guest-centric operations

SET IN THE HEART OF DOHA OASIS, Doha Quest, Qatar's largest indoor theme park, is built for scale, speed, and spectacle. But more importantly, it is built around people. What has made the facility a fan favorite is not only its record-breaking attractions, but how naturally the entire experience comes together. Guests don't come only to ride; they come to celebrate, explore, and create moments that stay with them.

In an environment that moves fast, operations can never stand still. Learning is constant, shaped daily by guest behavior, feedback, and live experience on the floor. There is always more to refine. But through that ongoing evolution, a few principles have consistently proven their value.

In particular, three lessons continue to shape how Doha Quest operations evolve.

Lesson No. 1 | Every Interaction Is Part of the Experience

At Doha Quest, the guest experience is never limited to the ride itself. It begins at the entrance, continues through every point of guidance, support, and service, and carries through until a guest leaves the park. A ride can be world-class, but if the surrounding interactions feel unclear, slow, or impersonal, the overall experience loses impact. That is why operations must treat every touchpoint as part of the attraction. Whether it is a guest feeling welcomed, directed, assisted, or served, every moment contributes to the rhythm of the visit. In a park built around high-energy experiences, consistency in human interaction is what keeps the experience feeling seamless, confident, and premium.

Lesson No. 2 | Guest Insight Must Lead to Action

Understanding guests requires more than instinct. At Doha Quest, guest preferences




DOHA QUEST


and behavior are reviewed periodically through multiple channels, including online data, guest feedback, attraction trends, peak and slower periods, and recurring recommendations. The value lies not in collecting that information, but in applying it. What do guests need to know more clearly? Which attractions do they naturally gravitate toward? What do they ask for repeatedly? Which moments elevate satisfaction, and which can be refined? These are not abstract questions; they directly shape operational decisions, from communication and guest guidance to how experiences are positioned across the park. Strong operations do not assume. They listen, review, and implement.

Lesson No. 3 | Experiences Beyond the Rides and Attractions

One of the clearest lessons learned at Doha Quest is how guests visit for more than just the attractions. Many come for occasions that are deeply personal or highly social: birthdays, school trips, corporate outings, team-building events, family days, and shared celebrations. Recognizing this has allowed Doha Quest to expand beyond a ride-led model into an experience-led one, where the park can host not only thrills, but connections as well. Introducing and strengthening these formats has helped make the destination more versatile, more relevant, and more memorable. It also reflects an important operational truth: Guest-centricity means understanding the reason behind the visit, not just managing the visit itself.

At Doha Quest, operational excellence is not a fixed model; it is a moving one, which is continuously shaped, constantly refined, and always aligned with the guest. 



Heiko Engels, general manager of Doha Quest, leads guest experience and operational excellence initiatives across the attraction. He started his career almost 30 years ago and worked in multiple countries where he planned, opened, and operated multiple theme parks. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#) 





How Small Creative Decisions Shape Big Guest Experience

A five-step approach

ATTENTION TO DETAIL IS THE DIFFERENCE between just completing a project and creating a truly immersive world. Large-scale set pieces capture attention, but great theming lies in the smaller, intricate details.

Guests might not consciously register precise textures or color accuracy, but they will instinctively sense when it's missing. Misaligned materials, inaccurate finishes, or something simply feeling off can break immersion. The best theming stems from millimeter-level attention to detail and collaboration across creative, technical, and production teams. Here are five lessons to insure everyone is aligned on a vision, with the end result looking impressive and feeling real.

Lesson No. 1 | Micro Details Create Macro Impact

Some decisions may seem small in isolation, but their collective impact can be enormous. For every project, our scenic artists produce paint samples on finished materials and detailed documentation of paints, techniques, and methodologies. Meticulous processes like this help guarantee consistency and preserve detail across the entire project. Ultimately, it's this consistency that allows environments to feel believable—even if guests can't pinpoint exactly why.

Lesson No. 2 | Detail from Day One

Attention to detail isn't something that can be applied at the end of a project. It should be embedded throughout, trickling into every aspect of decision-making from start to finish.

At Wild Creations, we obsess over colors, textures, and finishes from the earliest concept stages. A strong creative instinct—the gut feeling that something isn't quite right—is invaluable. Often, our

teams sense an imbalance before they can articulate it. That intuition, paired with technical knowledge, allows for subtle but crucial refinements that carry through into the final experience.

Lesson No. 3 | Create Moments, Not Just Environments

In theming, it's important to make guests feel something, rather than just present something visual. Factors like textures, colors, and coatings can subtly guide the narrative,

and the smallest nuances can help shape emotions.

The goal is to take guests on a journey. That starts with designing immersive, emotional, and multilayered environments that aren't just visually impressive, but also create moments within a space where guests pause, react, and connect with the story.


Lesson No. 4 | Protect the Vision

One of the most important aspects of theming is truly understanding someone else's vision. Clients bring ideas shaped by brand and story, but also operational realities and commercial objectives. Establishing a mutual understanding and trust is essential.

Attention to detail can often slip due to budget, timeline, or practical constraints. This erosion can undermine the very thing that makes theming so powerful: the storytelling. Maintaining quality requires close collaboration and clear documentation, ensuring that the original creative intent is carried through every stage, from concept to installation.

Lesson No. 5 | Design for How Guests Feel

Ensuring continuity of detail throughout a guest's journey is essential. Each element, regardless of size, should reinforce the narrative and contribute to an emotionally engaging experience.

Ultimately, quality theming comes from storytelling, authenticity, and passion for the craft. The bigger picture will always matter, but it's the smallest nuances and details that guests may never consciously name that make them feel. And when guests feel something, they remember it—and they return. 



WILD CREATIONS

In this detailed project example named Paddington in Peru, Wild Creations shows value in intricate details.



Nathan Roberts, part of the Wild Creations team since 2016, brings deep design and construction expertise across CNC, 3D printing, carpentry, and casting. He now leads the design department, growing to a staff of 15. He holds a South Wales set design degree and runs a ceramics studio. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





Balancing Data and Decision Making

How to best forecast, understand market reality, and ensure success

ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY LEADERS HAVE ACCESS TO MORE DATA THAN EVER: attendance by the hour, per cap by category, queue heat maps, sentiment tracking, conversion funnels, and the list goes on. However, the ability to make decisions seems to be getting harder.

The conflict is not data versus intuition. The conflict is how to effectively use both.

Testing the Numbers

In my experience, many projects have not succeeded because the data was never properly stress tested. There was a famous park that opened with attendance projections based on tourism growth statistics and optimistic capture rates. The reality was that within the first year of operation, the attendance was a fraction of what was forecast. The reason for the discrepancy was not the execution of the project. The reason was a flawed understanding of the market and a cost base that was designed to a reality that never existed.

Experience has shown the most common mistakes in forecasting are the simplest.

Tourism growth statistics are based on the number of visits, not the number of unique visitors. Market studies can be based on optimistic bias. The reality of the market can be misunderstood by failing to segment the data. The growth in the data can be linear, with no consideration of what happens in a downward trend.

I consider intuition a data point, but not the data itself. If the data suggests that a forecast is too optimistic or too conservative, then intuition says to test it. The art is to test the intuition to validate or invalidate the data.

Testing Different Markets

One interesting calibration exercise is to compare the same attraction concept in two different markets, one of which



is a mega city of tens of millions within a one-hour trip with a large target demographic. In such a market, an attraction concept can be pushed to its limits in terms of capacity. In a mid-size metropolitan area, the ceiling will be much lower in terms of the target demographic. While the attraction concept itself may be identical in each of these markets, the markets themselves are not. While it's tempting to borrow performance assumptions from one market to the other, it's not ambition; it's inaccuracy.


After establishing the market reality, performance is a result of three interrelated disciplines.

Financial Forecasting

Investment planning needs to be thorough. A feasibility study should consider downside scenarios just as much as upside scenarios. Investment needs to be properly aligned to realistic demands, including planning for reinvestment from day one.

Expense management requires a structural approach. Payroll costs, marketing, maintenance, and utilities are usually predictable in terms of industry standards. A pro forma that significantly diverges from these standards should be understood by management precisely for what reason.

Overruns in costs during the development phase are a permanent increase in the hurdle rate. Maintenance costs rapidly erode guest perception.

The best operators I have observed are neither purely analytical in their approach to running a business nor purely intuitive. This balance requires discipline, and they are those who can use data to establish a range of performance and experience to interpret what the data alone cannot tell them. 



Mark Wijman, IC AE, designs, plans, and operates economically sound, memorable visitor experiences. Former World Expo operations director, theme park GM, and AECOM consultant, Mark is an IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).





IAAPA'S QUARTERLY OUTLOOK SURVEY

Industry Sentiment and Business Expectations for the Next Six Months

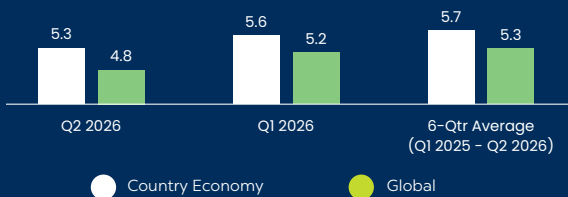


IAAPA's Quarterly Outlook Survey measures industry sentiment regarding economic conditions, business performance, workforce trends, and emerging opportunities and challenges over the next six months. Responses from attraction operators and manufacturers/suppliers/consultants provide insight into how the industry is navigating an evolving global environment.

The results below present findings from the Q2 2026 Quarterly Outlook Summary, along with trend data from the past six quarters. Full reports are available to members at: [IAAPA.org/research/economic-impact-study](https://iaapa.org/research/economic-impact-study)

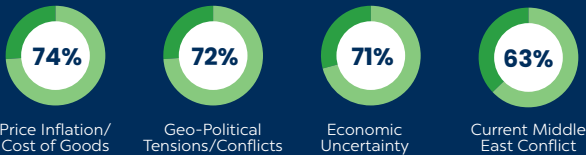
Attraction Operators

Economic Outlook Over the Next Six Months (Mean Scores)



* Mean scores reflect responses to a 1–10 scale, where 1 indicates very pessimistic and 10 indicates very optimistic.

Top Business Concerns



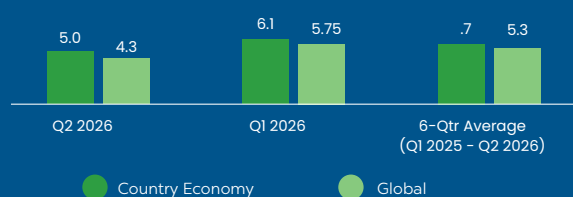
*Ratings of 4–5 on a 5-point scale, where 5 indicates 'Extremely concerned'

Top Trends in attraction development or investment

- Immersive & Themed Experiences** (end-to-end immersive environments; stronger narrative and thematic cohesion; sensory-rich experiences)
- Flexible Formats** (compact, lower-CAPEX attractions; multi-activity venues; shift away from large, capital-heavy parks)
- Technology & Digital Innovation** (VR/AR and hybrid digital-physical attractions; smart personalization and content generation; technology-driven guest engagement tools)

Manufacturers/Suppliers/Consultants

Economic Outlook Over the Next Six Months (Mean Scores)



* Mean scores reflect responses to a 1–10 scale, where 1 indicates very pessimistic and 10 indicates very optimistic.

