
CANADA'S WONDERLAND

AlpenFury

Canada's Wonderland, Vaughan, Ontario, Canada

Premier Rides

Following a successful run of attractions—water park attractions, seasonal events, and rides like Snoopy's Racing Railway—geared towards families with young children, Canada's Wonderland knew it was time to add a thriller of a roller coaster. Public Relations Director Grace Peacock encourages operators of other parks to invest extra time and thought early on: "In the design phase, consider how you may elevate the ride experience with creative integration in your park and the addition of unique ride elements." Premier Rides delivered with AlpenFury, whose launch, dives, and nine inversions on a track that "spans the length of our main thoroughfare," gives it a "massive presence in our park skyline."

canadaswonderland.com/rides-experiences/alpenfury


WHITEWATER

AquaTubes and Splash Pad

Carnival Cruise Line Celebration Key

WhiteWater

Celebration Key, Carnival Cruise Line's private island in the Bahamas, opened two AquaTube water slides and a splash pad decked with Life Floor safety flooring in July. Jordanna Bower, WhiteWater's vice president, business development, says that "it is exciting to be part of creating a spectacular destination for Carnival Cruise Line together with great partners. The meticulous work integrating two thrilling slides and supports into the Suncastle successfully made it an iconic water park landmark in the Bahamas."

celebrationkey.carnival.com


WAVEGARDEN

Atlantic Park Surf

Atlantic Park, Virginia Beach, Virginia, United States

Wavegarden

Since 1994, the former site of the Virginia Beach Civic Center sat empty as multiple redevelopment plans came and went. In 2019, the Spain-based surfing lagoon design and installation firm Wavegarden saw the location's potential to build their first surf park in North America. Combining ideas and feedback from community members with a concept highlighting the region's rich surfing heritage, Wavegarden proposed a surf park that "serves as a unique anchor for the entire development" at Atlantic Park, according to Marketing and Communications Manager Guillermo Díaz del Río. With nine other Wavegarden Cove installations open worldwide, Díaz del Río says the company is positioned "to guide our clients through this unique niche and help ensure the long-term success of their facilities," including personalized surfing experiences, wave frequency and variety, and energy sustainability through the application of electromechanical technology that "requires significantly lower lagoon construction costs" and dramatically lower energy costs.

atlanticparksurf.com

B-Rail

SkyPark at Santa's Village, Skyforest, California

Suspended 25 to 45 feet above the park, the B-Rail lets guests pedal single-rider bicycle cars along a 1,000-foot track that once hosted the original Bumble Bee Monorail attraction that was installed at the park in 1961. The new attraction vehicles were designed and built by park co-owner and operator Bill Johnson, who, as a bicycling enthusiast, modeled the cars after bicycles while aligning the attraction with the park's mountain biking focus. "So obviously, we're into bikes. It took us a really long time, but my husband Bill is like, 'I'm going to build this bike [attraction],"'and it obviously took a lot of years of us doing this other stuff and that on the side," says park co-owner and operator Michelle Johnson, while reflecting on years of her husband designing the new attraction while seeking insight from engineers. The vehicles are self-powered with bike pedals and chains, offering an opportunity for riders to combine nostalgia with adventure and panoramic views of the San Bernardino Mountains.

skyparksantasvillage.com/activities/b-rail/



SKYPARK AT SANTA'S VILLAGE

Bavarian Blast Waterpark at Bavarian Inn

Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth, Michigan

WhiteWater, Open Aire

For Bavarian Inn's latest major expansion, the Lodge's founding owners, the Zehnder family, returned to WhiteWater for an ambitious package of 16 slides, a 300-foot lazy river, a 5,130-square-foot wave pool, and Michigan's first adult swim-up bar. The slide offerings are diverse, incorporating "themed attractions for young children, thrilling slides for adrenaline seekers, a family raft ride for group adventures" and more, says Onno Meeter, president of water parks at WhiteWater. Bavarian Blast's colorful German alps aesthetic is enhanced using "veiling," a customization process that "adds a patterned layer to close-molded slide parts, allowing parks to use imagery on fiberglass to enhance their narratives," Meeter continues. Guests can enjoy the park's amenities no matter the weather, thanks to an energy-efficient over 20,000-square-foot Double Slope Skylight roof by Open Aire. Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn Lodge President Michael Keller Zehnder describes Bavarian Blast as "a testament to our [family's] continuous dedication to creating enjoyable experiences [for all guests]."

