

Attractions

MANAGEMENT

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Volume 28 Issue 2 2023

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heads to Japan,
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EXCLUSIVE

SCOTT O'NEIL

Merlin Entertainments' new CEO
is shaking things up *p32*

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People power

The pandemic has been hugely disruptive for people working in the sector. A new report highlights operators using creative solutions to rebuild staff joy



Every year, Elizabeth Merritt and her team at the American Alliance of Museums examine changes shaping the sector in their influential *TrendsWatch* publication.

From augmented reality to Blockchain, this year's report (see page 50) highlights the forces shaping museums and many are relevant right across the attractions industry.

In an interview on page 46, Merritt says the pandemic has had a major impact on the workforce which has led to stress, burnout and resignations, with a labour exodus hitting the nonprofit sector particularly hard.

Since the world reopened, some employers have been struggling to attract and retain staff and Merritt says it's not only about pay and benefits – although these are still important – companies must now offer flexible, hybrid work schedules, examine their workplace culture and think creatively if they want to build strong teams.

TrendsWatch highlights organisations taking a more dynamic approach, including Delaware Art Museum, which has broadened its pool of applicants by removing unnecessary requirements from job descriptions, while also recruiting outside the museum sector and the Philbrook Museum of Art, which has partnered with recruitment initiative Tulsa Remote to provide cultural incentives for workers to relocate.

California historic house, Filoli, focused on pay when staff turnover soared to 50 per cent, prompting managers to make a living wage the base remuneration for all positions and increasing revenue in a variety of ways to support these higher salaries. Following the change, Filoli reports that turnover staff dropped down to eight per cent.

All these examples show how attractions can make small changes that make a big

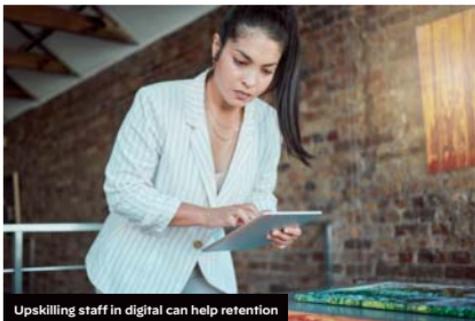


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ REON. IMAGES.COM - YURIA

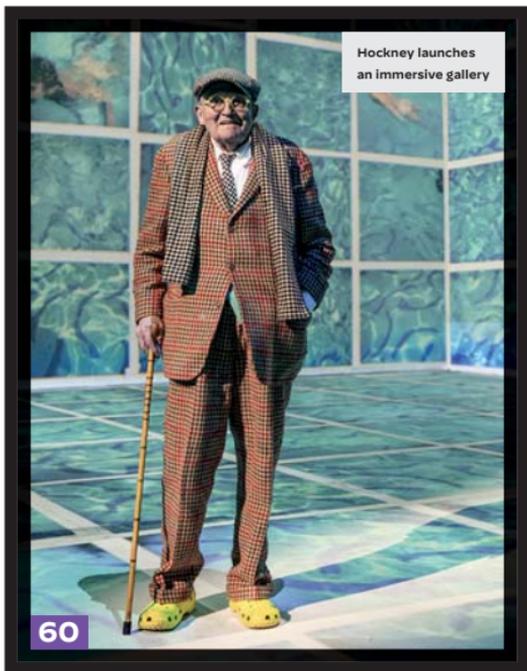
Operators must think creatively if they want to build strong teams

difference to the people charged with the duty of delivering the customer experience.

TrendWatch also considers the power of tech and its role in developing teams, suggesting the creation of staff development plans for digital literacy – another example of career development.

You only have to look at this edition of *Attractions Management*, which considers empathetic robots (p26), tech green space (p30), eco-tech (31), immersive art (p62), eye tracking (p86), deepfake (p88) and digital worlds (p40) to appreciate that it's to the advantage of both employer and employee for training in digital to be a fundamental part of the mix.

Magali Robathan, editor
magalirobathan@leisuremedia.com



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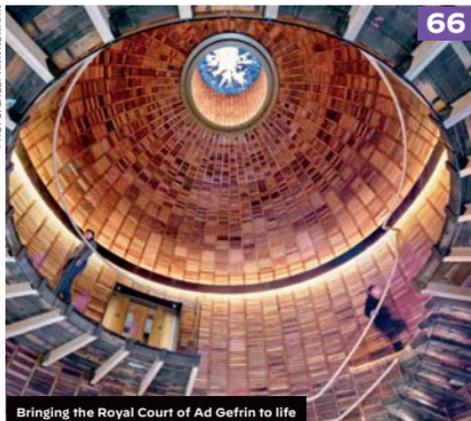
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Works from Luna Luna, a groundbreaking 'art amusement park' have languished in storage for 30 years. Now rapper Drake is bringing them back to life

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From an aquarium that tracks eye movements to deepfake technology that enables personalisation, we take a look at what's new in attractions

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Resurrecting a unique art carnival



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Write to Reply

Let us know what you think about the issues that matter to the industry.

We'd love to hear from you – editor@attractionsmanagement.com

“ **We'll do our best to ensure that 2023 will not only be a year of celebrating the past, but also the start of something new** ”

Andreas Andersen, CEO, Liseberg

The years 2020 and 2021 will go down in history as the times that changed the way we look at life, freedom, globalisation, trade, travel, work and togetherness.

We realised the fragility of everything we'd taken for granted and even though we've risen – as individuals, companies, societies – the years have left scars that are sometimes hard to conceal.

But now, with the pandemic in the rear-view mirror, I can't help but reflect on how COVID-19 helped Liseberg in many ways.

It turned everything upside down and we had to pivot and after doing things the same way for almost 100 years, it made us dare to challenge everything we'd previously taken for granted in our business.

The pandemic became a lever, a force that pushed us over the edge and into the unknown, to the point where now we conclude that the changes we were forced to make rescued us in many ways.



PHOTO: ANNA ELENA LUNDQVIST

Firstly, 2022 goes down in history as the most profitable year in Liseberg's history and many of the changes we introduced, such as capacity restrictions, differentiated pricing, continued focus on maximising guest satisfaction, are likely to transform the way Liseberg operates for good.

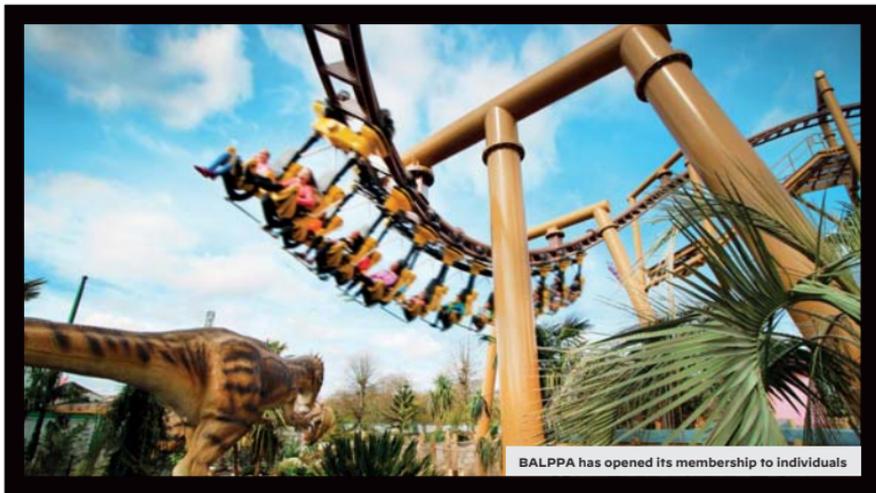
And now, as we move through 2023 – our centenary year – it feels both exhilarating and frightening. Exhilarating because we have so much good going on – the best team ever, a new hotel, an exciting coaster and all the experience we've gained over the last few years. Frightening because of uncertainties – the war in Ukraine, inflation, the ongoing energy-crisis, and a potential recession, to name just a few.

But, as always, something good may come out of all this. As Winston Churchill famously said when he was working to form the United Nations after WWII, "Never let a good crisis go to waste". Our situation is obviously less complex, but we'll do our best to ensure 2023 will not only be a year of celebrating the past, but also the start of something new. ●



Liseberg is getting a new €110m waterpark on its 100th anniversary

PHOTO: LISEBERG, QUARRY/COLLECTIVO, 2020



BALPPA has opened its membership to individuals

66

We want to make membership an affordable and attractive proposition for individuals

Paul Kelly, CEO, BALPPA (The British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers & Attractions)

In our fantastic industry, we're always keen to attract new businesses and people to work in the sector. Having been in the industry myself for many years, working in great businesses and with great people, I know what an amazing and long-standing career you can have.

That's why in 2022 at BALPPA we made a change in the way we do things and opened up our association to individuals as well as businesses, by launching an Individual Membership category.

The new category was launched to help support and develop people already working within attractions businesses looking to progress their career, as well as those who might have left an industry business but want to keep in touch. We hope this category will also attract new people who are looking to pursue a career within the industry, either as an operator or as a trade supplier or service provider.

As a member-to-member association, which has over 300 members and has represented the interests of the UK's commercial leisure parks, piers, zoos, visitor attractions and family entertainment and indoor play



centres since 1936, we want to develop this new category to make membership an affordable and attractive proposition for individuals and not just businesses.

We've been delighted to welcome many individuals to the association who've joined via the new category of membership from various backgrounds and businesses and with varying levels of experience. We're currently planning our first event for individual members where they will have the opportunity to visit a member attraction, network with their peers and hear from and speak to members of BALPPA's management committee.

We want to encourage more individuals to join us and get a head start in their career, so if you're an individual working within the industry and maybe looking to progress to a more senior position, simply want to engage directly with BALPPA and its members, or you've left a leisure business and would like to continue to network with members, this is for you. Individual membership is priced at just £100 per person for one year.

This membership category provides a series of benefits including access to BALPPA's events, webinars, newsletters and other guidance documents, as well as access to specific events for this group.

More information on our new membership category is live on the BALPPA website (www.attractionsmanagement.com/balppaindie) where you'll also find more information on the benefits of membership and the application form. You can also contact us at information@balppa.org.

Attractions **People**

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**“Japan is a core
hub of Harry
Potter fandom”**

**Sarah Roots,
EVP Warner Bros Worldwide
Studio Tours & Retail**

Sarah Roots was promoted
to EVP, Worldwide Studio
Tours & Retail in 2020

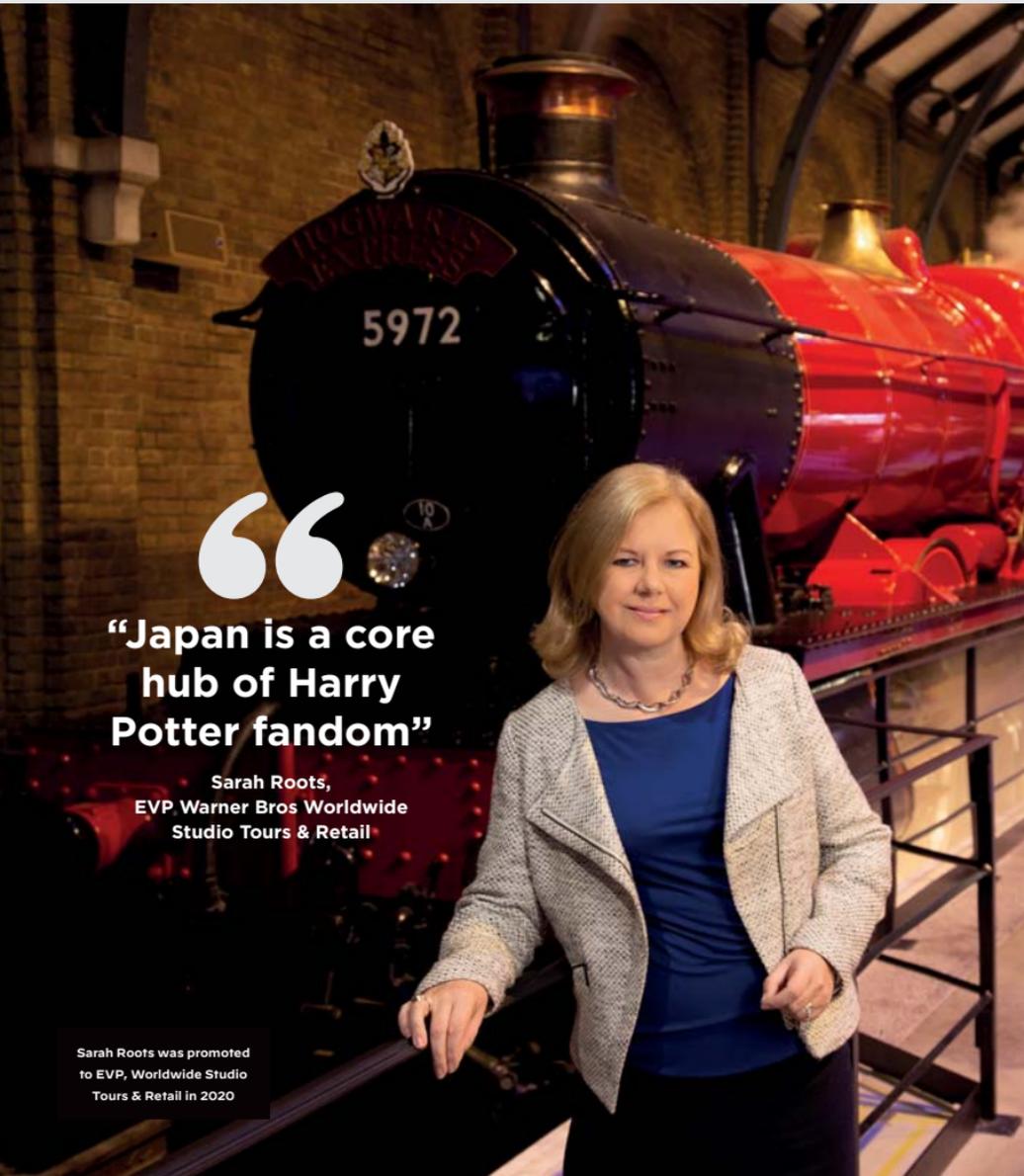




PHOTO: WARNER BROS. STUDIO TOUR TOKYO

Tickets are available to pre-book for the Tokyo Studio Tour

Following the enormous success of Warner Bros Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter which has had more than 17 million visitors since its opening in March 2012,

Warner Bros is opening a second Harry Potter Studio Tour in Tokyo, Japan, on 16 June 2023.

Built on the former site of the Toshimaen theme park, it will feature classic sets including the Great Hall at Hogwarts, Diagon Alley and the Forbidden Forest, as well as exclusive sets only available in the Tokyo attraction. Visitors can also view costumes and props, learn about the filming techniques used to make the movies, and take part in activities including riding a broomstick, posing for a moving portrait in a Hogwarts hallway and being part of a crowd at a Quidditch match. Tickets are

PHOTO: WARNER BROS. STUDIO TOUR LONDON

now available to pre-book. Adult tickets will cost ¥6,300 (£37.60/\$47/E42.70) and junior tickets will cost ¥5,200 (£31/\$38.50/£35). Anticipated dwell time is around four hours.

Here, Warner Bros' Sarah Roots talks exclusively to *Attractions Management* about what the new attraction will feature, and the highs and lows of getting the project built.

How are plans progressing for the Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo?

We have a talented team of the original Harry Potter filmmakers who have built sets, created props and designed costumes using the authentic techniques. This project has allowed more freedom for the team to create sets that weren't kept after the films were made, which means the Tokyo tour will feature some really exciting new pieces.

The team created the pieces in the UK, then we shipped them to Japan and have been working collaboratively with local Japanese experts to complete the creative process and bring the magical world of Harry Potter to life.

Right now, the finishing touches are being put in place and the interactive elements installed. We're so excited to be able to open the doors to the public soon.

► **What can you tell us about the exclusive sets that will only be available at the Tokyo tour?**

We'll have the moving staircase from Hogwarts – a first – and this will be accompanied by a new interactive photo opportunity where visitors can appear in their own Hogwarts portrait.

The Tokyo tour will also include a Fantastic Beasts section which highlights digital technology in relation to the beasts in the films that wasn't as advanced in the days of Harry Potter. Visitors will also get to explore new production spaces such as The Art of Sound that delves into the world of mixing, foley and sound effects.

The Tokyo tour is larger and has a huge amount of content so areas such as transition spaces where visitors pass from one set to another have been beautifully designed and show off costumes and props to an exceptional standard. We're anticipating a longer dwell time as there is so much to experience.

Can you highlight any other exciting features of the Tokyo tour?

We've learned from the success of Warner Bros Studio Tour London just how much our fans love hands-on interaction so that will be a big part of the experience. Fans will be able to take part in their favourite experiences from Warner Bros Studio Tour London like flying a broomstick or drinking a Butterbeer, as well as some that are new for Tokyo like posing for a moving portrait that will be displayed in the halls of Hogwarts. We're even inviting fans to step into the crowd of a Quidditch match, to cheer on their favourite team.

Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo will also be home to the largest Harry Potter shop in the world.

The British-inspired menu in the Food Hall will serve Hogwarts favourite dishes such as roast beef, fish and chips and sausage and mash, while the Professor Umbridge tearoom will serve a magical themed afternoon tea in deliciously pink surroundings.

What excites you most about the project?

Seeing the Studio Tour work through the construction, show fit out and current overlap into operations coming to life in Tokyo has been really special. I'm excited about the first fans walking through the doors on opening day. Welcoming Harry Potter enthusiasts (as opposed to business visitors) is always so uplifting – watching their emotional responses, shared experiences and excitement. Seeing the amazing reaction from fans when we launched the Studio Tour Tokyo opening date and put the tickets on sale to a record response has been incredible so I can't wait for them to see it in person.