Top Business Concerns



*Ratings of 4–5 on a 5-point scale, where 5 indicates 'Extremely concerned'

Top Trends in attraction development or investment

- Flexible Formats** (modular and scalable attraction formats; repurposing or upgrading existing facilities; focus on efficiency and flexibility)
- Immersive & Themed Experiences** (integration of digital, AR, VR, and projection systems; blending physical and digital entertainment layers; focus on storytelling and guest immersion)
- ROI & Efficiency-Driven Investment** (stronger ROI requirements; focus on per-capita spend and repeat visitation; data-driven attraction planning; preference for proven, monetizable concepts)

Explore the full Q2 2026 Quarterly Outlook Summary and share your perspective in the next survey at [IAAPA.org/research/quarterly-outlook](https://iaapa.org/research/quarterly-outlook)



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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IAAPA Honors Delivers Inspiration at Xcaret in Mexico

Annual awards gala excels with idea sharing, thought leadership, and networking



INSPIRATION BURSTS FROM THE HEART OF IAAPA HONORS. The annual awards event unfolded over three days in May at Xcaret, a resort destination and collection of eco-archaeological parks located in Riviera Maya, Mexico. The event brings together industry thought leaders, executives, respected decision makers, and IAAPA Brass Ring Award winners for peer-to-peer conversation, lectures, and presentations in best practices.

“IAAPA Honors is all about inspiration,” says IAAPA President and CEO Jakob Wahl. “We worked with Xcaret, a wonderful host, who opened up their backstage areas to inspire attendees.”

Almost two dozen EDUTours, talks, workshops, learning opportunities, and networking

receptions provided attendees with a front-row seat and behind-the-scenes access to see operations, culinary, live entertainment, and sustainability practices firsthand. IAAPA Honors has gained a reputation for bringing together industry decision-makers who freely exchange knowledge and insight.

“Being at Xcaret was so inspiring and motivational. It’s amazing what we exchanged, saw, and experienced together,” says IAAPA 2026 Chairman of the Board, Luciana Periales, who serves concurrently as the CEO of Neverland Parks.

Xavier López Ancona, president and CEO of KidZania, delivered a keynote address focused on creativity and strategies that drive innovation

with purpose. Jacob Robinson, founder and CEO of Dig World, took the stage for a keynote on resilience and choosing joy under pressure. Xcaret founder Miguel Quintana shared his secret to success during a conversation hosted by Wahl. Liseberg CEO and President Andreas Andersen presented insight on how industry attractions can stay relevant and sustainable for decades to come.

For the first time, leaders from Intamin, Mack Rides, and Vekoma—all competitive in the same markets—took the stage for a discussion moderated by Sally Dark Rides.

“The Brass Ring Awards are one of the highest honors you can receive in our industry—everybody wants one,” explains IAAPA COO Michael Shelton. 

Learn more about 2026 IAAPA Awards and apply today at IAAPA.org/Awards

IAAPA NEWS



2025 Brass Ring Excellence Award Winners

Food & Beverage Excellence

Best New Food & Beverage Build
Meow Wolf Grapevine
Prime Materia

Best New F&B Special Event or Festival
Gilroy Gardens Family Theme Park
Cherry Jubilee

Best New Menu Item: Limited Operation
Lagoon Amusement Park
The Peacock Float

Best New Menu Item: Year-Round Operation
Hersheypark
All Day Souvenir Cup Vending Machine

Games & Merchandise Excellence presented by DOF Robotics

Best Custom Retail Souvenir
Beach Park, Parque Arvorar
Arvorar Magic T-Shirt

Best Customized Game Prize
Dollywood Parks and Resorts
Cinnamon Bread Plush

Best Individual Visual Merchandise Display
Sky Pirates of Mermaid Bay
Kraken Merchandise Display

Best Collective Visual Merchandise Display
Xcaret Park
Main Plaza: Raíces de México

Human Resources Excellence

Best Talent Acquisition Program
FACE Amusement
Downtown Flavortown Talent Acquisition Program

Best Training Program
The Entertainment and Education Group
Guest U Connect Training

Best Health and Wellness Program
Beach Park
Taking Care of You

Best Reward, Recognition, and Retention Program
Parques Reunidos
WOW Service Program

Live Entertainment Excellence

Most Creative Halloween Production
Universal Studios Singapore
Once Upon A Time... To Die

Most Creative Holiday Production
Universal Beijing Resort
Universal Winter Holiday: This Time of Year Is

Most Creative Atmosphere Production
Universal Studios Japan
Melting Pot

Most Creative Theatrical Production: Limited Operation
Kolmården
The Enchanted Golden Egg

Year-Round Operation
Disney Cruise Line, Disney Treasure
Disney The Tale of Moana

Most Creative Spectacle
Disneyland Paris
Disney Tales of Magic

The Showstopper
Image Engineering
MLB All-Star Game: Hank Aaron Tribute Home Run Comet

Marketing Excellence

Most Creative Outdoor Advertisement
Morey's Piers
Jaws Will Drop

Most Creative Digital Marketing Campaign
Liseberg
The Weather Game

Most Creative Social Media Marketing Campaign
Jungle Island
Baby Capybara Yoga Campaign

Most Creative Integrated Marketing Campaign
Doha Quest
Discover Your Quest Self

Sustainability Excellence

Best Sustainability Program
Efteling
A Sustainable World Of Wonders

FEC of the Year

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LBE of the Year

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Regional Individual Achievement Award Winners

Young Professional of the Year

Europe, Middle East, Africa
Izzy Fletcher

Latin America, Caribbean

Rodrigo Quintana

North America

Megan Gannon

Service

Asia-Pacific

Victor Danau

Europe, Middle East, Africa

Jeroen Nijpels

Latin America, Caribbean

Rafael Penna

North America

Heather Barnes

Inspiration

Asia-Pacific

Tom Mehrmann

Europe, Middle East, Africa

Arnaud Bennet

Latin America, Caribbean

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2026 Liseberg Applause Award Winner

Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi, Yas Island, United Arab Emirates

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London Calls: IAAPA Expo Europe Returns to UK



EXCEL LONDON WILL HOST THE MOST AMBITIOUS EDITION of IAAPA Expo Europe yet, bringing the global attractions industry together in a dynamic world city.

For the first time since 2022, IAAPA Expo Europe will return to London. From September 21-25, education programs will take place, with the trade show floor open September 22-24.

As host city, London places Expo at the heart of one of the world's most innovative and commercially vibrant attractions markets. Whether attendees are seasoned veterans of the Expo circuit or registering for the first time, IAAPA Expo Europe 2026 promises a can't-miss week of business, learning, inspiration, networking, and wonder.

"Returning to London after four years is both exciting and humbling," says Peter van der Schans, vice president and executive director of IAAPA ESA "The United

Kingdom is home to IAAPA's largest European membership base and continues to be a market with influence on indoor entertainment trends within neighboring regions. This return reflects both the strength of the U.K. market and the continued growth of our event. We're proud to come back with our largest IAAPA Expo Europe to date, creating even more opportunities for connection, collaboration, and inspiration."

Record-Breaking Show Floor

Last year, IAAPA Expo Europe in Barcelona set a new benchmark, and IAAPA Expo Europe 2026 expects to raise the bar again. For the fourth consecutive year, the show is set to break its own record, with more than 800 exhibiting companies displaying the latest innovations across 22,000 square-meters of exhibition space at Excel London. The result will be the

largest IAAPA Expo Europe trade show floor in the event's history—a vast, energizing environment where the full breadth of the global attractions supply chain is on display—from ride manufacturers and technology providers, to theming specialists and digital experience designers.

New for 2026, a dedicated food and beverage zone will bring an exciting addition to the floor plan. Twenty companies will present their latest products and culinary concepts, covering everything from indulgent snack innovations to ice cream and revenue-generating catering solutions. For operators looking to diversify income streams and enhance the guest experience, this is a fresh destination within the show.

Inspiring Education

For the first time in 2026, education content will be spread across five dedicated spaces: the IAAPA Theatre sponsored by Angry Birds, three conference rooms, and the Innovation Stage. With more than 175 speakers and over 60 sessions, never before has so many educational opportunities existed at a single European attractions event.

The Leadership Breakfast will be a highlight of the education calendar. This year's theme highlights rapid growth and scalability, illustrated through two powerful business cases. Robert Dahl, CEO of Karls, the German-based theme park brand that recently announced its expansion into California, and Wouter Dekkers, CEO of Momentum Leisure, whose group has shown strong growth in Poland and is now expanding across Central Europe. Together, they will present a compelling vision of what



Visit IAAPA.org/IAAPAEurope2026 for updated information and to register (information presented was current at press time in mid-June)

IAAPA NEWS



is possible when bold operators pursue growth across borders and formats.

For those looking to deepen their expertise in specific disciplines, the program's breadth is unmatched. The Innovation Stage will once again give voice to emerging perspectives and new thinking, ensuring that the next generation of industry ideas gets the platform it deserves.

A Certified Sustainable Event

IAAPA Expo Europe 2026 has earned certification as a Sustainable Event by Greentime, following an independent third-party review. Achieving a total score of 76% and meeting all mandatory requirements, the certification is a meaningful recognition of IAAPA's commitment to responsible event management. The assessment covers the event's footprint, from transport and waste management to working conditions, diversity, and financial sustainability.

An Opening Night Like No Other

The Opening Reception is the networking event of the year in Europe, and in 2026, the event takes on an entirely different dimension. This year's event is a unique two-part experience: a two-hour reception to reconnect with colleagues and partners from across the industry, followed by a 90-minute concert at ABBA Voyage, the groundbreaking concert experience that redefined live entertainment in London. The Opening Reception is an evening that captures the spirit of the attractions business: creative, immersive, and utterly unforgettable. This event is exclusive to IAAPA members—and dancing shoes are highly recommended!



Networking Opportunities

Building on the success of previous years, the 2026 networking program will continue to grow significantly. The familiar constituency-based receptions for indoor entertainment, theme parks, and water parks return alongside the well-established MENA Reception. New for this year, are additional geography-focused receptions, bringing together professionals from the DACH Region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), Poland, and France, acknowledging Expo's growing relevance to operators across Europe's diverse regional markets.


The Women in the Industry Networking Lunch—which made its debut at last year's Expo—is confirmed as a signature event for 2026. Its return reflects the industry's continued commitment to championing women in business and building a more inclusive community.

Signature Events Not to Be Missed

Several of IAAPA Expo Europe's most popular events return in 2026, each with new content

and renewed energy. Indoor Entertainment Day, reserved exclusively for IAAPA members, celebrates the U.K.'s status as a global FEC and indoor entertainment trendsetter. Participants can expect a vibrant program of keynotes, panels, and high-value networking, rounded off with behind-the-scenes visits to Swingers, The Crazy Golf Club, and other venues in the O2 Arena for candid conversations.

The signature EDUTour, one of the event's perennial sell-outs (and thus reserved for IAAPA members), visits two of the U.K.'s best-loved destinations: Chessington World of Adventures Resort and Legoland Windsor Resort. Both facilities will offer behind-the-scenes access and direct operational insight that simply cannot be replicated in a conference room.

Also evolving for 2026, Water Park Day will be redefined as Water Park Forum, with a sharper focus on learning, peer networking, and a unique venue visit to Lee Valley White Water Centre, a facility that offers a very different perspective on water-based attractions. 



Angi Puigferrat, marketing director for IAAPA Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa, is leading efforts that raise awareness about IAAPA membership in the ESA region and promotes attendance at IAAPA Expo Europe and ESA events. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



IAAPA to Continue MENALAC's Success

ON JULY 1ST, IAAPA MENA OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED its own dedicated region in the Middle East and North Africa, amalgamating the global know how and experience of the IAAPA membership base and the regional expertise and legacy of MENALAC.

Established in 2016 under the aegis of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and the Dubai Association Centre, the Middle East and North Africa Leisure and Attractions Council (MENALAC) was created as a not-for-profit industry council dedicated to supporting and advancing the region's leisure, entertainment, and attractions sector.

Bringing together operators, suppliers, consultants, and industry stakeholders, MENALAC provided a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development across the MENA region. Through conferences, networking events, educational initiatives, research, and industry forums, the council helped foster innovation, promote best practices, and strengthen industry connections.


Through the strategic collaboration that began on July 1, IAAPA builds upon the strong foundation MENALAC has established over the past decade—championing the region's interests, elevating industry standards, and

fostering collaboration among theme parks operators, amusement parks, visitor attractions, family entertainment centers, along with manufacturers and suppliers.