bavarianinn.com/bavarian-blast-indoor-waterpark



BAVARIAN INN

Beach Rescue Racer

SeaWorld San Antonio, San Antonio

Zierer

Thinking about roller coaster design priorities, factors like height, speed, thrill intensity, and capacity leap to mind. For Rescue Beach Racer at SeaWorld San Antonio, the park's top priority "was to have a smooth ride for the whole family, especially for children, to enjoy the ride," says Zierer Senior Project Manager Klaus Gaek. Rescue Beach Racer is the flagship coaster at Rescue Jr., the park's new kid-friendly play area.

Gaek shares that the manufacturing process was an international affair, with the tracks coming from Slovakia, while the trains, seats, restraint systems, the decoration, the station, unloading and loading platform were all done by Zierer itself in Germany. All told, from the project's inception to its unveiling, the process, including design of the attraction's custom layout of the track and the in-house fiberglass theming work Zierer is known for, took just over a year.

seaworld.com/san-antonio/rescue-jr/



SEAWORLD SAN ANTONIO

WIEGAND



Brush Creek Holl'r Mountain Coaster

Princeton, West Virginia

Wiegand

Brush Creek Holl'r Mountain Coaster opened in April in Mercer County, West Virginia, introducing a new alpine attraction built by German manufacturer Wiegand. The installation features 3,400 feet of track with a 700-foot uphill cable lift and rider-controlled braking systems. Designed to operate year-round, the coaster accommodates single and tandem riders and integrates LED lighting for nighttime operation. The project was developed to expand Brush Creek Holl'r's offerings and support regional tourism growth. "Getting it built wasn't easy. Local authorities weren't familiar with this type of attraction, so there were definitely some learning curves during construction. But the end result was absolutely worth it," says Jessica Wedel of Wiegand. Operators worked closely with Wiegand to adapt the layout to the Appalachian terrain.

brushcreekhollr.com

COLUMBUS ZOO



Conservation Tower

Zoombezi Bay and Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Powell, Ohio

ProSlide

Zoombezi Bay's Conservation Tower is the water park's first major new attraction to open since 2018 and is at least the fifth major collaboration between the park and ProSlide. As Anthony Sabo, vice president of Zoombezi Bay explained, the tower needed to be "a significant investment that had both immediate and long-term positive impacts on attendance and revenue." The park was looking for a proposal that "checked the boxes for our guests, featuring high capacity and a minimum high requirement of 42 inches for all three of the tower's water slides."

That vision aligned neatly with guidance from ProSlide. Conservation Tower, combining fun with learning about the Zoo's Ohio-specific conservation projects, shows "how ride design can go beyond entertainment to reinforce brand purpose, spark curiosity, and connect with guests on a deeper level," ProSlide Senior Vice President of Global Strategic Partnerships Jeff Janovich says.

zoombezibay.com/conservation-tower

NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR MUSEUM.