This tour is an extension to Warner Bros Studio Tour London in many aspects, we've been able to utilise all of the best assets in London, plus our operational knowledge and more-up-to-date technology. It will be a good mix of fan favourites and new innovations.

The train stations serving the attraction are getting Harry Potter makeovers. What will this involve?

The closest station to Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo, Toshimaen, will be undergoing a magical makeover to celebrate the opening of the Studio Tour – we're working closely with our partners Seibu Railway to support the new opening. More details are coming.



The Warner Bros team have learned from the success of the London attraction



The central Tokyo hub station Ikebukuro where visitors start their journey will be taking inspiration from Platform 9 ¾ at Kings Cross and wrapped trains will be showcasing scenes from the films.

How did you choose the site for Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo?

We knew Tokyo would be the perfect location for the Studio Tour; it's the first attraction of its type in Asia and Japan is a core hub of Harry Potter fandom. We found an amazing space at Toshimaen, located in Nerima-Ku on two direct train lines from Tokyo city and with car parking on site – pretty incredible for central Tokyo.

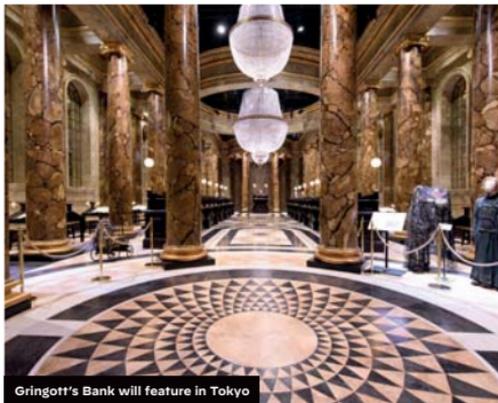
The advantage of building the Studio Tour from scratch has been the flexibility it's allowed us – we've been able to enhance the design, take learnings from London, accommodate more space for the general reception and F&B/retail areas, and plan for future growth from day one.

We've been working with the original filmmakers in London since the concept plans, so we've had the benefit of being able to create the sets, props and costumes for Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo under their expert guidance, using the original moulds, methods and techniques. The UK based workshops where the assets were built and made had an amazing buzz.

What have been the biggest challenges of the project so far?

We started feasibility, business planning and the site search for Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo back in 2017/18, and shook on a deal on the site

PHOTO: WARNER BROS. STUDIO TOUR



at Toshimaen in December 2019. As we built up to launching the construction part of the project, COVID-19 hit and we had to carry on at pace during the pandemic. Not being able to travel until mid-2022 was a real challenge. We had to be agile and adjust our approach and management of the project on the ground as the situation changed.

Key areas of adjustment included the need for additional project management resources on the ground in Tokyo to supplement the physical absence of the core Warner Bros Discovery team. And the global rising cost of raw materials and construction related labour was a big challenge.

It's been an amazing personal life opportunity to learn about another culture and appreciate a different approach to working – I'm still very much learning. ●



PHOTO: DAVID CAMP



“Operators have realised that the historic drive to increase visitor numbers is not necessarily the answer to a better business”

David Camp, Senior partner, D&J International Consulting

PHOTO: EUROPA-PARK



This year, D&J International Consulting celebrates its tenth anniversary. Launched by David and Julie Camp in January 2013, the consultancy's first project was helping the Mack

family plan the Rulantica water park at Europa-Park in Germany. Since then, the pair have consulted on a range of projects including the recently launched Lift 109 experience at Battersea Power Station, London; the expansion of Puy du Fou worldwide; Kalahari Resort, Round Rock, US; Infinity des Lumieres, Dubai; Gorewada Zoo & Safari, India; and the i360, Brighton, UK.

The company specialises in providing market and financial feasibility services to the visitor attraction and real estate development sectors, offering planning and development advice for theme parks, sports venues, visitor attractions, tourism destinations, mixed-use developments, brandlands, museums and entertainment developments.

Here David Camp looks back at a busy decade, and shares some of the biggest lessons he has learned with *Attractions Management*.

Can you share one or two of your highlights during the past 10 years?

It's always satisfying to see projects that we've worked on reach fruition and open to the public. We were very fortunate that our very first project was at Europa-Park with the Mack family who wanted some assistance assessing the potential of their planned waterpark.

They obviously knew their park and hotel business well but were concerned as to whether the waterpark would cannibalise theme park visits

PHOTO: PUY DU FOU

D&J consulted on the expansion of Puy du Fou worldwide





The firm worked on the Rulantica waterpark at Europa-Park

and how it might impact hotel demand. Through a process of research and analysis of their historic business, along with lessons from a range of international theme and water park operations, we were able to reassure them that the water park would add to the total resort guests and increase hotel demand. The number of visits to the water park in 2022 were also slightly higher than our original projections, which is always good to hear.

One of our other highlights has been our work with Eden Project International. We have been working alongside the development team there helping them with planned projects in England, Scotland, Ireland, Greece, Colombia and New Zealand. Every one of their schemes is different so the design, research and assessment process needs to reflect this.

What positive impacts do you see emerging post-pandemic?

The pandemic has led to a massive change in behaviour patterns, perceptions and motivation among both operators and consumers.

Operators have realised that the historic drive to increase visitor numbers is not necessarily the answer to a better business. Providing a quality experience to fewer visitors leads to increased guest satisfaction which in turn leads to increased spending. Gröna Lund in Stockholm changed from a low-priced park admission ticket operation pre-COVID to a pay one price park and limited the number of guests. In 2022, guest satisfaction was higher than ever, visitors were spending more in the park and this led to more income than before the pandemic from 20 per cent fewer guests.

With many people spending most of the past three years working from home, there's a strong resistance to returning to the workplace in the same way as before the pandemic. People want to maintain the increased flexibility and freedom that home working has offered, and many companies seem to be open to this.

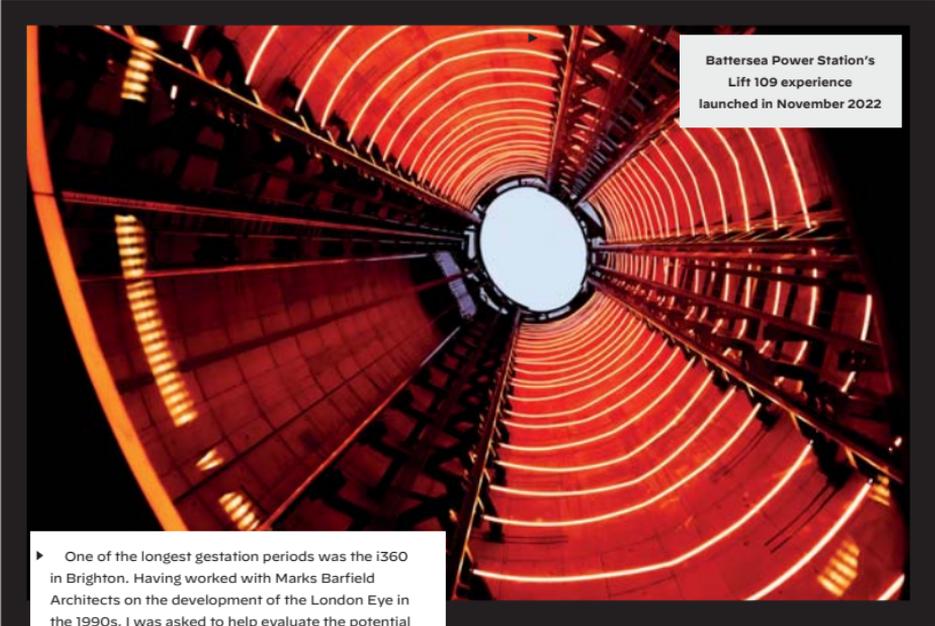
This increased flexibility offers opportunities to change some of the traditional seasonal visitation patterns that have impacted demand at attractions. There will still be the school holiday peaks in demand from families, however more and more attractions will look to operate seasonal or dynamic pricing systems and take a more active role in managing guest visitation patterns and experiences.

Which project has had the shortest lead time between initial enquiry and opening. And the longest?

One of the most frustrating aspects of working on feasibility studies for attractions is the length of time that it takes for projects to be realised. There are a host of reasons for this, and unfortunately the vast majority of the projects that we're involved don't go on to be developed.

One of the fastest developments I worked on was Ferrari World in Abu Dhabi. I undertook the feasibility study for the park in 2006 and the park opened in 2010. Major factors in the relatively rapid pace of development was that Aldar, the original developer of the park, had control of the land, was supported by significant state-related funds, and had appointed a strong team of masterplanners and other consultants to fast-track the process.





Battersea Power Station's
Lift 109 experience
launched in November 2022

▶ One of the longest gestation periods was the i360 in Brighton. Having worked with Marks Barfield Architects on the development of the London Eye in the 1990s, I was asked to help evaluate the potential for a smaller observation attraction. We looked at a number of different locations around the world and in 2006 a site in Brighton was identified. The development process for that attraction encountered a series of setbacks but the design team stuck with it and the iconic attraction finally opened in 2016.

What are your favourite attractions and why?

In terms of European attractions, my two favourite theme parks are Puy du Fou and PortAventura. We're fortunate to have worked for both of these parks and that's enabled us to get an insight into the operations and how hard the teams work to deliver the guest experience.

When I first saw the Le Bal des Oiseaux Fantômes bird show at Puy du Fou it took my breath away. Numerous handlers walking through the audience attract the birds to fly low across the stands and the finale – with more than 100 birds flying around the ruins – has to be seen to be believed.

For me, Port Aventura is about great coasters. Dragon Khan's eight inversions was a world record when it opened in 1995 and offered amazing views across the park. It was my favourite coaster until I rode Shambala in 2012. I had never ridden

anything so fast or that delivered so much air time, and with only a lap restraint to hold the rider in place. An incredible experience.

I am a Harry Potter fan and so find the Warner Bros Studios Tour in Leavesden fascinating, but I was awestruck when I first entered Diagon Alley at Universal Studios in Orlando. I was there with a host of attraction professionals as part of the IAAPA Expo and every single person gasped in awe as they walked through the station entrance and first glimpsed the Diagon Alley buildings arrayed in front of them, and the dragon atop Gringott's Bank. While the rides in the area are fantastic, it's the environment that's the real star of that part of the park.

What are you working on now?

In terms of current projects, we're working with Eden Project International on their Dundee development, helping the team there with the business planning for the scheme. We have also been working with Gröna Lund in Stockholm evaluating the potential impact of their planned park expansion on attendance levels and business volumes. ●

“

In terms of European attractions, my two favourite theme parks are Puy du Fou and PortAventura



Puy du Fou in France is one of Camp's favourite European attractions

SAUDI ARABIA

World's first Play-Doh attractions for Saudi Arabia

Saudi Entertainment Ventures (Seven) has revealed plans to develop and operate the world's first Play-Doh attractions in Saudi Arabia.

Seven, a wholly owned subsidiary of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), said it will open Play-Doh sites at eight of its entertainment destinations across the country over the next 10 years.

Thinkwell Group, the global strategy, experience design, and production agency, has been appointed to develop the attractions.

Seven has signed a licensing deal with global toy and entertainment giant, Hasbro, which owns the IP for Play-Doh.

Each Play-Doh attraction will feature multilevel playscapes, creativity stations and sensory discovery activity areas, allowing guests to fully immerse themselves in the essence and joy of playing with Play-Doh compound (or toys).

The centres will feature a café area for parents, alongside a dedicated party and events room.

Abdullah Aldawood, chair of Seven, said: "Our partnership with Hasbro brings the best-in-class entertainment attractions to the people of Saudi Arabia. Our Play-Doh themed entertainment centres will inspire the creative minds and imaginations of children." More: http://lei.sr/w8j4R_T



Seven has signed a licensing deal with Hasbro

PHOTO: SEVEN



PHOTO: SEVEN

“

Our Play-Doh centres will inspire the creative minds of children

Abdullah Aldawood

UK

London Resort Company grapples with CVA

“

The CVA represents yet another major hurdle for the £2bn proposal to build the huge attraction, once described as one of the most ambitious theme park projects in Europe

London Resort Company Holdings (LRCH), the company behind plans to build a theme park resort in Swanscombe, Kent, has called in administrators with the aim of completing a CVA.

The company says it's aiming to agree terms with creditors in relation to its liabilities, with a view to continuing with the development.

The CVA represents yet another major hurdle for the £2bn proposal to build the huge attraction, once described as one of the most 'ambitious theme park projects in Europe'.



The original £2bn plans were first announced in 2012

PHOTO: LONDON RESORT COMPANY HOLDINGS (LRCH)

The original £2bn plans were first announced in 2012 by a consortium which included US-based entertainment giant Paramount Pictures.

In 2014, the project was categorised as being of 'national significance' and fast-tracked by the UK government, while

plans were laid to improve transport links and Mission Impossible and Star Trek were slated as possible IPs for the development.

As Paramount pulled out, the name was changed from London Paramount Entertainment Resort to The London Resort.

More: http://lei.sr/b2U2n_T

UK

Number of visits to UK attractions ‘bouncing back’

Visitor numbers at the UK’s leading attractions have bounced strongly, getting to 78 per cent of pre-pandemic numbers.

Figures published by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) show that the number of visits to its sites rose by 69 per cent in 2022 when compared with the year before, only 22 per cent lower than in 2019.

As all pandemic restrictions were lifted for 2022, indoor sites enjoyed the strongest year-on-year growth, with a 176 per cent uplift, ahead of mixed sites at 44 per cent.

Outdoor sites reported an increase of five per cent during the year. The most-visited attraction in the UK

– with 5,636,844 visits (a four per cent increase on 2021) – is still Windsor Great Park, which is managed by the Crown Estate.

The most-visited indoor attraction and second most visited attraction overall was the Natural History Museum in London, which saw a 196 per cent increase in visitors to 4,654,608.

Bernard Donoghue, director of ALVA, said: “These figures show that visitors flocked back to their favourite places in 2022.

“The year ended strongly with attractions reporting a very busy Christmas, strong visitor numbers and strong retail sales.”

More: http://lei.sr/v2V7T_U



Visits to the Natural History Museum rose by 196 per cent

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ELNOCE



PHOTO: ALVA

“
The year ended strongly with attractions reporting a very busy Christmas
Bernard Donoghue

US

DeSantis strips Disney of special tax status and voids land deals



The move means Disney will now be treated the same as other Orlando theme parks and will no longer be exempt from certain state regulations, including building and fire prevention codes

The row between Florida’s governor, Ron DeSantis, and Disney – alleged to be over gender identity laws – has escalated, leading to Walt Disney World losing its special tax district status.

DeSantis has introduced a new bill that brings to an end Disney’s special privileges which have stood for more than 50 years.

The special tax status has granted the company the right to operate its own police and fire department and autonomy over zoning and other public functions.

Historically, the special tax status was seen as



DeSantis has voided Disney’s land deals in Florida

PHOTO: DISNEY

saving local taxpayers from large infrastructure and other costs required to operate the huge resort.

It means Disney will now be treated the same as other Orlando theme parks and will no longer be exempt from certain state regulations, including building and fire prevention codes.

By issuing the new bill, DeSantis gave himself the power to appoint the five members of the board that controls government services for the Reedy Creek district – which covers Disney’s Florida theme park properties. He has also voided Disney development deals in Florida.
More: http://lei.sr/a7H8n_T

UAE

SeaWorld counts down to opening in Abu Dhabi

Due to launch on 23 May, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will feature eight realms offering immersive experiences – as well as habitats housing different species together, as they are in nature.

The attraction will be home to 100,000 marine animals and with the exception of a few rides, the 183,000sq m site will be indoors.

Located on Yas Island near Warner Bros. World and Ferrari World, the attraction is being developed through a partnership between SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment and Miral, the Abu Dhabi-based 'curator' of visitor experiences.

One of the eight realms – Endless Ocean – will

feature the world's largest multi-species aquarium, housing more than 68,000 of the marine animals on-site, including sharks, fish, rays and sea turtles. Visitors will go on a journey from the poles to the tropics, enjoying animal experiences including up-close encounters and expeditions. The attraction will also feature a number of major rides.

Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, CEO of Miral said: "SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will be a next generation marine life park featuring the world's largest marine aquarium and the UAE's first dedicated research centre to study and care for animals."

More: http://lei.sr/7q8m6_T



PHOTO: LINKEDIN.COM/
MOHAMED ABDALLA AL ZAABI



“

This is another addition to Yas Island's existing immersive experiences
Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi

US

US\$1bn George Lucas museum will focus on storytelling



PHOTO: LUCAS MUSEUM OF NARRATIVE ART

A US\$1bn museum funded by legendary director, George Lucas, will look to become the world's first to focus exclusively on storytelling through images.

The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art – designed by architect Ma Yansong of MAD Architects with Michael Siegel of Stantec as executive architect – is set to open in Exposition Park, Los Angeles in 2025.

Housing expansive galleries, the museum will celebrate the art of visual storytelling – from comic art, paintings and illustrations to photography, filmmaking and



drawings – with collection galleries, exhibition spaces and two theatres.

In addition to the 300,000sq ft main building, the attraction will feature an 11-acre campus with extensive new green space designed by Studio-MLA.

The \$1bn museum, funded primarily by Lucas

and wife Mellody Hobson, broke ground in 2018 and was originally slated for a 2023 opening.

Sandra Jackson-Dumont, the museum's director and CEO, said: "It's humbling and energising to see how all aspects of this new public resource are taking shape."