Together, IAAPA and MENALAC will provide localized education, advocacy, research, resources, and expanded networking opportunities, while connecting professionals in the region to IAAPA's global community.

The collaboration also recognizes MENALAC's leadership and the Middle East's growing expertise in the regional indoor amusement and family entertainment sector, ensuring that operators of all sizes—from large-scale destinations to indoor entertainment venues—receive dedicated support, industry insights, and representation.

With MENALAC falling under the umbrella of IAAPA MENA, this will only cement and further drive IAAPA's vision to be the leading resource for the attractions industry, bringing the global industry together in every region of this world, and representing all parts of this dynamic industry.

IAAPA thanks the leading minds who founded MENALAC and everyone who has contributed to this wonderful association of professionals. IAAPA is excited to write the next chapter together. 



Connect with the new Middle East and North Africa region online at IAAPA.org/MENA

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Mike Rigby to Lead Continued Growth in MENA

Industry veteran excited for the future in the Middle East and North Africa

SITTING IN FRONT OF A PICTURE WINDOW with sweeping views of Hong Kong's skyline, Mike Rigby is 10,660 kilometers away from Dubai. He's too focused to notice the iconic Chinese wooden sailing vessel—complete with its distinct, battened sails—gliding across Victoria Harbour next to him. Rigby looks intently at his laptop, corresponding with constituents back in the Middle East.

The temporary office setting at IAAPA Expo Asia 2026 gave Funworld an opportunity to sit down with Rigby to learn his vision for the Middle East as IAAPA vice president and executive director of the new MENA region. It's a territory Rigby knows well after spending 11 years heading up WhiteWater's presence in the Middle East. His portfolio includes collaborations with Yas Waterworld, Atlantis Aquaventure, and multiple greenfield developments such as Meryal, Adrena at The Red Sea, and the recently opened Aqarabia Water Theme Park at Qiddiya City in Saudi Arabia.

When did you first get “bit by the bug” to work in the attractions industry?

I was living in Barcelona working in television and telecoms when I saw a job posting offering the opportunity to travel the world selling water slides. I really did not know if this was a serious job! After WhiteWater offered me the role, my first day included flying to Orlando to attend IAAPA Expo. It was incredible to see how much joy the industry brings to millions of people every year. And, I've never looked back.

Why is now the right time for IAAPA to open a dedicated office in the region?

The MENA region includes some of the most fantastic projects in the world—and it is only going to increase. Over the upcoming years, we're going to see bigger projects, better projects, and projects that




will break countless world records and will be renowned globally. This is a pivotal time. As the leading international expert, IAAPA can support our members in accomplishing their ambitions. We look forward to contributing with education, networking, and the best safety practices, bringing each to the MENA region—and then watching our members flourish.

What do you hope to accomplish during the first year in your new role?

I'm walking into an established association that is already a global powerhouse. The team is fantastic. Previously sitting under the ESA (Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa) office in Belgium, the team really has set huge foundations for me to build on. Looking to the future, it's time to create our own MENA board to ensure we are catering to all our members across both geographies, which includes all constituents, manufacturers, and suppliers. We're excited for the inaugural IAAPA Expo Middle East in Abu Dhabi and all the potential that is still to be fulfilled.

How can members tap into your experience?

I like to think that I'm super approachable. I recommend members reach out: Please, let's have a talk. If they see the team, please chat with them. Look into our resources online; join our webinars and understand the insights and perspectives from different parts of the industry that we bring together; attend our events as we look to make them fun and educational—they're a great way to network with peers and colleagues. I am always at your assistance. We look forward to supporting your journey in the Middle East and North African attractions industry. 

Mike Rigby is vice president and executive director for the newly-formed Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region at IAAPA. With more than 20 years of international business experience, he previously served as general manager of WhiteWater Middle East. Based in the UAE, Mike fosters industry growth, education, and collaboration across tourism, hospitality, and entertainment markets. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).



The Power of Connection



IAAPA NEWS

At IAAPA Expo 2025's Women in the Industry Lunch, I looked around the room and what stood out wasn't titles or companies. It was women from across the industry sharing experiences, asking questions, and supporting each other in a way that felt genuine and unfiltered.

That is something powerful.

In an industry like ours, it is easy to stay focused on the day-to-day challenges. But moments like these remind us that it is also about connection, perspective, and the people around us.

Women contribute across every part of the attractions industry. It is inspiring to see leaders like Gina Classen stepping into roles like vice president of operations at Herschend, watching Francess Gonzales be named COO of Enchanted Parks, having Denise Beckson serve on IAAPA's Global Board of Directors, and listening to Elizabeth Lugo COO of Xcaret speak about leading with empathy. There are so many examples, from operations and safety to marketing, finance, and executive leadership, that show how these women's impact is visible and growing.

It is important to continue creating spaces where experiences can be shared and voices can be heard because when women come together, something shifts. Conversations become more open. Those interactions build confidence, and confidence creates momentum.



I have seen firsthand how a simple conversation at an event can turn into mentorship, collaboration, or even a new opportunity. Sometimes it is just knowing that someone else has faced a similar situation and found a way through it. Creating space for these moments does not require something formal or complicated. Some of the most meaningful connections have come from informal gatherings during IAAPA events, where the goal is simply to connect. Those spaces allow relationships to form naturally, without pressure, and that is often where the real impact begins.

Supporting women in leadership is not about creating separation. It is about building a stronger industry. When different perspectives are included, better decisions are made, stronger teams are built, and new ideas emerge. Without that diversity, it becomes easy to think the same way and miss opportunities to grow. There is still more to be done, but the progress is real. Every conversation, every introduction, and every moment of support contributes to that progress.

I believe that leadership is not just about where you are in your career, but how you show up for others along the way. And when we show up for each other, the impact extends far beyond any single room or event. It carries into teams, organizations, and the future of our industry. That is my hope and why this topic matters to me. **FW**



Marah Rodriguez, ICAE has more than 20 years of experience in the attractions industry, with a focus on safety and business development. She is currently the regional vice president of sales at Mobarro, helping attractions improve safety, operations, and maintenance through a digital platform. She serves on the IAAPA Women in Leadership Task Force and is a founding member of the LinkedIn group Female Leaders of Amusement Parks and Attractions. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



Elevate Your Brand

Host an IAAPA Education Contributor Webinar




POSITION YOUR ORGANIZATION at the forefront of the global attractions industry by hosting an IAAPA Education Contributor Webinar. This program offers a powerful platform to expand brand recognition while connecting directly with a highly engaged, international audience actively seeking forward-thinking solutions.

As a webinar host, you can showcase your expertise through real-world success stories, innovative products, and thought leadership. Share lessons learned from project implementations, highlight emerging industry trends and tools, and offer actionable strategies to address today's challenges and drive growth. By educating and inspiring professionals across the

industry, your brand becomes a trusted resource and a recognized innovator.

The impact is measurable. In 2024 and 2025, IAAPA webinars earned an average 4.4 out of 5 satisfaction rating and drew a total of 3,463 registrants, with 1,673 live attendees. Promotion delivers strong reach, averaging 36,119 email opens, 5,790 registration clicks, and 32,477 social impressions with 1,189 engagements per webinar. Sessions are recorded and hosted in the IAAPA Learning Library, extending your reach and visibility well beyond the live event.

IAAPA supports your success with comprehensive marketing, post-event reporting, and strategic logo placement. Participating organizations also receive an IAAPA Education Contributor logo package (see above photo) for use across websites, social media, and marketing materials, further reinforcing credibility and visibility.

Whether you're introducing cutting-edge solutions or shaping industry conversations, IAAPA Education Contributor Webinars offer a high-value pathway to build connections, generate leads, and strengthen your brand presence worldwide. 



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](#).



Ready to get started?

Contact education@iaapa.org to schedule your Education Contributor Webinar.



IAAPA Stands with Industry Professionals Every Step of the Way

AT IAAPA, OUR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING GLOBAL ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS extends beyond moments of growth and success—it includes the times of transition and challenge. We recognize that recent workforce changes have impacted valued members of our community. That’s why IAAPA is offering complimentary individual memberships to those who have recently lost access due to layoffs or organizational changes.

“At IAAPA, we believe membership means more than access—it means community. We’re proud to offer this resource to ensure our members stay connected when they need it most,” says President and CEO Jakob Wahl.

Through this offer, we aim to ensure our members remain connected to insights, networking, and resources that can help guide their next steps, whether it’s exploring new roles, staying informed on industry trends, or remaining a part of the community they’ve helped shape. This is more than a membership—it’s continued belonging and support when it matters most.


To request support, send an email from your personal account to IAAPA@IAAPA.org and list your former company, company email address, and date of separation. 



Building Community Beyond the Show Floor

THE ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT CONNECTING. Ideas are exchanged between sessions, partnerships begin on show floors, and careers are shaped through conversations with people who understand the unique opportunities and challenges of this business. IAAPA Communities extend that connection beyond Expos and events, giving members a place to stay engaged 365 days a year.

Built for members, by members, these communities create space for deeper conversation, peer support, and shared learning across specific areas of the industry. From sustainability and family entertainment to young professionals, women in the industry, manufacturers and suppliers, and museums and science centers, each community helps members find people who share their interests, goals, and experiences.

IAAPA Communities are designed to strengthen belonging within the global attractions industry, helping members find their tribe and build relationships that continue long after an event ends. 



Danielle Snyder knows how to connect IAAPA members. As the organization's Manager of global social media and digital engagement, she oversees channels like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. She is also an administrator of IAAPA Communities. Before joining IAAPA, Snyder was a research coordinator at the Walt Disney World Resort. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



The Launchpad:
Future of the Industry



Sustainability Professionals



The Prize Counter:
Entertainment Centers



EmpowerHER



Manufacturers & Suppliers



Museum & Science Center Professionals



FIND YOUR NEXT STAR TEAM MEMBER

Have an opening at your facility or company?

The IAAPA Job Board allows you to create a company profile, post and manage job openings, search for candidates, and more.

Job postings are emailed to thousands of attraction industry professionals seeking employment.

Members save \$100 on job postings*

GET STARTED TODAY!

JOBS.IAAPA.ORG





ENCUENTRO IAAPA: CENTROS DE ENTRETENIMIENTO FAMILIAR 2026

AGOSTO 18-19 | BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

El mayor evento especializado para centros de entretenimiento en América Latina y el Caribe

Prepárate para formar parte de un evento interactivo con actividades colaborativas, estudios de caso y oportunidades especialmente diseñadas para compartir experiencias y conectar con colegas de centros de entretenimiento de toda la región.



**¡REGÍSTRATE
AHORA!**



IAAPA SUMMIT: FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS 2026

BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA | AUGUST 18-19

**The largest specialized event
for Family Entertainment Centers in
Latin America and the Caribbean**

Get ready to be part of an interactive event with collaborative activities, case studies, and specially designed opportunities to share experiences and connect with colleagues of entertainment centers across the region.



**REGISTER
NOW!**

This is a partial listing of upcoming IAAPA events. Event details are as of June 24, 2026, and subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, visit [IAAPA.org/Events](https://iaapa.org/Events)

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

Theme Park Expo
26-27 | Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

SEPTEMBER

IAAPA APAC Summit 2026
2-3 | Nagoya, Japan

IAAPA Presents: ZooTampa at Lowry Park
8 | Tampa, FL

IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals
19-20 | Chessington, United Kingdom


21-24 | London

NOVEMBER

IAAPA Presents: Central Europe
12 | Central Europe


16-20 | Orlando

DECEMBER

IAAPA Theme Park Summit
14 | Paris and Region

FEBRUARY 2027

IAAPA FEC Summit
7-9 | Atlanta



SAVC

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Massive Marvels**

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IMMERSIVE



QUERION

IMMERSION

Engaging guests in the Age of Participation

by Michael Costello

IMMERSION. IT'S THE ANTITHESIS OF THE SOCALLED MILLENNIAL GREY—a design aesthetic defined by clean, desaturated, cool-toned surfaces that reflect a broader visual and psychological mindset. This aesthetic parallels a homogenization of culture and media: an efficient sameness aligned with risk aversion, neutrality, and the desire for control in an increasingly chaotic world.