National Medal of Honor Museum

Arlington, Texas

The 100,000-square-foot facility, opened in March, features 102,000 square feet of exhibition galleries dedicated to the legacy of Medal of Honor recipients. The museum's immersive exhibits chronicle the stories of over 3,500 Medal of Honor recipients. Interactive galleries, archival footage, and personal artifacts provide a compelling narrative of courage, sacrifice, and patriotism. Designed to serve as a national center for reflection and learning, the museum integrates immersive exhibits, a dedicated theater, and interactive storytelling. The facility was developed with support from corporate partners, including Boeing. "In an evening filled with fireworks, nothing will shine brighter than the Medal of Honor Recipients. It is because of their service and sacrifice that we can gather for celebrations like these. I am so proud to open our doors and share their stories of courage, commitment and selflessness with the nation. At the National Medal of Honor Museum, we are stewards of their legacy and vow to uphold the values represented by the Medal," says Chris Cassidy, president and CEO of the National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation. The museum is expected to attract both leisure and group travel markets, with opportunities for school programs, corporate events, and civic engagement.

mohhc.org



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DISNEY



Disney Treasure

Disney Cruise Line

Port Canaveral, Florida

Disney Cruise Line marked the arrival of its newest vessel, Disney Treasure, with a waterfront christening event on the Hudson River. The ship integrates themed experiences inspired by Disney, Pixar, Marvel, and Star Wars. Disney Treasure blends themed dining and entertainment with immersive storytelling, offering guests experiences inspired by "Coco," Marvel, and "Moana," and lounges inspired by Jungle Cruise, The Haunted Mansion, and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. Its design integrates family-friendly attractions like AquaMouse with adult-focused lounges, creating a balanced onboard environment for all ages. "Our ships have become brand ambassadors that bring our storytelling and immersive experiences to new audiences in new places," says Bob Iger, CEO of The Walt Disney Company, emphasizing the ship's role in extending Disney's reach. Josh D'Amaro, chairman of Disney Experiences, noted, "We are more than doubling our fleet to 13 ships by 2031 so that we can bring Disney cruise vacations to even more families across the globe." Disney Treasure began its inaugural voyage on December 21, 2024, sailing seven-night Caribbean itineraries from Port Canaveral, Florida.

disneycruise.disney.go.com/ships/destiny/

CINCINNATI ZOO



Elephant Trek

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Schaefer, Satchell, COST of Wisconsin

The Cincinnati Zoo first became home to elephants more than 100 years ago, but Vice President of Facilities, Planning, and Sustainability Mark Fisher, says their "old habitat and barn were not up to our standards, and major renovations and expansions of space were not physically possible" due to the zoo's small footprint..

The complex Elephant Trek II project relied on structural engineering by Schaefer, aquatic systems by Satchell, and theming and rockwork by COST of Wisconsin. COST preconstruction services expert John Harkinson recommends that other zoos prioritize "design build assistance early in their projects' development," noting that it "can provide advantages to the project schedule, guest experience, and animal welfare."

Fisher's biggest lesson for zoos and aquariums contemplating renovation and expansion is to "go big or go home, and don't cut corners on capital investments," because without "the highest of expectations, mediocrity is what you will ultimately get."

cincinnatizoo.org/animals/habitats

LOST ISLAND



Fire Runner

Lost Island, Waterloo, Iowa

Rocky Mountain Construction (RMC)

As a newer theme park, Lost Island continues to grow. General Manager Eric Bertch says that as soon as "the park completed our first season [in 2022], we were already planning to add another coaster." Working with Rocky Mountain Construction was an easy decision thanks to their Raptor model winning a fan survey, Bertch explained. "They are an American company without much of a presence in the Midwest," and the Raptor presented an opportunity to offer "a unique addition" to Lost Island guests while helping RMC expand their footprint in another region of the country. Betch's advice to other park operators considering an addition like the Raptor is simple and direct: "Do it. Riders have a variety of different experiences depending on where they are seated."

thelostisland.com/amusement-park/attractions/rollercoasters/fire-runner/

Expedition Odyssey

SeaWorld Orlando, Orlando

MACK Rides



SEAWORLD ORLANDO

Expedition Odyssey, an Arctic-themed flying theater that blends immersive technology with real-world animal encounters takes SeaWorld Orlando guests on a journey through frozen landscapes, encountering polar bears, orcas, and beluga whales in custom footage captured during Arctic expeditions. "We sent teams on several weeks-long expeditions … to create this multi-dimensional experience," says Conner Carr, SeaWorld's corporate vice president of rides and engineering. The ride's 39-inch height requirement makes it accessible to families, bridging thrill and education. After the ride, guests enter the habitats of Arctic animals like Uki, a rescued Pacific walrus calf now bonding with her surrogate mother, Kaboodle.