More: http://lei.sr/T6m5b_T

“
We believe that narrative art can connect us and help shape a more just society

Sandra Jackson-Dumont

UK

Priceless Shakespeare artefacts go on show

Visitors to Shakespeare's New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, are able to view three priceless artefacts together for the first time.

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is displaying a copy of the Folio itself, a ring which is believed to have belonged to Shakespeare and a 17th century notebook – written by "his most obsessive fan".

The Ashburnham First Folio going on display is comprised of 18 of his original plays (including Macbeth), as well as multiple anecdotes and his opinions on a variety of subjects. It is the focal point of the new exhibition and

holds major significance as it is one of only 233 currently known copies of the First Folio to be still intact – experts say that no two copies are exactly the same.

Alongside the First Folio, the seal ring, found by archaeologists outside the Holy Trinity Church in Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford, will be displayed.

The ring is said to have belonged to Shakespeare himself, as it bears his initials and is dated to the Elizabethan era – a period of time in which the poet is proven to have lived and worked.

The third part of the display – which opened on 25 March – is a never-before seen 17th



The Ashburnham First Folio has gone on show

century notebook written by a person The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust describes as 'the first Shakespeare geek'.

The miniature book is made up of 48 pages with around 12,500 words of content.

More: http://lei.sr/G5v2y_T

“

The exhibition holds major significance as the folio is one of only 233 existing copies

JAPAN

Tokyo superfans prepare for Harry Potter tour opening

“

In addition to fantastic interactive features, multiple photo opportunities and the world's largest Harry Potter shop, the Studio Tour will exclusively showcase a number of incredible film sets

Torben Jensen

Warner Bros. has revealed the opening date for the Harry Potter studio tour in Tokyo – the home of some of the brand's most passionate fans.

The tour – which will open on Friday 16 June 2023 – will be the largest indoor Harry Potter attraction in the world.

Like the original studio tour near London, UK, the walking tour will allow visitors to enjoy behind-the-scenes of the Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts films.

Exhibits will include film sets, such as the iconic Great Hall at Hogwarts, Diagon Alley and the Forbidden Forest, where guests will



Exhibits will include film sets, such as Diagon Alley

see original costumes and come face to face with magical creatures while learning filmmaking secrets.

The Tour will also be home to the world's largest Harry Potter shop featuring 14 themed sections and more than 7,000 bespoke and specially sourced props and retail items.

Torben Jensen, VP and GM Warner Bros Studio Tour Tokyo – The Making of Harry Potter said: "The Studio Tour is a completely new experience for Harry Potter fans in Japan."

See our interview with Warner Bros.' Sarah Roots on p12
More: http://lei.sr/g5v6f_T

UK

Young V&A was designed collaboratively with children

A museum dedicated to children will open its doors in London, UK, on 1 July 2023.

The new £13m Young V&A is set to become the UK's leading cultural destination for children, families, and young people.

Designed by De Matos Ryan and AOC Architecture, the museum is the result of a three-year redevelopment of the iconic, Grade II*-listed V&A Museum of Childhood in London's Bethnal Green.

Dedicated to children aged from birth to 14 years-of-age, Young V&A's mission is to inspire the next generation of artists, designers, performers and practitioners. Created collaboratively with children, the museum has been shaped

around their interests to encourage playful learning, foster creative agency, and spark imaginations.

Young V&A will house three galleries – Play, Imagine and Design – which are “rooted in research into early years’ development”.

Dr Tristram Hunt, director of the V&A, said: “Children and young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its aftermath, alongside the dramatic fall in creative education in schools.

“Young V&A is our response: a flagship project investing in creativity with and for young people and their futures.”

More: http://lei.sr/X5m8K_T



PHOTO: AOC ARCHITECTURE/V&A

The museum has been shaped around children's interests



PHOTO: V&A

“

This flagship project invests in creativity with and for young people

Tristram Hunt

CANADA

Aquarium de Montréal will create adventures for guests



PHOTO: ECORECREO

“

Our vision of the Aquarium de Montréal is to create an unforgettable journey

Nicolas Gosselin

A new ‘world class’ aquarium, offering visitors ‘spectacular habitats’ and unique, immersive exhibits will open in Canada in 2024.

Called Aquarium de Montréal, the attraction is being developed – and will be operated – by Montreal-based Ecorecreo Group, which specialises in the development and operation of creative, outdoor, and environmentally-friendly attractions and activities. The group operates attractions under six brands across 16 summer and winter sites across the province of Quebec.



PHOTO: GAMESHOW STUDIOS

The aim will be to transform guests' relationship with nature

Ecorecreo is working with B+H Architectes Montréal and QMD on the project.

Nicolas Gosselin, general manager of Aquarium de Montréal, said: “Our vision of the Aquarium de Montréal is to create an unforgettable journey that celebrates healthy marine and freshwater environments,

while also highlighting uncompromised animal care and the importance of conservation action.

“We will educate the community and our team is focused on creating an adventure, transforming the way our guests view their relationship with nature.”

More: http://lei.sr/y5K7p_T

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US

Disney plans robot capable of ‘emotional connection’

Disney has revealed a new animatronic robot, designed to have an “emotional connection” with people.

Revealed at SXSW Media Festival in Texas, US, the two-legged droid is able to perform a multitude of tricks – such as using rollerblades and executing small somersaults.

When speaking at the festival, chair of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, Josh D’Amaro, demonstrated the prototype’s ability to make dynamic motions including “falling down and getting back up”.

The new template for Disney animatronics, the robot has motion capture embedded in its

systems, allowing it to be naturally animated with lifelike movement.

During the display, D’Amaro announced the robots will be making an appearance at various attractions and is expected to be able to build an ‘emotional connection’ with people.

Although further details were not revealed, it’s thought this could mean the robots will be able to communicate with visitors.

The company is still to announce whether the robot is controlled by a person or AI.

As demonstrated by the Spider-Man animatronic on the Avengers Campus in Disneyland, which was first revealed to guests in June



PHOTO: YOUTUBE.COM/DISNEY/PARKS

The robot has motion capture data embedded in it

2021, robots which perform daring stunts are known to garner large crowds. The Spider-Man animatronic is able to perform a full swing across a building and then land on a trampoline.

More: http://lei.sr/x2E2g_T

“

The new robots will be making an appearance at various attractions

US

Five finalists chosen in US Navy museum design competition



PHOTO: WWW.USNA.NA.COM

“

The designs show how we might celebrate our Navy’s accomplishments and honour our veterans

Carlos Del Toro

Five prominent architectural practices have revealed their designs for the planned new National Museum of the United States Navy.

The five teams – Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), Gehry Partners, DLR Group, Perkins&Will, and Quinn Evans – were finalists in an “artistic ideas competition” held by the US Navy and its historical and curatorial arm, the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC).

The competition was set up to discover a range of alternative opportunities for a new flagship museum and ceremonial courtyard for the

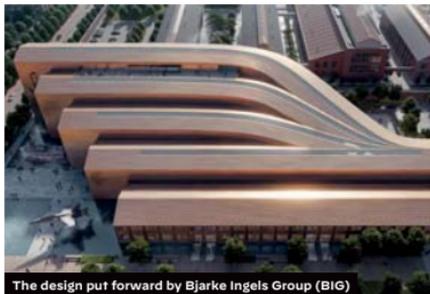


PHOTO: BJARKE INGELS GROUP (BIG)

The design put forward by Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG)

navy. The planned museum campus will consist of approximately 270,000sq ft and include about 100,000sq ft of net gallery space.

The new museum will replace the current museum, which dates to 1962 and sits on the grounds of the Washington Navy Yard in Washington DC.

Secretary of the US Navy, Carlos Del Toro, said the concepts were a crucial step in exploring what’s possible for the new attraction.

“While each concept is different, all of them show how we might celebrate our Navy’s accomplishments and honour our veterans.”

More: http://lei.sr/c9P4D_T



UNFORGETTABLE ENJOYMENT
IN THESE PARKS.

US

Bjarke Ingels creates meandering distillery attraction

Blue Run Spirits has released the first images of its planned distillery and visitor attraction in Georgetown, Kentucky, US.

Blue Run, a company specialising in bourbon and rye whiskeys, launched in October 2020 and appointed Bjarke Ingels Group's (BIG) as the lead architect for the US\$51m project.

BIG's plans for the new headquarters include a 35,000sq ft distillery and a 20,000sq ft rickhouse.

Called 'Meander' the designs evoke the journey of the limestone-rich water of Georgetown's Royal Spring as they meander through the distillation, aging and blending process to become the Blue Run spirits.

The project is set to break ground later this year, with an opening planned for 2025.

Bjarke Ingels, founder and creative director of BIG, said: "For Blue Run, we have boiled the entire process of whisky-making down to a single linear sequence – from distilling to maturing to bottling.

"The half-mile long process meanders through the gentle hillsides creating ends and banks, inlets and outlooks.

Blue Run Spirits CEO and co-founder Mike Montgomery, added: "The design gives everyone a glimpse at where we're heading in developing a welcoming, unexpected and modern facility with a true focus on sustainability."

More: <http://lei.sr>



PHOTO: BJARKE INGELS GROUP

The distillery will have a focus on sustainability



PHOTO: ATTRactions MANAGEMENT/CLAD GLOBAL

“

We have boiled the entire process of whisky-making down to a linear sequence

Bjarke Ingels

UK

London to get its own "Garden in the sky"



PHOTO: GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

“

The Camden Highline has captured local imaginations

Sadiq Khan

Planning approval has been granted for Camden Highline, a project to transform a section of disused railway into a new elevated urban park for London.

Similar to the High Line in New York, the new green space will run for 1.2km, connecting Camden Town with the King's Cross and St Pancras area – an important transport hub for the capital.

The elevated public walkway is forecast to bring new local green space for 20,000 people, along with health and wellbeing benefits worth £10.9m over the project's lifetime where



PHOTO: CAMDEN HIGHLINE

The attraction has been inspired by the High Line in NYC

people are expected to walk, run, exercise and socialise.

It is hoped that, in total, it could attract about 2.5m people a year.

The project is set to be built in three sections, beginning at Camden Gardens to Royal College Street, then east to Camley Street, and finally to York Way.

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "Camden Highline urges us to broaden the horizons of what's possible within our cities and is exactly the sort of innovative, environmentally sustainable, and community-driven project which will inspire generations to come."

More: http://lei.sr/6u2s6_T

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UK

‘Tech-based green space’ for Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum in London, has embarked on a project which will turn the iconic museum's grounds into a biologically diverse green space.

The museum's five-acre site in South Kensington is being transformed into a welcoming and accessible green space, which will include new outdoor galleries.

As part of the Urban Nature Project, people will be able to learn about the diversity of life on Earth and how the planet is changing over time.

The galleries will also showcase the museum's scientific research.

At the heart of the project is a new data platform, which is being created for

the museum in partnership by global tech consultant, Thoughtworks, and Amazon Web Services (AWS).

The new Data Ecosystem will help accelerate the biodiversity monitoring already carried out by the museum. Built using AWS technologies and utilising the AWS Cloud, the museum can capture, store, combine and compare data in a “secure, resilient and scalable way”.

Richard Hinton, CIO, Natural History Museum, said: “The Urban Nature Project gives us the opportunity, through data, to advance research, to support education and help people to reassess humanity's impact on UK biodiversity.” More: http://lei.sr/G7Y3s_T



The NHM will feature new outdoor galleries

PHOTO: NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM/THOUGHTWORKS



PHOTO: LINKEDIN/RICHARD HINTON

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The Urban Nature Project utilises data to support education

Richard Hinton

US

VR in focus at first ever IAAPA North America Trade Summit



PHOTO: IAAPA

“

The event was a rare opportunity to learn from industry leaders

Michael Shelton

Attendees to IAAPA's first-ever North America Trade Summit heard about how the visitor attractions industry has evolved from a service economy into an experience economy.

The four-day event, which took place in San Diego recently, featured a keynote speech from George Walker, CEO of The League of Extraordinary Dining – a new company that merges themed design with experiential dining.

Walker outlined how the popularity of virtual reality is shifting into a desire for what he calls “authentic



League of Extraordinary Dining – Argonaut Bar Florida

PHOTO: ARGONAUT BAR FLORIDA

reality” – explaining how technology can enhance the guest experience, rather than driving it.

Other speakers included Erika Kohler, interim executive director, San Diego Zoo; Jim Lake, president, SeaWorld San Diego; and Troy Sacco, SVP of sales and marketing, Five Star Parks and Attractions.

“The first-ever IAAPA North America Trade Summit inspired all those who attended,” said Michael Shelton, vice president and executive director, IAAPA North America. “It was a rare opportunity to learn from industry leaders and connect with attraction suppliers.” More: http://lei.sr/J2T9Z_T

UK

£186m Factory International to ‘transform culture’

A £186m cultural centre, set to transform the arts scene globally, will open its doors in June this year. Factory International, based in Manchester UK, but with a global outreach, is the largest investment in a national cultural project in the UK since the opening of London’s Tate Modern in 2000.

The centre will house 13,350sq m of flexible floor area, utilising supersized moveable walls that can be used to reconfigure the space for different exhibitions and performances.

The cultural centre has been named after the Factory Records record-label which was founded by the late Tony Wilson in the 1980s

and launched local bands such as the Happy Mondays and Joy Division. Wilson also ran Manchester’s Hacienda nightclub.

Designed by OMA’s Ellen van Loon, Factory International is located near the former site of Granada Studios – where popular TV shows such as Coronation Street were filmed.

The centre forms part of the new St John’s cultural community which is being developed by Allied London. The building is owned by Manchester Quays, a partnership between Manchester City Council and Allied London.

Factory International will act as the permanent



The centre is located near the former Granada Studios Tour

PHOTO: MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

home for the Manchester International Festival (MIF) – which runs from 29 June to 16 July – and will be operated by the festival. The cultural space will open in October with a contemporary dance show.

More: http://lei.sr/K6M5v_T

“
The centre forms part of the St John’s project being developed by Allied London

NORWAY

Kongeparken embraces solar with solar install and eco rides



PHOTO: KONGEPARKEN

“
Our Zierer Wave Swinger will operate on 100 per cent solar energy
Hakon Lund

Norway’s largest theme park, Kongeparken, is investing heavily in solar energy, as it looks to power the park’s operations using more sustainable resources.

According to CEO, Hakon Lund, a third of the energy needed for the park will come from solar power by the end of this year (2023).

As part of its energy strategy, Kongeparken installed 1,100 solar panels on its land, ahead of the park’s opening.

The power generated by the panels will be used across all operations – from popcorn stands and concessions to



Solar energy will power a number of the park’s rides

PHOTO: KONGEPARKEN

large rides. The park’s Zierer Wave Swinger carousel, for example, will be operated entirely on solar energy – the first in the world to do so.

“We’re very excited to unveil our Zierer Wave Swinger, which will operate on 100 per cent solar energy,” Lund said, adding that the park will also focus on

promoting the need for more sustainable energy strategies.

“To raise awareness about the importance of green energy in tourism, Kongeparken will establish an information center showcasing the industry’s transition towards eco-friendly practices,” he said.

More: http://lei.sr/5N2b2_A

SCOTT O'NEIL

From a background in sports management, the new CEO of Merlin Entertainments has big plans for the world's second largest attractions group. Magali Robathan hears all about them



What got Merlin to where we are now is not going to get us to where we ultimately want to go

I sit down with Scott O'Neil, the new CEO of Merlin Entertainments, on a beautiful spring day in the company's office on London's South Bank. To get to their offices, I walk past a large queue of people waiting to board the lastminute.com London Eye, and a steady stream of families and visitors excitedly waiting to enter Merlin's Shrek's Adventure! London, The London Dungeon and Sea Life London Aquarium attractions.

"I heard a statistic that a quarter of tourists who come to London, visit a Merlin attraction," O'Neil tells me. "Isn't that amazing?"

After five months in the job, O'Neil is still at the stage of being amazed by the company he's leading – he's spent his first few months travelling around the world to visit as many of Merlin's attractions and meet as many staff as possible.

"I've probably hit between 40 and 50 attractions since I started," he tells me. "Everywhere I go, I'm like a kid in a candy store. My eyes are big – I'm just struck by the attractions, and the incredible, passionate people that work for this company. It's a special, spectacular place."

O'Neil took over as CEO from industry legend Nick Varney, who headed up Merlin for more than 23 years before retiring in November 2022. Since forming the company in 1999 along with Mark Fisher and a senior team from Vardon, Varney led the firm through the acquisition of the Tussauds Group, a number of major private equity deals and helped to grow it into the world's second largest theme park operator in the world after Disney.

"After I took the job, I met with Nick Varney and had a wonderful talk with him about his vision and how he built Merlin," says O'Neil. "It's an amazing story about growing a big, big business from a guy who's very smart, very creative, understands brands and had a big dream."

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Since O'Neil's appointment, Merlin has announced a number of new projects, including North America's second Peppa Pig Theme Park, which is due to open in north Texas in 2024; the construction of a £35m 150-lodge Legoland Holiday Village at Legoland Windsor; and a global partnership with Ferrari to develop immersive themed brand experiences at three Legoland theme parks. ▶

- ▶ In addition, three more Legoland Resorts are under construction in China – in Shanghai, Shenzhen and Sichuan, which are set to open from 2025.

Closer to home, Chessington World of Adventures Resort is preparing to launch its World of Jumanji land in May, featuring the world's first Jumanji-themed rollercoaster, as well as a further two rides. The result of a partnership with Sony Entertainment Pictures, it represents the single largest investment in the park's history.

"We're in a growth phase right now and we're very bullish about our future," says O'Neil. "When we last updated the market, we said trading is good, the US and the UK have been particularly strong. Asia's still got some recovery left, but Europe's been good, Australia is doing well. We're doing great.