In contrast, the attractions industry is engaged by designing what feels like a countermovement—a pendulum swing in the opposite direction, marked by a surge in immersive experiences entering the global market.

Immersion is more than a buzz word. It's a movement. It's a term used in marketing to describe a vast array of attractions that blur the lines between the physical realm and the fantastical; where technical innovation and artistry push creative bounds that were previously only imagined.

Just like the enigma of creativity itself, Funworld's look at eight immersive experiences profiled herein form a continuum—rather than fixed categories—with each occupying a different point along that spectrum. Each illustrates the diverse approaches shaping the market. Similar attractions are bundled together to help guide the imagination. Yet, they only scratch the surface of a vast array of attractions that personify Immersion.

BEYOND CINEMA

THANKS TO CREATIVE WAYS OF USING EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, adding non-traditional elements to the cinema experience, and theaters adding FEC elements—from arcade games to bowling—immersion is now a feature presentation.

Cosm's purpose-built, ultra-modern venues have redefined what "going to the movies" means by offering shared reality experiences that fuse programming like cinematic storytelling, live sports, and event broadcasting with Cosm's technological innovations: domed theaters using ultra-high-resolution LED panels that wrap the audience in a seamless visual field. The concave screen delivers a sense of presence that flat screens simply cannot match.

Unlike conventional theaters, Cosm venues function as multi-use experiential spaces. Studios can premiere films in formats that feel closer to virtual reality than traditional cinema—without isolating the

audience. Sports leagues can deliver "front-row" experiences to fans outside of the stadium.

The Sphere in Las Vegas captures global attention each time its massive LED exterior and concert-scale interior displays are programmed in a fresh way. Take, for example, productions such as "The Wizard of Oz at Sphere." This 4D reimagining of the classic 1939 film surrounds viewers with 16K wraparound visuals, haptic seats, wind, fog, fire, sound effects, and even physical props—like leaves and artificial apples that fall from trees into the audience during the iconic woods scene. The 75-minute reimagining (the original film is 104 minutes) uses artificial intelligence to expand the original frame to fill the venue's dome.

Theaters like Sphere and Cosm are not just enhancing moviegoing; they're redefining and diversifying the category, creating a new experiential layer to cinema.



COSM

“LIFE IS A STAGE, AND WE ARE MERELY PLAYERS.”

DISSOLVING THE LINE BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND STAGE, immersive live theater is a transformative force in contemporary theatre arts. With Punchdrunk’s landmark productions—most notably “Sleep No More,” which recently concluded its long runs in New York and London—the genre-defining company reshaped expectations of what theater can be. Now, a new generation of creators have begun building on that foundation, and thus, pushing the form even further.

Simultaneously, Creep LA, a theater company with more than 225 registered members, evolved from a more traditional haunted house format. The company originally pulsed crowds in a linear way through scenes, eventually delivering a boutique, theatrical experience with 60 multiday, intellectual property productions under its belt.

“We created the ultimate black box theater for them to go through,” says Justin Fix, founder and creative director of the Creep LA theater concept from a historic Hollywood mansion that the company calls home.

As the productions play out, guests navigate the corridors and rooms of the old home in a way that is uniquely their own. The company is careful to educate their guests and set expectations. “We have to train the audience ... so they don’t come in and experience our stuff like an escape room,” says Fix.

Further strengthening the educational component, the performers—while staying in their roles—have a responsibility to educate as soon as guests enter. “We have



to set the tone extremely quickly: what the boundaries are and what you can and can’t do,” says Executive Producer JT Swierczek of the opening scene in the company’s production of “The Willows.” During this production, a guest is literally tied up and locked in a closet.

“It’s like the best form of cinema, because it’s like the one take—these actors are literally breathing live, and the audience basically becomes the POV,” says Fix.

Several Six Flags parks presented The Conjuring: Beyond Fear interactive experience last Halloween. The new boutique haunted maze took small groups of guests through scenes from the Warner Bros.

Pictures film of the same name. At different points, live actors placed guests in closets, asked participants to escape by crawling through tunnels, or had visitors hold creepy dolls. Cedar Point branded the up-charge attraction as an interactive “SCREAMium experience.” The immersive haunted house routinely had a wait time extending more than an hour just to purchase tickets.

At its core, these experience are about human connections and transformations.

“What we’re ultimately telling our audiences (when they leave our world) is that you are allowed to take up space,” Fix says. “You as a human should be seen, you are big enough, we are real enough.” It’s this kind of immersive theater that invites adults to play, to drop in, and to discover themselves anew.



...these actors are literally breathing live, and the audience basically becomes the POV.”

– Justin Fix, Creep LA



“BUT FIRST, LET ME TAKE A SELFIE.”

TREATING VISITORS TO CONTENT WORTHY OF INSTAGRAM, TikTok, or Little Red Book (in China) are immersive, camera-friendly spaces designed for playful creativity and bold visual storytelling. Attractions filled with themed rooms, oversized props, and vibrant backdrops entice visitors to experiment with poses, lighting, and unique perspectives that don't require an app filter. Unlike traditional museums, these attractions prioritize interaction and personal expression as a form of exploration and entertainment, with the visitor knowing the content will scream to be shared digitally during and after the visit.

Taking advantage of available retail space, Otherworld Philadelphia, located in the middle of a cluster of suburban-style shopping centers, offers guests the opportunity to explore 55 rooms of large-scale interactive art, mixed reality play-

Immer-
sion is what transforms an attraction from something guests consume into something they remember.

—Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group

grounds, and secret passageways. Otherworld Philadelphia is an immersive art experience that complements the portfolio of Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group's immersive attractions. “Immersion is what transforms

an attraction from something guests consume into something they remember. When you create a truly immersive environment, you increase emotional engagement, and emotional engagement drives behavior,” says CEO, Chris Stafford.

On a larger scale, the Museum of Ice Cream, with locations in major U.S. cities and one in Singapore, opens its 10th location later this year in Las Vegas.

“The word I use is ‘experium,’ a term we created but a category I believe we have helped define over the past decade,” says Manish Vora, co-CEO and cofounder of the Museum of Ice Cream, launched in 2016. Vora explains that the attraction is not a museum in the traditional sense, and it's not a theme park. “It lives in a space between the two, where design and art meets genuine interactivity and participation.” Some might call the attraction a next-level ice cream shop.

Think of the facility as a dessert-themed playground where real ice cream is served and guests are free to plunge down slides into pools of sprinkles. While the Las Vegas location fills 30,000 square feet of space, Vora reflects on the humble beginnings of its first installation. “It was 6,000 square feet in a vacant building in downtown New York City. It was scrappy, imaginative, and it sold out before it even opened,” shares Vora. “What that moment told us was that the appetite for this kind of experience was enormous and largely unmet. People weren't just showing up for ice cream; they were showing up for a feeling.”



FOR ART'S SAKE



BLENDING INTERACTIVITY, SENSORY ENGAGEMENT, AND CREATIVE ENVIRONMENTS, Meow Wolf and Superblue are some of the most globally recognized immersive art experiences wowing guests.

The large-scale physical installations at Meow Wolf—located in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Denver; Las Vegas; Houston; and Grapevine, Texas (with additional facilities planned for Los Angeles and New York City)—create expansive narrative worlds that invite guests to explore, discover, and co-create meaning. Superblue, with locations in Miami and London, offer digital environments alongside large-scale physical installations. Both experiences are distinctly non-linear, operating in a choose-your-own-adventure format that encourages guests to explore for several hours.

Conversely, Wndr Museum Chicago offers a boutique experience that can be enjoyed in 45 minutes to an hour. Located in the vibrant, walkable West Loop cultural district, the museum occupies a repurposed historic industrial building, echoing the character of its neighboring converted warehouses, indie galleries, and restaurants. Its street-level visibility also supports steady walk-in traffic.

As guests move throughout the museum's corridors and rooms, they are invited to play, touch, and engage with many of the installations. "Wndr defines immersion as inviting guests to participate in engineering their own moments of awe as they embark on their collective and individual exhibit journeys," says Cameron Rogers, senior operations coordinator at Wndr Museum

Chicago. The attraction offers an interactive museum experience that blends playful learning—such as its light-bending physics installation where guests experiment with reflection and refraction—with world-class art, including Yayoi Kusama's immersive infinity-mirror environment, "Love is Calling."

"Our goal is to create moments that resonate beyond the technology itself, allowing each guest to engage with the work in a way that feels meaningful and uniquely their own," concludes Rogers.

Read
Funworld's
July/August 2024
edition for more
about Meow Wolf.
Visit [IAAPA.org/
Meow](http://IAAPA.org/Meow)



Our goal is to create moments that resonate beyond the technology itself.

— Cameron Rogers, Wndr Museum Chicago



THAT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM

A NEW STYLE OF MUSEUM EXHIBITING HAS EMERGED exemplified by The Blue Paradox. The exhibit is an immersive, science-driven experience that launched at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago in 2023. The attraction takes guests “underwater” with LED wave walls, recycled-plastic sculptures, and interactive displays to reveal the scale, causes, and solutions to global ocean plastic pollution. The experience



GRIFFIN MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY IN CHICAGO

nature of the visual, the auditory, the feeling, the storytelling. It's simple, it's direct, it's very accessible, and all that together takes you through it, invoking different emotions at different times,” says Dr. Patricia Ward, the associate vice president of exhibitions and partnerships and head scientist at the museum. She tells Funworld that the experience “engages you intellectually, but very much emotionally, right from the get-go.”

00 It's simple, it's direct, it's very accessible,
—Dr. Patricia Ward, Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago

blends large-scale visuals, data storytelling, and interactive environments to spark action and highlight humanity's impact on marine ecosystems.

The museum partnered with S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc. to masterfully produce an exhibit that successfully expands the idea of immersion to highlight a profoundly important purpose. “It's the holistic

The exhibit masterfully blends art and technology to draw guests into the subject matter, surrounding them with 360-degree LED screens—including the floor beneath their feet. Its message lands through interactive moments that move visitors from the sobering scale of plastic pollution to a grounded sense of optimism. The metrics back it up: In follow-ups conducted weeks after their visit, the museum found that nearly 84% of visitors continued to make changes in their plastic use.



GRIFFIN MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY IN CHICAGO

ON BRAND

WHO WOULD CONSIDER A GAS STATION AS SOMETHING IMMERSIVE—or as an attraction in its own right? Next exit: Dolly's Tennessean Travel Stop, off Interstate 65 in Cornersville, Tennessee.

This new roadside travel stop from IAAPA Hall of Famer Dolly Parton goes beyond the namesake's Pigeon Forge theme park. From the outset, the team designed the property so that “Dolly's influence is thoughtfully woven throughout the entire guest experience, from the moment visitors arrive,” says Gregory H. Sachs, partner of Dolly's Tennessean Travel Stop. That influence appears not as memorabilia, but as atmosphere. Warmth, hospitality, and Tennessee charm is “...reflected in the food, retail offerings, design details, and storytelling elements across the property,” Sachs says. Menu items are pulled directly from Dolly's own cookbook.