seaworld.com/orlando/rides/expedition-odyssey

Flash: Vertical Velocity

Six Flags Great Adventure, Jackson Township, New Jersey

Vekoma



SIX FLAGS GREAT ADVENTURE

The Flash: Vertical Velocity by Vekoma, opened in March, expanding Six Flags Great Adventure's portfolio of thrill rides. Ryan Eldredge, a Six Flags' public relations manager says the new ride meets the guests' desire for "a new, intense coaster experience" with "a fast, repeatable thrill they want to ride again and again." The roller coaster's compact footprint is unique to the park, and allows for high throughput and efficient land use, while its visual impact and dynamic motion make it a standout attraction within the park. Eldredge particularly appreciates that it delivers what guests want while offering surprises: "that's how you spark real excitement." This compact layout delivers forward and backward launches, a 172-foot vertical spike, Zero-G roll, and 180-degree twisted drop, and launches, while reaching speeds of up to 60 mph in both forward and reverse directions. Inspired by DC's iconic speedster, the ride incorporates immersive onboard lighting and audio synced to the train's motion, enhancing the superhero theme. With a minimum height requirement of just 48 inches, Vertical Velocity is designed to be accessible to a broad demographic, supporting Six Flags' strategy to appeal to both families and thrill-seekers.

sixflags.com/greatadventure/attractions/the-flash-vertical-velocity

Georgia Gold Rusher

Six Flags Over Georgia, Atlanta

Intamin



SIX FLAGS OVER GEORGIA

Launched as part of a multiyear refresh of Six Flags Over Georgia's historic Lickskillet area, Chris Foshee says Georgia Gold Rusher "surprises guests—it looks kind of quaint because it's got a small footprint, but it really packs a punch." Coordinator of Digital Content and Public Relations Jamie Sebastian concurs, describing the latest attraction as providing "unexpected bursts of airtime and moments of weightlessness." The spin-incited gondola design by Intamin ensures that no two rides are ever exactly the same. Sebastian notes that Six Flags and Intamin's earlier collaboration, the 2001-built free-fall tower ride Acrophobia, is still a hit with guests nearly a quarter century later. "Working together again just made good, crowd-pleasing sense," Sebastian says.

sixflags.com/overgeorgia/attractions/georgia-gold-rusher

BROOKFIELD ZOO CHICAGO



James & Elizabeth Bramsen Tropical Forests

Brookfield Zoo Chicago, Chicago

Stantec

The James & Elizabeth Bramsen Tropical Forests, a "modern care facility with enriching, expansive outdoor space, marks a major milestone in Brookfield Zoo Chicago's history," says Andrea Rodgers, senior vice president of guest experience and operations. The habitat, while immersing guests in the biodiversity of rainforest ecosystems, includes spaces for the zoo's family troop of western lowland gorillas, their orangutans, and monkeys. It was designed to be immersive, "providing up-close, eye-to-eye encounters" to encourage the personal connections between animals and the zoo's guests that "can lead to care and conservation." The habitat also includes the Gorilla Conservation Center and King Conservation Leadership Academy, reinforcing Brookfield Zoo's commitment to education and global wildlife protection. Opened in July, the exhibit features lush vegetation, elevated walkways, and climate-controlled environments that support primates, birds, and reptiles from Central and South America, Africa, and Asia. The space emphasizes conservation and education, with interactive displays and behind-the-scenes views of animal care.