"The combination of having the brands and the world needing escapism – if there's ever been an experience generation, this is it, and we're sitting right at the heart of it."

PHOTO: MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS



Shanghai Dungeon opened in 2018 – the first Dungeon in Asia



O'Neil describes Legoland California as "just extraordinary"



Trading in the US and UK have been very strong, says O'Neil

“Going through the COVID-19 pandemic was tough on CEOs

A NEW ERA

A US sports and entertainment industry veteran, O'Neil's career has seen him work for the NBA and MSG Sports. He was most recently CEO of HBSE, parent company for the Philadelphia 76ers basketball team and the New Jersey Devils ice hockey team.

During his time with HBSE, O'Neil helped build the business from a single team entity to a major sports and entertainment franchise.

“The last two places I've worked have been turnarounds,” O'Neil tells me. “Merlin is not a turnaround – it's a wonderful, world class business that does very well financially, but that notion of having a transformation mindset is something I've spent a lot of time thinking about.”

“What got Merlin to where we are now is probably not going to get us to where we ultimately want to go. A lot of my focus is on our strategy – how do we reset that? What's it going to look like?”

“The second thing I'm focusing on is taking a good look at the structure of the company, the people, the talent and where that sits. Thirdly, we're evaluating the estate. A lot of businesses were under financial pressure during the pandemic and when you're under

financial pressure you don't tend to put your foot on the gas and invest in the estate. A lot of assessment has gone into where we need to make our smartest and most prudent investments to stay top of the class.”

AN UNEXPECTED CALL

O'Neil left HBSE in July 2021 after eight years at the helm. “Going through the COVID-19 pandemic was very tough on CEOs,” he says. “A lot of us reassessed – I did. I took some time off, wrote a book, invested in some companies, sat on some boards, and spent a lot of time thinking about what I wanted to do, and what I wanted to be.”

“One day I got a call from a recruiter. She said, would you be interested in working for Merlin? I said I've never heard of it,” O'Neil laughs. “She said, Scott, why don't you Google the company and call me back. I called her back very quickly.”

What appealed to O'Neil about the role?

“When I left HBSE, I spent a lot of time thinking about the characteristics of a job that would have me popping out of bed in the morning, and I kept circling around the idea of people, purpose and scale,” he says.

“I want to work with people I like, love and respect, and that was an easy check for



Merlin's midway attractions include Madame Tussauds

- this job. As for purpose – is there any better purpose in life than bringing fun and helping people make memories? If COVID taught us anything, it taught us that we need connection, escapism and fun, and we need to be together. Merlin is a very purpose-driven organisation.
- “Finally, the scale is incredible. I'd never worked outside of the US, and I'd certainly never worked for a business with more than 140 attractions across 25 countries with 30,000 employees.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MERLIN?

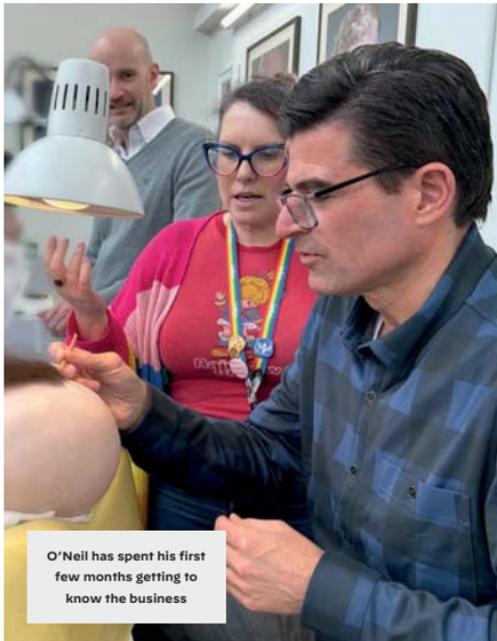
What are O'Neil's priorities for the business over the next year or two, I ask him.

“A lot of our emphasis will be on pricing, data, F&B and retail to make sure that those are four things we do at a world class level,” he says.

“It may not be as interesting as building a rollercoaster or doing the next deal with Sony Entertainment or Ferrari but these things are at the core of the business.”

In terms of pricing, O'Neil is keen to implement new ideas such as “a more sophisticated dynamic pricing model,” he tells me.

“The guest experience is hugely impacted by how many people are side by side with you. If you've been to an overcrowded theme park, you'd be hard pressed to say that it was as good an experience as if the numbers were regulated and one way to regulate that is with dynamic pricing.”



O'Neil has spent his first few months getting to know the business

Three new Legoland resorts
are being built in China



“

**We have some
resorts that are
just extraordinary.
I want that to be
the baseline**

Describing himself as a “bit of a data junkie,” O’Neil says another major focus is understanding more about Merlin’s customers and their preferences. “That will help us to understand what experiences we should be acquiring, enable us to custom-tailor our experiences for our visitors and encourage them to come back more often,” he says.

In terms of F&B, O’Neil says he’s focused on improving quality across the Merlin estate. “When someone I know goes to one of our parks and says they’ve had a great meal, I say, did you have a great meal for an attraction, or did you have a great meal?” he says.

“I don’t know why we can’t have extraordinary food – and we do in some of our attractions, but I think you’ll see a bit of an upgrade in the UK and Europe.”

BUILDING LEGOLAND

In terms of Merlin’s new Legoland theme parks in China – Legoland Shanghai Resort, Legoland Sichuan Resort, and Legoland Shenzhen Resort, O’Neil says: “It’s a complicated time to be building right now, with inflation, and it’s always complicated to be building in China, but it’s very exciting.”

I ask about how many Legoland theme parks O’Neil sees room for long-term – instead of giving me an answer, he tells me



World of Jumanji opens at Chessington World of Adventures in May

▶ that his focus is on ensuring the existing parks are as good as they can possibly be.

"We have some resorts that are just extraordinary – Legoland California, Legoland Billund Resort and Legoland Deutschland – and I'd love for that to be the baseline," he says. "It's a bit too early to say what that actually feels like and looks like, but I do want to raise the overall guest experience."

RESORT THEME PARKS AND MIDWAY ATTRACTIONS

As for the resort theme parks division, O'Neil says there'll be investment across the estate in order to bring all the parks up to the level of the best of them.

When *Attractions Management* interviewed Nick Varney two years ago, he said the strategy was to encourage visitors from further afield to stay for two or three days when they visit a Merlin theme park, by offering accommodation and adding second gates. Is that still the case, I ask O'Neil?

"Very similar," says O'Neil. "Nick said bring them back for more days, I say invest in more data. It's the same thing, said in different ways. I think the way to do that is not to build new rollercoasters – although we'll definitely be doing that – it's through understanding our customers' preferences and who they are and what they want."

And finally, the focus with the midway attractions is on growth. Using London as a

model – a gateway city that's hugely popular with tourists and where Merlin can cross-sell multiple attractions – the plan is to highlight a number of other gateway cities where the company can build more branded attractions.

"London is a wonderful model," says O'Neil.

"I'm trying to figure out other cities where we can build what we've got here. I can't tell you where we're looking yet, but it's going to be good."

As for the longer term, O'Neil says, "I can speak with certainty about where we'll be in five years. This will be the greatest place to work in the world. Some companies are laying off – we're not, we're hiring. We're in a growth phase.

"More brand partners will enter the experience economy, which is great for us – Lego, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Ferrari – there'll be more of those reaching out to us asking us to bring their brands to life. They're already calling.

"We'll also be bigger in more gateway cities and our resorts will be top of the heap. You're going to see us take off like a rocket ship." ●



World of Jumanji Chessington World of Adventures Resort

Opening in Q2 2023 at Chessington World of Adventures Resort in Surrey, UK, the £17m World of Jumanji land will feature the world's only Jumanji-themed rollercoaster, Mandrill Mayhem, plus two more rides – Mamba Strike and Ostrich Stampede.

The £17m World of Jumanji marks the world's first themed land for the popular Jumanji film franchise and is the single largest investment in the history of Chessington.

At the heart of the new area is the Jaguar Shrine which, at 55ft tall, 'Keeps a watchful eye out over all who enter as it awaits the return of the curse-lifting Jaguar's Eye jewel.'

World of Jumanji is the result of Merlin's multi-territory exclusivity agreement with Jumanji IP owner, Sony Pictures Entertainment

The agreement will see a range of experiences being built across Merlin's resort theme parks and waterparks in Europe (including the UK) and North America.

The deal forms part of Merlin's broader global strategy to engage and work with leading IP and brands across its global estate.

Sony has described the partnership as a "pivotal step" in the studio's larger global strategy to grow and expand location-based entertainment."

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/GMAS



Merlin plans to develop clusters of attractions in other world cities, as it has in London

RECKONING *with* HISTORY



The Horniman Museum and Gardens has become the first publicly-funded UK museum to return artefacts stolen from The Kingdom of Benin. Meanwhile, a ground-breaking project is digitally uniting globally dispersed Benin treasures for the first time. Magali Robathan learns more



The Horniman Museum made a policy decision to repatriate its Benin Bronzes

In November 2022, the Digital Benin project was launched in Berlin, providing an online platform that brings together more than 5,200 artefacts looted by British forces during the 1897 raid on Benin City. More than 131 museums from 20 countries have worked together to create the digital platform, which allows the public to view objects, historical photographs and documentation material from collections worldwide.

A week later, the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London gave the Nigerian authorities back six looted artefacts – the first of 72 pieces set to be repatriated after the Horniman’s trustees agreed that the transfer of ownership was the ‘moral and appropriate’ response to a request from Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM).

Other institutions, including the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art in Washington DC, recently returned stolen Benin treasures, but the Horniman Museum is the first publicly-funded UK museum to do so.

A TIPPING POINT

The repatriation was marked as a “significant moment in time for the museum sector in the UK,” by director of the Museums Association Sharon Heal.

“As the Horniman’s director Nick Merriman said, we are at a tipping point in terms of restitution and our work to understand and interpret the connection between our institutions and collections and the British empire,” Heal said.

Here *Attractions Management* talks to Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhatator-Obogie, project research lead at Digital Benin, and Horniman Museum CEO Nick Merriman about the future for the treasures stolen from Benin, as well as the wider issues around the repatriation of cultural artefacts stolen from their countries of origin as part of colonisation and war. ▶

“

If you continue to keep these objects in Western museums, and allow those museums to tell their story, you're telling the Western story. People should be able to tell their own story and the story of their objects

Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhatator-Obogie

Project research lead, Digital Benin



Research lead Osaisonor Godfrey Ekhatator-Obogie

PHOTO: OSAISONOR GODFREY EKHATOR-OBOGIE



PHOTO: FRANKHOUBRY SMITHSONIAN

One of the Benin Bronzes returned by the Smithsonian

What is the aim of Digital Benin?

The aim of the project is to create a catalogue that's able to show in one place the displaced Benin Bronzes that were looted in 1897 and globally distributed between 1897 and 1930. The majority of these cultural objects are now in European and American museums.

By the close of the 20th century it was very difficult to say categorically where these objects were, and how many of them were in museums across the world. Digital Benin aims to help provide an answer to this long-standing question.

What does this project mean to you personally?

As a Benin man, I grew up learning about the invasion of The Kingdom of Benin and the looting of these cultural treasures, but I'd never had the opportunity to interact with them.

This platform has given me the opportunity to really appreciate these treasures – to learn from them and use them as a resource for education and research.

What have you learned from working on this project?

Before Digital Benin, I didn't realise how far beyond Britain the circulation of these objects had gone – to 20 countries across the world.

These treasures are veritable sources of history about our civilisation and our development over time before colonisation. While studying them, I begin to appreciate the fact that of all the pre-colonial sources of history about the Benin Kingdom, these artefacts are the most reliable. Every bronze plaque is a page in the history of Benin. That was an amazing lesson for me.



The Cleveland Museum of Art is one of 131 institutions that took part in the project

What do you think should happen to these treasures now?

The ownership of all the looted objects obtained in questionable circumstances should be given to Benin and to Nigeria from where they were stolen. Once they've been returned to their rightful owners, Western museums and institutions can enter into professional collaborations so that they can exhibit some of them on loan.

These treasures are ambassadors for Benin – it's important for us, the Benin people, that ownership is returned to their rightful owners, but some of them should remain in museums as representatives of Benin.

If you continue to keep these objects in Western museums, and those museums continue to tell their story, you're telling a Western story. People should tell their own stories and the stories of their objects.

DIGITAL BENIN

The result of a two year, €1.5m international research project funded by the Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation, Digital Benin brings together objects, historical photographs and documentation material from collections worldwide to provide a comprehensive database of the royal artefacts looted from The Kingdom of Benin (now Edo State, Nigeria) in 1897 and distributed around the world.

Connecting digital documentation about the looted objects to oral histories, object research, historical context, a foundational Edo language catalogue, provenance names, a map of the Kingdom of Benin and museum collections worldwide. Digital Benin connects data from 5,246 objects across 131 institutions in 20 countries.

More: www.digitalbenin.org

Some argue that artefacts should remain in Western museums because they may be better able to preserve them. How do you respond?

This was a late 20th century argument from European and American museum professionals. Now scholars have come to realise that before these objects were looted, they were very safe. Also, these objects were not produced as museum objects, they were created as functional objects within a living culture. They can't be better preserved in Western museums – in a society where they have no cultural value – than in a society where they are meaningful and significant.

What advice do you have for museums grappling with these issues?

Digital Benin has helped bring a sense of transparency to the museum world; it has shown that there's a tendency among museum professionals to approach this debate with openness.

If we follow this approach, it will be a win-win for both the countries of origin and for Western museums.



An ivory and lead leopard's head currently held at the Hunt Museum in Ireland

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Before we made the decision to return the bronzes, we had instances of visitors being upset about the display of looted objects

Nick Merriman

Chief executive and content director, Horniman Museum and Gardens



Nick Merriman has been CEO since 2018

PHOTO: HORNIMAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS

► The Horniman is returning its Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. How did you arrive at this decision?

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria wrote to the Horniman in January 2022 to request the return of the objects that had been looted from Benin City by British forces in February 1897. After detailed research and widespread consultation, the trustees agreed to the request in July 2022. In many ways it was a straightforward decision in that our Restitution and Repatriation Policy determines that objects may be returned if they were taken by force, and these clearly were. What took the time was to hear a wide range of views from different stakeholders, and pinning down exactly which objects were in scope. Our research eventually showed that 72 of the Horniman's objects came from the looting.

The Horniman is the first UK museum funded by the government to agree to return looted artefacts to Nigeria. Should other museums follow suit?

The material taken from Benin City in 1897 was clearly looted and the Horniman trustees (endorsed by the Charity Commission) felt there was a moral case for return. However, each museum

is differently constituted and has different governance. Some of the national museums have primary legislation; others are governed as part of a university or a local authority; and there's different legislation in different countries of the UK.

The Horniman, although government-funded, is constituted as a charity and its regulator is the Charity Commission. So, each museum has a different set of circumstances in which it has to work. Some university museums have already repatriated objects or have announced that they will, as have Glasgow Museums.

It's difficult to generalise about repatriation as a whole, as every situation is different, both in terms of the context of the museum, and the circumstances of the particular object or objects in question. That is why all the professional guidance is to proceed on a case-by-case basis.

The largest diaspora local to the Horniman is people of Nigerian origin





The transfer of ownership ceremony took place in November 2022

You ran workshops and invited feedback from schoolchildren and the local community. What came out of this?

The largest diaspora group local to the Horniman is people of Nigerian origin. We wanted to ask whether they felt we should keep the objects where they are so that they could bring their children to learn about the great Kingdom of Benin. They unanimously said that, as they were stolen, they should be returned. They felt we could then ask for some objects to come back on loan for display.

We also consulted people who have membership of the Horniman. Although there was a minority feeling that 'you can't change history' and they should remain, again the consensus was that they should go back on moral grounds, with a subsequent request to borrow some items back.

What reactions have you had from visitors to the Benin Bronzes?

Before we made the decision to return the bronzes, we did get instances of visitors being upset about the display of looted objects. Research amongst non-visitors also showed that some were disinclined to visit the Horniman because of its associations with empire. We trained our visitor hosts to listen and respond by talking about our plans.

How do you respond to the argument that artefacts should remain in Western museums because they may be better able to preserve them?

I'm uncomfortable with these arguments. If somebody steals your car, imagine if they said they would only give it back if you could show you're a good driver. We need to work in partnership with colleagues in non-Western museums to build capacity in skills and infrastructure.

How do you respond to the argument that returning these artefacts will leave Western museums empty?

There's absolutely no evidence to support this. Those few returns that have already been made



PHOTO: HORNIMAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS

The Horniman Museum and Gardens has agreed to return ownership of 72 Benin Bronzes to Nigeria

have not been followed up by large numbers of further requests. The Horniman has over 300,000 objects, and we are returning 72.

Are you concerned that visitors will miss out on the chance to view examples of craftsmanship from Benin?

We already have some replica pieces that we use in schools handling sessions, but we hope that in due course Nigerian colleagues will agree to lend us back a proportion of the objects for display in a new permanent exhibition.

What do you see as the biggest challenges and opportunities for museums in relation to the issue of the repatriation of artefacts?

The biggest challenges for museums are to determine what material could or should be open to repatriation. The Benin Bronzes were actually quite easy in that no-one disputes that they were looted. In many other cases it's not so clear-cut. The biggest opportunities are around building long-term partnership relationships with colleagues and institutions in other countries. ●

Merritt founded the Center for the Future of Museums in 2008



PHOTO: AMERICAN ALLIANCE OF MUSEUMS



During the lockdowns, a video of Wellington the penguin watching the belugas got 93,000 views on YouTube

ELIZABETH MERRITT

Since 2015, the VP and founding director of the Center for the Future of Museums has been tracking the sector in an annual *TrendsWatch* publication. She tells Magali Robathan about this year's biggest trends and how to capitalise on them



PHOTO: BRENNA HERNANDEZ

Museums have a superpower –
they're one of the most trusted
sources of information and
that trust is non-partisan

As a futurist, how do you support museums?