This new era of roadside attraction opened in June and distinguishes itself through iconic visual anchors. Sachs describes to Funworld features designed to “create a sense of place that feels distinctly Tennessee.” A

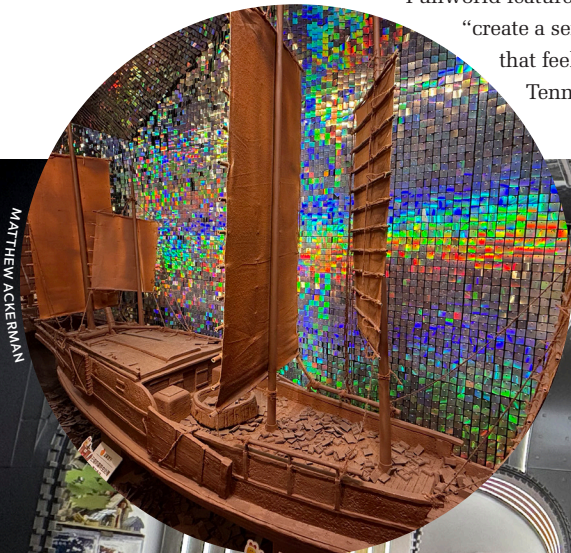


custom mural and a Dolly-inspired tour bus serve as both landmarks and storytelling devices, inviting guests to linger, explore, and engage rather than rush back to the highway. In Sachs' words, “most travel stops are focused on getting people in and out quickly.” Yet this one is intentionally designed to feel welcoming, enjoyable, and worth the visit.

In Shanghai, the Nanjing Road shopping district is lined with brand name stores so immersive in their design that the walk-in exploration experience often eclipses the act of shopping itself. Pop Mart—the Beijing-born toy brand now found worldwide and known for its collectible blind-box figurines and characters like Cry Babies and Labubu—houses a futuristic, space-themed interior that feels like stepping into a sleek spacecraft. Just steps away, Choc Choco offers a chocolate-lover's dream: part candy shop, part free-entry museum, complete with towering carved chocolate sculptures that make a visit as experiential as it is sweet.

Dolly's influence is thoughtfully woven throughout the entire guest experience.

—Gregory H. Sachs, Dolly's Tennessee Travel Stop



MATTHEW ACKERMAN

MICHAEL COSTELLO



THE GREAT ESCAPE (ROOM)

ESCAPING AN ATTRACTION WITH THE HELP OF CLUES and puzzles is a pastime experiencing greater availability than ever before. Crack and Reveal estimates a whopping 50,000 separate escape rooms operate globally.

With concepts possible that match any budget, footprint size, layout possibility, thematic story,

creativity level, or target audience, escape rooms can be designed to suit

everything from casual first-timers to highly experienced puzzle enthusiasts.

In his book, "The Future of Storytelling," Charles Melcher writes the escape room originated in Japan in 2007 as a descendant of story-driven video games of the 1980s and '90s.

Escapeology—an operator of more than 50 locations in countries that include the United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, Mexico, and the United States—embraces franchising to bring some of its games to life across its locations in multiple cities. Guests can try their luck at Scooby-Doo and the Spooky Castle Adventure, Chemical Warfare, or Agatha Christie's Murder On The Orient Express, to name a few.

AmazingXscapes delivers an escape room experience built with the same passion co-owner Rick Briggs describes when he says a great attraction can be created "on a shoestring budget," yet still feels "really, really immersive and really cool." Briggs tells Funworld that while large-scale productions may cost \$50,000 to \$60,000, guests enjoy his original adventures just as much—often leaving five-star reviews. He emphasizes that true immersion isn't about price; it's about creativity and care.



ESCAPEOLOGY

It's something you can go to on a Friday night for an hour with a date ... or you can go there with a corporate group.

—Rick Briggs, co-owner AmazingXscapes



FUZION GAMZ

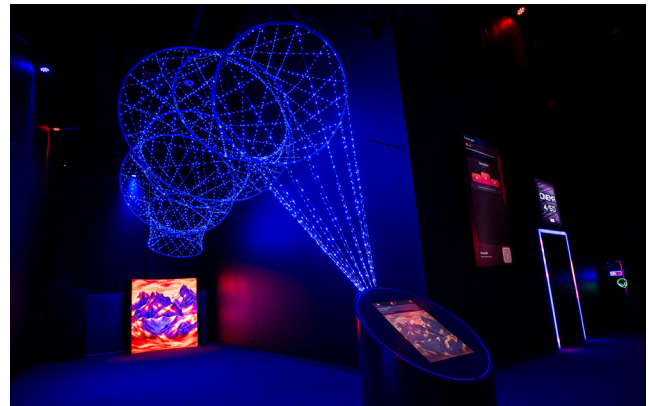
FUN AND GAMES

ACTIVATE ILLUSTRATES HOW GAMIFICATION HAS BECOME A DRIVING FORCE in today's immersive attractions landscape. Their experiences move beyond traditional gameplay by blending physical activity, digital interactivity, and real-time feedback—an approach that resonates strongly with guests seeking agency and personalization in entertainment.

Activate's high-energy arenas place players inside a series of tech-enabled challenge rooms where lighting, sensors, and responsive environments create a living game space. Guests aren't just observing the attraction; they're inside it, making choices, collaborating with one another, and competing in ways that feel immediate and meaningful.

Querion a new concept in immersive family entertainment, launched in June 2026 as an amenity of the 2,500 room Górskie Resort in Poland. "We were looking for solutions and ways to help our guests make the most of their free time, whatever the weather. And that is how the idea for a hypermedia entertainment park came about," Karol Brzeškiewicz, general director of Górskie Resort, tells Funworld. The desire of the company that capitalizes on longer length of stays at its resort sought to create an immersive entertainment center that transports guests to other realms. "The technological sophistication of our attractions, as well as the absolutely unique design of the communal areas, means that from the moment they enter, we transport our guests to another world," says Brzeškiewicz.


Querion is the result of a partnership between Austria-based Attraktion!



QUERION

GmbH and Górskie Resort's newly established Querion Media Studio, created to develop original content for the venue. At Querion's opening, the team explained that three of the projections inside the FEC are their own creations, including the media that plays inside Querion's flying theater.

One of the key gamified attractions is the Angry Birds motion game ride, which puts players on a rotating platform with blasters as a 360-degree screen and synchronized movement create the sensation of being fully immersed in the Angry Birds world.


Across the global attractions industry, these styles of interactive play are responsible for reshaping expectations. Gamification is a core ingredient of modern immersion, giving guests a sense of progress, mastery, and connection that keeps them coming back. 

 From the moment they enter, we transport our guests to another world.
—Karol Brzeškiewicz, Górskie Resort



QUERION



Michael Costello is the managing editor of Funworld at IAAPA. With 20 years working in the attractions industry, he has also volunteered in his free time with the National Amusement Park Historical Association. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#) 





Beach Park: A Splashing Success



Operational insights from one of Latin America's favorite attractions

Story by Evan Ponstingle
Photos provided by Beach Park

PALM TREES SWAY AS THE SPARKLING BLUE OCEAN LAPS THE SANDY SHORELINE, just feet away from guests screaming down some of the world's largest water slides. Nearby, visitors put their toes in the sand while dining gourmet cuisine before journeying into a giant treehouse.

This is the scene at Beach Park in Aquiraz, Brazil, situated against the turquoise waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Recently, the park drew headlines when Guinness World Records certified the attraction's new Surreal slide as the world's tallest water coaster.

Founded as a beachside restaurant, the facility is now a true destination with four hotels (a fifth is on the way), the Aqua Park, and the Arvorar natural adventure park. Distinct themes, unique marketing campaigns, and a focus on the employee experience elevates the park, empowering the resort to make its mark.

The Origin

Beach Park began with a dream and a vision that transformed and grew the property into a destination.

In 1985, developer Ednilton Soárez opened his beachside restaurant as the anchor of a real estate development project. One fateful trip to Orlando changed everything. Soárez's visit to the now retired Wet 'n Wild water park sparked inspiration. He returned to Brazil with the vision to create a world-class attraction for the Latin America market.

"That was the seed for what happened next—in 1989 the

water park opened as the first attraction," Murilo Pascoal, CEO of Beach Park, explains to Funworld. The facility became one of the first water parks in Brazil, starting with a lazy river and a single tower with five slides. "From that point on, we kept growing the park."

Over the years, the park has added attention-grabbing attractions, like Insano, which opened as one of the world's tallest water slides in 1997. That spirit of innovation and creative thinking continue to be a common thread running through each new attraction.

Park leaders point to their 2021 Tobomusik slides, made by Polin Waterparks, as one key example. The planned tower of three slides did not have record-breaking features, but thinking outside the box allowed Beach Park to create a new type of experience in their market. The translucent-colored sections on the slide's design reminded Pascoal of the lights found inside a discotheque. "It would be nice if we had some sound inside [combining] sound and light, like a dance club. We did a test with a loudspeaker, and it worked well," Pascoal recalls. Tobomusik opened as a unique experience with lights and music inside the slide—a first in Latin America.

Marketing Splashy Synergies

As the property continued to grow, park officials began looking for ways to attract visitors from a wider area. "We are in Fortaleza, a three-hour flight from the main markets [of] Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and all that. We have to attract our main crowd from a little bit far away," Pascoal explains.

Creating a sense of exclusivity has allowed the resort to thrive.

"Brazil is very rich and has a lot of beautiful destinations around, so we know we have to create something unique and special," elaborates Clarisse Linhares Machado, Beach Park's marketing director. "Every time that we create something, we make our brand stronger—and we know that when we do—more people want to come here. It's a formula that we use."

The park has found significant success through partnerships with high-profile guests for marketing campaigns to further elevate Beach Park's profile. Pascoal mentions partnering with the popular



Brazilian DJ Alok to create a playlist for Tobomusik, who then made an appearance at the ride's opening as both an emcee and performer. "The ride was not that big, but the excitement around it was great," Pascoal shares. "We always try to create something special, something different."

Surreal, the new water coaster, also was part of an elaborate marketing campaign. When Guinness certified the ride, a year had passed since the official opening. Beach Park didn't miss the opportunity to treat the certification ceremony as a second inauguration for the ride. Drawing on Aqua Park's beachfront location—which is popular for surfers—the event featured appearances by world-renowned surfers who gave lessons in a nearby pool, along with music, dancing, and a specialty menu. Leaning into the park's setting and creating a full experience enforced its core identity. "We knew that this combination is who we are. It makes us different to be around the surf theme," shares Machado.

One Common Goal

Beach Park's 2,300 employees are encouraged to live by the company's purpose: to create happy moments. Management empowers the employees through the mantra of "plan, do, check, and act," maintaining a standard of excellence. The operator believes that when employees are treated well, a trickle-down effect takes place: employees pass along the positive energy to the guest, creating a memorable and uplifting guest experience.

"They have the autonomy to do it well, and we follow that up when the result of their work is good," Pascoal explains. "You have to plan it; you have to do it right as you plan; then you check if you did it right; and then you act by correcting what is wrong in the process. We do that all over the company."

With Beach Park's roots in the restaurant business, it's no surprise that F&B offerings remain central to the park's identity. Machado outlines the importance that food plays, saying that culinary is not simply a complement to the guest experience; it's essential. The team has found strong profitability by leaning into fresh, local food festivals, a strategy other operators can adopt to drive success.

"We always think of local, fresh ingredients," Machado says. "We



"We know that the vacation experience is always around new experiences with food, so everyone goes from here and thinks, 'Oh, that's different, that's unique.' We like to think about food as an attraction."

—Murilo Pascoal CEO of Beach Park





know that the vacation experience is [based] around new experiences with food, so everyone goes from here and thinks, ‘Oh, that’s different, that’s unique.’”


Beach Park’s success is a result of successful partnerships forged over the decades with some of the industry partners, including WhiteWater, ProSlide, and Polin Waterparks. “When we go to IAAPA Expo, we stop and say, ‘Hey, what would be the different thing to do next?’” Pascoal says. “That collaboration is something that we try to do together,” adding it’s essential that suppliers visit his property to see their vision.

Beach Park’s management also emphasizes the importance of using a week spent at IAAPA Expo to explore other central Florida attractions and potentially gain inspiration that can be taken back home. Inspired by Disney Springs and Universal

CityWalk, Beach Park built Vila Azul do Mar, a retail and dining area. Sourcing inspiration from their visits to central Florida, Beach Park also diversified its offerings and created an area to host retail, dining, and events.