brookfieldzoo.org/bramsentropicalforests

MERLIN



Lego Duplo Peppa Pig Playground

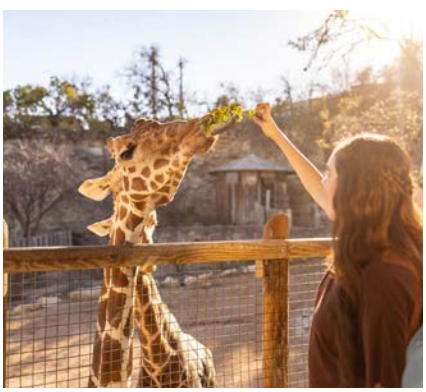
Legoland New York Resort, Goshen, New York

Merlin Entertainments

Legoland New York Resort debuted the Lego Duplo Peppa Pig Playground in April, marking a new collaboration among Merlin Entertainments, Hasbro, and Lego Duplo. The 13,000-square-foot space offers interactive play experiences inspired by the Peppa Pig universe. The initiative builds on Merlin's ongoing partnership with Hasbro. "Merlin shares our vision of creating play spaces designed just for little ones," added Matt Proulx, Hasbro's SVP of global experiences, partnerships and music. The Playground features themed zones, including Peppa's House, Grandpa Pig's Boat, and Peppa & George's Puppet Show, aligning with Legoland's broader strategy to expand offerings for preschool-aged guests.

legoland.com/new-york/things-to-do/theme-park/rides-attractions/peppa-pig-playground

SAN ANTONIO ZOO



Naylor Savanna

San Antonio Zoo, San Antonio

Opened in October 2024, the Naylor Savanna at the San Antonio Zoo offers a sprawling, naturalistic habitat for giraffes, zebras, ostriches, sitatunga, and other African wildlife. Doubling the previous space, it features a state-of-the-art giraffe barn supporting the AZA's Species Survival Plan. "We have all this beautiful limestone to create these habitats more naturally, like it is in the wild," says Hope Roth, vice president of marketing. Guests can enjoy up-close encounters and even overnight stays at the Spekboom Lodge, a luxury suite overlooking the savanna. The lodge includes exclusive zoo access and supports giraffe conservation through donations to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation. With immersive experiences and a strong conservation mission, the Naylor Savanna exemplifies the zoo's commitment to education, innovation, and wildlife protection.

sazoo.org

Niagara Takes Flight

Niagara Parks, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

Brogent



NIAGARA PARKS.

Niagara Parks' new attraction, Niagara Takes Flight, is a flying theatre experience that immerses visitors in the beauty and history of the region. Located at Table Rock Centre beside Horseshoe Falls, the $25 million attraction suspends guests in gondola-style seats, simulating flight with motion programming and sensory effects like wind, mist, and scent. Riders soar over 56 kilometers of Niagara Falls' iconic landscapes, captured through drone cinematography and displayed on a 17-meter-wide, 180-degree domed screen. "We are proud to be partnering with Brogent Technologies, the world leader in flying theatres, to deliver an exceptional new visitor experience to our flagship site Table Rock Centre, located at the brink of the iconic Horseshoe Falls," says David Adames, CEO of Niagara Parks. The experience begins with a pre-show narrated by filmmaker James Cameron, guiding guests through 13,000 years of Niagara Falls' history—from its glacial origins to its cultural significance today blending thrilling visuals with authentic storytelling.

niagaraparks.com/visit/attractions/niagaratakesflight

Peppa Pig Theme Park Dallas-Fort Worth

North Richland Hills, Texas

Merlin Entertainments



MERLIN

Merlin Entertainments officially opened Peppa Pig Theme Park Dallas-Fort Worth in March. Representing an investment of over $40 million, the standalone attraction builds on Merlin's collaboration with Hasbro and marks the brand's first U.S. site outside of a Legoland Resort. "This new destination reflects the strength of our partnership with Hasbro and our shared commitment to creating meaningful experiences for families," says Fiona Eastwood, CEO of Merlin Entertainments. "We're pleased to bring Peppa Pig to a broader audience through a dedicated location." The park features five rides and nine themed play areas based on familiar scenes from the Peppa Pig series. It is also recognized as a Certified Autism Center, offering inclusive amenities like sensory guides and accessible pathways. "Merlin Entertainments is dedicated to providing safe, inclusive and engaging experiences for all families," adds Jeremy Aguillen, general manager of the new park.