I create little temporal anomalies that give museum people a glimpse into what the world might be like, decades hence. That sounds very sci-fi, but it's a pretty good summary of what a futurist does.

What does your role involve on a day-to-day basis?

In day-to-day practice, this involves teaching, forecasting and research. I teach museum people the skills of foresight, starting with a basic awareness of the fact that decisions about long-term organisations, such as museums, need to be made in the context of envisioning long-term futures. What challenges will face their community in 10, 20, or 50 years? What changes will they need to navigate?

Realising that not every museum person has the time to become a futurist, I do some of the groundwork – identifying important trends, creating scenarios that describe worlds museums might inhabit in coming decades, and asking critical questions.

To fuel this work I unearth the information museums need to inform their foresight. That

sometimes requires conducting research, whether that's on public expectations of museums, or trends in museum practice.

What do you see as the most important trends highlighted in this year's TrendsWatch?

Two of the trends this year illustrate the power museums have to help create a better world for all of us. The term 'existential crisis' has been overworked in the past few years, but I think it's warranted when applied to the current levels of partisanship in the US. Some historians and political analysts fear for the future of our democracy, even as we approach the semiquincentennial (250 years).

Museums have a superpower that can help us tackle this wicked problem: they are one of the most trusted sources of information in America (ranked second only to friends and family), and that trust is non-partisan. I think it's entirely possible we might look back in 100 years and recognise that museums played a significant role in holding our country together through difficult times, by helping people understand and become more tolerant of other points of view. ▶

- ▶ The second trend I think has culturally transformative potential is the pivot towards reparative practice. Museums can play a significant role in shifting the dialogue in America from what the law demands to a values-based approach to reparations and restitution for descendant communities.

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of technologies in the museum sector. What does this mean for the future?

Museums are, overall, slow to adopt new technologies and new practices. Prior to 2020, relatively few museums implemented practical digital applications – such as business analytics, advanced ticketing and variable pricing – that were transforming for-profit practice.

The pandemic lit a fire under the field, as directors realised these tools weren't just shiny new toys, they were potential lifesavers.

Going forward, I hope we'll see a broader appreciation of how an integrated digital strategy can make museums more resilient and successful.

What other lasting impacts is the pandemic having on the museum sector?

Public appetite for digital content has ballooned since the start of the pandemic and many museums have expanded the size and diversity of their audience via digital programming. This has presented opportunities, but also threats.

It's clear digital can be an effective medium to deliver meaningful content and can have a wider impact on the world and so if museums

can solve the thorny problem of monetising digital offerings, it could add a whole new income stream to the bottom line.

However, in terms of threats, will school attendance ever rebound, especially now more teachers are aware of the rich trove of online museum content and the convenience of digital field trips?

Even pre-pandemic, the rising cost of transportation and decreasing tolerance for risk had already begun to threaten the traditional school field trip.

What are the challenges for museums in attracting and retaining staff? What trends are impacting the workplace?

The US is still in an incredibly tight labour market and that's teaching us all a great deal about what it means to be a good employer, as workers can vote with their feet if they're unhappy.

For the most part, successful practices for attracting and retaining staff are the same for

Individually and collectively,
museums are waking up
to the power they have
to shape the future

Visitors put on virtual reality goggles to enter the Kremer Museum



The Philbrook Museum acquired 'Equestrian Portrait of Philip IV' by artist Kehinde Wiley who champions diversity

nonprofit and for-profit employers: flexibility of working conditions, equitable pay and benefits and pathways to advancement. And, of course, creating a healthy workplace culture, including good communications, fair treatment, and mechanisms for meaningful input.

This might mean a change in the allocation of resources, as museums may have to devote more of their budget to human resources as they commit to paying a living wage and providing critical benefits such as parental leave.

One of the biggest challenges to improving museum jobs is getting over the baggage that comes with nonprofit employment, including the expectation that people are prepared to sacrifice pay for the opportunity to do what they love. Maybe one bright spot from the pandemic will be that the disruption of our assumptions about work will free us to create more equitable jobs.

What positive trends are you seeing?

I think the most positive trend in the museum sector over the past century is a shift in its core identity – both in how museums see themselves, and how they're seen by their communities.

Rather than narrowly identifying themselves by what they do (collect, preserve, interpret), museums increasingly define themselves by the ways in which they can change the world.

In the course of a dozen years of writing *TrendsWatch*, I've documented museums combatting climate change, supporting people who are homeless, advocating for criminal justice reform and fostering empathy. This cause-based work is rooted in their core strengths, but deploys those strengths to meet the needs of their communities.

Individually and collectively, museums are waking up to the power they have to shape the future. ●

BUILDING THE FUTURE

The latest edition of *TrendsWatch* from the American Alliance of Museums examines the forces shaping the museum sector and helps museum professionals plan ahead. We take a look

Museums, as prominent symbols of civic life, can all too easily become pawns in partisan quarrels

Shedd Aquarium penguins visiting the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago



Cleveland Museum took part in the Digital Benin repatriation initiative, see p40



Following the profoundly disruptive events caused by COVID-19, the museums sector is taking stock.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has published its 2023 *TrendsWatch* report, highlighting the forces shaping the museum sector in the context of broader changes in society, helping to inform planning and identify opportunities.

As AAM VP Elizabeth Merritt says in her introduction, "Museums face a long road to recovery, but they can learn from each other the best ways to rebuild attendance, stabilise finances, and attend to the damage staff and volunteers experienced. These good practices can help museums prosper in the post-pandemic future."

The report identified four key trends affecting museums right now:

1. THE FUTURE WORKPLACE

As the world shut down in 2020, unemployment in the US soared to its highest rate since the government started keeping records in 1948.

The pandemic labour exodus struck the non-profit sector particularly hard, and as the world reopened for business, the shortage only got worse. In AAM's 2021 *National Snapshot of COVID-19 Impact on US Museums*, directors anticipated that one of the biggest disruptions of 2022 would be labour and skills shortages.

This labour shortage stems in part from the terrible toll the pandemic has taken on staff. In the past three years museum workers experienced

stress and burnout paralleling that of their non-profit and for-profit colleagues. Over 40 per cent lost income, and nearly half experienced increased workload – with the heaviest burden falling on BIPOC staff and women. Stress and burnout may have been exacerbated by the pressure museums felt to innovate their way out of the pandemic.

These pressures are leading many museums to think about how they can create better, more supportive and more equitable workplaces.

Museums might...

- Evaluate how they can improve pay and benefits.
- Consider how compensation practices reflect an organisation's values, particularly regarding equity, fairness and transparency. A growing number of museums are explicitly setting a cap on the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid positions.
- Follow the lead of organisations in the non-profit sector that are offering flexible and hybrid work schedules or full-time remote work.
- Improve workplace culture – communications, mechanisms for meaningful input, sharing responsibility and power and reducing unfair treatment at work (one of the biggest contributors to burnout).
- Create pathways to advancement and provide leadership training in order to keep people in the field.
- Revisit assumptions about degree requirements.

PHOTO: FRANCO KHOURY SMITHSONIAN



PHOTO: FRANCO KHOURY SMITHSONIAN



The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art has returned Benin Bronzes

▶ 2. A DIGITAL (R)EVOLUTION

Sometimes a disruptive event can transform the world by magnifying the importance of what already exists. Over the past 20 years, digital technologies reshaped the world with bewildering speed, transforming how people engage with entertainment, shopping, education, work and socialising. The pandemic has turbocharged that pace of change.

The museum sector has always been cautious about adopting new practices and technologies, preferring, on the whole, to let others go first and see what works. But during the financial disruptions of COVID-19, digital practices were often essential to museum's survival.

The past three years turned into a vast, unplanned experiment in testing audience appetite for engaging with museums via digital pathways.

Museums might...

- Create a digital strategy that establishes a vision and goals for how digital in a broad sense can contribute to the work of the museum.
- Invest in content creation in tandem with developing digital channels.
- Audit current digital assets and assess whether and how they contribute to the museum's operations and strategy.
- Evaluate the preferences and appetite of current and potential audiences for online participation, the potential for the museum to reach a broader segment of the public locally and internationally, and the business plan for serving these audiences.

The past three years turned into a vast, unplanned experiment in testing audience appetite for engaging with museums via digital pathways

- Identify how digital can contribute materially to financial stability through direct income for products and services, by optimising operations or by enhancing staff productivity.
- Create a staff development plan for digital literacy.

3. THE PARTISAN DIVIDE

Museums, as prominent symbols of civic life, can all too easily become pawns in partisan quarrels. Unfortunately, museums and allied sectors are beginning to get caught up in a new wave of politically-funded culture wars.

In addition to uproars over specific exhibits, books or statements, a broader risk arises when a sector is perceived as inherently partisan. The museum field skews significantly to the left, with 69 per cent of people working in the US museum sector identifying as somewhat or very liberal compared to one quarter of the public. These political differences may become relevant as



museums come under pressure to take positions on issues – whether directly related to their mission or of importance to society generally.

Currently, going to museums is a nonpartisan activity, and museums are trusted across the political spectrum. As such, museums can play an important role in bridging the partisan divide, using their existing superpower of trust to help build bridges and foster tolerance and inclusive attitudes.

Museums might...

- Engage in actions likely to strengthen democratic attitudes, building on research about successful interventions.
- Explicitly encompass political diversity in their commitment to DEAI (diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion – www.attractionsmanagement.com/DEAI), ensuring that staff with diverse political values feel able to express that identity at work.
- Provide free access to information that is being censored in other spheres.
- Encourage voter participation.

4. REPATRIATIONS, RESTITUTIONS AND REPARATIONS

Collections lie at the heart of museums, and values regarding the ownership and control of collections are central to museum ethics. As we look towards the future of the sector, it's vital to acknowledge that the field is at a tipping point where these values are radically shifting.

Epic shifts in standards and practices are being validated by global, national and institutional examples. The landmark report *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage* in 2018, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron, prompted museums around the globe to

reconsider their positions on the repatriation of material looted from Benin in the 19th century. In 2022 the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) released a report sparked by the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, advocating a proactive approach to the return of cultural property.

In the US, the Smithsonian Institution is leading the way, revising its policies to allow shared ownership and the return of objects for ethical rather than legal reasons. In October 2022, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art transferred ownership of 22 Benin Bronzes to the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria.

Museums might...

- Start by ensuring the museum is in compliance with all current local, national and international law. Review collections and establish a process for flagging any objects with unclear provenance or that might be subject to legal claims for repatriation.
- Engage the board and staff in discussing the following questions:
 1. Where does the organisation currently lie on a spectrum of action that encompasses legal compliance, voluntary repatriation of collections, and repatriations for damage inflicted by the museum or by society?
 2. How might the museum work productively with communities and individuals who self-identify as having a moral, cultural or legal claim to collections?
 3. Where is there agreement, or disagreement, on the values that should guide the museum's decisions regarding ownership and control of cultural heritage? ●

More: www.attractionsmanagement.com/TW23



Shanghai Disney Resort
opened in 2016, following
Hong Kong Disneyland

新时代

(NEW ERA)

China is now the second largest market for theme parks globally. A new report from McKinsey sheds light on this fast-changing sector

Driven by strong consumer enthusiasm, China's theme park industry has transformed considerably over the past few decades, with hundreds of local players tapping into a rapidly growing market.

International brands with strong intellectual property have upped the game, and by the end of 2021, three new international theme parks had opened in China including Disneyland Shanghai and Hong Kong, and Universal Studios Beijing.

The market has huge potential – McKinsey's latest report, titled *China's theme parks face a new era*, (www.attractionsmanagement.com/McKinseyChina) suggests that only 27 per cent of China's population has ever visited a theme park, less than half the average for developed markets, at 68 per cent. And the market size could more than double from RMB40bn (£4.7bn, \$5.8bn, E5.2bn) in 2019, to over RMB90bn (£10.5bn, \$131bn, E11.9bn) by the end of 2025.

The challenges

Even before COVID19-related restrictions, only half of the country's parks turned a profit. During the pandemic, theme park attendance declined globally – theme parks had to comply with attendance caps, limits on individual rides, and a ban on indoor performances. Some theme parks shut down and those that remained open saw sharp drops in visitor numbers. Parks in Shanghai and Beijing closed for a few months, but visitor

numbers rebounded quickly after reopening, with some theme parks hosting events.

Given the highly competitive environment, volatility due to COVID-19, and the fact that visitors are looking for new experiences after lockdowns, operators may have work to do to capture market share. But the good news is that there's still enormous potential in the market, says McKinsey.

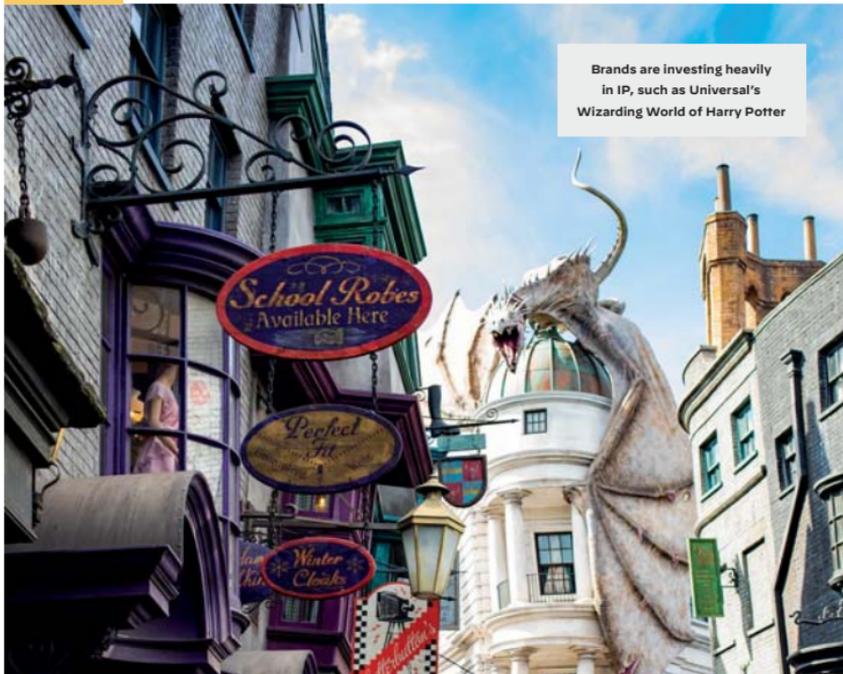
Despite pressure from leading international operators such as Legoland, Universal Studios, and Disneyland, local operators such as Happy Valley, Fantawild, and Chimelong are likely to draw more visitors than international brands. Leading local operators attract the majority of visitors thanks to the sheer size of their portfolios, number of chains, and their broad geographical coverage. In 2019, 81 per cent of visitors chose local operators. It's expected that by 2025, local theme parks will serve around 70 to 75 per cent of visitors.

Looking ahead, a number of trends are shaping visitor expectations according to the report:

1. New experiences can draw repeat customers

During COVID-19, trips around hometown cities became the first choice for leisure travel. A McKinsey survey of Chinese tourist attitudes revealed that nearly half of consumers said their first choice for travel would be a short trip to a new destination and over 80 per cent of consumers said they preferred short breaks of one or two nights. ▶

Brands are investing heavily in IP, such as Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter



▶ Operators can stay relevant by updating their offering regularly and integrating entertainment and events to provide repeat visitors with new experiences. For example, the Disney characters dressed in traditional Chinese Hanfu attire to celebrate the Spring Festival in Shanghai soon captured visitors' attention and became a trending topic on social media, gaining over 20 million views on TikTok. And when Chengdu Happy Valley launched its Dunhuang-themed event, cosplayers and influencers arrived in Bodhisattva and Feitian costumes, creating a hype on social media with over 1.5 million views on TikTok.

2. Digitisation is enhancing theme park experiences

Consumers are increasingly looking for interactive and immersive storytelling experiences, not just rides. Operators are now introducing wearable devices as well as AR and VR technology to elevate the in-park experience.

Super Nintendo World at Universal Studios in Japan allows guests to play video games in real life, throughout the park. Players wear tracking devices and collect coins with interactive coin blocks and mini-games throughout the area, and can check their real-time ranking via mobile app.

3. Social media experiences are promoting engagement

COVID-19 pushed people to spend more time online – now short-form videos and livestreaming have become the top online entertainment options. These categories have seen exponential growth, and in the first half of 2022, short videos accounted for 30 per cent of mobile internet use time in China.

As a result, theme park operators are doubling down on social content. When Disneyland Shanghai premiered LinaBell through a promotional video and influencer/celebrity endorsements, the character quickly became ubiquitous online. LinaBell-related hashtags gathered an estimated 940 million views on Weibo and 200 million views on TikTok, drawing visitors to the park (www.attractionsmanagement.com/linabell).

4. Greenfield parks need a strong IP

While new theme park developments provide an opportunity to introduce something original to the market, they're capital-intensive and take at least five years from initial planning to launch – often longer.

To help ensure their success, they need a strong brand identity or IP, a unique product concept based on consumer insight and innovative technology so the park retains its 'wow factor'.



PHOTO: DISNEY

5. Build a strong identity based on IP

Global brands have invested heavily in IP, often over many years and such success can be difficult to emulate, so operators looking to use an IP could take a partnership approach, with the IP owner supervising the conceptual design phase and staying involved until construction is complete, so the end product aligns with the storyline.