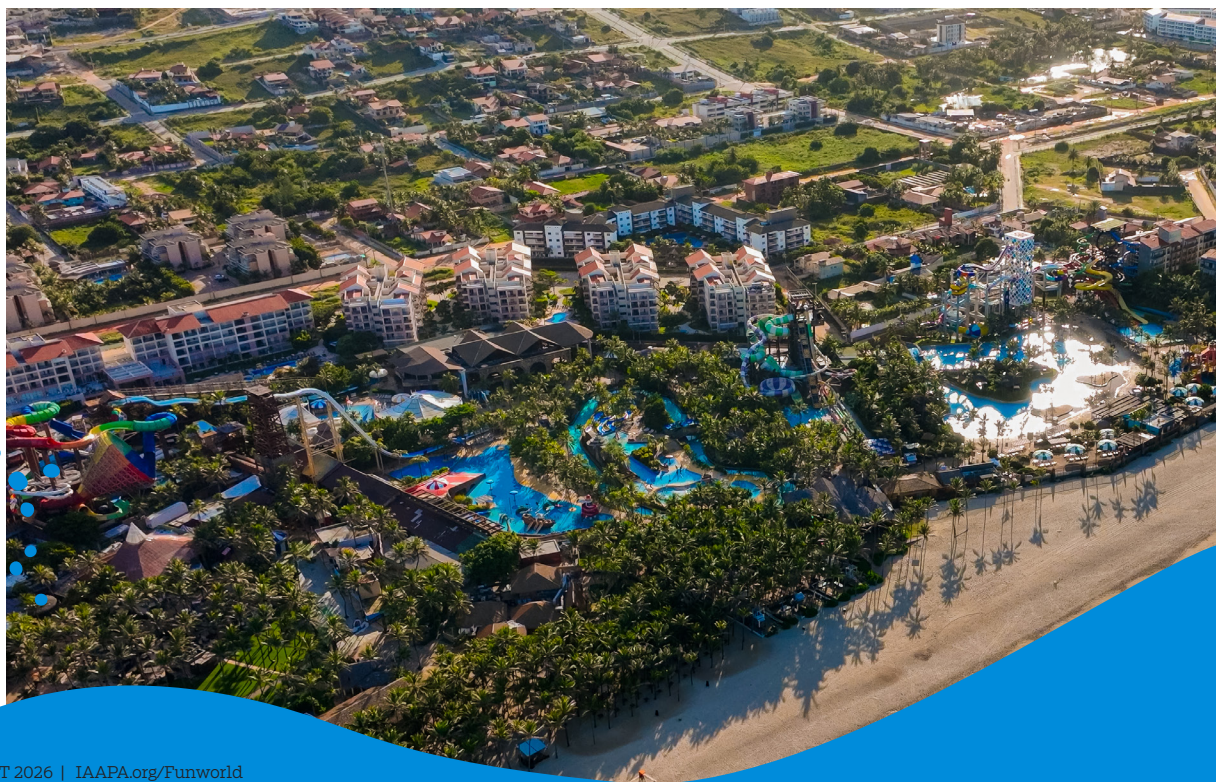
“I think this is something that completes the products that we offer to the client,” Pascoal says.

The plan has worked. Through its history, Beach Park has become a place where Brazilians have demonstrated a sense of ownership—a sense of belonging that every operator could benefit from.

“They come here and they think, ‘It’s ours,’” he concludes. 



Evan Ponstingle is the Digital Content Associate for IAAPA. A graduate of Bowling Green State University, he has worked in a variety of roles at Kings Island, Hersheypark, and Cedar Point. Evan is the author of the book, “Kings Island: A Ride Through Time,” and is passionate about telling the stories of the attractions industry. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





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A family of five is walking away from the camera on a paved path at night. In the center is a large, glowing blue moon with visible craters. The scene is illuminated with purple and blue lights, and there are some white starburst decorations in the upper right. The family consists of a man in a plaid shirt, a woman in a tan jacket, and three children. They are walking towards a structure that looks like a bookshelf.

Sparkling by Twilight

STANLEY ZOO

Nighttime events keep guests beyond traditional hours

by Jaclyn Greenberg

IN 2025, AUSTRALIA'S SYDNEY ZOO ATTRACTED more than 100,000 visitors to Glow, a stand-alone after-dark light festival. Guests can visit the zoo during the day and return for Glow, but the majority attend as a separate evening experience, which increases overall visitation.

The event runs for approximately four hours, where guests move through an illuminated trail and engage with a curated mix of food, beverage, and retail offerings positioned throughout the route. "This naturally drives an increase in length of stay and per capita spend, as guests pause, explore and interact with multiple activation points along the way," says Michael Kelly, CEO of Sydney Zoo.

Nocturnal programs have become a trend to increase facility interest and generate extra revenue.

Night Safari Singapore, located next to Singapore Zoo and open from 6 p.m. to midnight, is one of the world's first nocturnal wildlife parks; visitors can explore walking trails and ride a tram to see more than 900 nocturnal creatures.

"Guests visiting any of our daytime parks can naturally extend [their visit] into an evening at Night Safari, and many do," says Dr. Cheng Wen-Haur, deputy CEO and chief life sciences officer at Mandai Wildlife Group.

The Louisville Zoo in Kentucky hosts several major nighttime events each year, such as a Wild Lights lantern festival and an annual Boo at the Zoo Halloween event.

Their partners develop event-specific offerings, including Wild Lights-branded merchandise and specialty food items, as well as seasonal novelties like light-up and glow products. "These limited-time items are designed to enhance the guest experience while encouraging incremental spending throughout the evening," says Dan Maloney, Louisville Zoo director.

Fremantle Prison, a UNESCO site in Australia, offers daytime as well as after-hours tours. "[This] enables guides to promote additional tours aligned with visitors' interests, supporting deeper exploration of specific historical themes, and encouraging return visitation," says Heather Christy, manager of sales and marketing at Fremantle Prison.

Luminiscence productions, which are 360-degree projections held in sacred monuments with live music, feature two or three 45- to 60-minute shows each evening in cities across the world. In Paris, the inaugural run drew more than 100,000 ticketed visitors. "For a few months, a heritage site usually visited briefly during the day becomes a full evening cultural destination," says Nicolas Leboucher, vice president of operations at LOTCHI.

Technical Concerns Coming into Play

Tour departure times at the Fremantle Prison vary throughout the year to ensure the experience takes place in full darkness, explains Christy. Visitors, who are provided regularly maintained torches, have to remain on the designated routes and emergency lighting, clear evacuation paths, and regular training on safety protocols are critical, especially in a heritage building.

Additionally, there are accessibility considerations to take into account. For example, low light may be challenging for guests with low vision, depth perception issues, or sensory sensitivities. And large, echoing spaces may impact visitors who are hard of hearing. Limited lighting can present challenges for visitors with limited English proficiency.

"The tour is advertised as 100% accessible due to entry ramps and a lift available at the final point of the experience, however we ensure visitors are advised that the broader prison footprint includes uneven floors, narrow corridors, stairs, and lowlight conditions," says Christy.





Luminiscence productions are held in heritage venues like cathedrals and basilicas, which were not designed to host high-end video projection or modern show infrastructure, explains Leboucher. “Power supply, rigging points and equipment routing need to be engineered from scratch on each site, while preserving the architectural and historical integrity of the building,” he says. “Every alignment, every sightline, and every projector position is custom.”

Zoos and other facilities that feature animals need careful planning and consideration to ensure the animals’ comfort and safety. For example, at Sydney Zoo Glow, the animals have access to back-of-house and retreat spaces so that they can move away from activity, explains Michael Kelly, CEO at Sydney Zoo.

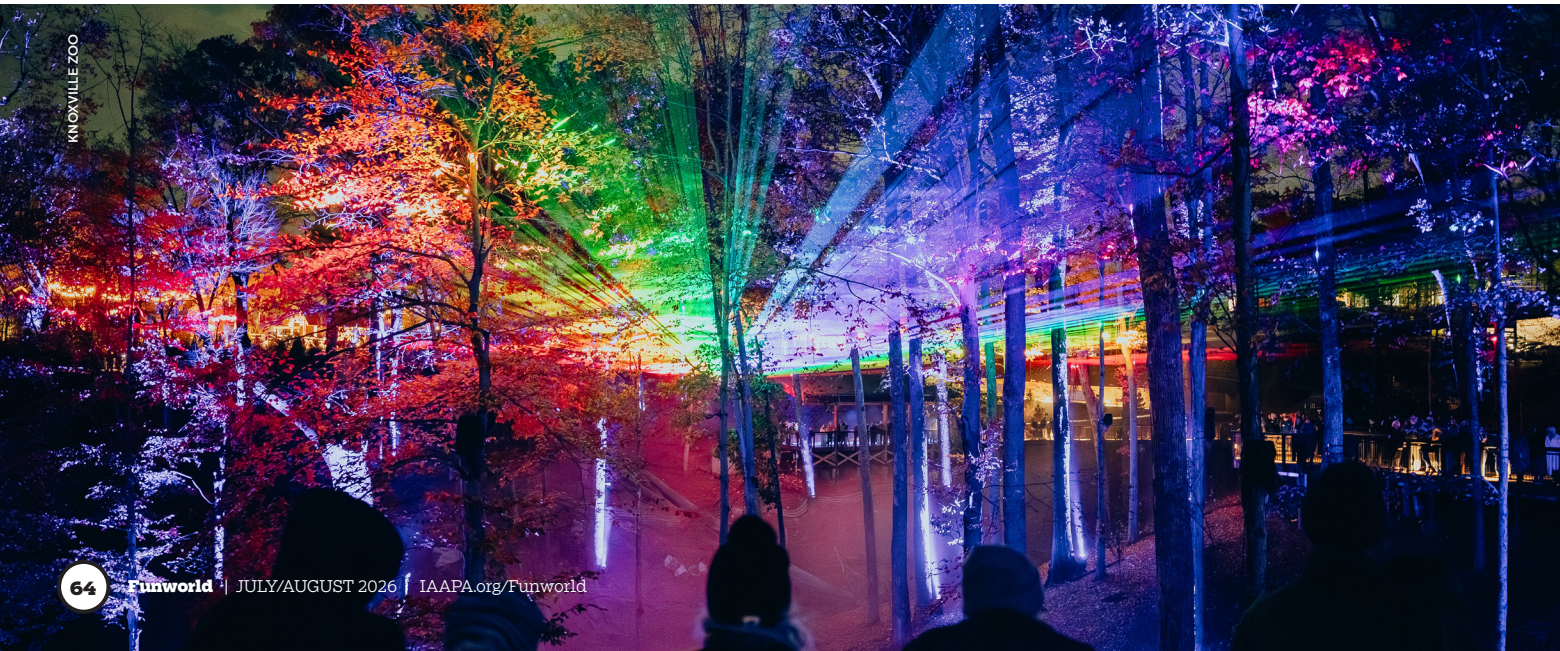
“This is consistent with how we manage all aspects of the zoo environment and ensures animals maintain control over their space,” Kelly says.