peppapigthemepark.com/dallas-ft-worth/

Rafter's Rage

Soaky Mountain Waterpark, Sevierville, Tennessee

WhiteWater



SOAKY MOUNTAIN WATERPARK

Soaky Mountain chose to build on the success of The Edge—winner of the 2023 IAAPA Brass Ring Award for Best New Product—by launching its sixth season with Rafter's Rage, a WhiteWater Wall Runner model. Master planner and theme park designer Frederic Pastuszak described how the six-person ride's four arcs produce lateral drifting by "using roller coaster engineering to create bespoke layouts that offer some roller coaster sensations" of climbing up as well as sliding down. The design ensures that riders can enjoy top speeds throughout their descent, adding an extra thrill.

soakymountainwaterpark.com/attractions/

KINGS DOMINION



Rapterra

Kings Dominion, Doswell, Virginia

Bolliger & Mabillard

When it was time to design and debut the new roller coaster that would become Rapterra, Kings Dominion returned to Swiss custom roller coaster design firm Bolliger & Mabillard. Public Relations Regional Manager Sydney Snow says the park chose to work with B&M again thanks to their "reputation of being reliable, efficient, and thrilling," something Kings Dominion had experienced firsthand with the installation of their popular Dominator coaster. Rapterra, a winged coaster featuring a high-speed launch and dynamic maneuvers, is a centerpiece of the Jungle X-Pedition area of the park, which was renovated and re-themed in 2022. Bolliger & Mabillard's design offers "amplified rotational motions and multiple possibilities of thrilling near-misses," while spectators on the ground get an eyeful of Rapterra's thrills thanks to its peak being located over the Jungle X-Pedition midway.

kingsdominion.com/rides-experiences/rapterra

KINGS ISLAND



RiverRacers, Splash River Junction

Soak City Water Park at Kings Island, Mason, Ohio

WhiteWater

This summer, Kings Island unveiled two attractions from WhiteWater as part of an ongoing strategic refresh focused on families and thrills. Nestled between existing attractions, the new RiverRacers is a dual racing water coaster (known in-house at WhiteWater as the Blaster Battle) that features 33-foot drops and speeds up to 30 miles per hour.

Splash River Junction replaces an aging splash zone with an up-to-date kids' area. Here, the seven slides flow gently into a lagoon anchored by a nostalgically themed water tower, reflecting the region's heritage. Children under 36 inches won't be left out thanks to interactive splash stations throughout the area.

visitkingsisland.com/soak-city

MERLIN



Sea Life Florida Aquarium

Legoland Florida Resort, Winter Haven, Florida

Legoland Florida Resort, in an effort to expand marine education and family engagement, opened Sea Life Florida in May. The aquarium features 25 interactive exhibits, including a central display themed as a "Theme Park Under the Sea." Claire McCool, Sea Life regional director, notes, "This location was developed to foster curiosity and support conservation through immersive design and educational programming. Our team worked closely with Merlin Magic Making to ensure the experience aligns with Sea Life's global mission." The attraction includes approximately 150,000 gallons of water and houses over 3,000 animals across 150 species. In partnership with Sea Life Trust, the resort has implemented recyclable bags across all affiliated parks to reduce single-use plastics. Merlin Entertainments CEO Fiona Eastwood adds, "Sea Life Florida reflects our broader strategy to deliver branded experiences that connect families with the natural world in meaningful ways." The opening complements Legoland Florida's existing offerings and reinforces Merlin's commitment to accessible, family-focused attractions.