Examples of IP-related partnerships include Haichang Ocean Park in Shanghai adding an Ultraman-themed pavilion to its offering, including a theatre, restaurant, and entertainment centre with interactive facilities. Global examples include Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Orlando and Pandora – The World of Avatar at Disney's Animal Kingdom.

For operators without their own IP, the brand itself can become a key element in building a strong identity. For example, Chimelong built nationwide brand awareness with its Guangdong theme park complex, that includes an animal park, amusement park, waterpark, ocean park and circus.

6. Deliver a unique concept

Concepts should be developed with reference to consumer insights to ensure the end product provides a unique experience consumers want.

“The market has huge potential. Only 27 per cent of China’s population has ever visited a theme park”

Leading operators incorporate consumer perspectives early on, for example, by drawing on a design-thinking process or running ‘innovation garage’ initiatives to test concepts with consumers and then adjusting and optimising the product design accordingly.

7. Think two steps ahead

Keeping abreast of recent tech developments is key to ensuring the visitor experience will be exciting, easy to navigate, and on-trend.

Examples include VR/AR devices and RFID systems which can be used to create immersive experiences and ensure a seamless customer journey. ▶

“To boost customer retention, operators can increase efforts to build long-term relationships with their customers and keep them engaged”

- ▶ For example, Universal Studios' Super Nintendo World features a Mario Kart-themed ride including AR headsets for an immersive experience. Other operators are creating customised solutions for visitor identification, including wearable devices and mobile apps, for more frictionless ticketless experience.

8. Elevating brownfield theme parks

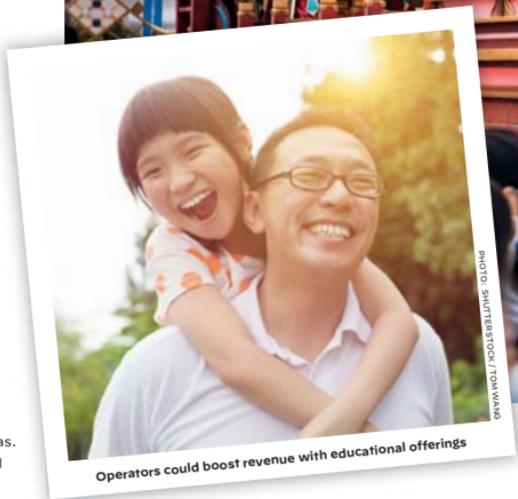
For operators looking to elevate established parks, it's critical to understand the value-creation process right across the customer journey, from visitor acquisition and value conversion (including ticket sales, and non-ticket sales), to customer retention.

In terms of visitor acquisition, local operators often invest in one-size-fits-all mass marketing campaigns through traditional and offline media, such as TV, newspapers and outdoor advertising.

Considering the increase in consumers' time spent online, operators could instead invest in online presence – and use customer insights to tailor messages to different segments and personas. Operators could also consider stimulating demand by promoting holidays or events that fall outside peak periods and by creating themed events that cater to local interest. They could also collaborate with partners, across industries, to reach new customers – for example, Universal Studios Beijing leveraged Tencent's Honor of Kings mobile game to attract gamers by holding themed events at the park.

9. Growing revenue from ticket sales

To grow revenue from ticket sales, operators could consider taking a tailored approach to travel agency management. Travel agencies accounted for around 45 per cent of Chinese tourism bookings in 2019. Theme parks may be able to manage these sales in a more efficient manner.



Operators could boost revenue with educational offerings

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/TOM WANG

Local online shopping channels and apps such as Meituan (www.meituan.com) are gaining traction too. Theme parks can partner to better leverage these online platforms' capabilities when it comes to planning and executing marketing campaigns.

Although use of direct-to-consumer channels by visitor attractions operators is on the rise, they have generally been under-utilised when compared to other industries, such as retail.

These online shopping channels could be more effective in gaining traction with consumers than operators' official brand websites and mobile apps, says McKinsey.



Universal Studios Beijing attracts gamers with Honor of Kings shows and events

10. Boosting non-ticket revenue

Operators can increase non-ticket revenue, which accounts for between 30 and 40 per cent of total income for industry leaders, but usually makes up less than 20 per cent of revenue for local operators.

To do this, McKinsey advocates operators develop more premium experiences, including VIP tours, backstage passes, fast passes and exclusive services.

They could also provide edutainment in the form of tailored offerings for families, designed around educating and entertaining children. These offerings are relatively new in the market.

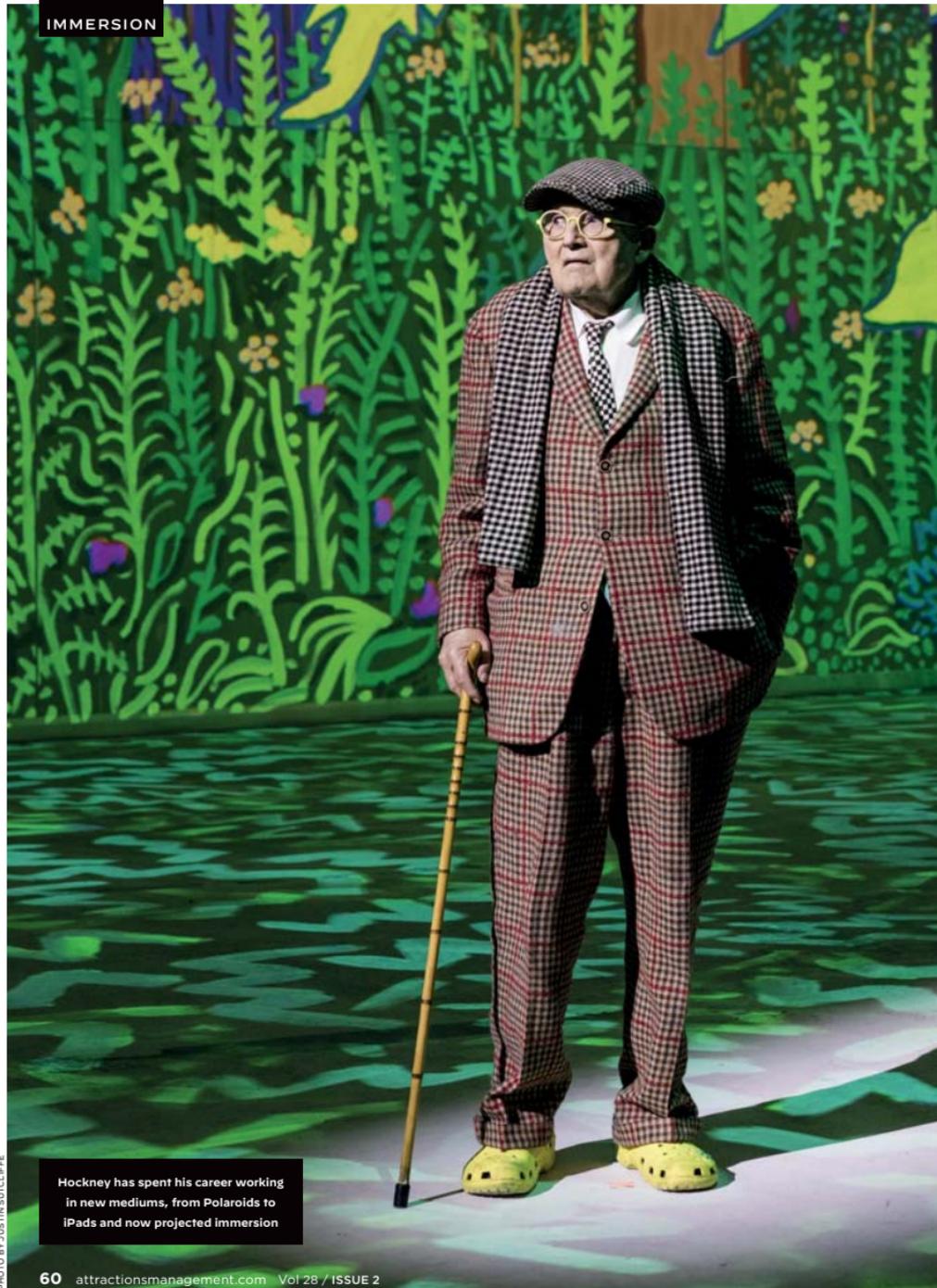
Festivals, holidays, and special occasions also create the opportunity to boost non-ticket revenues through the sale of special dining experiences, costumes and limited-edition merchandise.

11. Improving customer retention

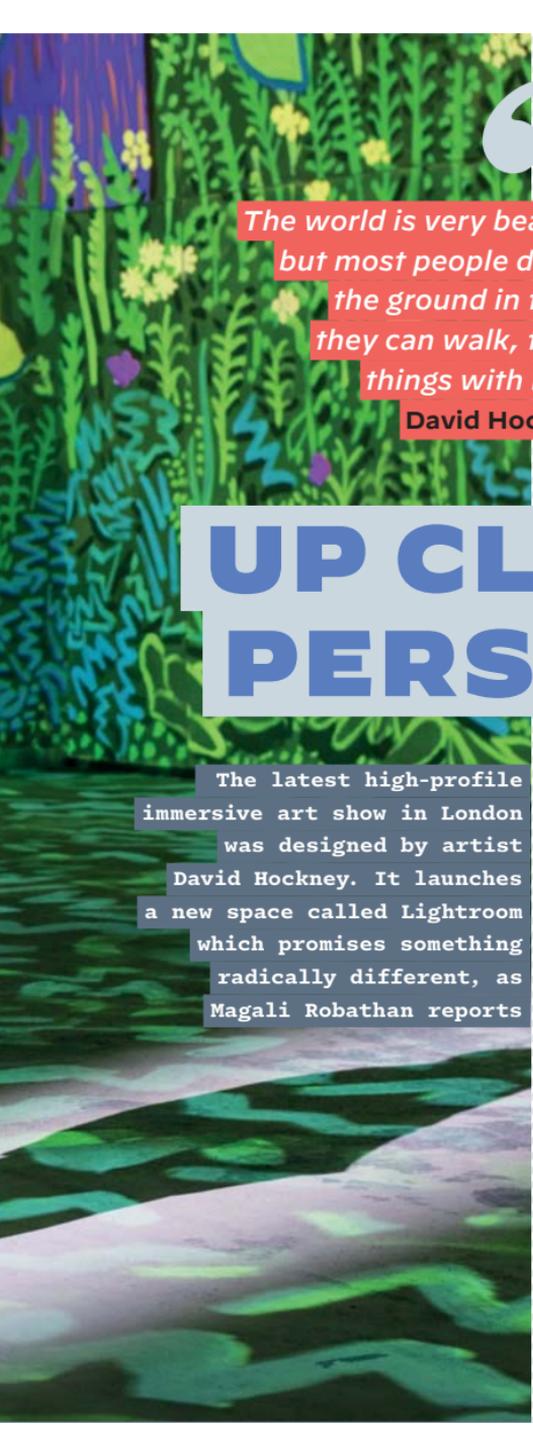
To boost retention, operators can increase efforts to build long-term relationships with customers and keep them engaged – inside and outside the park.

Touchpoints outside park help keep the brand top of mind. For example, Universal Studios partnered with Nintendo to provide a wearable power-up band to visitors. This is more than an in-park accessory, it's a Nintendo amiibo with game characters that can be connected to Nintendo consoles for at-home use, extending the park experience (www.nintendo.com/amiibo/detail/power-up-band).

Customer retention can also be improved by a tiered annual pass that meets different needs. For example, a weekday pass can cater for visitors with more flexible schedules. ●



Hockney has spent his career working in new mediums, from Polaroids to iPads and now projected immersion



“

The world is very beautiful if you look at it, but most people don't look, they scan the ground in front of them so they can walk, they don't look at things with intensity. I do

David Hockney, artist

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

The latest high-profile immersive art show in London was designed by artist David Hockney. It launches a new space called Lightroom which promises something radically different, as Magali Robathan reports

David Hockney has launched a new projection-led art show in London's Kings Cross, taking visitors on a journey through his art and life.

Immersive art shows have become hugely popular over the past few years, with high profile touring exhibitions celebrating the likes of Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo and Gustav Klimt. This one – which is the launch show for new artist-led, interactive art space Lightroom – is different because the artist is still alive and the exhibition was actually designed by him.

Talking to *The New York Times* about the trend for immersive arts shows, Hockney said: “They're dead. I'm a living artist, so I've come in and actually done things.”

Hockney's exhibition treats the four-storey Lightroom venue as a backdrop for projections of his art onto the walls and at times the floor, featuring some of his most famous artworks, as well as lesser-known pieces. The projections and documentary films are accompanied by commentary by Hockney, in which he explains his process and approach to art and by soaring music written specially for the show by American contemporary classical composer Nico Muhly. ▶

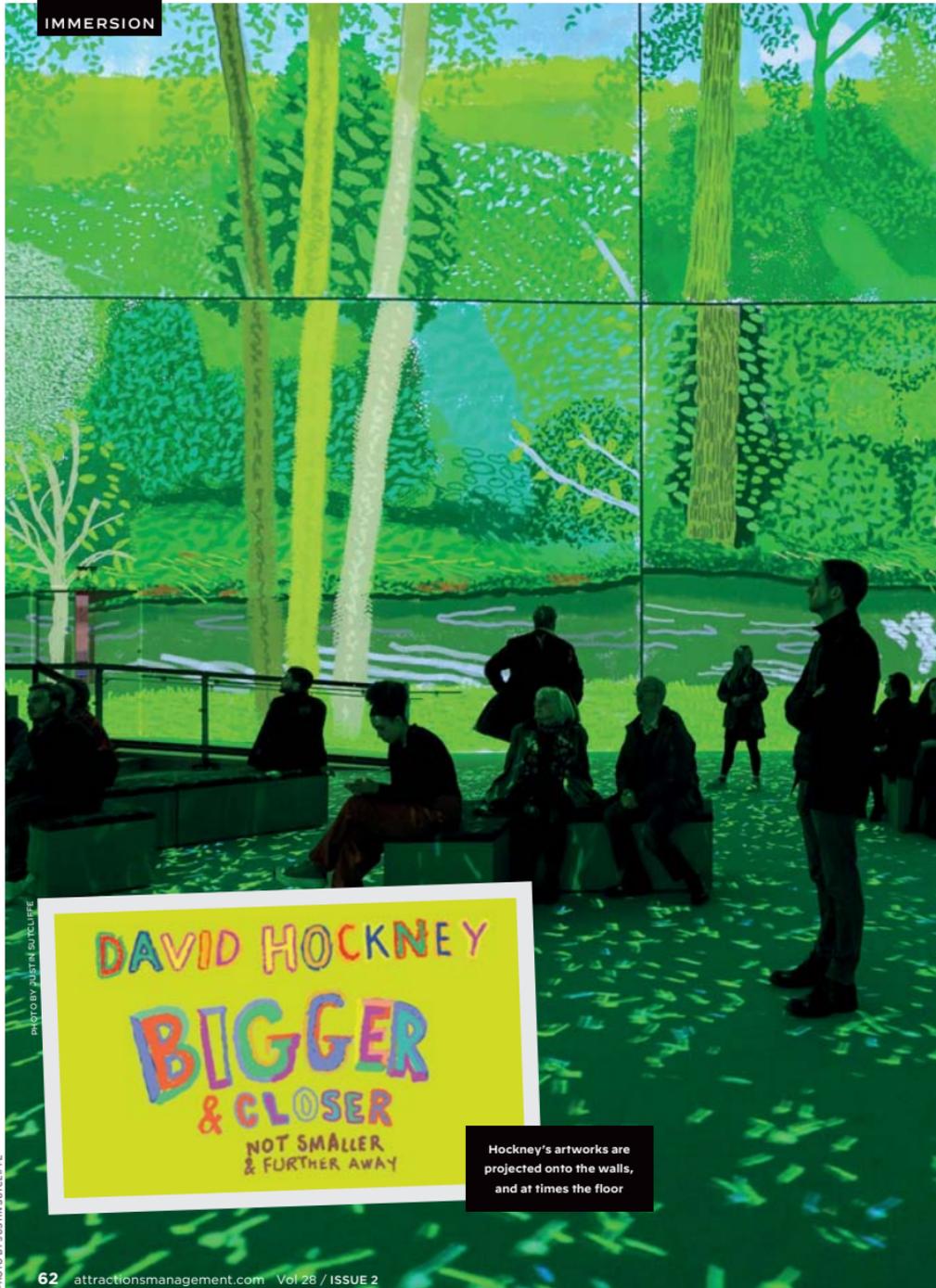


PHOTO BY JUSTIN SUTCLIFFE

DAVID HOCKNEY

BIGGER
& CLOSER

NOT SMALLER
& FURTHER AWAY

Hockney's artworks are projected onto the walls, and at times the floor



MYSTERY SHOPPER

Enlightening and surprisingly moving

Magali Robathan pays a visit to David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)



I visited on a Tuesday afternoon a couple of months after the exhibition launched and it was very busy. The 50 minute-long film is on a loop, meaning you can join at any time, and visitors arrive and leave throughout. The atmosphere is very relaxed, with small children wandering around, people standing, sitting and lying back on the floor – I found watching visitors' reactions almost as interesting as the show itself.

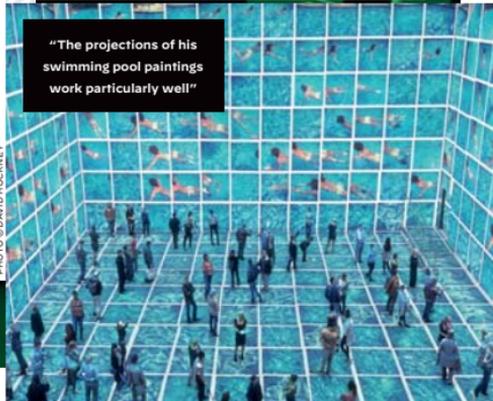
The film is divided into six 'chapters,' travelling through Hockney's life from LA to Yorkshire, and finishing with paintings of his present day home in Normandy, France. For me, the section about his early life and his gleeful reaction to Los Angeles were the most exciting, with the huge projections of his swimming pool paintings working particularly well. There's also a brilliant section of film with Hockney driving through the Santa Monica hills playing a soundtrack of Wagner with the bends in the road carefully timed to match the music. It's thrilling and feels as though you're in the car with him.

Some of the reviews of the exhibition have been a bit snifty, with critics arguing that it lacks passion and is not 'real art'.

For me that misses the point – of course it's a different experience to viewing

Hockney's paintings in real life, but I found it visually spectacular and his commentary made it enlightening and surprisingly moving.

Something about hearing the artist talk about his life, while watching his art through the years play out in such an immersive setting really stayed with me, and I found myself resolving to look at the world more closely, and appreciate the beauty all around. ▶



"The projections of his swimming pool paintings work particularly well"

PHOTO © DAVID/HOCKNEY



David Hockney with the model box for August 2021 *Landscape with Shadows* which was originally composed on 12 iPads. Production and design of the exhibition is by Mark Grimmer

► About Lightroom London

Launched in February 2023, new interactive art space Lightroom promises to offer 'spectacular artist-led shows'. It's a joint venture between London Theatre Company and design studio and production company 59 Productions, backed by a group of investors led by Sir Leonard Blavatnik who is represented by Danny Cohen, president of Access Entertainment; and Michael Sherwood, former co-CEO of Goldman Sachs International.

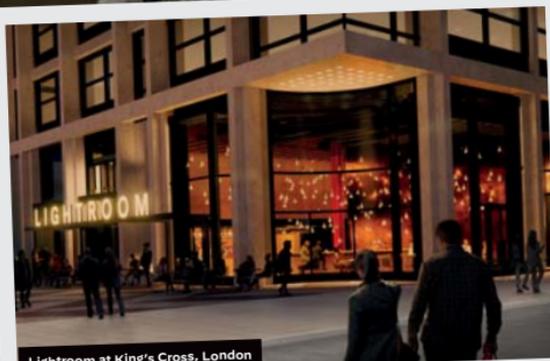
Future shows haven't yet been announced, but the operators promise the Hockney show will be the first in "a repertoire of original shows, made with leading artists and innovators." ●

It's been thrilling to work with Hockney over the last three years and we hope the show will introduce a whole new audience to his art

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FAST FACTS

- David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not Smaller and Further Away) runs from 22 February to 1 October 2023
- The exhibition takes place at the newly-launched Lightroom in Lewis Cubitt Square, London, NIC 4DY
- Lightroom is a joint venture between London Theatre Company and design studio and production company 59 Productions
- Lightroom was designed by architects Haworth Tompkins, who envisioned the venue as a sister space to the recently opened Bridge Theatre in London's Southwark
- The show was created by David Hockney & Lightroom and designed by 59 Productions
- Tickets are from £25 for adults and from £15 for students
- Dwell time is 50 minutes



Lightroom at King's Cross, London

VISITOR CENTRE



A GOLDEN AGE



L-R: Eileen, Alan and Chris Ferguson – the family behind the Ad Gefrin attraction



PHOTO: SALLY ANN MORRIS



The architecture is by Richard Elphick of Elphick Associates

As the much anticipated Ad Gefrin museum and whisky distillery opens in Northumberland, UK, Steve Newman speaks to the people who made it happen

The Ad Gefrin Anglo-Saxon Museum and Whisky Distillery has opened in Wooler, UK, bringing to life the Golden Age of the seventh century Northumbrian royal court.

The £16m attraction showcases the hidden history of the Anglo-Saxon court of Northumbria discovered five miles away at Yeavering in the 1950s – widely considered to be one of the 20th century's most remarkable archaeological finds.

With anticipated visitor numbers of 35,000 in the first year, rising to around 50,000 thereafter, Ad Gefrin celebrates and showcases the unique heritage, ancient hospitality and contemporary crafts, arts and produce of Northumberland. The site includes a bistro, bar, gift shop and the Ad Gefrin whisky distillery – home to the first Northumbrian English Single Malt Whisky.

Stills were produced by Forsyths of Speyside and drive production at the county's first (legal) whisky distillery in 200 years.

"Since the very beginning of this project, we strongly believed that the story of Yeavering and of the 'Golden Age of Northumbria' was worth sharing with the world," says Ad Gefrin director of experience, Chris Ferguson.



The site includes
Northumberland's
first legal whisky
distillery for 200 years



Visitors can take part in distillery tours and whisky tastings



“

This museum is about far more than just giving visitors a memorable experience



▶ THE EXPERIENCE

For an entry fee of £10, visitors get self-guided day-long access to the Great Hall with a fully immersive AV experience and unlimited museum access. The next price point – the £25 entrance ticket – includes a guided 90-minute tour of the distillery, cask store, tasting room and a whisky tasting.

On display in the museum are archaeologically important artefacts found at the original site and borrowed from leading international museums and collections, including the British Museum.

“The museum is about far more than just giving visitors a memorable experience,” says co-founder, Eileen Ferguson, “it’s also about re-introducing them to a part of Northumberland’s history and heritage that many people in the county simply aren’t aware of. For us, Ad Gefrin has always been about community.

“There’s a deep-seated sense of hope that builds from a pride in our connection to our past and our present, nurturing a confidence in ourselves as individuals and as a community. We also made a decision that all the staff and virtually all the companies involved in the project should come from within borders of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria to boost the economy and profile of the area.” ▶

VISITOR CENTRE

PHOTO: SALLY ANN NORMAN



The lighting design was by Michael Grubb Studio

FAST FACTS

Partners: The Gefrin Trust, the British Museum, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Ford & Etal Estates, and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne

Architect: Richard Elphick

Exhibition designers: Studio MB

Lighting designer: Michael Grubb Studio

Anticipated dwell time: 2-3 hours

Anticipated visitor numbers: 3,500 for the first year, then 5,000 a year after that

Entry price: Great Hall & Museum: Adults £10 Children £5. This gives visitors self-guided day-long access to the Great Hall with AV experience and unlimited museum access

Great Hall, museum, distillery tour & tasting: Adults £25 Children over 8 years £12.50. This gives access to the Great Hall and a guided 90-minute tour of the distillery, cask store, tasting room and whisky tasting

Opening dates: Open every day apart from Tuesdays, 10am-6pm. Ad Gefrin is open all year round apart from the second and third weeks of January

PHOTO: SALLY ANN NORMAN



Ad Gefrin is the brainchild of Alan and Eileen Ferguson, pictured with the team

L-R: Eileen, Alan and Chris Ferguson with architect Richard Elphick

PHOTO: SALLY ANN NORMAN



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There's a deep-seated sense of hope that builds from a pride in our connection to our past and our present

► MAKING IT HAPPEN

The building was designed by local architect Richard Elphick to resemble an Anglo-Saxon Great Hall with the whisky stills visible to passers by through large windows overlooking the road. Builders Brimms Construction were the main contractors and local craftsman Albert Fairninton produced the dome-like atrium of the entrance hall, which is lined with more than 9,300 pine tiles. International exhibition and interpretive designers StudioMB were responsible for the Great Hall, museum, cask store and the interiors of the bistro and shop while lighting designer Michael Grubb produced lighting effects throughout the building.

Standing in front of the hearth in the recreated Great Hall, visitors are swept up in the rich stories of the time, through immersive AV technology also supplied by StudioMB. Even the walls of the tasting room change to reflect the Northumberland countryside's seasonal appearance.

Ad Gefrin has received funding towards the construction phase from the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, the North East Rural Growth Network – Strategic Economic Infrastructure Fund (SEIF), North East LEP and Northumberland County Council. The project has been made possible in partnership with the Gefrin Trust. ●

PHOTO: SALLY ANN NORMAN



HOUSE of FUN

The summer of 1987 saw the launch of an arts carnival featuring rides designed by artists Salvador Dali, Roy Lichtenstein and Jean-Michel Basquiat, among others. Now Canadian rapper Drake is working with founder Andre Heller to bring it back to life, finds Magali Robathan



PHOTO: SABINA SARNITZ, COURTESY LUNA LUNA, LLC

Visitors entered Luna Luna in 1987 via an arch designed by artist Sonia Delaunay



In the summer of 1987, around 250,000 curious visitors flocked to Luna Luna in Hamburg, Germany – described as the world’s first travelling art amusement park. It featured fairground attractions that were also works of art by the likes of Salvador Dali, Roy Lichtenstein, Sonia Delaunay, Jean-Michel Basquiat and David Hockney, as well as music, games and performances.

Luna Luna was the brainchild of Austrian artist Andre Heller. Now, more than 35 years later, Heller has teamed up with musician Drake and his production company DreamCrew to relaunch Luna Luna with new commissions by contemporary artists alongside restored works from the original attraction. ▶



PHOTO: SABINA SARINITZ, COURTESY LUNA LUNA, LLC

“

I wanted to build a bridge between the so-called avant-garde – the artists who were a little snobbish sometimes and didn't connect with the masses – and the so-called normal people. Andre Heller



The open air museum and amusement park featured music and performance



PHOTO: SABINA SARINITZ, COURTESY LUNA LUNA, LLC



PHOTO: SABINA SARINITZ, COURTESY LUNA LUNA LLC

LUNA LUNA – THE TEAM

- The new Luna Luna tour – which is set for 2024 – is being made possible by a team of creatives led by rapper Drake's arts and entertainment company DreamCrew.
- Other partners in the project are founder of creative agency Something Special Studios, Michael Goldberg, international art attorney, Daniel McClean and art, culture and technology entrepreneur, Justin Wills.
- Anthony Gonzales is the new CEO of Luna Luna and a partner in DreamCrew.
- The tour is being produced by Live Nation.

Heller persuaded 32 artists to design the original fairground attractions

► It's an incredible story, that started with an idea by Heller inspired by childhood visits to traditional luna amusement parks. His vision was to create an attraction that could act as a "big bridge between the so-called avant-garde – the artists who were a little snobbish sometimes and didn't connect with the masses – and the so-called normal people," as Heller told *The New York Times*.

Heller used his growing success as an artist to bring his vision to life – in 1985, he was awarded a grant of around US\$350,000 from German magazine *Neue Revue*, and he travelled around the world trying to persuade artists to take part.

Heller's powers of persuasion clearly worked – he collaborated with 32 of some of the world's most exciting artists – reportedly paying them \$10,000 each – to create attractions for the open-air park, which opened to visitors from 4 June to 31 August 1987 in Hamburg.

A dizzying spectacle

Visitors arriving at the park were greeted by a welcome sign and entrance archway by French artist Sonia Delaunay. Once inside, they could explore attractions and amusements designed by some of the world's most exciting artists, including a pavilion wrapped with Roy Lichtenstein's paintings housing a mirrored glass labyrinth, a ferris wheel created by Jean-Michel Basquiat composed of his drawings, and a geometric forest pavilion designed by David Hockney.

Salvador Dali created a dome with a mirrored geodesic funhouse interior designed to induce 'spatial hallucinations,' August Walla contributed a hand-painted circus wagon, and every attraction had its own music, some of it specially composed for the project.

Long before 'immersive art shows' became a trend, Luna Luna plunged visitors into



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**It's such a unique
and special way to
experience art.**

Drake

► a spectacle of creativity and imagination described by *Life* magazine as the “most dizzying, dazzling art show on Earth”.

The plan was for Luna Luna to tour Europe and the US after its summer in Hamburg, and the city of Vienna hoped to buy and permanently exhibit the attraction, but a series of lawsuits and political concerns thwarted these efforts and the park was forced to close.

Brought back to life

For more than 35 years, the unique attractions sat in storage, most recently in a warehouse in rural Texas, where they have been since 2007.

Now creative director Michael Goldberg and founder of creative agency Something Special – who stumbled on the story of Luna Luna when browsing the web – has teamed up with Drake and his arts and entertainment company DreamCrew to restore the artworks and bring the carnival back to life. ►





Rapper Drake has teamed up with Michael Goldberg to revive Luna Luna

▶ Drake has reportedly pledged \$100m (£84m) of his fortune to the project. "When I first heard about Luna Luna I was blown away," Drake said in a statement. "It's such a unique and special way to experience art. This is a big idea and opportunity that centres around what we love most: bringing people together."

The original attractions left Texas in January 2022 in a series of crates and containers bound for an industrial warehouse in Los Angeles, where they are currently being restored by a team of experts.

As well as exhibiting the original rides and attractions, the team behind Luna Luna's new incarnation promises to launch a collection of "rideable, playable fairground attractions" designed for the carnival by influential contemporary artists. The project is also set to include art workshops, film screenings and other events, concert and parties, interactive experiences, food and drink. The curatorial team reportedly includes experts from the Museum of Contemporary Art and The Shed.

A multi-city tour is planned for 2024, beginning in the US before touring globally. The tour is being produced by live entertainment company Live Nation.

Details of the tour and the new artists taking part haven't yet been announced, but this is definitely one to watch. ●

The new Luna Luna will feature the original rides alongside new designs

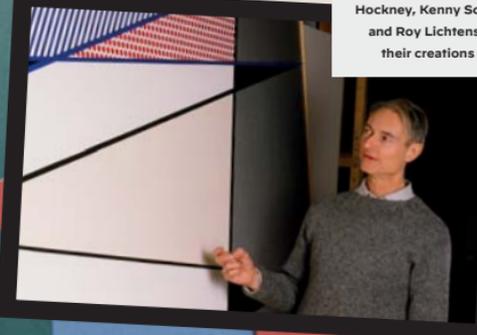
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A multi-city tour is planned for 2024, beginning in the US before touring globally





Clockwise from top left: David Hockney, Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring and Roy Lichtenstein working on their creations for Luna Luna



MARINE LIFE



PHOTO: SEAWORLD ABU DHABI

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi is being billed as the 'first marine life theme park' in the GCC region. Magali Robathan finds out more from deputy GM, Carlos Rodriguez





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eaWorld Abu Dhabi has announced details of its eight immersive 'realms', ahead of its opening date of 23 May 2023.

The long-anticipated attraction on Abu Dhabi's Yas Island will house more than 100,000 marine animals across these themed areas, offering animal encounters, rides, entertainment, as well as a range of dining and retail experiences. The realms will focused on different aspects of the ocean and have been designed by scientists, engineers and animal care specialists, according to developer Miral, which recently unveiled details of the content that will make up the new park.

1. ABU DHABI OCEAN

Guests will start their journey in Abu Dhabi Ocean, which will tell the story of local coastal waters, its marine life and the pearl diving traditions of the UAE. This realm will feature 30 species native to the UAE, including sea snakes, sea turtles and dugongs, as well as crustaceans, sharks, and rays, some of which will be housed in touch pools.

The design and atmosphere of this realm has been influenced by its location, with waterfalls, palm trees, desert plants, Emirati architecture and regional music.

Abu Dhabi Ocean will feature two theatre shows, one telling the story of the history and

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Research and rescue is central to SeaWorld's mission

PHOTO: SEAWORLD ABU DHABI



► of the region's waters, they other highlighting the Abu Dhabi Souk, a traditional-style marketplace selling keepsakes and souvenirs.

2. ONE OCEAN

One Ocean will act as a portal for visitors to explore the other realms at SeaWorld Abu Dhabi.

It features the One Epic Ocean show, telling the story of a young Emirati woman's adventure exploring the seas and sharing the park's message 'we are connected to the ocean and the ocean connects all of us'.

The show will use immersive multi-media, a fleet of choreographed drones, spatial audio and a 360-degree screen. The Animal Care Center is also situated in this realm.

3. ROCKY POINT

Described as 'a hidden cove where seals and sea lions can be seen resting on rocks and swimming'.

The animals' habitats will feature an Advanced Animal Lighting System (AALS) that recreates night/day and seasonal light cycles, simulating those found in the Pacific Northwest of the US.

4. MICROOCEAN

This will be a colourful, playfully-designed area for children, exploring the experiences of some of the ocean's smallest creatures via interactives, experiments and child-friendly rides.

5. ENDLESS OCEAN

This realm will be home to the world's largest multi-species aquarium featuring more than 68,000 marine animals. Educators will teach guests about the marine life in this realm.

6. POLAR OCEAN

This will house Arctic and Antarctica realms, featuring puffins, sea otters and walruses in the Arctic and six species of penguin in Antarctica.

7. TROPICAL OCEAN

The final realm will have a rainforest, a lagoon and waterfalls, as well as animals including toucans, parrots, flamingoes, dolphins and tropical fish. Visitors will be able to ride the Manta Coaster and watch a dolphin presentation.



The Tropical Ocean area is one of eight ocean 'realms'



The Rocky Point realm will feature sea lions in naturalistic settings

PHOTO: SEAWORLD ABU DHABI

Carlos Rodríguez, deputy general manager, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi

How would you sum up the design of the park?

The first SeaWorld park outside the US, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi is also the first to be completely indoors. With 183,000sq m of space across five floors, it has a different feel from a one-level theme park. The multiple levels create a distinctive viewpoint for our animal habitats, dining options and experiences.

Centred around the theme of One Ocean, our park represents the interconnectedness and interdependency of life on earth and the life in our oceans. To bring this theme to life, the park is divided into eight immersive realms that take visitors on a journey through oceanic environments.

Each realm is designed to provide an authentic experience, with animal habitats that simulate the natural environments of the animals. In the Polar Ocean realm, for example, guests will be transported to chilly Arctic and Antarctic regions where they can observe animals in their habitats.

What makes SeaWorld Abu Dhabi special and different?

In uncovering the interconnectivity of life on earth and our ocean it will aim to inspire a deep commitment to conserving our planet. The park will deliver fun, engaging, and immersive family-

friendly experiences through its eight realms, featuring up-close animal encounters, exciting rides, inspiring entertainment, as well as dining and shopping experiences, all under one roof.

Guests will embark on journey starting from the shores of Abu Dhabi through to the vibrant tropics, from the vastness of the ocean to its smallest inhabitants and finally to the polar realms.

Acting as the portal to the rest of the park, the One Ocean realm will transport guests to the seven other realms, bringing them closer to the wonders of the ocean.

A standout feature is that SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will be home to the world's largest multi-species aquarium. Located within the Endless Ocean realm, this 25 million litre aquarium will allow guests to get a real-life view of the depths of the ocean and many of the animals that call it home. The tank will house more than 68,000 marine animals, including sharks, fish and rays.

Do you have a personal favourite?

The area that resonates most with me is the Tropical Ocean realm. Being from the Caribbean, it feels like home.

With design modelled on the Tropical regions of the Earth, it encompasses areas familiar to me and to others from different cultures around the equator, featuring spaces that simulate



PHOTO: SEAWORLD ABU DHABI

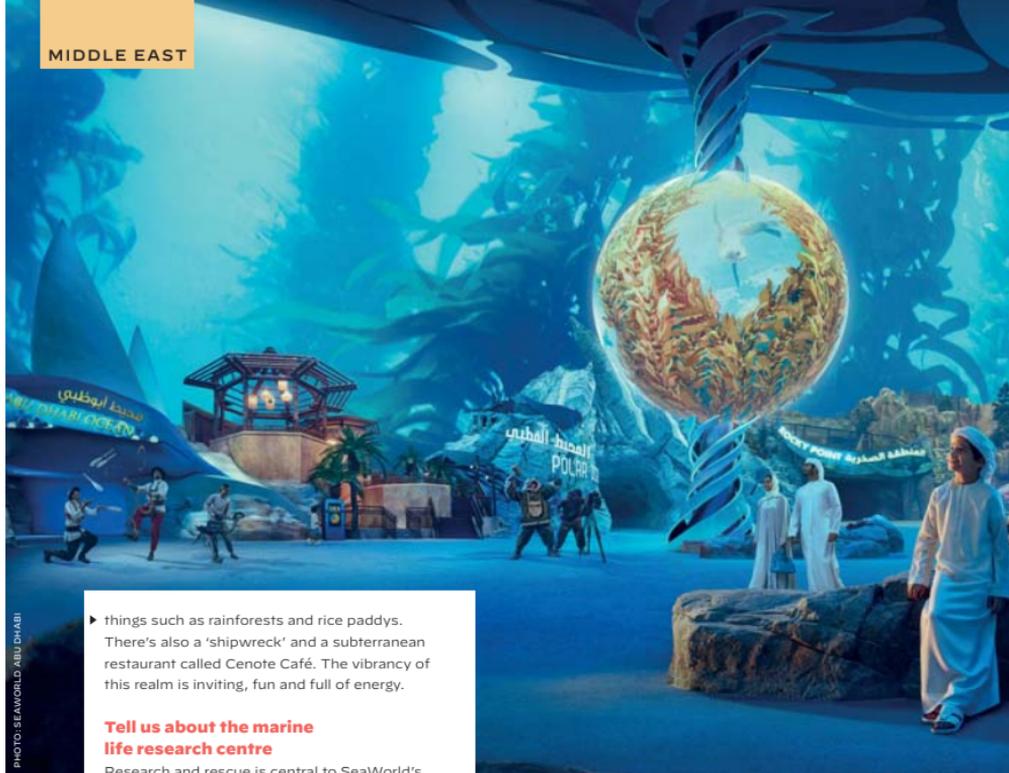


PHOTO: SEAWORLD ABU DHABI

- ▶ things such as rainforests and rice paddys. There's also a 'shipwreck' and a subterranean restaurant called Cenote Café. The vibrancy of this realm is inviting, fun and full of energy.

Tell us about the marine life research centre

Research and rescue is central to SeaWorld's mission – the company has a legacy of nearly 60 years in animal rescue, having rescued more than 40,000 animals to date.

As its first overseas park, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will continue that legacy with the opening of the Yas SeaWorld Research & Rescue.

The centre will be the region's first and will be dedicated to marine research, rescue, rehabilitation and return and will serve as an advanced knowledge hub for marine science.

Highlight some innovative features

Spaces will be tailored to each species' needs and employ hi-tech systems such as the Animal Life Support System (ALSS), and the Advanced Animal Lighting System (AALS) for optimal living conditions.

By offering the best possible environments for the animals, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi aims to not only support their wellbeing, but also to inspires guests to care for and protect these remarkable animals.

Located in the heart of the One Ocean realm, there's also an Animal Care Center where guests can observe veterinarians and animal care experts providing animals from the park

FAST FACTS

Number of realms: Eight

Number of animals: More than 100,000

Dining experiences: 17

Partners: The design team for the park includes FORREC, JRA, PGAV and Falcon's Creative Group

Solar energy systems are being provided by Emerge, a joint venture between UAE's Masdar and France's EDF. The project, which will have a capacity of 8.2 megawatts (MW), will see rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) systems installed at the marine-life development

Yas SeaWorld Research & Rescue: This 8.600sq m marine research, rescue and rehabilitation and return centre opened adjacent to SeaWorld Abu Dhabi in February 2023



One Ocean acts as a gateway to large parts of the park

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The first SeaWorld park outside of the US, it's also the first to be indoors

with round-the-clock care, routine check-ups, and treatment when needed. This will be an opportunity for guests to witness these interventions first-hand and gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the care and attention provided for the animals.

Other features include a parkwide interactive game called S.E.A. Guardian which invites guests to become 'guardians of the sea' by completing games, challenges and expeditions to collect points.

In kiosks found in each realm guests can then scan their passes and participate in the educational and interactive games throughout the park.

Can you highlight the most innovative rides?

As a theme park operator, we don't just offer marine life experiences, but also thrilling coaster rides, including the Manta Coaster at Tropical Ocean, a rollercoaster which will hold the regional record for the most airtime moments at 17 in total and which will also feature a zero gravity flip-out and world's first twisting double-down dive.

In the Polar Ocean realm, guests can also experience a journey on the SEA Guardian-designed Hypersphere 360, which allows them to explore the depths of the ocean in a 360-degree immersive multimedia sphere. ●

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Product Innovation

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PHOTO: INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Eye tracking AI Aquarium from ITRI helps visitors identify fish species

It can take a while for visitors to identify the species of fish they're looking at in an aquarium – trying to match them up with information on an information panel can take time and isn't always straightforward. Now a new aquarium by Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) helps by exhibiting marine life information in real time according to visitors' line of sight.

The AI Aquarium, which recently won a CES Innovation Award from the Consumer Technology Association, uses virtual-real fusion technology to enable gaze tracking and interactive information display of marine life information. According to ITRI, it has an accuracy of 98

per cent, and is also available for gesture control, which can create "intuitive but hygienic interaction for visitors via a contact-free method".

The AI Aquarium integrates smart display, AI recognition, and human-computer interaction technologies to introduce augmented reality tourism services, said ITRI president Edwin Liu.

"This innovation addresses the needs in the post-pandemic era and the trends of immersive experience," Liu said. "It has been applied in the National Museum of Marine Science and Technology in Taiwan to enhance marine exploration and education, offering a more interactive and



PHOTO: INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

effective option than conventional aquariums." Besides edutainment, the technology can also be deployed for other purposes such as surgical simulation for medical training.

[attractions-kit](http://attractions-kit.net) keyword
ITRI

Design Silver Fish teams up with Christie to deliver spectacular visuals at immersive South Korea art exhibition

Christie laser projectors have been used at an experiential art exhibition designed by media production firm Design Silver Fish to celebrate the history, culture and ecology of Damyang in South Korea – known for its strawberries and bamboo products.

Delight Damyang is a permanent museum comprising 11 themed galleries inspired by folktales from the ancient city of Damyang. The exhibition is the latest in a series of experiential art exhibitions conceptualised by Design Silver Fish, which includes Design Seoul – a temporary exhibition exploring the history of South Korea's capital using digital projections, virtual reality, augmented reality, and holograms.

"Delight Damyang is the largest media art exhibition in Korea to date and we're proud to deploy an array of state-of-the-art technologies – including large-scale projections – to realistically showcase thousand-

year-old mysteries and legends of Damyang," says Gyong Tae Hong, CEO, Design Silver Fish.

"Visitors will be enthralled by the highly immersive and lifelike visuals accomplished by almost 90 Christie laser projectors fitted in seven themed galleries that seek to reinterpret the rich ecological and cultural fabric of this symbolic location. These high-performance projectors are

a perfect match with the contents we have specially created."

The exhibition features images displayed on large screens and surfaces by the Christie HS and GS Series laser projectors, which are fitted overhead in seven themed galleries: Moon, Echo of Soul, Delight Damyang, Into the Mind, An Olden Tale, My Gallery and For the Future.

In the Into the Mind gallery, Damyang's famous Metasequoia Road is used as a motif to display the changing scenery of the four seasons using contemporary art techniques. The massive gallery is lit by 36 D13WU2-HS projectors to create an intriguing immersive environment.

Yongso Waterfall in Damyang's Gamagol Valley has also been recreated in the Echo of Soul gallery using DWU1075-GS and DWU880-GS projectors – motion tracking sensors enable visitors to interact with the virtual waterfall by 'splitting' the pouring water apart to generate fascinating patterns on several surfaces.

attractions-kit keyword
Christie

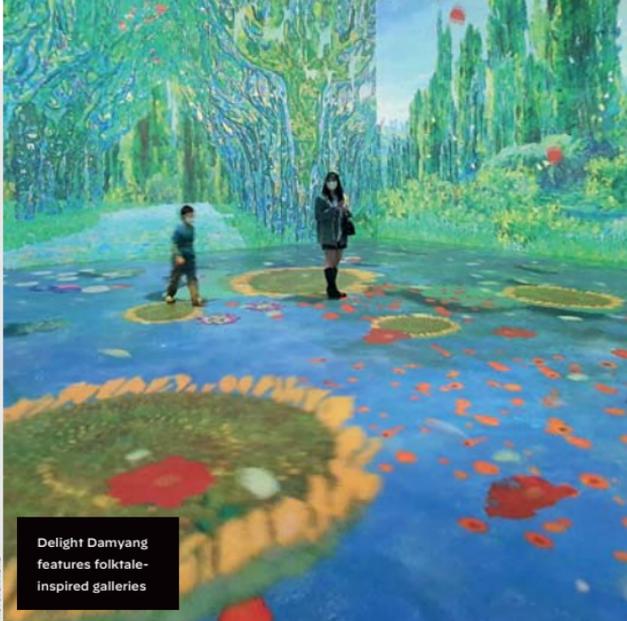


PHOTO: CHRISTIE

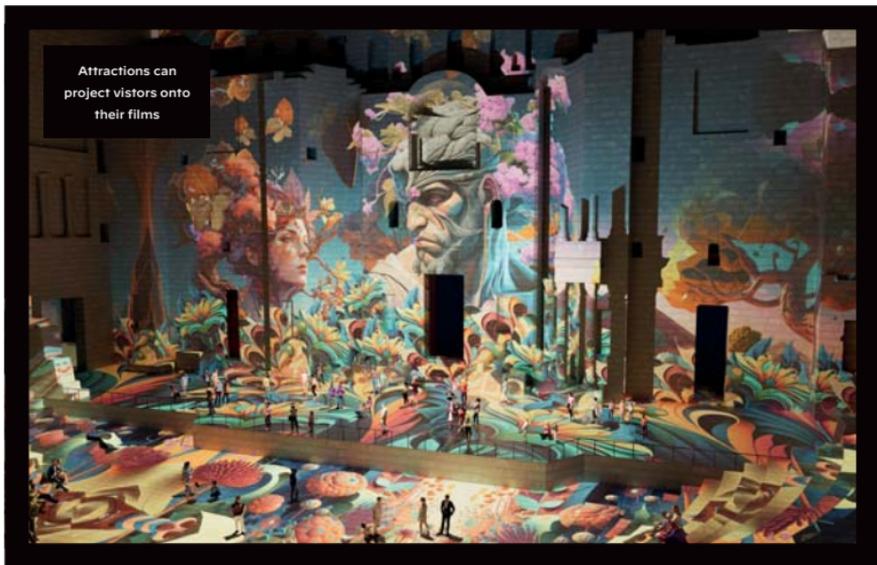
Delight Damyang features folktale-inspired galleries

Projectors have recreated the Yongso Waterfall



PHOTO: CHRISTIE

Attractions can project visitors onto their films



PHOTOS: IMMKI, IMKI, STRASBOURG

IMKI launches We are Legends, based on deepfake technology

IMKI, a startup specialising in the design and development of generative artificial intelligence, has launched its We are Legends turnkey solution.

Based on deepfake technology, We are Legends is a cinematographic immersion in which the visitor becomes the hero with “spectacular and playful scenography that adapts to your surface,” according to IMKI.

The technology allows attractions to project visitors into their films, creating a unique, personalised experience.

Founded in Strasbourg, France in October 2020, IMKI develops “Generative Artificial Intelligences that enable its clients to stimulate their creative capacities.” The company is currently working on the development of a “text-

to-image’ AI, a project based on artificial intelligence capable of generating images on demand from a textual description.

According to a spokesperson for IMKI: “IMKI’s solution also makes it possible to modify the style of an existing image. From a drawing, IMKI’s AI – aided by a textual description – can generate a painting or a photorealistic image by taking into account the semantic elements contained in the drawing as well as in the text.”

“We’re committed to democratising access to immersive projections thanks to artificial intelligence, said Frederic Rose, CEO and founder of IMKI. “Our ambition is to enable our customers to use new technologies to serve culture and entertainment, while delighting the public with innovative and unique solutions.” ●



The solution is based on deepfake technology



PHOTOS: IMMKI, IMKI, STRASBOURG

attractions-kit keyword
IMKI



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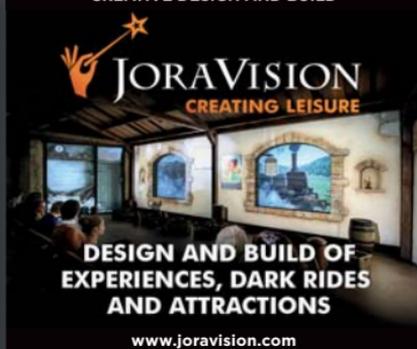
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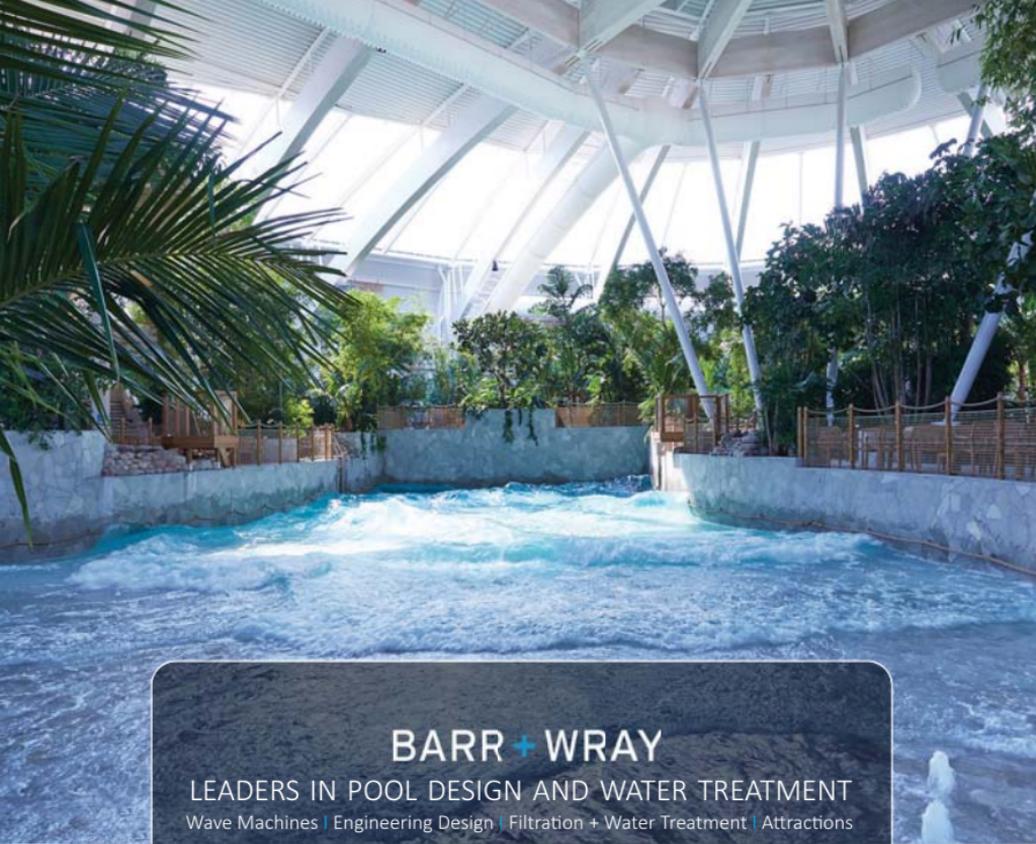


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