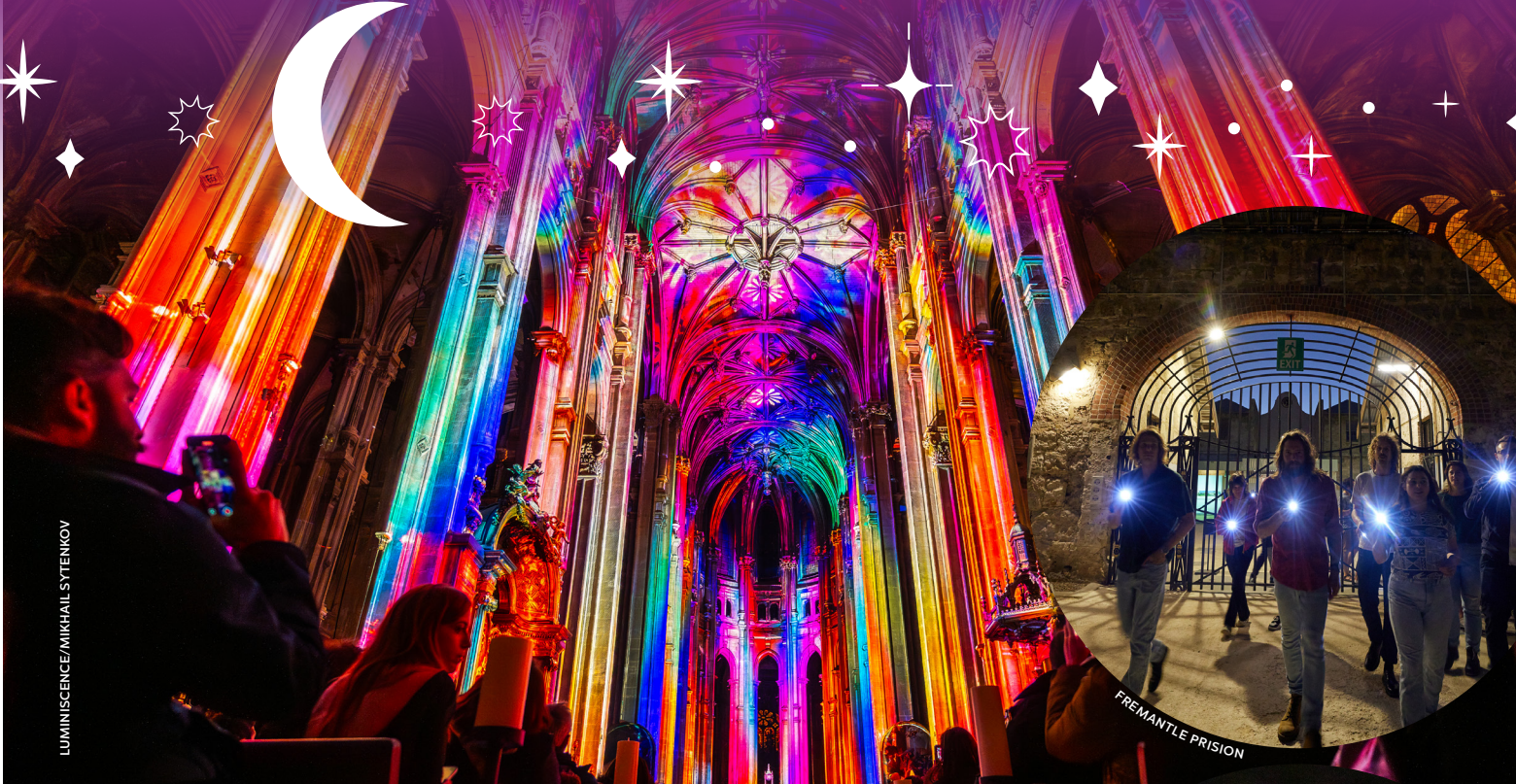
To create Smoky Night Lights at Knoxville Zoo in Tennessee, the facility hired Moment Factory, an entertainment studio, to partner with their director of animal care, conservation, and education so the program would remain harmonious with the zoo environment.

“To ensure we didn’t introduce undue stress, we measured the baseline audio floor of the zoo,” says Mathieu Grainger, producer at Moment Factory. “By working with the existing ‘noise floor’ of the area, we used slow fades and gradual builds to bring intensity while ensuring the transitions for the animals were seamless rather than startling.”

The red wolves were the only animals in close proximity of Smoky Night Lights, so they worked with the zoo to install natural baffling and fencing to minimize any sensory intrusion. The zoo team then monitored these animals for weeks leading up to the grand opening to ensure they showed no signs of anxiety, confirming that the natural amphitheater was as effective a barrier as it was a performance space.

At Night Safari Singapore, the Safari Tram Adventure is a fully electric fleet, which reduces noise. “This allows the tram to move closer to the animals and lets guests hear the park’s natural soundscape,”





LUMINESCENCE/MIKHAIL SYTENKOV

says Dr. Wen-Haur. “The trams also operate without headlights, preserving the dark, quiet atmosphere that allows visitors to observe the animals’ natural nighttime behaviors.”

Lighting was one of their most critical considerations. “To recreate the feeling of walking through a rainforest at night, we adopted a targeted approach to simulate a full moon night, keeping illumination low enough to minimize disturbance to the animals’ natural behaviors while still giving guests clear sightlines,” he says.

At the Sydney Zoo, specific consideration was given to light intensity, direction and color temperature so their installations didn’t spill into animal habitats. “In many cases, installations are positioned to ensure they are either outside of key habitat zones or oriented away from animal areas,” says Kelly.

And at the Louisville Zoo, the focus is on the experience itself rather than the animals, explains Maloney.

In Baltimore, Maryland Zoo’s Snooze program runs similarly; the educational overnight program, which offers night hikes, animal ambassador visits, and camping, ensures its animals are not on exhibit overnight, explains Amanda Fabian, their senior director of conservation education. She says this helps minimize the disruption of their natural routines.

Indoor programs take place in the Penguin Education Center, and outdoor Snoozes are held in open green spaces away from animal habitats. “Participants meet an animal ambassador in the evening and take part in a guided night hike designed to be low-impact and respectful of the animals’ environment,” says Fabian.

Expanded Marketing Efforts

Because of the diversity of these offerings, facilities are finding new and innovative ways to market their programs. For example, at the Night Safari Singapore, many of their marketing campaigns are anchored in featuring the animals themselves, but they also have other collaborations, explains Dr. Wen-Haur. “A recent partnership with smartphone brand Honor Device Co., Ltd. put their low-light camera technology to the test within the park—a natural partnership given our environment, and one that reached a younger, tech-savvy audience beyond our traditional visitor base,” he says.

This year, the marketing team at Louisville Zoo is prioritizing digital marketing, such as paid social, connected TV, and YouTube ads, as well as influencer partnerships to showcase their content. This is in addition to extended-format billboards designed to highlight the size and detail of the lanterns.

In addition to marketing Glow on their own channels, the Sydney Zoo has amplified its reach through their partners’ networks, including production partner Laservision, sister property Scenic World, presenting partner Commonwealth Bank, and major partner Carnival Cruise Line. They are also working with Nova 96.9, a local radio station, to build excitement across the Sydney market.

“These partnerships allow us to extend into new audiences and leverage established customer bases, significantly increasing visibility and engagement,” says Kelly. 



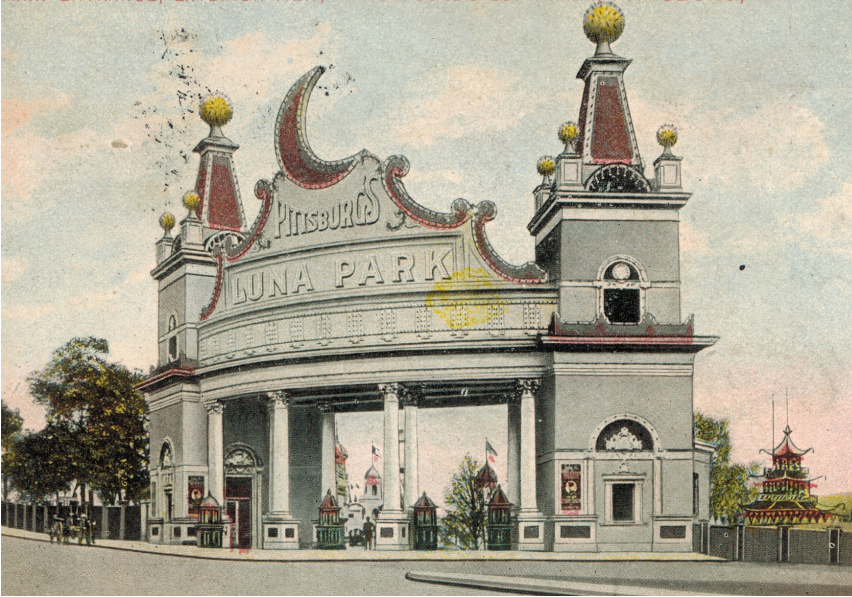
SYDNEY ZOO



Jaclyn Greenberg is a freelance writer based on the East Coast. She writes about disability, accessibility, travel, and personal finance. In her free time, she loves traveling with her family of five. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



JIM FUTRELL ARCHIVES



While building attractions for other parks, Fred Ingersoll also developed one of the first amusement park chains: Ingersoll's Luna Park.

Supplier and Operator Aren't Mutually Exclusive

By Jim Futrell



Jim Futrell has authored ten books on the amusement industry and dozens of articles for industry trade publications. He began producing IAAPA's Oral History Project in 2005 and currently serves as IAAPA's Historian in addition to being Historian for the National Amusement Park Historical Association (NAPHA). Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):



IN JANUARY, BROGENT TECHNOLOGIES INC., a provider of flying theater ride systems and immersive attraction technology, announced that it had entered into an agreement to acquire Flyover Attractions, which operates four flying theaters in North America and Iceland. At the time of the announcement, Brogent said that it represented an important step in evolving the company into “a more integrated immersive solution provider.”

Traditionally, the distinction exists between the companies that supply the attractions industry and those that operate the attractions. Yet, in some instances, those suppliers find advantages in occupying both ends of the spectrum.

A Long History

The practice of suppliers operating their own products was initiated early when operators typically relied on concessionaires to populate their facilities. At the turn of the 20th century, IAAPA Hall of Fame member Fred Ingersoll built more than 250 roller coasters along with owning and operating 44 amusement parks, including the first chain: Ingersoll's Luna Park. But as the industry evolved following World War II, this became much less common. Although it is not as prevalent today, a variety of suppliers see the benefit in also operating their products.

An Intentional Decision

Among the most visible companies in the supplier/operations space are two of the industry's largest and most enduring family-owned manufacturers.

Mack Rides, which traces its roots back to 1780, entered both spaces in 1975 when Franz and Roland Mack opened Europa-Park. According to Torsten Koebele, chief officer of sales and marketing for Mack Rides, the decision for the Macks to get into the theme park business was two-fold. First, they realized that there was a need for a theme park in that part of Germany, but they also saw an opportunity to create a showcase for their ride business.

Over the next five decades, the relationship between the two companies allowed each to grow into leaders in their respective sectors—the development of Europa-Park pushed Mack Rides to expand their portfolio by creating new attractions for the park. “It's aided product development since the park is only 15 minutes from the factory,” said Dr. Volker Klaiber, operations and service director at Europa-Park.

Zamperla opened its first attraction in 2003, when they were approached to develop an amusement park at the Wollman Rink in New York City's Central Park. Seven years later, they had an opportunity to redevelop a portion of the storied Coney Island amusement area in nearby Brooklyn.

According to the late Alberto Zamperla in his 2015 IAAPA Oral History Interview, the opportunity to operate at Coney Island came with benefits. “I have so many rides, and when I display at IAAPA [Expo], I bring you one ride. I cannot bring all my productions, no? So my dream was always to have a showcase to show my customers all the different types of rides that we are building,” Zamperla shared.

Sally Dark Rides, is an industry supplier that moved into operations on a more opportunistic basis, partnering to operate its rides four times in its nearly 50-year history.

John Wood, Sally's president and chairman says that he had long been intrigued with the idea of gaining experience as an operator. “Anytime you can know about both sides of the turnstile, you're better off,” Wood says.

His first opportunity came in 1999,

when Mall of America in Minnesota was interested in one of Sally's interactive Ghost Blasters rides, but couldn't fit it in their capital budget. Sally installed the ride in a revenue share arrangement, giving Triple Five Corp. the option to purchase the ride after three years. "I made considerably more than if I had sold it," says Wood.