legoland.com/florida/things-to-do/sea-life-florida/

Siren's Curse

Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio

Vekoma



CEDAR POINT

Cedar Point launched Siren's Curse, a tilt coaster, developed in partnership with Vekoma Rides. Opened in June, the attraction features a 160-foot vertical tilt mechanism that transitions riders from horizontal to vertical before a controlled drop, enhancing the coaster's thrill profile and engineering complexity. "This project took a lot of passion and effort," says Ricardo Tonding Etges, vice president of sales and marketing at Vekoma. "It's impressive what we accomplished in just nine months." Originally slated for another Six Flags property, the decision to relocate Siren's Curse to Cedar Point was driven by strategic placement along the park's midway, maximizing visibility and guest engagement—even for non-riders. The ride's location offers a visual impact while an immersive queue design, and synchronized audio-visual effects that align with the siren mythology theme enhance the experience. "We've been working on this product for six years," Etges adds. "We continue to innovate, create new concepts, and deliver memorable experiences."

cedarpoint.com/rides-experiences/sirens-curse

Snoopy's Racing Railway

Carowinds, Charlotte, North Carolina

ART Engineering



CAROWINDS

Carowinds continues to invest in attractions for the youngest thrill seekers at Camp Snoopy, most recently with Snoopy's Racing Railway. The family launch coaster "is perfectly themed to match the area" and is "our second expansion of Camp Snoopy since 2018," says Chris Foshee, regional manager for public relations. It is designed for riders who clear just 36 inches in height and has a gentle maximum speed of 31 miles per hour. Park manager Brian Oerding set high expectations for the ART Engineering-designed coaster's potential to "provide fun-filled adventures for generations of park guests."

carowinds.com/rides-experiences/snoopys-racing-railway

Sol Club Lagoon Amenity Village at Sunterra

Crystal Lagoons, Katy TexasLand Tejas and Starwood Land



CRYSTAL LAGOONS

Sunterra's lagoon was "designed as an active centerpiece where residents can swim, paddle, or simply relax beachside, with a clubhouse at its center." All this "incorporated the developer's market research" pointing to strong resident preferences for "family-friendly recreation and social gathering spaces." To adapt the design to the development's terrain, Crystal Lagoons worked with developer Land Tejas and Starwood Land across a longer-term iterative design process.

Frischmann's best advice to developers and clients is "to define how they want the lagoon to function within their overall master plan, whether as a resident-only amenity, a mixed-use anchor, a hospitality attraction, or a Public Access Lagoons project with ticketed entry."

crystal-lagoons.com/proyectos/sunterra/

SPEEDZONE



Tennessee Twister, Blue Ridge Blitz, Dragon Tail Slick Track

SpeedZone Fun Park. Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

Five Star Parks & Attractions

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee's SpeedZone Fun Park is the third park owned and operated by Five Star Parks & Attractions in the region alone. "The exact timing [of the opening] wasn't strategic, but more of a desire to invest more into the area," says Five Star's Vice President of Entertainment Strategy and Tech Services Jeff Gebhart. Five Star also owns and operates Xtreme Racing Center of Pigeon Forge.

SpeedZone's two newly redesigned tracks are "elevated go kart tracks woven together," incorporating "downhill straights that give a rush, passing lanes that make for great competition racing, and turns that give the tracks character and that take skill to navigate." The park's location is special too, offering a feature that you just cannot re-create anywhere else: the Rocky Mountain view from the top of the track.

speedzonefunpark.com/

ROYAL CARIBBEAN



Star of the Seas

Royal Caribbean Port Canaveral, Florida

Royal Caribbean officially introduced Star of the Seas, its newest Icon Class ship, during a naming ceremony at Port Canaveral, Florida. "Star of the Seas represents the next bold step in our journey to reimagine vacations," says Jason Liberty, president and CEO of Royal Caribbean Group. "It brings together the best of our innovation, signature experiences, and the most sought-after destinations into one unforgettable vacation." The ship features eight distinct neighborhoods, including Surfside for young families, Category 6 waterpark, and Crown's Edge, a 154-foot-high experience above the ocean. Michael Bayley, president and CEO of Royal Caribbean International, notes, "Star of the Seas delivers everything families want in a vacation with more adventure and more ways to make unforgettable memories together." Star began seven-night Caribbean sailings in August from Port Canaveral.