Over the next three decades, Sally set up similar arrangements in Wildwood, New Jersey, and San Antonio, and most recently, the company teamed up with Daniels Wood Land to open Treasure Hunt: The Ride in Monterey, California, in 2023.

Unintentional Diversification

While the strategies at Mack, Zamperla, and Sally were intentional, in some instances, the crossover comes purely by accident.

In the late 1960s, Bob Cassata was operating games on the Daytona Beach Boardwalk in Florida when he developed the idea for the water race game. He took the prototype on the fair circuit and suddenly found himself in the manufacturing business. Now, Bob's Space Racers (BSR) is a respected manufacturer of midway games. "Being an operator gives us a better, stronger product," says Larry Steele, who oversees BSR's operations business.

In the late 1980s, Robin Winecup was operating a party rental business in the United Kingdom when one of his clients requested a mechanical bull for a party. Dissatisfied with the heavy, difficult-to-move models on the market, he worked with an engineer to develop a portable version with interchangeable ride attachments—the first multi ride. When a guest at one of his events offered to buy six of them, Winecup also found himself in the manufacturing business. Since selling the first unit in 1990, 5,500 machines were put in operation across 45 countries.

According to Mike Winecup, Galaxy's chief ride designer and marketing director, the company started developing inflatable parks, and after building 108 worldwide by 2018, thought to themselves, "Why aren't we doing this?"

"A manufacturer only makes money once [at the sale], whereas an operator is constantly making money," Winecup

explains. The result is Do the Beach, an immersive beach-themed adventure park featuring Galaxy's products. The first Do the Beach opened in September 2025 in North Port, Florida, and generated \$1.1 million in revenue with a 28% profit margin in its first six months of operation. While Galaxy has a 25% ownership interest in the North Port location, they plan to franchise future locations with three more opening by the end of September.

Why Do It

All the companies interviewed were unanimous that doing business as both a supplier and operator benefits both sectors by providing a continuous feedback loop.

Steele says keeping the operations business is a no-brainer. "Our operations experience and know-how play major factors in our current and future game design and production," he says. He also explains how BSR enjoys firsthand knowledge of what games work region to region and country to country.

In addition to providing additional work for people on the shop floor, Wood says that his forays into operations have helped Sally better refine operational issues like crowd handling.

Product development has also proven to be an important benefit for Mack Rides, as it created added incentive to develop new products. Since Europa-Park's maintenance and operations team is experienced in dealing with prototypes, it helps fine-tune concepts. "It's a big advantage for both parties," says Mack's Koebele, noting that constant feedback on all levels of both companies is now commonplace. "We can implement that knowledge much quicker for other customers," he says.

That relationship has also created new business opportunities. According to Koebele, the Mack Rides factory now assists with attraction refurbishment. This led to a new division of the company that provides refurbishment and non-destructive testing (NDT).

Winecup says that manufacturers should be prepared for a learning curve should they move into operations. "Operations teach you about human nature, especially when dealing with kids. You're going to learn some hard lessons and take on feedback, so don't be stubborn." **FW**



ABOVE: Bob Cassata (seated second from left) started operating games on the Daytona Beach Boardwalk before moving into manufacturing with Bob's Space Racers.

BELOW: Galaxy Multi-Rides products include the mechanical bull (foreground) and Toxic Meltdown.



BSR

GALAXY MULTI-RIDES



Keeping It Clean

How Aquatic Attractions Maintain Sanitation

Sophie Brookover



Sophie Brookover is a writer with bylines at Vulture, The Daily Beast, and Grammy.com. Thanks to her previous career in librarianship, she's curious about everything from costume design and decorative arts to logistics and amusement design. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



FEW EVENTS STRIKE HORROR IN THE HEARTS OF WATER PARKS OPERATORS faster than a code brown. Fortunately, by following stringent safety regulations with sanitation technology and chemistry, guests and operators alike can enjoy a high degree of confidence. Days spent in basin-style lagoons, water slides, surf parks, and classic swimming pools won't be disrupted by unsanitary conditions with a little planning.

Field leaders from WhiteWater and Martin Aquatics spoke with Funworld about the latest developments in ensuring safe conditions at water attractions of all kinds, from state-of-the-art filtration systems to flocculent control and chemical standards of quality.

All innovations in aquatic-attraction sanitation are based on advances in the field of wastewater treatment. Once those technologies or chemistry applications move past the experimental development phase and “become competitive in terms of its costing, they come to market as some types of new products within the aquatics industry,” says WhiteWater Sales Engineer Evan Forman.

Widespread adoption of newer technologies has reduced the

incidence of chemical burns suffered at swimming pools. When this happens, “it’s usually going to be at an older facility that’s using older distribution methods,” leading to spikes in chlorine concentration. Forman notes that the burns result from “considerations of the mitigation of certain risks, alongside the outcomes and the severity of those outcomes,” says Forman. Therefore, operators should devise a risk mitigation protocol that fits their budget and staffing parameters.

With the advent of more advanced, higher precision sanitation products, delivery systems, and technologies from companies like Pulsar and Clearflow, aquatic attractions designers and operators have more sophisticated options than ever to select from. As is so often the case, upgrades to systems like Pulsar’s offer “a higher level of control in the release of its chlorine, relative to where you have to measure it, treat it, and watch it filter through,” Forman explains, elaborating that these filters “and the way that they break down the chlorine, it’s more or less ensuring that the infusion of the treated water is consistent.” Pulsar’s delivery systems rely on Calcium Hypochlorite (Cal Hypo) briquettes rather than liquid chlorine.

Sometimes a classic method is the most appropriate choice for a project. Josh Martin, president and creative director at Martin Aquatics, notes that each project is unique, so “how you design your water treatment system is based on what the necessary support services are around you. We might use liquid chlorine on a project in Orlando because it can be delivered in bulk. Or we might use a version of a salt-pouring generator with rock salt on a cruise ship or island.” This is because the product can be shipped in and stored easily, and it doesn’t degrade over time.

Every facility—and each facility type—follows its own safety standards for the wide variety of potential fecal incidents, Martin adds. Since his company works on so many high-volume projects, “we

use computational fluid dynamic modeling, or CFD. We're designing systems to circulate water and to target certain areas. If we're working with a swim-up bar, we're making sure that additional water and chemicals can go to that area, because we understand that by nature, people may not get out of the water when they're at a bar drinking." This realistic, nonjudgmental approach accounts for human behavior at the design stage, and it has enabled Martin Aquatics to design some attractions "where, even if you have a fecal incident, you may not be required to shut the entire body of water down if you have the proper CFD model and improved water chemistry."


Another non-chemical method of water sanitation is flocculation: a process that electronically agitates water, encouraging minute particles of suspended matter—grass, insect remains, and sand, as well as effluvia—to condense into bundles of matter that can then be vacuumed or filtered out of the water. Flocculation, explains Forman, offers "a means to additionally clean the water even more than what was previously achievable through just pumping water in and out," yielding the clearer water that attraction visitors expect to enjoy.

Filtration media and methods have also improved, Martin says, noting that while "regenerative media filters have higher upfront capital costs," using them can make the difference between a pool remaining open or being down for several days. From an operator's perspective, that downtime can ruin the chances of guests returning for another stay next year. Some of the latest filters "now filter particles down to one micron. They're capable of capturing [the intestinal parasite] Cryptosporidium," adding—at an expense—another layer of health and safety protection for guests and staff.

Surf parks and basins, with their ranges of 2.5 to 7 million of gallons of water depending on size, are the largest aquatic attractions by volume. The difference, Martin says, "is bather load and how people use and interact with that water." One of the largest surf parks in the world is Kelly Slater's Surf Lagoon, but there are usually just "20 to 30 people in the water at any one time over acres." Martin's in-progress endless surf lagoon in Melbourne, Florida, will accommodate a maximum of 60 people at any one time. By comparison, the basins at Carnival Cruise Lines' Celebration Key island hold "4,000 people per three acres—a massively different amount of bather load, organics, and sunscreen." Despite the substantial disparities in bather load, Martin says, the sanitation approach is the same, "because ultimately, you still have the same risk of bacteria and amoebae growing in those bodies of water if they're not treated correctly."

Looking ahead to future innovations in this sector of

the industry, Martin notes that many of the cutting-edge technologies are likely to be deployed outside of the United States due to the amount of time and costs are required to navigate regulations, plus the process of securing a National Science Foundation listing. Consequently, projects in regions like the Middle East and Europe benefit from "using different chemical generators and different dispersion methods," Martin explains, adding this is because these regions have regulations allowing their use.

The global economy is an ever more confounding variable, as well. As of this reporting in June 2026, the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East remains closed, and even if it reopens soon, most economists anticipate that it will take six to eight months for the flow of goods to return to normal. Aquatic attractions are best served to plan ahead for continued disruption in the supply chain and potential added costs to maintain their safe operating standards. 



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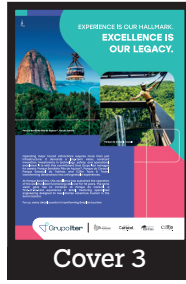
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Launching a New Chapter in the Middle East and North Africa

OVER THE YEARS, I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF WITNESSING FIRST-HAND the incredible growth and evolution of the global attractions industry. I have seen how collaboration, education, and shared best practices can elevate not only individual organizations but entire regions. That is why I am especially excited for the launch of IAAPA's newest regional presence in the Middle East and North Africa: MENA.

The Middle East has emerged as one of the most dynamic and ambitious markets in the world for theme parks, attractions, entertainment destinations, and immersive experiences. From groundbreaking developments to world-class guest experiences, the region is redefining what is possible in our industry. Establishing a dedicated regional presence allows us to better serve existing members, welcome new ones, and create stronger opportunities for professional development, networking, safety advancement, and industry collaboration.

Growth is central to our mission—specifically, growth that strengthens our collective expertise and creates value for members. Throughout my career, I have learned that the most successful industries are those that share knowledge freely, celebrate innovation, and work together to address common challenges. Our expansion into the Middle East and North Africa reflects that philosophy.

This new chapter will bring together operators, suppliers, consultants, and industry leaders who are passionate about creating memorable experiences for guests. It is about building connections among regions, fostering innovation, and ensuring that our industry continues to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The opportunities ahead are remarkable. As investments in entertainment and tourism continue to accelerate across the region, our association is uniquely positioned to support professionals with resources, research, training, and a global




IAAPA NEWS

Michael Shelton is the chief operating officer of IAAPA. He oversees IAAPA's regions and people. Prior, Shelton served as VP and executive director of IAAPA North America. He started in the attractions industry as a trash attendant at Colorado's Hyland Hills Water World where he eventually became general manager of the same park. He is ICAE certified and received a degree in business from the University of Northern Colorado. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):

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network of expertise. We look forward to helping members navigate new opportunities while maintaining the highest standards of safety, excellence, and guest satisfaction.

I am grateful to the many members, volunteers, partners, and industry leaders who have helped make this expansion possible. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected global attractions community, and I am excited to see what we will accomplish in the years ahead. 



for

EXPERIENCE IS OUR HALLMARK. EXCELLENCE IS OUR LEGACY.



Parque Bondinho Pão de Açúcar®, Rio de Janeiro



Parque do Caracol, Canela

Operating major tourist attractions requires more than just infrastructure: it demands a long-term vision, constant innovation, investments in technology, safety, and operational excellence. It is with this commitment that Grupo Iter manages its assets: Parque Bondinho Pão de Açúcar®, Parque do Caracol, Parque Estadual do Tainhas, and C2Rio Tours & Travel, transforming destinations into unforgettable experiences.

At Parque Bondinho, this excellence has sustained the operation of the world's oldest functioning cable car for 114 years. The same vision gave rise to *Corajoso* at Parque do Caracol, a first-of-its-kind experience in Brazil, featuring specialized engineering designed to revolutionize adventure tourism in the Serra Gaúcha.

For us, every detail counts in transforming Brazilian tourism.

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