royalcaribbean.com/cruise-ships/star-of-the-seas

FLORIDA AQUARIUM



The Tide Pool

The Florida Aquarium, Tampa, Florida

The Florida Aquarium's latest milestone in their multi-year, $45 million expansion project—get ready for puffins, California sea lions, and African penguins in 2026 and 2027—is The Tide Pool, a large, new cool water touch habitat focused on the flora and fauna of Pacific Northwest coastal waters. For Roger Germann, president and CEO, the attraction offers "a rare opportunity to interact with" upwards of 200 invertebrate species, making it a "hands-on experience that ignites curiosity and can spark a lifelong commitment to conservation."

According to Senior Vice President of Engagement & Learning Debbi Stone, "touch habitats consistently rank among the highest-rated experiences at the Aquarium," and research has found that "tactile engagement leads to greater learning and retention."

To bring The Tide Pool to life for guests, The Aquarium worked with designers and fabricators that include Water Dog, Animal Exhibits, Aquatic Innovations, and Aquatic Design Group.

flaquarium.org/visit/habitats/the-tide-pool/

Top Thrill 2

Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio

Zamperla



CEDAR POINT.

Cedar Point opened Top Thrill 2 in 2025 with a new experience that incorporates the existing 420-foot tower experience of the original Top Thrill Dragster roller coaster. The ride experience now includes a new 420-foot vertical spike that riders experience after propelling forward enough of the main tower before a rollback and subsequent launch backwards and up the new spike before another 120 mph launch forward up and over the main tower and iconic top hat. "Because nothing was off the shelf, it needed to be completely engineered just for this project," says Antonio Zamperla Jr., Zamperla CEO. Zamperla helped the park incorporate data from guest surveys to preserve their favorite aspects of the original coaster while guiding the Ohio park towards the future. "The project was really a huge partnership between Zamperla and Cedar Point but I think the pride is to the testament of our two teams working together to really integrate our new technology and make it work with the attraction," says Sales and Marketing Director at Zamperla, Adam Sandy.

cedarpoint.com/rides-experiences/top-thrill-2

Universal Horror Unleashed

Area15, Las Vegas



MICHAEL COSTELLO

Universal Destinations & Experiences officially opened Universal Horror Unleashed in Las Vegas, marking its entry into year-round horror entertainment. Located in the Area15 District, the venue features four haunted houses, themed zones, live performances, and curated food and beverage offerings.

"This marks an exciting step in our expansion into new markets as we officially welcome guests to Universal Horror Unleashed in Las Vegas," says Page Thompson, president of new ventures for Universal Destinations & Experiences. "Horror Unleashed will provide unique character interactions that will thrill fans of both horror and immersive entertainment." The experience also includes a VIP package, offering priority access and exclusive amenities. With this launch, Universal continues to diversify its entertainment platforms while deepening engagement with fans through interactive storytelling and themed environments tailored to horror enthusiasts.

universalhorrorunleashed.com/en/us

Volcanic Wedgeee

Wet'n'Wild Hawaii, Kapolei, Hawaii

WhiteWater



WHITEWATER

Wet'n'Wild Hawaii shifted to 100% solar power and "partnered with Hawaii Energy to install 20 variable frequency drives (VFDs) on the motors powering its water attractions," which are bold moves that have yielded approximately $500,000 in annual savings, says General Manager Scott Loos. The park reinvested that money into the development and installation of their latest attraction, the Volcanic Wedgeee. As Loos succinctly put it, "harnessing the power of the sun pays off, and afforded us the ability" to reinvest in guest experience.

Volcanic Wedgeee's pair of High-Speed AquaTubes from WhiteWater, launches riders from 70 feet up into body slides featuring custom flashes of light and speeds of up to 30 miles per hour.

wetnwildhawaii.com



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**: