

# Attractions

## MANAGEMENT

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Volume 28 Issue 4 2023

Meow Wolf's

**VINCE  
KADLUBEK**

On the unique  
power of art and  
attractions

**KEEP  
THE FAITH**

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explores the  
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*How the CEO of Parc Astérix is transforming the company p34*



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# Bridging divides

In an ever more polarised world, the attractions industry plays a key role by providing shared experiences and reminding us that we're not so different



Whether it's the US election, conflict in the Middle East, or just people arguing on social media, everything feels incredibly polarised right now.

In a world where extremes of opinion are making people feel ever-more divided, the attractions industry has a unique role to play.

Museums can help us learn from the past, showing us where escalating tensions and historical divides have led us. Knowledge and understanding can help build bridges and counter ignorance and fear.

But it's not just about education. We're learning more and more about the crucial role play holds in our lives, and it's something many adults forget. Dr Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play in the US, has carried out research showing that a life devoid of play can lead to depression, stress-related illnesses and a decreased immune system, and on a societal level, can lead to higher rates of rage, violence and crime.

We may hold wildly differing opinions but we all have an inner child that wants to play and be carefree. On page 40 Meow Wolf founder Vince Kadlubek explores the role attractions can play in healing division. He says: "Our industry provides a miraculous opportunity for people of all backgrounds, beliefs, and character to co-exist in the communion of exploration."

"If that communion can be felt for even the slightest moment, it has the profound power to short-circuit the mechanisms of judgement and remind us that we're loving and forgiving beings."

I experienced this a couple of years ago, during a visit to an outdoor zoo attraction. It was during the pandemic, and I had a disagreement with



Play has many benefits for adults

**“Play allows us to take ourselves less seriously and that's vital right now”**

another visitor about social distancing and mask wearing. The conversation was getting heated – each of us entrenched in our positions – when suddenly a bear started climbing a tree. We both reacted in exactly the same way – our faces lit up with joy – and suddenly our differences were forgotten and we found ourselves smiling at the way we had shared this moment.

Play allows us to take ourselves less seriously, and that's very much needed right now. Whether crawling through an immersive installation, screaming on a rollercoaster or interacting with a work of art, we can put aside our opinions and prejudices, be in the moment, and just play.

Magali Robathan, editor  
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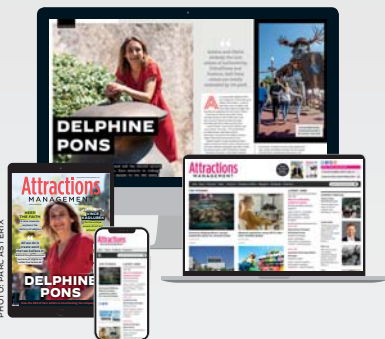
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Studying memory and emotion



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WILDCAT LOOPING COASTER 'FONIX'  
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V E K O M A



Visitors are invited to reflect on the way faith has shaped the history of Britain



Visual artist Mat Collinshaw created a large scale work for the Faith Museum



Artefacts include a Book of Hours – a compilation of prayers and readings



## Faith can be a hard subject to talk about

Clare Baron, head of exhibitions, Auckland Project



Clare Baron hopes that the Faith Museum can be a starting point for reflection

PHOTO: THE AUCKLAND PROJECT

The Faith Museum has opened in Bishop Auckland, County Durham, UK. Housed in a 14th century wing of Auckland Castle and a contemporary extension by Niall McLaughlin Architects, the museum explores the ways faith has shaped lives and communities across Britain.

Revealing 'encounters, experiences and expressions of faith in Britain', the museum features more than 250 objects from private and public collections, including the Binchester Ring – a Roman silver ring excavated in 2014 that represents one of the earliest pieces of evidence of Christianity in Britain; an 18th century wooden pulpit built by miners for a chapel in Teesdale; and the Bodleian Bowl, a 13th century medieval Jewish artefact on loan from the Ashmolean in Oxford.

The ground floor explores 6,000 years of faith, beginning in the Neolithic period and ending in the year 2000. Contemporary expressions of faith are displayed within temporary exhibition

galleries in the upper floor – a dramatic, immersive installation by Mat Collishaw has been specially created for the Great Gallery. Titled Eidolon, this large-scale work features a burning blue iris accompanies by a choral soundtrack, and is displayed alongside works by artists including Khadija Saye, who died in the Grenfell Tower fire.

The museum sits at the heart of the Auckland Project, in Bishop Auckland, which includes historic buildings, art galleries, gardens, extensive parkland and a heritage railway. The Faith Museum is part of the wider restoration and redevelopment of Auckland Castle, which has been made possible with a £12.4m grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which was raised by National Lottery players.

Local faith leaders, academic specialists and community groups have provided thoughts and perspectives throughout the development process. The museum aims to welcome visitors from all walks of life, whether they identify as religious, spiritual, or neither.

Here, head curator Claire Baron talks us through this unique project.

### **What is the aim of the Faith Museum? Why is this an important museum?**

In this fast-paced, increasingly uncertain world, there is a need for spaces to pause, reflect, and consider our individual perspective or worldview. Although there has been a fall in the number of people participating in organised religion in Britain, there is evidence of a wide range of beliefs and spiritual practices among people of all ages and backgrounds. The Faith Museum aims to kindle people's curiosity, raising universal questions about how we understand our place in the world and how we relate to one another.

### **What have been the biggest challenges with this project?**

From the outset, the curatorial team were faced with one central challenge: how do you create a museum display centred on something invisible and intangible? Yet, over time, the challenge of defining the nature and impact of faith became the foundation of the museum. Instead of seeking to force a definition of faith, the exhibition invites visitors to consider how people across history have described and demonstrated it.

“

***In this fast-paced, increasingly uncertain world, there is a need for spaces to pause, reflect, and consider our individual perspective or worldview***

Each of the objects on display – ranging from valuable works of art to small, intimate objects – presents a reflection, shadow, or impression of an individual's faith.

### **What are you proudest of?**

Though the project has been running for many years, there's one specific moment that stands out. It was the moment I first met Rachael Woodman, one of the artists exhibiting within the final gallery of the museum. Rachael is an established artist who has been working with glass for 35 years.

Despite the fact that her practice is deeply rooted in her Christian faith, she's never been offered an opportunity to explicitly discuss this aspect of her work. I was immediately struck by her honesty and openness, and our conversations will stay with me. If the museum can prompt further conversations such as these, it will be something I can take pride in.

A Neolithic carved stone ball on loan from National Museums Scotland





The museum features more than 250 objects from 50 institutions and collections

### Do you have a personal favourite artefact in the museum?

For me personally, it has to be the very first object that visitors encounter in the museum. The Gainford Stone, on loan from the Bowes Museum, was created around 6,000 years ago. It is a cup and ring marked stone, carved with geometric patterns of concentric circles. We don't know what the marks represent; it could be a map of the stars, or of the natural landscape. But what fascinates me about this object is the sheer effort and care someone put into its creation.

This was an act of creativity. The object has no practical use – it would not have helped someone to keep warm or to feed a family – which suggests that there is 'something more' to life than simply surviving. At the outset of the museum journey, this object invites us to consider whether or not we believe in something bigger than ourselves – be that a universal idea or concept, a deity, or another world beyond our own.

### What do you hope visitors will take away from a visit to the Faith Museum?

One of our key aims was to give visitors a better understanding of the role faith has played in our nation's history, and to emphasise its continued importance in so many people's lives today. Faith

### SUPPLIERS

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can be a hard subject to talk about, so we wanted to create a place where people feel comfortable to consider and share their own experiences.

I hope that the museum itself is just the starting point and that, having left the building, visitors will continue to reflect privately, or discuss with family and friends. ●



The book aims to  
explore key issues for  
the theme park industry

# Attractions People



Left to right: Florian Freitag, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, Salvador Anton Clavé

“ Theme parks must be taken seriously as spaces of cultural significance ”

Florian Freitag, Salvador Anton Clavé & Filippo Carlà-Uhink, authors of *Key Concepts in Theme Park Studies*

**P**ublished earlier this year, *Key Concepts in Theme Park Studies* aims to help readers understand the history, development, design and operation of theme parks. Written collaboratively by 13 scholars from different disciplines and countries, the book covers theme park origins, industry, design, people, culture, development and management, ethical issues and the methodologies of theme park studies.

The idea for the book was born in 2014, when one of the authors, Florian Freitag, a scholar in American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, was giving a guest lecture on theme parks in front of an audience of geographers.

“During the Q&A I realised that although we were all talking about the same topic – namely, theme parks – we were not speaking the same language,” says Freitag. “It was then that I started thinking about a comprehensive, transdisciplinary introduction to theme park studies that would discuss key aspects of theme parks in a way that

would combine the viewpoints and findings of theme park researchers in different disciplines and yet be accessible to all of them.”

Here the books’ authors tell us why it is an important resource for the industry.

## What global trends are covered in *Key Concepts in Theme Park Studies*?

The book discusses the expansion of the theme park industry worldwide in the context of increasing urbanisation, digital innovation, accelerated mobility, globalisation, and greater environmental awareness.

One interesting trend is the way the theme park industry is merging with other entertainment and attractions companies including interpretation centres, high-tech facilities, cultural, heritage and environmental-based parks, museums, zoos, water parks and corporate centres. The book also explores how the industry is diversifying into other areas of leisure and consumption together with real estate corporations, shopping centre operators and transmedia corporations.

“

*In the Middle Ages, strategies of immersion were used to help religious inspiration and experience*

- Technology is also becoming a key player in the process of defining the economic, social, environmental, experiential and customer-oriented strategies of theme parks.

**In the book you look at the history of theme parks. Did you find out anything that would surprise people?**

There are many surprises – from the acknowledgement that the Romans created spaces with controlled access in which they could spend time and be entertained, to the discovery that in the Middle Ages strategies of immersion – with the technology of the time – were used to help religious inspiration and experience.

We were particularly interested in exploring the history of theme parks outside the Western world. The Old Summer Palace near Beijing, for example, built between the 18th and the 19th century, contained replicas of many different Chinese landscapes and buildings that could be experienced by visitors. In fact these visitors were limited to the emperor, his family and his guests – and this is maybe one of the most interesting aspects discussed in this chapter: who was allowed to access these ‘ancestors’ of the theme parks, and how that access was regulated.

**There is a section on authenticity. What were the key takeaways?**

This was an interesting chapter to put together – we wanted to look at the history of the concept of authenticity in academia, and evaluate its application to theme parks.

Recent scholarship has discarded the idea of authenticity as an attribute of objects, in the sense of the ‘museumological authenticity’ of displayed material. Instead, scholars

have developed the notion of ‘perceived authenticity,’ according to which the authenticity of something is determined by what visitors consider to be real, believable, and convincing. Here, obvious mistakes – such as in the representation of foreign cultures or anachronisms in the representation of historical themes – don’t necessarily contrast with the authenticity of a themed area.

An object or a place can also develop its own identity and aura over time, meaning new developments can acquire a sense of authenticity – a concept described as ‘emergent authenticity.’

Theme parks draw on these different kind of authenticities. In marketing, theme parks often draw on museumological authenticity to advertise the accuracy of their themed areas.

Perceived authenticity plays a central role in design, where representations of specific themes need to match visitors’ expectations. The idea of emergent authenticity can manifest itself in fans’ reactions to such changes as the updating, replacement, and closure of ‘classic’ theme park attractions or in theme parks’ decisions to keep and even bring back certain traditional elements that may have otherwise fallen victim to the constant striving for novelty in the interest of economic competitiveness.

**What can you tell us about immersion and theme parks?**

From the point of view of immersion, theme parks are extremely interesting places because in contrast to other immersive media, the mediated or themed space and the space of reception are one and the same.

Of course, this doesn’t necessarily lead to the total immersion of theme park visitors,







© GETTY IMAGES/DAVID J. PHILLIPS

Theme parks offer a highly immersive experience for visitors

as immersion depends on a large variety of factors that include not just the specific build-up of the immersive space, but also the recipients' current disposition and the general context of the experience. In the book, we discuss theme parks' capacity to engender or induce an immersed state of mind in visitors, focusing on two key strategies to achieve immersivity – narrativity and bodily affect.

### What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

Theme parks must be taken seriously; as an industry, as a medium, and as a space of cultural significance. And we hope that we can contribute not only to scholarly dialogue, but also to an open and mutually beneficial dialogue with fans and stakeholders in the industry. As we write at the end of our introduction, our book is an open invitation to come and talk to us. ●

Salvador Anton Clavé is Professor of Regional Geographical Analysis, University Rovira i Virgili, Spain. Filippo Carlà-Uhink is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Potsdam, Germany. Florian Freitag is Professor of American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/AMBERT SHAFER



The book explores theme parks from multiple perspectives



Adirondack Studios' projects include Meow Wolf's Convergence Station

**It all boils down to cultural sensitivity and meeting people where they are**

Clara Rice, director of global marketing, Adirondack Studios





Adirondack Studios (ADKS) – a company that specialises in the design, fabrication and installation of entertainment, retail and cultural experiences – has employed industry veteran Clara Rice as its first director of global marketing.

Rice joins the firm at a time of rapid expansion, as ADKS broadens its reach into new geographic areas and markets.

Rice joins ADKS from JRS where she worked since 2008, most recently as director of global marketing for the studio's new parent company RWS Global. She has served in various leadership roles for the Themed Entertainment Association since 2011, from NextGen committee chair to Eastern North America divisional board member to international board vice president and executive committee member.

"Joining Adirondack Studios is a new adventure as well as a homecoming of sorts," said Rice. "Through our work together for the TEA, I have known ADKS president Michael Blau for over 15 years, so there's already an established level of trust. ADKS' theatrical roots are also familiar territory, and I love the philosophy that developing an attraction is akin to producing a show. Experiencing the industry from the fabrication side will be an exciting journey for me, and I look forward to sharing the stories of ADKS' projects and people with a global audience."

PHOTO: WESTFIELD PROPERTIES

The Citrovia pop up art installation at Hudson Yards, New York City

ADKS is currently developing a number of high-profile entertainment attractions in the Middle East, as well as a wide array of theatrical, public art, entertainment and brand experiences in North America. Recent launches include Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway at Disney's Hollywood Studios; Kung Fu Panda: Land of Awesomeness at Universal Beijing; Hersheypark Dark Nights; Genting SkyWorlds; Doha Oasis; Meow Wolf: Convergence Station; and Knott's Berry Farm's Fiesta Village.

As she settles into her role, Rice tells Attractions Management about her plans.

#### What's your brief in the new role?

My responsibility at Adirondack Studios is to create marketing that celebrates, inspires and sells – that honours the collective creativity and innovation of ADKS' dreamers, designers and doers.

PHOTO: THE ISLAND IN PIGEON FORGE

Sky Fly Soar America flying theatre, The Island in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee





## ***I am a big believer in relationship building, omni-channel marketing and repurposing***

► **ADKS is looking to globalise at a time when environmental, financial and legislative pressures are driving reverse globalisation. How will you tackle this?**

ADKS is a global company that aims to have the right teams in the right place at the right time through highly localised design, fabrication and installation staffing, such as our large-scale production facility in Dubai.

This approach reduces the carbon footprint in the transport of materials and people, and it means we can reach our EMEA clients more quickly, efficiently and sustainably than if we were solely based in the US. In addition, we offer design as a stand-alone service, in which case there's no transport of materials whatsoever. And of course, our design, project delivery and procurement groups are always researching the most sustainable fabrication, shipping and installation tools and techniques. All of these factors prepare us for the inevitable introduction and evolution of regulations such as CBAM.

**How will geopolitical instability, such as war in the Middle East and tensions in Taiwan impact your approach to a global marketing push?**

It does seem a bit inappropriate to push marketing messages about leisure and entertainment in a time of such devastating events, so we'll continue to be sensitive to the geopolitical climate of the areas in which our clients, teams and projects are based.

In general, we're creating experiences that won't open for several months or even years, so the hope is that many of these conflicts will have come to a peaceful resolution by that time. Our goal – and that of our clients – is to create destinations, experiences and touchpoints that bring people together in positive ways, so that desire will be reflected in any marketing messaging we create.

It all boils down to cultural sensitivity and meeting people where they are. Because we have offices in Dubai and Shanghai, we can lean on our team members to guide us in the proper content and delivery of any marketing messaging (including whether it's appropriate to deliver any messaging at all).



Adirondack Studios worked on the creation of the National Comedy Centre



Adirondack Studios works  
to help clients bring their  
creative visions to life

PHOTO: RABBIT HERMAN DESIGN OFFICE



### Which marketing approaches do you intend to deploy and why?

My primary approach to marketing Adirondack Studios is storytelling. When I walked through the shop with Adirondack Studios president Michael Blau a few months ago, I filled my notebook with two pages of story ideas within the first 30 minutes. If you're creating a post to showcase a particular ADKS fabrication technique, you can also showcase the team member employing that technique and the joy they feel in their work. That one piece of content celebrates the team member, inspires others to apply for a similar role and sells ADKS' innovativeness to a potential client.

As far as the 'how,' I'm a big believer in relationship building, omni-channel marketing and repurposing. I will be carrying out a 'listening tour' to find out what kind of content people want, what channels they absorb content on and the frequency with which they expect content. In collaboration with our business development and HR groups, I'll develop a fully-informed growth marketing strategy and deployment.

Repurposing is a fantastic way to get optimal impact out of a single piece of content. Let's say Michael Blau or I give a presentation at a conference. That presentation can be video recorded and put on our website or YouTube

channel. It can be podcasted. It can be transcribed and turned into a blog, LinkedIn article or an *Attractions Management* feature.

That feature can then be shared as a social post. So now, that one piece of content has been disseminated via at least six different touchpoints, which is great if you have target audiences that digest content in different ways.

### How are you personally feeling about the move?

I'm thrilled to join Adirondack Studios.

I've never worked in a fabrication studio before, so this new environment will provide unique opportunities for learning, problem solving and storytelling. ADKS is navigating a time of incredible growth and change right now, so I've come to the right place at the right time.

But what I'm most excited about is the fact that this is a brand new department, so nothing is sacred. As we move through the various approaches I have mentioned, we can do so without road maps, hang-ups, preconceived notions or "this-is-how-we've-always-done-its." We also have the ability to lengthen the table and invite new perspectives to the party.

The possibilities are open, limitless and exciting. I can't wait to see what we create together. ●

## US

### Universal Beijing's second phase work 'to begin by 2025'

Construction work on the second phase of the Universal Resort Beijing is set to begin by 2025.

The expansion of the resort, which first opened in September 2021, will form part of the Chinese government's wider action plan to invest in Beijing's tourism infrastructure and to develop the city into a global destination.

The second phase will add around 2.2sq km to the total park area at Universal Beijing and will include up to five new hotels.

As a result, the second phase is set to more than double the current size of the 1.8sq km park. Further details of the new areas,

attractions and rides will be revealed at a later date.

The park currently has seven themed lands – The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, Transformers Metrobase, Kung Fu Panda Land, Hollywood, WaterWorld, Minion Land and Jurassic World Isla Nublar.

Across the seven zones, Universal Beijing houses a total of 37 rides and attractions.

In addition, the park features a Universal City Walk and two hotels.

Universal Beijing Resort is owned by Beijing International Resort Company. The news about the second phase comes four months after Universal Parks & Resorts



PHOTO: UNIVERSAL RESORT BEIJING

The resort currently has seven themed lands

underwent a rebrand, which renamed Comcast NBC Universal's theme park arm as Universal Destinations & Experiences, to "better reflect" the changing nature of its offerings.

More: [http://lei.sr/T2x5B\\_T](http://lei.sr/T2x5B_T)

“

The second phase will add around 2.2sq km to the total park area

## GLOBAL

### Falcon's Beyond raises US\$100m and begins trading on Nasdaq

PHOTO: FALCON'S BEYOND



“

Listing on Nasdaq enables us to scale globally  
Scott Demerau

Falcon's Beyond Global has begun trading on the Nasdaq stock exchange, after raising more than US\$100 million to support its growth strategy and completing a business combination with Fast Acquisition Corp.

The company – which operates visitor attractions and hotels, as well as delivers entertainment experiences at theme parks through a wide range of products, platforms and IP – is now trading on Nasdaq under the ticker symbols 'FBYD,' 'FBYDP' and 'FBYDW'.

Listing on the stock exchange is part of the

company's long-term growth strategy.

Falcon's Beyond's executive chair and co-founder, Scott Demerau, said: "Listing on Nasdaq is not only a momentous occasion for Falcon's Beyond, it also enables us to scale globally and continue delivering some of the most innovative

entertainment experiences in the world. This transaction is a game changer for our business as we look to capitalise on significant white space opportunities in front of us."

The company operates a number of attractions under its Falcon's Beyond Destinations arm.

More: [http://lei.sr/v5w5f\\_T](http://lei.sr/v5w5f_T)

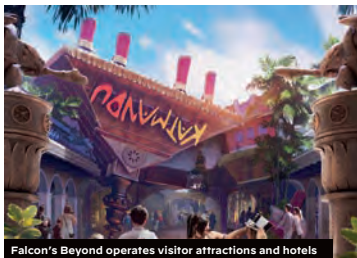


PHOTO: FALCON'S BEYOND

Falcon's Beyond operates visitor attractions and hotels

US

## Morgan's Wonderland reveals largest ever expansion

Morgan's Wonderland – a Texas-based theme park which caters specifically to people with disabilities – has revealed plans to add attractions worth US\$6 million in 2024.

The major additions will include a 4D cinema giving, a passenger boat ride across the park's eight-acre fishing lake, a zipline soaring above the lake and a wheelchair-accessible 'bike ride'. The 4D theatre, located at the park's Sensory Village, gives guests the sensation of riding a thrilling rollercoaster.

Designed to accommodate guests in wheelchairs – and to give them the same roller-coaster-type experience as 'typical' riders – the cinema

will feature electric actuators that deliver motion effects.

Meanwhile, the wheelchair-accessible Jette's Wonder Bikes will have six, hang-glider-style cars that gently fly in a circular pattern.

Each is equipped with pedals that riders can use to make the cars swoop up and down. Guests unable to access the pedals can use hand cranks instead.

Morgan's Wonderland was founded by Gordon Hartman and has been designed to be accessible for all.

Hartman said: "It's now time to refresh and add new elements that will constitute our largest expansion since we opened in 2010."

More: [http://lei.sr/4h8G9\\_T](http://lei.sr/4h8G9_T)



PHOTO: MORGAN'S WONDERLAND

The wheelchair-accessible Jette's Wonder Bikes



PHOTO: MORGAN'S WONDERLAND

“

It's now time to refresh and add new elements to the park

Gordon Hartman

US

## SeaWorld to introduce marine life-themed rides 'at every park'

“

At SeaWorld San Antonio, guests will be treated to the opening of the much-anticipated Catapult Falls, the world's first launched flume coaster

SeaWorld has revealed plans to open new, "one-of-a-kind" marine life themed rides and attractions at all three of its US-based SeaWorld parks during spring 2024.

The new attractions include Penguin Trek at SeaWorld Orlando – an all-new family friendly coaster which will transport riders on an expedition through the Antarctic wilderness.

Riders will travel aboard unique snowmobile styled ride cars, traversing at speeds of up to 43 mph across a 3,020-foot indoor/outdoor track that ends at the penguin habitat where riders can



PHOTO: SEAWORLD

The family-friendly Catapult Falls at SeaWorld San Antonio

experience the world of the remarkable, flightless birds.

At SeaWorld San Diego, guests will be able to visit a first of its kind at SeaWorld parks, the all-new Jewels of the Sea: The Jellyfish Experience. The attraction features an 18ft-tall cylinder, among the tallest jelly cylinders in the country.

The third new attraction will be at SeaWorld San Antonio, where guests will be treated to the opening of the much-anticipated Catapult Falls, the world's first launched flume coaster and the only vertical lift in North America. It will also boast the world's steepest flume drop.

More: [http://lei.sr/y8f7R\\_T](http://lei.sr/y8f7R_T)

US

## Six Flags opens haunted houses based on Hollywood IPs

Six Flags is launching two new haunted house experiences, inspired by iconic horror movies, *The Conjuring* and *Saw X*.

Coinciding with the 30th season of the 'Six Flags Fright Fest' – an annual event linked to Halloween – *The Conjuring* will feature at two parks, Six Flags Great Adventure, New Jersey and Six Flags Magic Mountain, California, while *Saw X* will open in four parks across the US (Six Flags Magic Mountain, Six Flags Great America, Six Flags Great Escape and Six Flags Over Georgia).

In addition to the four parks with the major new attractions, 15 other Six Flags parks in the US,

Canada and Mexico are also taking part in Fright Fest, with dozens of immersive experiences, spooky mazes, live shows, themed food and beverage offerings.

Edithann Ramey, Six Flags chief marketing officer, said: "Six Flags Fright Fest is an important part of our passion to thrill guests and exceed their expectations.

"The Fright Fest events are scarier than ever, but we've also included activities for the little ones at our daytime Boo Fest event. What's also great, is that it's incredibly affordable to visit during Fright Fest because the event is included at most parks for season pass holders."

More: [http://lei.sr/M2E2p\\_T](http://lei.sr/M2E2p_T)



The Saw X haunted house features the return of 'Jigsaw'

PHOTO: LONSONGATE/SIX FLAGS - TWITTER.COM/SAW



PHOTO: SIX FLAGS

“

Six Flags Fright Fest is an important part of our passion to thrill guests

Edithann Ramey

## GLOBAL

## Matt Dawson joins JRA as VP of business development

“

Prior to his VP appointment, Dawson served as Forrec's senior director of visitor attractions, managing client relations with cultural institutions, such as Science North, Mandai Singapore Zoo and the Panama Canal Authority

JRA has appointed Matt Dawson, a former VP at experience design company Forrec, as its new VP of business development.

At Forrec, Dawson – who has a master's degree in architecture – served on the executive team responsible for setting corporate priorities and also set the strategic direction for Forrec's client relations, leading a 12-person team to pursue new business development efforts across North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Prior to his VP appointment, Dawson served as Forrec's



PHOTO: MATT DAWSON

Dawson is a sought-after thought leader

senior director of visitor attractions, managing client relations with cultural institutions such as Science North, Mandai Singapore Zoo and the Panama Canal Authority.

As a sought-after thought leader, Dawson has been a featured speaker at conferences worldwide and

has contributed content to dozens of industry articles.

JRA's executive vice president, Mark Amos, said: "Matt could not be arriving at a more perfect time. With the leisure market hungry for new experiences, we at JRA set a strategic growth plan in motion to expand our reach."

More: [http://lei.sr/e3h8d\\_T](http://lei.sr/e3h8d_T)



## GLOBAL

### Visit Dubai and Real Madrid sign “landmark” deal

Spanish football club, Real Madrid, has signed a global partnership agreement with Visit Dubai, which aims to generate new growth opportunities for both parties.

The collaboration, which is part of the Emirate's recently announced Dubai-D33 Economic Agenda, will offer a wide range of “unique and special” experiences for Dubai and Real Madrid fans.

The deal was signed as Dubai prepares to open the world's first Real Madrid theme park, located at Dubai Parks and Resorts.

Featuring a number of Real Madrid-related attractions, such as a museum, amusement rides and games of footballing

skill, there will also be significant range of retail and restaurant outlets, including a shop selling memorabilia featuring the club's history.

Emilio Butragueño, a former Real Madrid forward and the club's director of Institutional Relations, said: “We're very proud of this new partnership with Visit Dubai as the club's first official destination.

“Dubai is striving for excellence in all its entertainment activities, a goal shared by the club.

“We are delighted to be bringing this exciting tourist destination to our fanbase of millions of Madridistas (Real Madrid fans) around the world.”

More: [http://lei.sr/9y8M4\\_T](http://lei.sr/9y8M4_T)



PHOTO: REAL MADRID/VISIT DUBAI



PHOTO: REAL MADRID

“  
We're bringing an exciting tourist destination to our fanbase of millions of Madridistas  
Emilio Butragueño

## UK

### ‘Birthplace of Scottish tourism’ to get iconic viewing tower



“  
We're excited to be taking this project forward through the building stage

Simon Egan

Plans to create a visitor attraction at Trossachs Pier in the Scottish Highlands have been given the go-ahead.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority approved the proposals, filed by Steamship Sir Walter Scott Ltd, for a three-storey scenic tower and lookouts with walkways.

The £350,000, landmark lookout tower will feature two high-quality viewpoints with linking boardwalks on a headland above the busy Trossachs Pier visitor hub.

Forming the latest phase of a £1.8 million investment in sustainable tourism in the



PHOTO: CAP CO

Trossachs, the construction project will be led by visitor attractions specialist, Cap Co.

The attraction is set to open to the public in early 2024.

Simon Egan, business development director of Cap Co, said: “We are excited to be taking this project forward through the build stage and are delighted that our

initial designs, which blend sensitively into the stunning landscape at this iconic site, have been widely welcomed by many community groups and individuals who strongly supported this scheme.”

When it opens, the attraction will be named Roderick Dhu Watchtower.

More: [http://lei.sr/R6t3M\\_T](http://lei.sr/R6t3M_T)

## GLOBAL

### Net zero advocate Håkon Lund named IAAPA EMEA chair

Håkon Lund, president and owner of Lund Gruppen, which runs theme parks in Norway and Sweden – including Kongeparken and Skånes Djurpark – has been named chair of IAAPA EMEA.

Lund will take a seat on the global IAAPA board, with the role of EMEA regional advisory committee chair director.

Lund said: “As a fourth-generation member of a family deeply rooted in the attractions industry, I’ve literally grown up on popcorn and the smell of cotton candy.

“My earliest memories include attending IAAPA shows, where I was inspired by the magical moments, innovation and camaraderie

that defines our industry. I’m honored to have been elected as the chair of IAAPA EMEA and thrilled to collaborate with Peter van der Schans – executive director and vice president IAAPA EMEA – and the entire IAAPA EMEA team.

“Their dedication to excellence is something we all saw first-hand at the recent IAAPA Expo Europe in Vienna and I’m eager to contribute to our collective efforts to strengthen our industry.

As we embark on this journey together, my focus will be on creating millions of safe, magical moments for our guests and strengthening the support we offer to our members. Safety and magic go hand in hand.”



Lund will also take a seat on the global IAAPA board

PHOTO: LUND GRUPPEN/IAAPA

Lund is an advocate of environmental sustainability and earlier this year revealed how Kongeparken plans to source a third of its energy needs from solar power by the end of this year (2023).

More: [http://lei.sr/Y3u2V\\_T](http://lei.sr/Y3u2V_T)

“

My focus will be on creating millions of safe, magical moments for our guests

## US

### Las Vegas’ Sphere stuns audiences as it opens with U2 gig

“

Billed as the world’s largest spherical structure, the 366ft-tall and 516ft-wide arena has already become a new Las Vegas landmark, with vast immersive screens inside and out

The Sphere at the Venetian in Las Vegas, a US\$2.3 billion project described as the “entertainment venue of the future”, has made its public debut by hosting its first major event – a rock concert by Irish band U2.

The project was initially conceived as costing US\$1 billion. Billed as the world’s largest spherical structure, the 366ft-tall and 516ft-wide arena has already become a new Las Vegas landmark, with vast immersive screens inside and out.

Operated by Sphere Entertainment Co, the venue



The exterior of the arena is covered in 580,000 sq ft of LEDs

PHOTO: SPHERE ENTERTAINMENT CO

was designed by architects Populous and houses an 18,600-seat auditorium.

Its unique, immersive video and audio capabilities include a 16K resolution, wraparound interior LED screen, as well as a 580,000 sq ft (54,000 m<sup>2</sup>) LED displays covering the exterior. Inside, bespoke audio

solutions utilise specialist speakers to facilitate beamforming and a spatial audio rendering technique called ‘wave field synthesis’.

Combined, the Sphere’s technological capabilities enable the LED displays both inside and outside to be used as huge, single screens.

More: [http://lei.sr/U6d4C\\_T](http://lei.sr/U6d4C_T)

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## CHINA

### White Crane Lake visitor centre ‘glows like a lantern’

A newly opened visitor centre at White Crane Lake in Yingtan, China, has been designed to look like a shining lantern within a forest.

The White Crane Lake Visitor Center forms part of an ambitious tourism development initiative for the area in Jiangxi Province.

Designed by Beijing-based architecture firm, Archperience Design, the centre features a general reception area, a viewing platform, rooftop pool, restaurant, conference space, and a VIP Club.

The design brief was to place a “stylistically modern cultural building”, aimed at increasing tourism into an area of a natural

beauty which is defined by its quiet ambience.

The visitor centre is located on a tidal flat, surrounded by the lake on the north, south, and west sides of the site, with an extensive bamboo forest to the east.

In order to reduce its impact on the environment, Archperience Design opted for a decentralised layout, so its overall form is divided into a series of connected volumes which effectively reduces its perceived visual scale.

The building’s design also incorporates rounded forms and curves, softening its relationship with its surroundings and giving the impression of flow and movement.



PHOTO: ARCHPERIENCE DESIGN

The building has been designed to look like a ‘bamboo cloud’

The building incorporates a transparent, undulating glass volume with a second layer of “bamboo skin” – designed to appear as if was floating like a “cloud of bamboo” by the waters.

More: [http://lei.sr/a6p3g\\_T](http://lei.sr/a6p3g_T)

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The visitor centre is located on a tidal flat, surrounded by the lake on three sides

## UK

### ‘Immersive miniverse’ for London’s famous Oxford Street

“

The attraction will have an eye-catching, 50m frontage along Oxford Street in the hope of attracting drop-ins from the estimated passing footfall of more than 150 million people per year

A new immersive experiential attraction is being planned for the famous Oxford Street in the heart of the UK’s capital city, London.

With a target of attracting more than a million visitors per year – and to support the revitalisation of the area, famous for its retail offer – Pocket Planet will feature small scale, but very large model landscapes of London, UK landmarks and a selection of scenes from around the world.

Spreading across 30,000sq ft, the attraction promises to “take miniature world model making to a whole new level”



PHOTO: POCKET PLANET

Pocket Planet will spread across 30,000sq ft

with moving aircraft, trains, vehicles and boats, while enhancing the physical models with audio and visual effects.

The attraction will have an eye-catching, 50m frontage along Oxford Street in the hope of attracting drop-ins from the estimated passing footfall of more than 150 million people per year.

The attraction will be opened in two phases. A 10,000sq ft Pocket Planet retail and café will open in spring 2024, before the launch of the main exhibit in early 2025. The project is driven by entrepreneurs Mark Vlassopoulos and Mark Brodermann.

More: [http://lei.sr/z7H7h\\_T](http://lei.sr/z7H7h_T)





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## EUROPE

### TEA reveals date and location for SATE Europe 2024

The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) has revealed the dates and location for its annual TEA SATE Europe event.

Considered one of the most important gatherings of the themed entertainment sector, TEA SATE Europe 2024 will be held at Gardaland, Italy, from 14 to 17 May.

The event is TEA's signature conference, bringing together the leading professionals and decision-makers across storytelling, architecture, technology, and experience (SATE) in themed entertainment.

Among the conference programme will be a wide range of educational sessions covering topical issues, led by

industry experts, trendsetters and specialists in their field.

Delegates will also have an opportunity to explore Gardaland Park, owned by Merlin Entertainments. Located on the shores of Lake Garda near the city of Verona, Gardaland attracts around 3 million visitors each year.

TEA said: "Speakers will share a broader look at what is happening inside and outside the industry and provide an in-depth discussion of exciting projects and developments."

Further details of speakers and topics will be announced later this year. To find out more, visit: [teaconnect.org/sate-europe.html](http://teaconnect.org/sate-europe.html)

More: [http://lei.sr/W2f6Z\\_T](http://lei.sr/W2f6Z_T)



PHOTO: GARDALAND

TEA SATE Europe 2024 will be held at Gardaland



Among the conference programme will be a wide range of educational sessions covering topical issues, led by industry experts and specialists in their field.

## AUSTRALIA

### Sydney Opera house's AV project wins Fast Co innovation award



PHOTO: ART PROCESSORS



My prior expertise in the many facets of the story was never more useful than beginning to think how best to visualise

*Sam Doust*

An AV experience project which turned the Sydney Opera House's famous 'sails' into huge video screens, has won the Experience Design category in Fast Company's 2023 Innovation by Design Awards.

Created by Australia-based Art Processors, the From the Sails: Light Years project included an original film artwork projected onto the Sydney Opera House's western sails to mark the iconic landmark's 50th-year celebrations. The 17-minute film charts the building's history and legacy as a performance venue,



PHOTO: ART PROCESSORS

Sydney Opera House's famous 'sails' became screens

as well as its reputation as a World Heritage-listed masterpiece of architecture.

Those watching the video – from across the harbour, on the water, or at a local venue – could listen to the accompanying musical score on their mobile device thanks to live audio-visual synchronisation technology.

The project was the brainchild of Art Processors' Sam Doust – who is also a recognised Sydney Opera House historian.

Doust said: "My prior expertise in the many facets of the story was never more useful than beginning to think how best to visualise it."

More: [http://lei.sr/v2P4n\\_T](http://lei.sr/v2P4n_T)



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US

## Otherworld Philadelphia opens its doors

A new immersive, interactive art experience – described as a place where ‘anything is possible’ – has opened in Philadelphia.

Called Otherworld, the attraction occupies a 40,000sq ft space in a building located in north Philadelphia that previously housed a discount retail outlet, Formal Mills.

Designed and built by Otherworld, the experience features 55 unique rooms that guests can explore, with a number of storylines interlinking and connecting them to each other.

Interactivity is key and each room has been designed to be entirely different. In total, Otherworld includes

works from 100 artists, modellers, animators and creative technologists.

The Philadelphia location is the second Otherworld site – following an opening in Columbus, Ohio in 2019 – and will be operated by Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group.

Describing the attraction, Otherworld CEO, Chris Stafford said: “Imagine a world where anything is possible. A place with no rules, only your imagination to guide you through countless rooms of large-scale interactive art.

“It’s a place where mixed reality playgrounds and secret passageways await you in our surreal landscape of fantasy.”

More: [http://lei.sr/Q8d7z\\_T](http://lei.sr/Q8d7z_T)



PHOTO: OTHERWORLD

“

Otherworld is a place where mixed reality playgrounds and secret passageways await you in our surreal landscape of science fiction and fantasy

*Chris Stafford*

UK

## Attractions.io creates night-time map for Alton Towers



PHOTO: ALTON TOWERS

“

We strive to be innovative and love to provide our guests with something unique

*Bianca Sammut*

Attractions.io created a bespoke night-time app for UK theme park Alton Towers, which the operator used for its Scarefest and Ultimate Fireworks Spectacular events.

Designed to reflect the environment for after-dark events at Alton Towers, the interactive map adjusts – in real time – to mirror the ambient light in the mobile device’s environment.

The dynamic lighting map was part of Attractions.io’s ongoing collaboration with Alton Towers Resort.

The new map was made available to visitors as an update to the mobile



PHOTO: ALTON TOWERS

app created by the tech company for Alton Towers and which is already being used by the operator.

Bianca Sammut, divisional director for Alton Towers Resort, comments: “As a Theme Park Resort we strive to be innovative and love to provide our guests with something unique.

“Thanks to this new feature, Attractions.io has made this possible.”

For this year’s Scarefest, Alton Towers partnered with gaming influencer Daz Games for *The Immersive Daz Games: Panic!* ride, which combined an escape room with a live action scare maze. More: [http://lei.sr/p9k7e\\_T](http://lei.sr/p9k7e_T)



UK

## Museum opens life-size replica of 1960s health centre

Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, UK, has opened a life-sized replica of a former healthcare centre for infants, offering visitors an opportunity to discover how new and expectant mothers in the early 1960s were looked after.

The new Lea Road Infant Welfare Centre is housed in its own building, allowing visitors to explore a waiting room, doctor's surgery, a dispensary and other exhibits – as well as meet costumed characters.

One of the characters, a midwife named 'Cicily Sinclair', will share experiences of travelling to the Black Country from Jamaica as part of the Windrush Generation.

In addition, a collection of archival materials, donated objects and personal memories from the period will help transport guests back to the 1960s.

The opening of the major new attraction has been scheduled to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the UK's National Health Service, which was founded in 1948.

To mark the opening of the attraction, Black Country Living Museum invited 75 babies to celebrate the launch.

A mother of one of the babies, Beth Lucas-Pearce – who brought along her five-month-old daughter, Eleanor – said: "It has been really interesting to see what maternal care was like in



PHOTO: BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM

the 1960s – the leaflets, the very basic toys, the heavy old-fashioned prams.

"Things have obviously moved on significantly since those times, but the backbone stays the same."

More: [http://lei.sr/G8w4d\\_T](http://lei.sr/G8w4d_T)

“  
Things have obviously moved on significantly, but the backbone stays the same

UK

## £250m Therme Manchester gets planning approval

“  
A project by Therme Group, the £250m (US\$317.8m, £291.4m) resort's design was recently updated to include a pavilion-style concept enveloped by a natural landscape

Therme Group has received planning permission to build the UK's first city-based wellbeing resort, Therme Manchester, after a four-year journey.

Planning approval has been granted for the UK's first city-based wellbeing resort, Therme Manchester, in Trafford in northern England.

A project by Therme Group, the £250 million (US\$317.8 million, £291.4 million) resort's design was recently updated to include a pavilion-style concept enveloped by a natural landscape.

Construction in the project is set to commence



PHOTO: THERME GROUP

later this year, with an estimated duration of 24 months for completion.

Trafford Council's decision coincides with the appointment of professor David Russell as the first UK-based CEO of Therme UK and demonstrates a shift in Therme's focus from design and planning to delivery.

With 30 years of experience in delivering large-scale projects, Russell has been involved in major ventures around the world including the London 2012 Summer Olympics, The Rugby World Cup in Japan 2019 and the US\$8 billion (£7.5 billion, £6.5 billion) Expo 2020 in Dubai. ●  
More: [http://lei.sr/b9Y2k\\_T](http://lei.sr/b9Y2k_T)

# DELPHINE PONS

With a brand new €36m land and the second record breaking year in a row, Parc Astérix is riding high. Magali Robathan speaks to its CEO about what's next for the much-loved French park

Pons joined Compagnie des Alpes in 2005 and became CEO of Parc Astérix in 2021

“

*Astérix and Obélix embody the core values of authenticity, friendliness and humour, and these values are totally embodied by the park*

**A**

s a young child, Delphine Pons was a huge fan of the Astérix and Obélix comic books. “I used to read them with my father, and they really made me laugh a lot,” she tells me, speaking from her home in Paris.

Growing up in Africa, Pons didn’t have the opportunity to visit a theme park until she moved to France to study, but when she finally did, Parc Astérix was her first.

“I was 19 when I went to Parc Astérix, and I just loved it,” she says. “The combination of rollercoasters, adrenaline and my admiration and love for the Astérix universe made it the perfect theme park for me.”

Delphine spent 16 years working across a variety of roles for French visitor attraction and ski resort operator Compagnie des Alpes. When the chance arose in 2021 to lead Parc Astérix – owned by the group – Pons didn’t hesitate.

“It was the most wonderful opportunity,” she says. “I loved the product, the universe and the team. It’s really the perfect job for me.”

### **The recipe for success**

Launched just outside Paris in 1989 – three years before EuroDisney – by Astérix creators Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny, Parc Astérix has become a much-loved attraction within France and beyond. Organised into six different ‘lands’ inspired by the comic book, it features a mix of 50 theme park rides and live shows.

“We’re the only park in the world themed around Astérix and Obélix; that’s a real strength,” says Pons. “Astérix and Obélix are at the heart of a very rich universe, with 40 comic books, five



PHOTO:PARC ASTÉRIX

The new E36m Festival Toutatis land launched in Parc Astérix in May 2023

live movies, 10 cartoon movies, video games and toys. Astérix and Obélix embody the core values of authenticity, friendliness and humour, and these values are totally embodied by the park.

“The licence is also very active, which is great for us. A live film was released last year, and the 40th comic book will be released next October – that’s going to be a big event in France and in Europe. In 2024 there will be a new animation series created for Netflix by Alain Charbat. There is a lot of actuality around the licence for Astérix.”

Last year, Parc Astérix attracted a record 2.6 million visitors – 20 per cent higher than its 2019 pre-pandemic attendance. This year, says Pons, will be even better in terms of attendance and turnover, with its continuing success owing much to the launch of a major new ride and a brand new land, in the shape of the Toutatis LSM launch coaster by Intamin and the Festival Toutatis area. ▶

"I think our success is down to the quality of the product – the rides, the shows, the F&B, the hotels. We offer our guests a very immersive and unique product."

### By Toutatis!

The genesis of the idea for Parc Astérix' new Festival Toutatis land came in 2017, when the team were debating what major attraction to open next.

"We had just launched the Pegase Express coaster in our Greek zone," says Pons. "The ambition was to build a new generation of coaster that didn't yet exist in France – something very different from any other ride in Parc Astérix."

The team settled on the Intamin multi LSM launch coaster. The ride fitted the brief of offering something different – it was the first launch coaster for the park, accelerating at a speed of 110kmph (a speed record for France). It also breaks the world record for airtime, with

23 separate instances, as well as a European record for the number of accelerations (seven).

While the team were happy with the choice of ride, it wasn't suitable for young visitors, and it soon became clear that a whole new land was needed to cater for everyone.

Next, work began on the theming and storytelling for the area, says Pons. "We knew it was going to be in the Gaulish land, so we got together with the concept designers and came up with the story of a festival in honour of the God Toutatis organised by the Gaulish people."

The park invested €36m into the three hectare land – its largest ever single investment since launching. As well as the Toutatis coaster, Festival Toutatis features a family ride, Chez Gyrofolix; the Le Sanglier d'Or playground; a themed restaurant; a sweet shop; and a gift shop.

The new land was an immediate hit with visitors, says Pons, with the Toutatis coaster scoring particularly highly. "It's a real success



In August 2023, 20 per cent of the park's guests came from outside France





The park has attracted record numbers of visitors since reopening after COVID-19



– we're very proud of the result," she says. "We measure guest satisfaction via surveys at the park, and the ride Toutatis immediately became our highest ranked ride in the park, scoring 9.64 out of 10. I also check the coaster fan websites and the ride is ranked fifth at a European level and eighteenth worldwide."

### Creating a destination

When Pons took over as CEO of Parc Astérix in 2021, the park was part way through an evolution to move from being a single day destination to a multi-day destination. This saw 50 rooms added to the existing Hotel Les Trois Hiboux in 2018, and two new hotels opened – La Cité Suspendue in 2018 and Les Quais du Lutèce, in 2020.

Soon after joining, Pons drew up a new 10-year masterplan. "One of biggest focuses is on pursuing hotel development and developing accommodation capacity," she says. "Our three hotels are working very well – they're fully booked and the satisfaction rate is really good. We're now planning a fourth hotel, with 300 rooms and a convention centre, to open in 2026." Work on the theming of

this hotel is underway, she adds, although it's too early to reveal more details.

"The main aim with the hotel development was to attract visitors from further away – from all over France and from Europe. That's working well. In August 2023, 20 per cent of our guests came from outside France, compared to 14 per cent in August 2022."

### Extending the season

Extending the opening calendar further is also a key part of the masterplan, Pons says.

A decade ago, the park extended its traditional opening season by opening for the Halloween season. Now called *Peur sur la Parc*, this period – from 30 September to 5 November in 2023 – has become the park's busiest time of year.

"It's a very important season for us," says Pons. "It's the period when we have the maximum number of visitors per day. During the Halloween season last year, we welcomed 432,000 visitors. On the days we are open late at night, we can welcome 32,000 visitors per day."

*Peur sur la Parc* features themed attractions, spooky shows, haunted houses, a monster



- ▶ parade and Halloween theming throughout. This year, the park is showcasing seven late night events from 7pm until midnight, featuring an inferno and percussion show and a sound and light show. These are priced at €46.

New for 2023 is Parc Astérix' fifth Haunted House, situated in its Egyptian zone. Called the Tomb of the Gods, it will introduce visitors aged 16 and above to 'the most evil souls in Egyptian history' and challenge them to survive several trials.

"I'm really happy with this product," says Pons. "It's a next level haunted house – multi-sensory, with smells, water, fire and very scary and strong characters."

A new secret bar is also being launched for the 2023 Halloween season. Visitors follow clues around the park to lead them to the Sanglier Borgne speakeasy-style bar, where they must solve a riddle to gain entry.

In 2020, the park launched a new Christmas season, Gallic Christmas. Open this year from 23 December to 7 January, it sees Parc



PHOTO: PARC ASTÉRIX

## The Toutatis coaster

*Designed by Intamin, the Toutatis steel coaster features:*

- Three trains with 20 seats made of five carriages
- 23 airtimes – a world record for a steel coaster
- Seven accelerations, both forward and reverse (a European record)
- Top speeds of 110kmph (a French record)
- A 101 degree inclined drop
- Three inversions
- 1,328m in length

Astérix transformed, with a Christmas market, Christmas-themed shows, festive theming, and a covered skiing village – with a skating rink, toboggan runs and a special children's area.

"It's a really successful event and something we're continuing to develop," says Pons.

This year will see the launch of a new Gallic Christmas parade as well as a new Christmas show – Les Jardins Merveilleux de Pere Noel.

## Future plans

What else is in the 10 year masterplan, I ask Pons.

"Another key area is the renovation of ageing infrastructure in the park. "We want to bring up the quality everywhere," she says.

"Also, we have decided to invest in the renovation and enlargement of the 'backstage' areas for staff. When you have an investment plan you naturally focus on what we call 'the show' – what is visible for guests. We think it's also important to create good areas for our staff. Last year we created a new building for the F&B team, we're enlarging and renovating the building for operators, and we're creating a new 'show house'."

While the board has explored the idea of a second gate waterpark for Parc Astérix, this is not part of the current masterplan, Pons tells me.

"Perhaps in the longer term," she says. "There is no waterpark in our 10 year masterplan, but after that it could be a possibility. The masterplan

Extending the opening calendar is a key part of the park's plans, says Pons



Festival Toutatis features the new coaster, a playground and a new family ride

PHOTO: PARC ASTÉRIX

does, however, contain the possibility of adding an aquatic area dedicated to hotel guests.”

When I ask Pons for some of her most fun moments leading Parc Astérix, it’s clear that she has lost none of the thrill of her 19-year-old self visiting the park for the first time. She lists the inauguration of Festival Toutatis, brainstorming new ideas and stories with the team – and her first ride on the Toutatis coaster.

“We had three months of testing the ride with mannequins, then the project manager at Intamin said, Okay, we’re ready to go,” she says. “I was at the front of the queue with my deputy CEO Sebastien Rotillard. We were thinking: I hope it’s going to be worth it. The ride lasts two minutes, and at the end of those two minutes we looked at one another, exhilarated, and just said Yes!” ●

### Parc Astérix by numbers

- Opened: **30 April 1989**
- Cost to build: **3,850m French Francs (€129.5m, US\$145m)**
- Operator: **Compagnie des Alpes**
- Size: **97 hectares**
- Number of hotels: **3**
- Number of hotel rooms: **450**
- Distance from Paris: **35km**
- Annual visitor numbers (2022): **2,632,000**
- Annual opening days in 2023: **193**
- Number of employees: **2,400 (400 permanent and 2,000 seasonal)**
- Number of food outlets: **34**
- Revenue in 2022: **€170m**

FIRST PERSON

# THE POWER OF PLAY

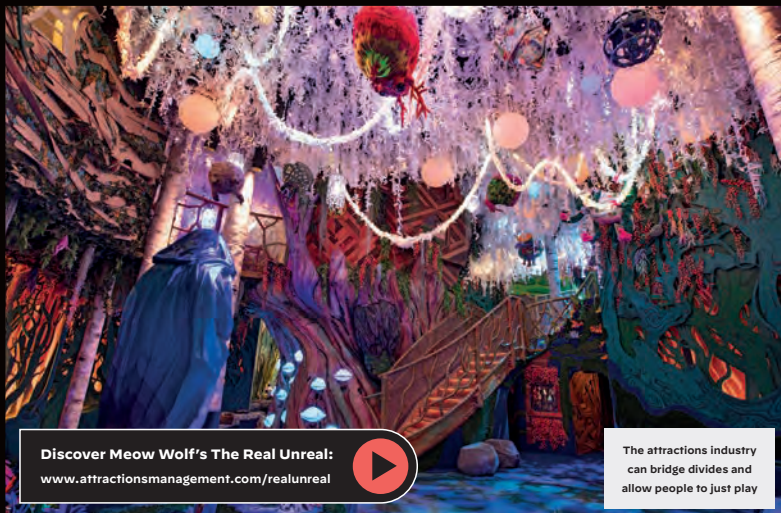
As election season dawns in the US, Meow Wolf co-founder Vince Kadlubek muses on the unique power of the attractions industry to bridge divides

PHOTO BY KATE RUSSELL COURTESY OF MEOW WOLF



The Real Unreal in Texas, US, is Meow Wolf's latest permanent attraction

PHOTO BY KATE RUSSELL COURTESY OF MEOW WOLF



Discover Meow Wolf's The Real Unreal:  
[www.attractionsmanagement.com/realunreal](http://www.attractionsmanagement.com/realunreal)



The attractions industry  
 can bridge divides and  
 allow people to just play



Meow Wolf launched in New Mexico in 2008

“

***In this binary existence  
 of right versus left,  
 there's an alternative  
 space of possibility in  
 the worlds of co-creation***

lection season is once again upon us, and this cycle looks to be most divisive yet again. Whether we like it or not, the attractions industry has found itself squarely in the political discourse. As Meow Wolf has grown into an expansive company with exhibitions in both red and blue states, I've been doing a lot of thinking about my love for art, entertainment, storytelling, and themed attractions and how politics fits into it all. Our industry should not avoid the discourse, but at the same time we hold a unique position and responsibility that we should never forget.

This world we live in is filled with various forms of division. These separations express themselves through large-scale, aggregated societal forms but they actually originate within each one of us individually.

Division is found within our personal identities, our distinctions, our definitions. We fabricate hard stances based on our own observations of threat – sometimes that threat is real and sometimes it's exaggerated by our personal mental narratives. We gravitate towards packs of like-mindedness, whether on social media or in social spaces, that then re-enforce these identifiers and perspectives. A loop of validation strengthens our stances in the world, affirms our place as the righteous, and fuels our view of the enemy.



### ► No room for exploration

A caricature of ourself starts to form, increasingly void of nuance, and our delusional minds form the same caricatures about 'the other'; a simplified construct of human beings painted with low-resolution textures and monochromatic colours. Fox News reflects it back to us, and so does MSNBC, and so does ESPN, and so do the hyper-targeted ads we see on our feeds, and so does the curated algorithms of our social networks, and so does the sub-cultures of the communities we live in. The grey areas become black and white. The result is us vs. them with punitive dogmas running our mental processes.

Communion becomes impossible. The ecosystem of these defined perspectives leaves no room for exploration or possibility – we become determined by our determinations. Our daily lives are experienced within environments that re-establish our divisions and further define our enemies.

### The magic of play

But a magical opportunity exists within the landscape of entertainment: Play. Through storytelling, art, and creative expression,

humans have crafted make-believe worlds that are free from identifiers and create space to connect as the versions of ourselves that existed prior to when we committed to all of our opinions: The Child.

Because in the limitless world of the imagination, the dividing perspectives of our day-to-day carry little reference or value. Who I am and what I've already determined becomes irrelevant within the vastness of dreams. In this binary existence of red vs blue, right vs left, wrong vs wrong, old vs new, black vs white, there's an alternative space of possibility where nothing has been labelled yet and we can co-exist in the communion of exploration. It's within our worlds of co-creation.

If that communion can be felt for even the slightest moment, it has the profound power to short-circuit the mechanisms of judgement and remind us that we are loving and forgiving beings that ultimately seek to have peace with one another.

Our industry has been bringing all types of people together for the past century, providing a miraculous opportunity for people of all backgrounds, beliefs, and character to come

Storytelling, art and play  
have the power to bring  
people closer together





Meow Wolf's installations allow adults to feel like children again

“  
**This world of  
imagination is  
for everyone**”

together to share in wonder and joy with each other, even for small windows of time. That's the power of art, entertainment, attractions and play; to rise above the predictable divisions of the self and expand our minds towards the shared experience of community.

### The child inside

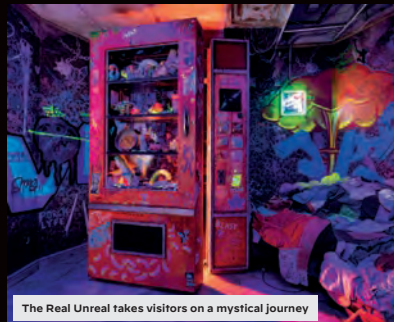
I'm reminded of a time when Meow Wolf first opened House of Eternal Return in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A family standing in line caught my eye. The mom and the two kids were giddy with excitement, but the father, wearing a Harley Davidson tank top and a hat with the Texas state flag, stood there with his arms crossed looking uncomfortable. I could tell he that he had already determined that Meow Wolf was not for him.

An hour later, I was walking around inside the exhibition and saw this family again. The mom and kids were still in a place of enjoyment, and the father was crawling through the fireplace with a huge smile on his face proclaiming: "There's a dinosaur skeleton in this room that plays music through its bones!"

The environment allowed the father to drop his identity and instead just explore and play like a kid again.

This world of imagination is for everyone. ●

PHOTO BY KATE RUSSELL COURTESY OF MEOW WOLF



The Real Unreal takes visitors on a mystical journey

## The Real Unreal

Meow Wolf's fourth permanent attraction opened in the Grapevine Mills shopping centre near Dallas-Forth airport, North Texas in July 2023.

Created by 40 Texas-based artists together with more than 150 Meow Wolf artists and fabricators, the exhibition takes visitors on a journey that begins in what appears to be an ordinary front yard in the Midwest. Guests enter and explore the 'Delauney family home' where everyday objects hint at a mysterious disappearance.

In signature Meow Wolf style, what follows is a "swift freefall down a narrative rabbit hole. Guests will revel in spectacle after spectacle which materialise into a gleaming triumph of multisensory art."

Immersive installations include Brrrmuda, an "intersection of refrigerator portals from various dimensions, taking guests on unexpected adventures or to lively parties." A mystical forest cloaked in magical daylight features musical fungus and a treehouse, while Lamp Shop Alley has shop windows overflowing with trinkets and doors leading to the unknown. Neon Kingdom offers visitors the chance to take part in a 'multiversal dance party' with its 'charming dance floor' and 'whimsical cuckoo-clock landscape'.

PHOTO: PHOTO: IMANITHOMAS



More than 450 artists worked on the attraction



We believe that everything exists in a long, fragile yet miraculous borderless continuity

# LIGHTING THE WAY



**With a huge new immersive art space under construction on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island and a permanent museum taking shape in Jeddah, teamLab is changing the face of immersive digital art. Magali Robathan speaks to the team behind the magic**

Since 2001, art collective teamLab has been creating jaw-dropping digital art installations. Their interactive exhibitions involve the viewer in the artworks – over the years visitors worldwide have watched waterfalls part at their feet, birds fly from their dinner plates and flowers bloom and then wither as they pass.

While the early years saw teamLab create art in relative obscurity, the past decade has seen the collective become increasingly well known, with major exhibitions around the world. In 2021, teamLab Borderless Tokyo was announced as the most visited single-artist museum in the world. The collective now has permanent exhibition spaces in Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore

and Macau, with their teamLab Borderless Tokyo museum relocating to Azabudai Hills in central Tokyo – due to open next year.

teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi – a huge 17,000sq m multisensory art space on Saadiyat Island – is set to complete construction in 2024, and will sit alongside the Louvre Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.

A further permanent teamLab museum is being constructed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia as part of a collaboration with the Saudi Ministry of Culture. teamLab Borderless Jeddah will be located on the Al Arbaeen Lagoon overlooking the old town, and will feature more than 50 artworks, with a brand new installation created for Jeddah.

Here the collective answer our questions.



A permanent teamLab museum is under construction in Jeddah

### How would you sum up teamLab and what you do?

teamLab is an international art collective that seeks to navigate the confluence of art, science, technology, and the natural world. Through art, our interdisciplinary group of specialists – including artists, programmers, engineers, CG animators, mathematicians, and architects – aims to explore the relationship between the self and the world, and new forms of perception.

teamLab seeks to transcend boundaries in our perceptions of the world, of the relationship between the self and the world, and of the continuity of time. We believe that everything exists in a long, fragile yet miraculous, borderless continuity.

In the interactive artworks created by teamLab, the presence and movement of visitors transforms the art – visitors become a part of the work. This changes the relationship between an artwork and an individual into a relationship between an artwork and a group of individuals. Suddenly the way the person standing next to you behaves becomes important. We wanted to create a space where you can feel that you're connected with other people in the world.

### What's the history of teamLab?

teamLab was founded in 2001 by Toshiyuki Inoko and several of his friends to create a 'laboratory to experiment in collaborative creation'. Through art, teamLab was

(and is) interested in creating new experiences to explore what the world is for humans.

The collective has been creating art ever since, with the aim of contributing to societal progress.

**You've gone from relative obscurity to huge success. How has this changed what you do?**

In the beginning, teamLab didn't have the opportunity to present its work, nor could we work out how to financially sustain our art creation. However, we believed in the power of digital technology and creativity, and kept creating.

As time went on, while teamLab gained passionate followers, we were still ignored by the art world. Our breakthrough came in 2011 at the Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Taipei, to which the collective was invited by the artist Takashi Murakami. Since then, teamLab has gained opportunities to join major contemporary art exhibitions in cosmopolitan cities starting with the Singapore Biennale 2013.

In 2014, New York PACE Gallery started to help promote teamLab artworks, enabling us to expand rapidly, and in 2015, the collective was finally able to organise its own exhibition for the first time in Tokyo.

These events led to opportunities to exhibit internationally, in New York, London, Paris, Singapore, Silicon Valley, Beijing, Taipei, and Melbourne among others. As of today, teamLab has welcomed more than 35 million visitors to our art exhibitions.



PHOTO: TEAMLAB, MICROCOSMOSES © TEAMLAB

Many of teamLab's works react to the movement of the people viewing it



The presence and movement of visitors transforms the art – they become a part of the work. Suddenly the way the person standing next to you behaves becomes important





**Forest of Resonating Lamps**  
featured numerous glass  
lamps fitted with sensors

All we do is create artworks that we believe in – our hope is that our work reaches people's hearts and changes their behaviour and ways of thinking. Popularity is just a by-product of that.

### What can people expect from teamLab Borderless Jeddah?

teamLab Borderless Jeddah is the first-ever permanent teamLab Borderless museum to open in the Middle East.

Located in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah, it's currently being built on the shores of Al-Arbaeen Lagoon overlooking the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Historic Jeddah.

This immersive museum will comprise over 50 artworks spread across its labyrinthine spaces, including Borderless World, Athletics Forest and Future Park. It will also feature an entirely new installation created exclusively for Jeddah.

teamLab Borderless is based on the concept that everything exists in a borderless continuity.

In order to comprehend the world, people separate it into parts, creating boundaries in between. Through this exhibition, teamLab aims to create a place in which various artworks are connected with one other without boundaries, giving visitors an opportunity to rethink their perception of the world, and discover that continuity itself is beautiful.

At teamLab Borderless Jeddah, the artworks leave rooms, move through the halls and influence other artworks. For instance, the 'crows' flying in a given space initially came from a different room to enter that space. As

## TEAMLAB EXHIBITIONS

### Permanent exhibitions:

#### ■ teamLab SuperNature Macao

Soft opened June 2020 at the Venetian Macao

#### ■ teamLab Massless Beijing

Opened in Chaoyang Joy City, Beijing in December 2022

#### ■ teamLab Botanical Gardens Osaka

Opened in July 2022, this open air museum features teamLab's artworks at the Nagai Botanical Garden in Osaka

#### ■ Future World: Where Art Meets Science, Art Science Museum, Singapore

Opened in March 2016

### Upcoming exhibitions:

#### ■ teamLab Borderless Jeddah

No opening date has yet been released for this permanent new teamLab museum, set to be located on Culture Square in Jeddah

#### ■ teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi

With construction due for completion in 2024, this new 17,000sq m art museum will be housed in a curved organically-shaped building on the waterfront on Saadiyat Island

#### ■ teamLab Borderless: MORI Building

Digital Art Museum, Tokyo

Scheduled to re-open in early 2024, in Toyko's Azabudai Hills, this museum replaces teamLab Borderless in Odaiba, which closed in August 2022. In 2021, the museum in Odaiba was announced as the world's most visited single art group museum





Visitors can change the flow of 'water' by interacting with the work



At teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi, visitors will be immersed in a world that organically evolves through the actions of the people in it

- ▶ they fly about, they affect other artworks, causing 'flowers' to scatter and fall.

The artworks are also affected and changed by the presence of people – when visitors stand still in a space, the flow of the waterfall will change around their feet, and flowers will begin to bloom in their wake.

#### What can you tell us about teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi?

Housed in a 17,000sq m venue within the Saadiyat Culture District, teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi will offer a completely new art experience based on teamLab's new concept, Environmental Phenomena.

This experience will consist of a selection of dynamic works by teamLab. Visitors will be immersed into a world that organically changes and evolves through the participation and actions of the people in it.

A key characteristic of the experience is the environment and the various phenomena created by it. Unlike stones or man-made creations that can maintain a stable structure on their own, the artworks at teamLab Phenomena don't exist independently, but are dependent on their environment.

Elements like air, water, and light are transformed by their environment into unique phenomena that become works of art. The

boundaries of their existence are ambiguous and continuous. Even if people destroy the work, the work will remain in existence as long as its environment is maintained – and will disappear, if it's not maintained.

The venue is set to complete construction in 2024, and will sit alongside the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.

**teamLab Borderless Tokyo was announced as the most visited single artist museum in 2021. Why was it so popular?**

All we can say is that teamLab believes that digital technology can expand art and

PHOTO: TEAMLAB, FLOATING FLOWER GARDEN: FLOWERS AND ARE OF THE SAME ROOT, THE GARDEN AND I ARE ONE © TEAMLAB

The Floating Flower Garden at teamLab Planets in Tokyo





that art made in this way can create new relationships between people, as well as between viewers and the artwork.

Digital technology enables complex detail and freedom for change. Before people started accepting digital technology, information and artistic expression had to be presented in some physical form.

Creative expression has existed through static media for most of human history, often using physical objects such as canvas and paint. The advent of digital technology allows human expression to become free from these physical constraints, enabling it to exist independently and evolve freely.

No longer limited to physical media, digital technology has made it possible for artworks to expand physically. Since art created using digital technology can easily expand, it provides us with a greater degree of autonomy within the space. We are now able to manipulate and use much larger spaces, and viewers are able to experience the artwork more directly.

The characteristics of digital technology allow artworks to express the capacity for change much more freely. Viewers, in interaction with their environment, can instigate perpetual change in an artwork. Through an interactive relationship between the viewers and the artwork, viewers become an intrinsic part of that artwork. ●

# We need a



Several macro trends are making it harder for operators to attract and retain staff



# revolution

**The industry is facing a staffing crisis and in a heartfelt plea to designers, Margreet Papamichael asks for radical solutions**

**T**he staffing crisis is a burning issue for our industry. Many parks are finding it difficult to staff up to the required level while using the flexible hourly model that's traditionally been used and that allows operators to keep labour costs as low as possible. This issue has become so urgent that at times it has led to closures of attractions and F&B outlets.

I believe designers in our industry – including engineers and technologists – should lead the revolution to help us out of this painful problem.

Our industry needs to radically rethink design by modifying the design process so it starts by ensuring very little to no people power is required unless it significantly benefits the guest experience through amazing customer interaction.

I don't know exactly what this might look like, but I'd love to find out. What I'm saying is – we need designers of all kinds to help us design attractions that are cheaper to operate by reducing the number of staff needed to do so.



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER ANDREOU

Margreet Papamichael

## **BACKGROUND: Why are we in this situation?**

### **1. Ageing population**

A couple of macro trends have landed us here. We're all aware of the fact that the populations in Western Europe and the US are ageing. Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 are now aged between 58 and 76. With the average retirement age in the EU at 64.3 years for men and 63.5 years for women (slightly lower in the US), this group is slowly withdrawing from the working population.

The population group of 20- to 64-year-olds is set to reduce significantly over time, mainly caused by a steadily declining birth rate post WW2. This trend will only become more visible and immediate.

### **2. More time in education**

Not only is the working population shrinking through ageing and a lower birth rate, children are also spending more time in education. The expectation is for this global trend to continue and to have an even greater impact in the future.





## ***Our industry needs to radically rethink design***

This means that over time, a larger proportion of people is entering the workforce at a later age, thereby 'shrinking' the available workforce further. This puts specific pressure on the number of young people entering the workforce, who often do so at entry level wages and with more flexible work hours – the people we often need to meet our seasonal staffing requirements.

Furthermore, people entering the workforce with a higher level of qualification look for secure employment that values those qualifications, thereby increasing salary expectations and expectations around meaningful, full-time, year-round work.

### **3. Fewer older workers**

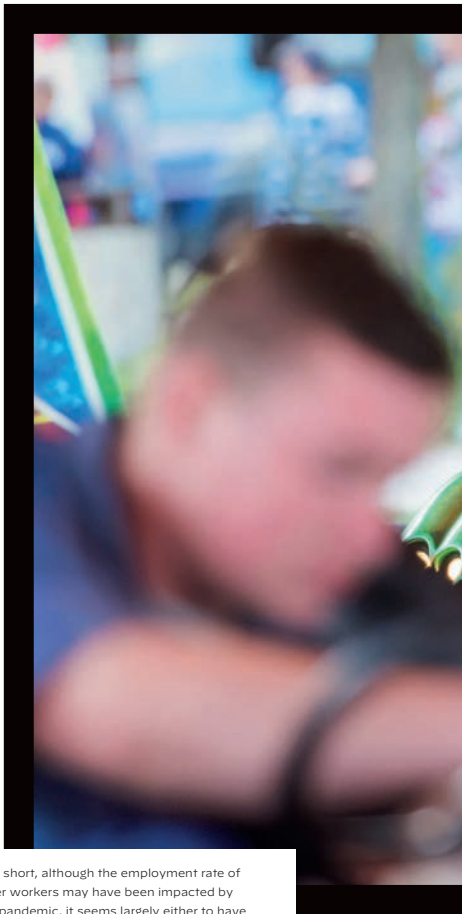
As we came out of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a lot of talk about a decrease in older workers in the workforce. Data for this is hard to source, but the OECD provides data on employment rate by age group for 55-64 year olds. Data from five countries shows that the long-term trend prior to the pandemic was generally an increase in participation in the workforce of this age group, although it started to slide in the US prior to the pandemic.

The effect of the pandemic is clear to see in the US, where participation among this age group dropped dramatically. A downward effect was measured for all countries albeit to a lesser degree. Interestingly, of the five countries, only the UK is still significantly below pre-pandemic levels. The US is still slightly lower than pre-pandemic levels; having experienced the sharpest drop, it stands to reason that recovery of this may take longer in the US but it seems to be coming back to that pre-pandemic level.

In short, although the employment rate of older workers may have been impacted by the pandemic, it seems largely either to have recovered or to be still recovering. Perhaps other factors than the pandemic are also influencing the dip in employment rate for the UK?

### **4. The Great Resignation... or is it?**

There was much talk during and towards the end of the pandemic about a phenomenon dubbed the Great Resignation. Data on this is hard to find as most of the information seemed to come from informal surveys and most countries measure numbers of job vacancies rather than numbers of resignations.





Changing attitudes to work  
and an ageing population  
are affecting the industry



The US Bureau of Labor Statistics does measure resignations, and Statista sourced figures on this. From 2001 they found that when there's a recession, fewer people quit their job – no surprise there. The findings also show the impact of the pandemic in September 2021 when resignations dropped tremendously. The sharp uptake following that, in my opinion, doesn't represent a new trend but rather a trend that has been rising since around 2009. This prompts two questions: What is causing the phenomenon, and what if another recession follows?

Causes include people retiring early taking advantage of relatively high real estate values in the US and a relatively upbeat stock market –

this group was seen to 'cash in' and downsize. Taking that as read, this would logically be a blip in the statistics and will fade away over time.

Other workers cited a general discontent with their jobs, which has led to what's been dubbed the Great Reshuffle – the phenomenon of an increase in people changing jobs that's been seen widely throughout Western Europe and the US. Respondents to various surveys give a number of reasons for changing jobs, including low pay, job insecurity, a desire for a better work/life balance, better benefits and the wish for more meaningful work.

Many also found that working from home during the pandemic suited them better and have

66

**We need  
designers of all  
kinds to help  
us get rid of  
the lap-bar**

gone in search of jobs that allow this workstyle. This has obvious implications for the attractions industry – in the words of Ida Troive, HR director for Parks & Resorts Scandinavia, “You can’t serve candy floss from your home office.”

With the increase in vacancies offering very flexible options, many of these considerations that are encouraging people to change jobs are likely to stay.

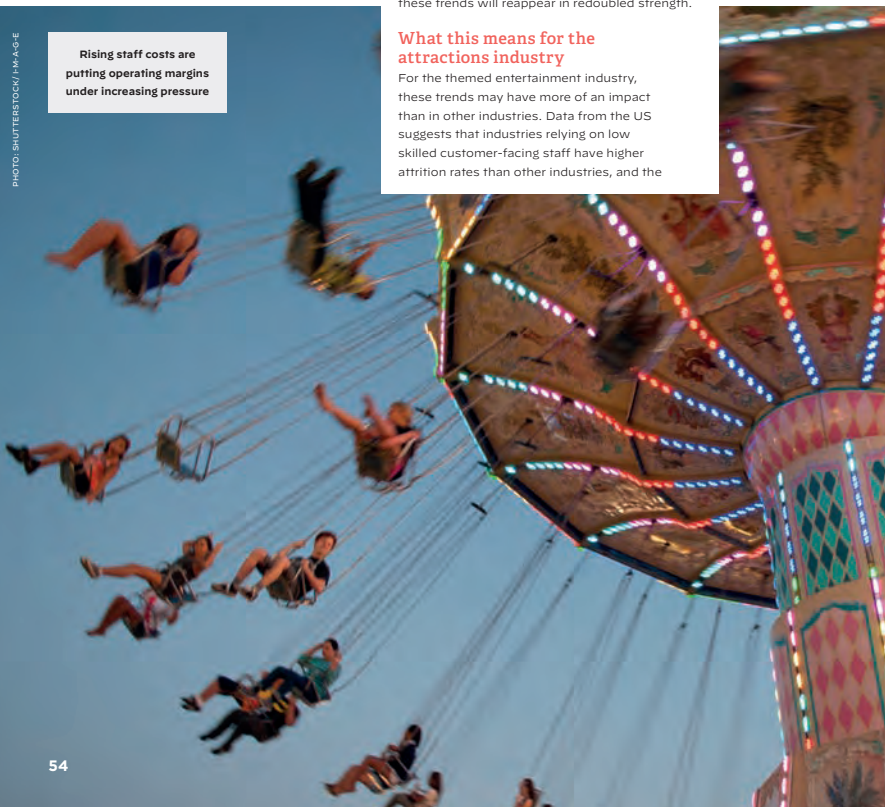
What if another recession follows? A recession would likely dampen the trends mentioned but, given the more flexible job options that now exist, they’re unlikely to go away. That means that at the end of a (hopefully hypothetical) recession, these trends will reappear in redoubled strength.

**What this means for the  
attractions industry**

For the themed entertainment industry, these trends may have more of an impact than in other industries. Data from the US suggests that industries relying on low skilled customer-facing staff have higher attrition rates than other industries, and the

Rising staff costs are  
putting operating margins  
under increasing pressure

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/H-K-A-G-E





Can we design parks  
that require fewer staff,  
asks Papamichael

attractions industry is particularly vulnerable, given its reliance on seasonal workers, low skilled labour, low wages, and on the seasonal and zero hour contracts which are the target for increasingly strict legislation.

Being in this poor labour position also has a real impact on the financial wellbeing of our theme parks and attractions. The 2020 IAAPA Theme and Amusement Parks Benchmark Report indicated that 37 per cent of total revenues go toward staffing costs and from what I hear, this percentage seems to be ever-increasing, putting immense pressure on performance and operations. Staff shortages have led to closed rides and F&B outlets and a decrease in visitor interaction, impacting guest satisfaction, as can be seen from reviews on Tripadvisor and the like.

Rising staffing costs means that operating margins are under increasing pressure in a market where all costs are rising and purchasing power is not, due to the cost of living crisis. Increasing admission prices in order to manage cost increases is unlikely to be the answer – for the majority of attractions and parks that's simply impossible.

### So what can we do?

These trends aren't going away. Employee cost is based on the number of hours we need an employee to work, multiplied by the wage we pay per hour. We can't (and shouldn't) reduce the wage-per-hour. It then follows logically that we need to reduce the number of hours we need employees to work. But we need to do so without negatively impacting the guest experience and while creating enjoyable work year-round.

Can we think outside of the box and design parks that need fewer staff to operate them, yet still give guests an amazing experience? The industry attracts some of the most amazing designers, engineers and technologists – I'm confident the skills and brainpower exist to find a way out of this situation.

In my next article, I'll take a look at what's currently being done to address the staffing crisis creatively, and I'd love to hear from you if you're working on an ingenious product, solution or project that's tackling this issue head on or if your attraction or park has found really creative operational solutions. ●

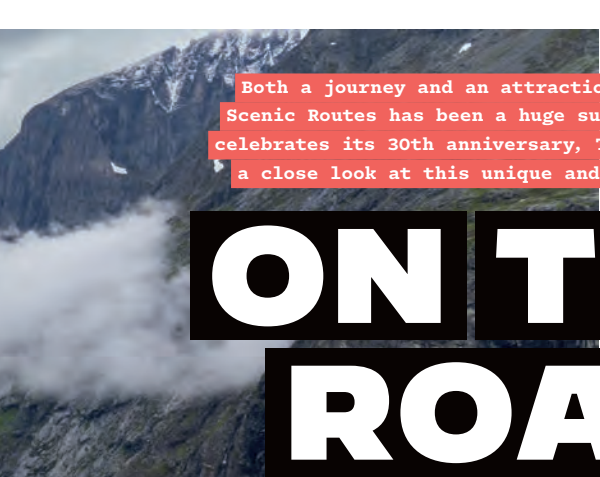
*Margreet Papamichael is director of Clear Associates*

“  
*It is not the  
destination,  
it's the journey*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The Scenic Routes were  
introduced to strengthen  
Norway's tourism offer





Both a journey and an attraction, the Norwegian Scenic Routes has been a huge success story. As it celebrates its 30th anniversary, Terry Stevens takes a close look at this unique and evolving project

# ON THE ROAD



re-imagining of the classic road trip, the Norwegian Scenic Routes is built on a long history of scenic road design that started with the concept of the US Parkways in 1868. In 1900, The Automobilation of the American Landscape encouraged states to develop scenic roads; 26 years later Route 66 was established.

The scenic parkways movement in the USA and the success of Route 66 spawned a global interest in harnessing the road trip to boost tourism, with examples including South Africa's Garden Route, The Basque Route, The Great River Route (USA), and Canada's Powder Highway. Recent additions include Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, The Wales Way, Scotland's North Coast 500, and the innovative Catalan Cultural and Music Routes curated in conjunction with Spotify.

These road trips aspire to reach the heights of the Norwegian Scenic Routes but fail to reach the benchmark set by the Norwegian Public Roads Authority (NPRA) on almost every level.

## The mandate

In the early 1990s, there was widely held view in Norway that the country was struggling to compete in the international tourism markets. The idea of the National Scenic Routes was to help address the issue of enhanced touristic appeal whilst stimulating economic and cultural development in remote and peripheral communities and, at the same time, harness the potential of tourism to diversify and strengthen job creation in the regions.



- Art and architecture installations could be used as a means of adding value and uplifting the quality of the visitor experience.

In 1993, the Norwegian Parliament (the Storting) asked the Ministry of Transport and Communications to look at the relationship between roads and tourism.

A year later, in 1994, the NPRA began a four-year pilot project that gave four routes the status of National Scenic Routes. After the success of the pilot, the Storting agreed that the project should continue and 60 proposed routes became 18. It was April 2004 when the NPRA signed the directive to make the Norwegian Scenic Routes a priority, setting the long-term direction, mission, and principles.

### A sense of place

The purpose was to create a new concept of a tourist attraction for the international tourist markets by encouraging road-travelling to be the motivation to visit Norway. The roads through unique and majestic scenery already existed and many of the best places to stop had already been discovered. It was therefore decided that architecture and art would be used to enhance the experience based upon the unique atmosphere, environment, and sense of place at every site.

The existing 18 routes are to be found along the western, indented seaboard of Norway – from Jaeren and Ryfylke in the south to

Havøysund and Varanger in the north high above the Arctic Circle. The routes closely follow the coast and fjords; then they dive inland to cross the grand landscapes of the high mountains before flowing through the fields and woodlands of the valleys and plains of central Norway.

They are threads that connect communities and destinations. This is a transformational scheme that has positively impacted on all the communities along their routes.

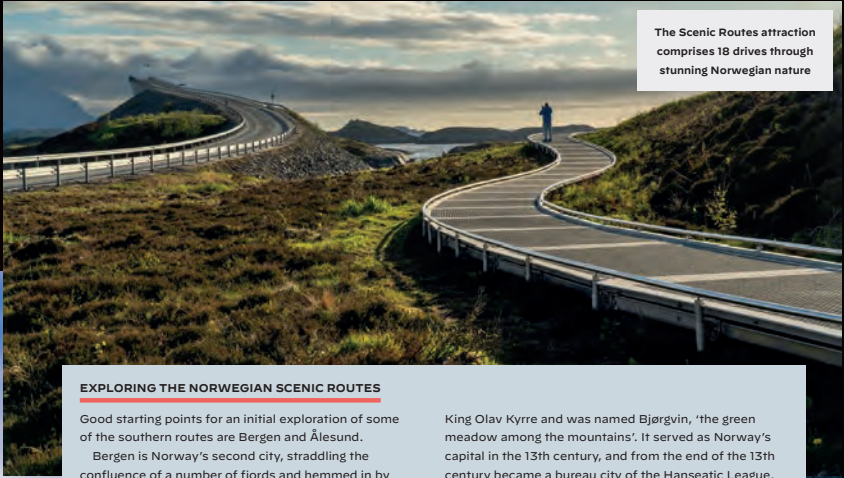
It has prompted imaginative tourism developments – such as the family-run Juvet Landscape Hotel (at Valldal Trollstein–Geranger Route) – and has also changed the world's perception of Norway as a country.

### Harnessing art and architecture

In Norway, there's a long tradition for adapting buildings and structures to meet the harsh climatic conditions and the arduous terrain. Clearly, Norwegian architects and designers have drawn on this tradition in their efforts to enhance and elevate the tourist experience along these routes.

The goal is that the architectural and artistic interventions should not only help to enhance the visitor's experience of nature, but also become an attraction in their own right. Norway's untouched coasts, fjords and mountain valleys offer some of the most dramatic vistas in Europe, but by their nature they are pretty difficult to

More than 50 architects, designers and artists have worked on the project



The Scenic Routes attraction comprises 18 drives through stunning Norwegian nature

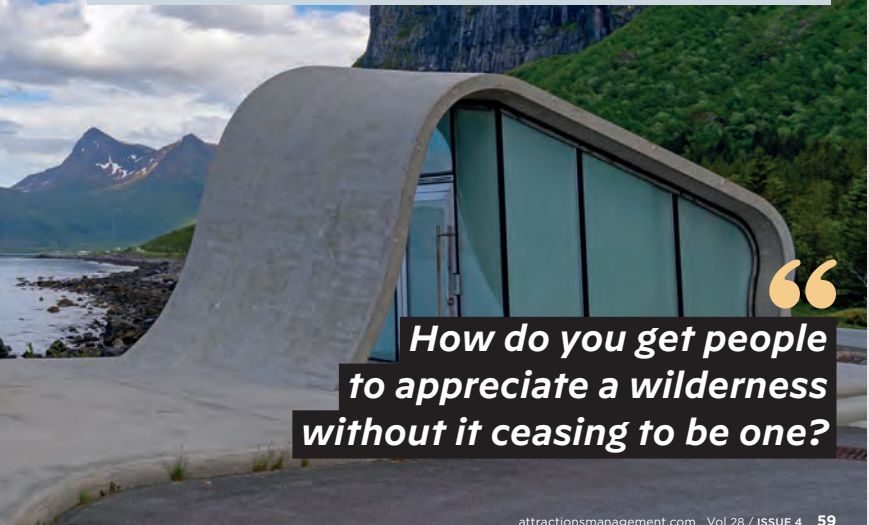
#### EXPLORING THE NORWEGIAN SCENIC ROUTES

Good starting points for an initial exploration of some of the southern routes are Bergen and Ålesund.

Bergen is Norway's second city, straddling the confluence of a number of fjords and hemmed in by steep, forested slopes. It is photogenic for both the contemporary neighbourhoods (its commercial streets, parks, and civic buildings), and the older, historic areas of Bryggen, the famous historic timber wharf with UNESCO World Heritage Site status and nearby cobbled street with their white-painted wooden houses. The city centre and northern neighbourhoods are on Byfjorden, 'the city fjord', and the city is surrounded by mountains; indeed, Bergen is known as the 'city of seven mountains'. According to tradition, the city was founded in 1070 by

King Olav Kyrre and was named Bjørgvin, 'the green meadow among the mountains'. It served as Norway's capital in the 13th century, and from the end of the 13th century became a bureau city of the Hanseatic League.

Ålesund is situated on the coast at the end of the E136, 240 kilometres (150 miles) north-east of Bergen, and is adjacent to the Hjørund and Geiranger fjords – a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is a seaport noted for its concentration of Art Nouveau architecture and occupies seven of the islands with the town centre located on islands Aspøya and Nørvøya. The town has a rapidly developing culinary scene with a wealth of new innovative restaurants and bars and artisan producers accessing the best seafood and local produce.



“  
**How do you get people to appreciate a wilderness without it ceasing to be one?**

get to. How do you help people appreciate a wilderness without it ceasing to be one?’

The suitably apt Norwegian response to this challenge can be traced back to the country's great modernist architect, Sverre Fehn. His philosophy was that architecture, if carefully considered, could serve to elevate nature without competing with it and, in so doing, become an experience in itself.

The tone for the project was set in the two pilot projects with the bold work of two young architects: Jan Olav Jensen and Carl-Vigge Hølmekbakk in designing the routes at Sognefjellet and Gamle Strynefjellsvegen. These two routes – which remain among the most popular – combine extraordinary landscape-inspired architecture with thought-provoking art.

As a result, the decision was made to invite over 40 Norwegian architects and artists along with a small number of internationally-renowned personalities to design amenities and the ‘pauses’ along each of the tourist routes.

The artworks are there to reinforce the character of the route and to encourage the tourist to think deeply about what they are experiencing. The results are often jaw-dropping because they clever,

witty designs for simple viewpoints and funky toilet blocks as at Akkarvikodden (Lofoten) or Jektvik (Helgelandskysten), or outrageous suspended viewpoints as at Trollstigen (Geiranger Trollstigen), Vøringfossen (Hardangervidda) or at Stegastein (Aurlandsfjellet).

In some locations a very profound story is told through contemporary architecture combining with art.

This is very definitely the case at Steilneset (Varanger) with a haunting memorial in memory of the 91 victims of witch trials in Finnmark designed by Peter Zumthor in collaboration with artist Louise Bourgeois, and the narrator Professor Liv Helene Willumsen.

There are now more than 170 initiatives, large and small along the 2,240 km of the 18 existing routes involving over 50 architects, landscape architects and artists. By 2029 a further 50 art and architecture projects will be completed.

In April 2023, the NPRA announced the appointment of Silje Myhre Amundsen as the new project director for Norwegian Scenic Routes. She takes over from Jan Andresen, who has led the Scenic Route work for 30 years.

10 more architects have been chosen to design further rest areas and viewpoints

“

**Artworks are there to encourage tourists to think deeply about what they're experiencing**





The 18 selected routes run through landscapes with unique natural qualities

## Funding the initiative

The total state investment over the three decades of the initiative, including the initial 1994 tourism pilots amounts to over NOK 4.37bn (\$390m, £323m, E371m) with a further NOK 0.55m provided by local authorities. By the time the National Plan ends in 2029 the total spent will exceed NOK 5.9bn (\$530m, £436m, E500m) of which NOK 5.3bn (\$476m, £392m E449m) will have come from the state.

Over the 36 year period this means an average annual investment by the state of NOK 146m at 2023 rates. In terms of comparisons, the NPRA highlights that the new National Museum in Oslo cost NOK 6.15bn in 2022 (\$553, £454m, E521m) and the recently opened Munch Museum NOK 2.3bn (\$206m, £170m, E195m).

In terms of the economic impact, research highlights a significant uplift in turnover for businesses and communities served by the routes, especially following the completion of a major art or architectural installation.

The investment in art was at the heart of the initiative from the outset and established as a separate programme led by a curator and an advisory committee. The aim is to introduce at least one piece of art to every route thus creating what has been termed 'a permanent museum of contemporary art across Norway.' ●



Norway celebrates the 30th anniversary of the National Scenic Routes in 2023

PHOTO: © SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP



# MARK CUTMORE

As the Science Museum Group launches its permanent Power Up exhibit, a new children's gallery and Flying Scotsman VR experience, SMG's head of commercial experiences discusses the future of immersive technology in museums



While the Science Museum Group's five museums are free, each museum also offers paid for visitor experiences to help generate money for the Group, and immersive technologies

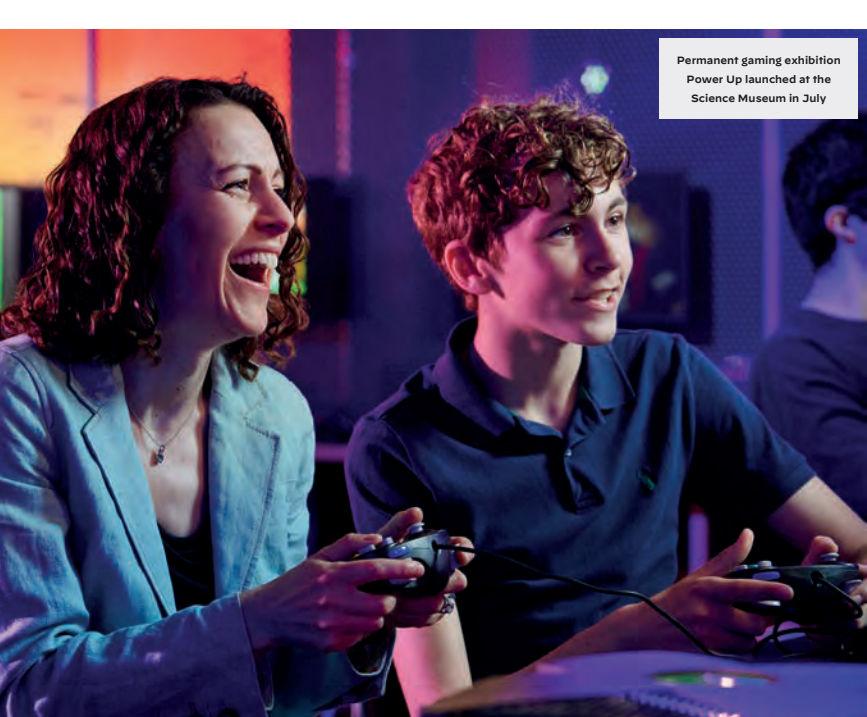
play an increasingly important role in these offers.

This year, the group has launched Wonderlab: The Bramall Gallery at the National Railway Museum in York – an interactive engineering-themed experience for families. Designed by De Matos Ryan, the space features 18 hands on challenges including Feel the Force – a 'human-sized wind tunnel' and the Sandscapes interactive sandpit that

uses digital projections to create railway landscapes.

A new Flying Scotsman multisensory VR experience also launched at the National Railway Museum in April. Visitors don VR headsets to explore 100 years of history of Flying Scotsman, including the British Empire Exhibition, 100mph record-breaking run and journeys around North America and Australia.

In July 2023, hands-on gaming experience Power Up launched at the Science Museum in London. After five seasons as a temporary event, the Power Up exhibition is now a permanent fixture at the museum, allowing visitors to explore the history of video gaming by playing some of the best games of the past five decades.



Permanent gaming exhibition  
Power Up launched at the  
Science Museum in July

PHOTO © SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP



The Flying Scotsman VR  
experience takes visitors  
on a historic journey

PHOTO © SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

*Here Mark Cutmore, head of commercial experiences at the Science Museum Group, tells us how technology is used to tell stories and bring in visitors, and what's next for the group*

#### **What is your role at the Science Museum Group?**

I'm the head of commercial experiences for the Science Museum Group. My job is to create and manage visitor experiences that have a ticket price associated with them in order to give visitors a great experience and generate money to put back into the Science Museum Group.

These include our interactive galleries for children, including Wonderlab – we have three Wonderlab galleries aimed at inspiring kids with the wonder of science, technology and engineering. I also manage the IMAX cinema at the Science Museum in London, which features both a cutting-edge laser 4K projector and a very important 70mm IMAX film projector. We have the best of analogue and best of digital next to one other.

#### **Wonderlab: The Bramall Gallery recently launched at the National Railway Museum in York. How have immersive technologies been used in this attraction?**

Each of our Wonderlab galleries – we now have three in London, Bradford and York – has its own theme and core principles based on the museum it's in.

The Bramall Gallery's core focus is engineering. Our aim for all of the Wonderlab galleries is for them to be very hands on and interactive, so the technology is there, but it's subtle. One of the exhibits at the Bramall Gallery illustrates this well. It's an interactive sandpit table with projection mapping that projects a landscape with railtracks and rail vehicles moving around.

Visitors can dig into the sandpit, play with the sand, and when they do, the landscape changes as the interactive mapping reacts. If visitors dig deep into the sand, for example, the landscape creates water and rail bridges across the water. When visitors create hills and mountains from the sand, the tracks will go through tunnels. It's a beautiful application of technology that feels very subtle and clever.

PHOTO: © SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

Wonderlab: The Bramall Gallery in York, UK brings engineering alive





The Wonderlab galleries  
aim to inspire curiosity via  
interactive hands on exhibits



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***We're always looking for  
interesting ways to deliver  
stories beyond written text***



PHOTO © SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP



The Science Museum  
Group's Wonderlab Galleries  
are hands-on and interactive



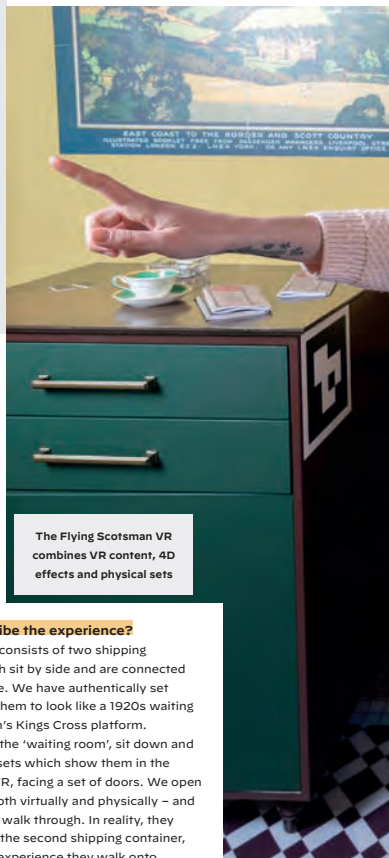
2023 marks 100 years since the launch of the world famous Flying Scotsman

► **The National Railway Museum also launched a Flying Scotsman VR experience this year. How did this come about?**

Our new Flying Scotsman virtual reality immersive experience is one of the most cutting-edge things we've created in terms of a visitor experience. It's leagues above anything we've done before in terms of the technology and immersivity we're using.

We're always trying to find interesting ways to deliver stories to our visitors beyond written text – VR is a great way to do this. Several years ago, we developed a very successful VR experience around Tim Peake's Soyuz capsule (Space Descent VR) which we acquired just after he came back to Earth in it.

We were looking at how we could celebrate the upcoming centenary of the Flying Scotsman locomotive, which is one of the jewels in our collection. We decided to develop a new immersive experience exploring its history, using everything we'd learned from the Space Descent VR experience and taking it up several notches.



The Flying Scotsman VR combines VR content, 4D effects and physical sets

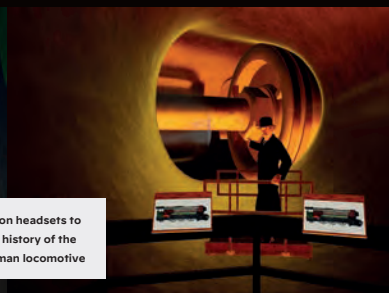
**Can you describe the experience?**


The experience consists of two shipping containers which sit by side and are connected down the middle. We have authentically set dressed one of them to look like a 1920s waiting room on London's Kings Cross platform.

Visitors enter the 'waiting room', sit down and put on VR headsets which show them in the same room, in VR, facing a set of doors. We open those doors – both virtually and physically – and invite visitors to walk through. In reality, they walk through to the second shipping container, while in the VR experience they walk onto



Visitors put on headsets to explore the history of the Flying Scotsman locomotive





PLEASE STORE YOUR BELONGINGS  
UNDER THE BENCHES

“  
***This experience is leagues above  
anything we've done before in terms  
of technology and immersivity***

the platform of Kings Cross in the 1920s, and are taken on a 10 minute journey showing key moments from the history of Flying Scotsman.

Visitors are taken further back in time to the shopworks where Flying Scotsman was built; they're then shrunk down and taken inside the engine and shown how a locomotive steam engine works from inside the boiler. Another highlight is being taken on a 100 mile-per-hour run, where they get to experience Flying Scotsman racing a biplane and a speedboat.

We have a range of 4D effects – including rumble plates, heat lamps, wind fans and sound, which all enhance the experience. You feel the heat of the furnace, the rumble of the engine. It's really compelling and immersive. And we use top of the line VR headsets, which are completely untethered – it's as comfortable and easy to wear as it's possible to be with VR at the moment. At the end of the 10 minutes,

Flying Scotsman 'arrives' at Edinburgh Waverley Station and we invite people back into the waiting room (in the original shipping container) to take off their headsets. While they've been gone, we've done some physical trickery, changing the posters and signs so you come into Edinburgh waiting room for a bit of theatre at the end.

We've tried to pack a lot of very clever technology in there in a way that doesn't feel at odds with the fact that we're taking the visitor back in time to the steam age.

#### **How has it been received?**

The experience has gone beyond my hopes – it's absolutely fantastic, and we've had an amazing response from visitors. We get a lot of railway enthusiasts, who know Flying Scotsman far better than I ever could, and they have given us some great feedback. I'm very proud of it and it's done very well for us. ▶

► **Power Up has just opened at the Science Museum. What can you tell us about this?**

When I joined the Science Museum Group in 2017, Power Up was quite a simple idea – one of our open gallery spaces that we'd take over for half term week and fill with video games to celebrate gaming history. It was really fun, but I felt that we could do it better, with the mission and values of the Science Museum Group at heart.

I petitioned the organisation to let me buy my own set of equipment; they said yes, and my team and I embarked on a fun episode of buying every console we could on eBay. We built up an amazing catalogue of video games.

After several years of development, we've now opened our permanent version of Power Up in the Science Museum. It's a hands-on gaming experience which celebrates the history of home video gaming in a way that focuses on interactivity and play rather than panels and text. It's incredibly interpretation-light – really it's about showing people how technology has changed over time through play, because that's what gaming's all about.

**What does Power Up offer?**

We have 160 consoles telling the story of technology changing through different thematic areas – for example we have a set of consoles lined up with Mario through the ages, from the 1980s to today. You really see how that character and the technology has evolved.

We have a few centrepieces. One highlight is our timeline, which is beautifully lit, so it draws you to it. It's 27 consoles in chronological order starting from a Binatone TV Master in 1976 that plays Pong with interpretation about each console and why it was important.

I love watching what people make a beeline for – you can generally predict their age because it's usually the first console they had as a kid.

We also have a 16-player gaming ring – 16 Xbox 360s connected together so people can play the same game at the same time.

**What are you proudest of with Power Up?**

For me Power Up is inspiring because it helps people to see that gaming is universal, and it's for everyone. It's lovely to see parents



Power Up allows different generations to share their favourite video games





The Power Up gaming exhibition was designed by Sam Jacob Studio



## Power Up at the Science Museum, London

Launched in July 2023, interactive gaming exhibition Power Up now has a permanent home at London's Science Museum.

Featuring more than 160 consoles and hundreds of games, visitors can explore the history of gaming, from the Atari 2600 to the PlayStation 5. At Power Up, visitors can navigate

between 20 themes and sections, playing franchise-centred games from Disney to LEGO, jumping from a generation of Mario, Sonic or Zelda to the next, and challenge friends and fellow gamers to gaming competitions.

A physical games area allows fans to (re)discover iconic games like Wii Sport, get active with Kinect games, explore the future of gaming through VR experiences, strum on Guitar Hero and do a spot of Sega Bass Fishing.

A dedicated PC area features family favourites including Minecraft and classics like Monkey Island 2. Gamers can battle it out in Splatoon or test their sports skills with Madden NFL 2003 in the multiplayer zone, while 16 players can test their skills together in an action-packed multiplayer Halo 3 tournament, joining the same game on Xbox 360.

Cost: Day passes: £10, annual passes: £15

and grandparents showing their kids or grandkids the games they used to play.

We have also worked with BAFTA, who run a great initiative called Young Games Designers aimed at encouraging young people to consider a career in the gaming industry. Every year young people between the ages of 10 and 18 submit their games to BAFTA – they're reviewed by judges and prizes are awarded and the young people are given help and mentorship. I thought it would be lovely if part of the prize for the winners would be for them to have their games featured in Power Up, alongside the greats like Sonic and Pac-Man and Space Invaders – we have a section featuring the winning games.

### What do you see as the biggest trends in the industry right now?

VR is being adopted by a lot of museums at the moment. When it's done right it can be absolutely amazing – compelling, immersive and it can deliver storytelling in a way that you just can't do outside of the VR environment.

There are real challenges though. Good quality VR is not cheap and people have high expectations – we're all used to high quality technology in the home now. It can be extremely challenging to offer good VR experiences at scale



The world of VR in museums is changing fast

for museum visitors – I think right now it's being delivered with varying degrees of success.

In terms of the use of Augmented Reality in museums, we're at the early stages of that journey. While there's a lot of opportunity there, and I think it will be the way things will go in the future, we're not quite there yet.

As for the Science Museum Group, we're always looking for new and interesting ways to deliver stories to our visitors beyond written text. ●

# Joined up thinking

In an effort to find solutions to some of the 21st century's most urgent issues, a group of natural history museums has mapped more than a billion objects in scientific collections across the world



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*These collections provide a unique window into the planet's past, and they are increasingly being used to make actionable forecasts to chart our future*



PHOTO: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

The project imagines a global collection of the world's natural history museums



A group of natural history museums, organised by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC, the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and the Natural History Museum in London, has mapped the total collections from 73 of the world's largest natural history museums in 28 countries. This is the first step of an ambitious effort to inventory global holdings that can help scientists and decision-makers find solutions to urgent, wide-ranging issues such as climate change, food insecurity, human health, pandemic preparedness, and wildlife conservation.

Beyond the walls of their public galleries, the world's natural history museums serve as the guardians of an unprecedented archive of the history of our planet and solar system. These natural history collections provide a unique window into the planet's past, and they are increasingly being used to make actionable forecasts to chart our future. Museums have traditionally acted as independent organisations, but this new approach imagines a global collection composed of all the collections of all the world's museums.

To better understand this immense, untapped resource, lead scientists from a dozen large natural history museums created an innovative but simple framework to rapidly evaluate the size and composition of natural history museum collections globally. The findings have been published in *Science* magazine in the paper *A Global Approach for Natural History Museum Collections*.

PHOTO: SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



Kirk Johnson, director, SNMNH

The survey organisers created a methodology that could rapidly survey collection holdings across museums by creating a common vocabulary of 19 collection types spanning the entirety of biological, geological, paleontological, and anthropological collections and 16 terrestrial and marine regions that cover the entirety of the Earth.

## A COLLECTIVE STRATEGY

"We wanted to find a fast way to estimate the size and composition of the global collection so that we could begin to build a collective strategy for the future," says lead author Kirk Johnson, *sant* director of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Johnson co-led the effort along with Ian F P Owens (formerly at the Natural History Museum in London and now the executive director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology) in collaboration with more than 150 museum directors and scientists representing 73 natural history museums and herbaria.



PHOTO: AMNH/R. KIKENS

Michael Novacek, AMNH



**The authors recognise that the historic concentration of large museums in North America and Europe can be a barrier to knowledge-sharing and perpetuates power imbalances rooted in the colonial history of museum science**

- The survey confirmed an aggregate collection of more than 1.1 billion objects, managed by more than 4,500 science staff and nearly 4,000 volunteers. While the aggregate collection is vast, the survey showed that there are conspicuous gaps across museum collections in areas including tropic and polar regions, marine systems, and undiscovered arthropod and microbial diversity. These gaps could provide a roadmap for coordinated collecting efforts going forward.

The report is a significant summary, but it is only the first step in surveying the global collection and tapping its enormous potential. Natural history collections are uniquely positioned to inform responses to today's interlocking crises, but due to lack of funding and coordination, the information embedded in museum collections remains largely inaccessible. With strategic coordination, a global collection has the potential to guide decisions that will shape the future of humanity and biodiversity.

By creating this framework and survey, project organisers aim to create a foundation for the global museum network to work together to support future global sustainability, biodiversity, and climate frameworks using knowledge gained from museum collections. This will enable all museums to be more strategic as they plan their collection efforts in the future.

PHOTO: AMNH/AL KEDING



The American Museum of Natural History is taking part





**Doug Gurr, director  
of the Natural History  
Museum London**

## A GLOBAL VIEW

The authors also recognise that the historic concentration of large museums in North America and Europe can be a barrier to knowledge-sharing and perpetuates power imbalances rooted in the colonial history of museum science. In the future, it is crucial that the global collection also reflect and support museums elsewhere in the world.

"Natural history collections are the evidence from which scientists derive knowledge, including knowledge that can be applied to critical issues facing our planet today," says Michael Novacek, curator in the Division of Paleontology and former provost of science at the American Museum of Natural History. "This has never been more urgent than today, as global biodiversity loss and climate change are accelerating."

"This global view of natural science collections emphasises their combined potential to help us act in response to the planetary crisis," says Doug Gurr, director of the Natural History Museum in London. "It also demonstrates an ongoing commitment and responsibility to build equitable international collaboration and capacity with partners from all countries,

harnessing the latest technological advances to further scientific understanding and make data available for all. This vast and progressively united infrastructure of collections and expertise represents a crucial resource in scientific understanding and prediction of global change, supporting action to avoid disaster."

The paper considers applications of collection-based research, focusing on case studies that explore how museum natural history collections can be used to study pandemic preparedness, global change, biodiversity, invasive species, colonial heritage, and museomics (study of DNA from museum specimens).

As the authors write, "The long-term security and value of natural history collections depends on developing global and local partnerships that demonstrate not only their relevance for specific scientific, societal, and conservation challenges, but also for the benefits that apply to every person on the planet." ●

The full Global Collections dashboard is available here: <https://rebrand.ly/global-collections>.

Source: [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)

# SHOW TIME



Four years late and £130m over budget, the UK's biggest new cultural venue for years has opened in Manchester. Magali Robathan finds out if it was worth the wait

The opening show was directed by Danny Boyle and inspired by *The Matrix*



**The Free Your Mind team:**  
 Danny Boyle, Kenrick Sandy,  
 Michael Asante, Es Devlin



When Dutch architects OMA won the competition to design a major new arts venue for Manchester, they were given a brief

to design a place where 'anything could happen'. From the outset, the ambition was huge – to create a venue where artists could showcase large-scale ambitious works of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world.

On October 18, the £242 million Aviva Studio (formerly named the Factory) opened with a major show by film director Danny Boyle featuring 50 dancers, hip hop choreography by Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy, music by Michael 'Mikey J' Asante, and set design by Es Devlin. Five thousand tickets for the show were made available for £10 or less – part of an ongoing affordable pricing strategy aimed at ensuring the venue is accessible to as many people as possible.

It is more than £130 million over budget and four years late, but there is no doubt that this is a major cultural addition to the UK. Upcoming events include a nine day programme of music, circus, art and fashion developed by Manchester residents; a two night show by musician Johnny Marr; a retelling of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* by director Robert Wilson and folk duo CocoRosie; and a feminist theatrical reimagining of the BBC's *Robin Redbreast* created with actor Maxine Peake. ▶



Johnny Marr will play  
several orchestral shows at  
Aviva Studios in December



The £242m building sits  
on the site of the former  
Granada television studios



PHOTO: MARCO CARPARELLI



***This venue  
unlocks the full  
potential of the  
performing arts***

#### ▶ A truly flexible space

OMA have delivered a highly adaptable building with two main performance spaces – the 21m-high Warehouse space, with capacity for up to 5,000 people, and the Hall, which features a flexible stage and can house up to 1,600 seated or 2,000 standing. A moveable full-height acoustic wall can be used to further divide the spaces as needed, and the Warehouse and the Hall can also work together – showcased by Boyle's Free Your Mind performance.

It has been designed to cater for a wide variety of activities, from intimate concerts to huge raves, small scale theatre performances to major immersive exhibitions.

"I've worked on numerous theatres and performance spaces, but none compare to this one in terms of what it offers to performers," said OMA's Ellen van Loon, who led the project. "This venue serves as a platform, unlocking the full potential of the performing arts. All too often, abandoned post-industrial buildings and neighbourhoods are erased from the map, and with them the creative scenes that once thrived within them. This building reinstates what was lost."



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***It's a unique venue, a real asset for the future which will stimulate minds and spirits***

#### ▶ Economic boost

The project received £99.05 million of government funding – the UK's largest investment in a national cultural project since the opening of the Tate Modern in 2000 – as well as £7m National Lottery funding from Arts Council England. It has been estimated that the venue will support up to 1,500 new jobs and add £1.1 billion to the local economy in its first decade.

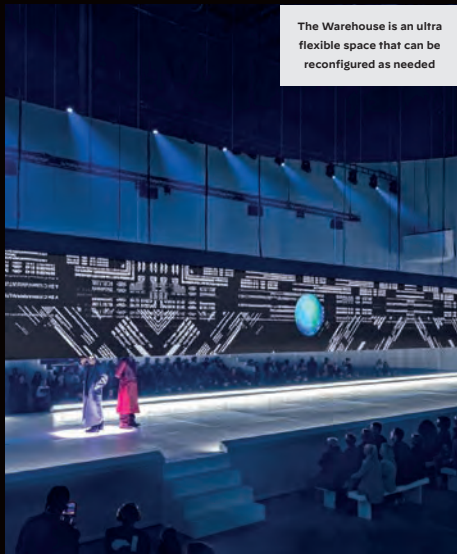
“This internationally-important venue, extraordinary in scale and ambition, will open up a world of possibilities for people in Manchester – inspiring creativity and nurturing careers in the arts,” said Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of Manchester City Council. “It's a unique venue, a real asset for the future which will stimulate minds and spirits as well as acting as a catalyst to economic growth and opportunities.” ●



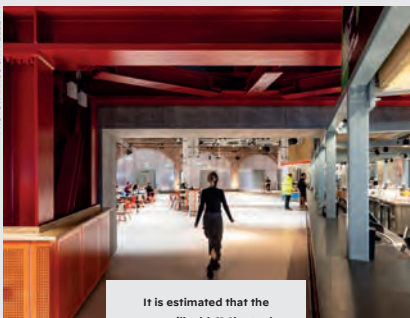
The Danny Boyle-directed  
Free Your Mind performance  
featured 50 dancers



The opening show showcased how the Theatre and Warehouse can be linked



The Warehouse is an ultra flexible space that can be reconfigured as needed



It is estimated that the venue will add £1.1bn to the economy in its first decade



## THE BUILDING

The 13,350sq m building's design is centred around large, open, flexible spaces that will continuously adapt and reconfigure to meet the requirements of work created and presented in the building.

Key elements include the 33m-wide, 64m-long and 21m-high Warehouse, with a theatre grid spanning the entirety of the area. The Warehouse features two supersized moveable 'multiwalls' which enable an almost limitless number of configurations within the expansive space.

Plugged into the Warehouse is 'the Hall', a 1600 seat auditorium with a flexible stage, able to accommodate ballet, theatre, music, and cross-art performances. The Hall

and the Warehouse can work in tandem, allowing the stage to extend deep into the warehouse.

The design references Manchester's industrial and cultural history through its use of corrugated metal and rough concrete. The building is lifted over Water Street and incorporates the 19th century arches from the Pineapple railway. Typically, venues of this size are relegated to the outskirts due to noise concerns. However, by enclosing the structure with dual layers of concrete and employing advanced acoustic techniques, the highest sound insulation was achieved, allowing the building to be part of the city centre.

Source: oma.com

# Making Memories

Emotions play a key role in how visitors remember an experience.

Wim Strijbosch shares the findings from his research

I'll never forget my first visit to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando. Although it was more than a decade ago, I distinctly remember how I experienced it and how I felt when I was there.

Understanding how visitors remember their experiences is key in the world of attractions. Visitors can't recommend attractions to others or decide to visit again if they can't remember them.

The question, then, is how to ensure experiences are as memorable as possible.


In my PhD research (Strijbosch, 2022), built on the work of many others, I explored the factors that determine how an experience is remembered. Using questionnaires and state-of-the-art electrophysiological equipment, I studied how emotions wax and wane during leisure experiences, and how these emotions relate to the way people remember their experiences,

## The world of experience

Experience is a complex concept. On the one hand, experience can be understood as a verb, referring to the continuous sensing and feeling in the here-and-now. When awake, we continuously attend to stimuli both from the world around us and from within ourselves, resulting in a flux of experiencing.







Disney creates  
memorable experiences  
in a variety of ways

*Emotions determine not just if  
we will remember an experience,  
but also how we remember it*



Emotion and memory are linked, but more emotion is not always better

On the other hand, experience can be understood as a noun, referring to experiences that transcend the here-and-now and are stored into memory.

The flux of experiencing is incredibly complex. In order to manage this, our brain uses mental models to cut this flux into smaller pieces – so-called experiential episodes.

Mental models are a type of reference frame based on earlier experiences, so that the brain knows what experiences generally start and end with – an experienced theme park visitor will know what to expect, allowing the brain to view a visit as a separate experiential episode from whatever happened before or after.

In turn, our brain can subdivide such episodes into sub-episodes that form experientially coherent units in time, such as attractions in a theme park or exhibits in a museum.

### The role of emotion

Most experiential episodes are so ordinary that they won't make the shift towards a remembered experience. However, sometimes there's an ingredient in our experiential episodes that makes them relevant enough to be stored into memory.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/PAULA MONTIELER GARDEN

That ingredient is emotion. And that's why arriving at Disneyland Paris from the freeway with the Disneyland Hotel in the distance is more memorable than a standard freeway exit, why Moaning Myrtle's sound effects make The Wizarding World of Harry Potter's toilets stand out and why the queue line at Efteling's Flying Dutchman is probably the most memorable section of the entire attraction.

Emotions determine not just if we will remember an experience, but how we remember it. Emotions aren't static during an experiential



The Wizarding World of Harry Potter engages all of the senses

episode. Instead, they wax and wane as experiential episodes unfold. For example, the sense of tension that you feel on a rollercoaster has different levels on the chain lift compared to the various inversions or the final brake section.

### More emotion is not always better

In experience design, we tend to believe that we have to blow people's minds – the more emotion the better.

This turns out not necessarily to be the case. In one of the studies in my dissertation which

involved measuring emotions in visitors watching a musical theatre show, we indeed found positive relationships between the emotionally stronger scenes and overall evaluations of the audience members: the stronger the emotional engagement, the better the evaluation.

However, for some scenes we also found negative relationships: the less strong the emotional engagement, the better the evaluation. Perhaps, this suggests that to have emotional highs, you also need emotionally less intense moments.



**Sesame Street: Street Mission balances intense and tranquil moments**

PHOTO: PORTAVENTURA WORLD



**Attractions designers need to consider the role of visitors' emotions**

A good example might be PortAventura's Sesame Street: Street Mission, which combines game-driven moments putting riders on the edge of their seats together with tranquil moments in-between where beautiful animatronics calmly tell the story of the ride.

Another study in our lab found that museum visitors on a guided tour were more inclined to recommend the tour if they felt less emotionally engaged (Miras et al, 2020). This seems to suggest that the relation between emotional engagement and overall evaluation might be highly context dependent.

Attraction designers therefore need to get a good sense of which emotions work best in the context of their attraction and to consciously consider which emotions they want to evoke at which points in the attraction.

### The bigger picture

Attraction designers shouldn't think of their attraction as happening in a vacuum, where nothing happens before or after. They should remember that how they want visitors to feel is not necessarily how visitors truly feel, and that this may be influenced by events outside of their control.

In the same musical theatre show study, we made a comparison between the emotion profile as intended by the designers and the lived

emotion profile of the visitors. To some extent, the lived emotion profile could be predicted from the emotion profile as intended by the designers.

However, this prediction became gradually stronger towards the end of the show. We observed a lot of variation between visitor emotions at the beginning of the show, arguably because of carry-over effects from experiences directly preceding the show. Some audience members might have been in a traffic jam, some might have stood in a long queue for the wardrobe, some might have had higher expectations than others.

When aiming for visitors to get in line with designers' intentions, designers should consider that it takes time for visitors to get attuned to an experience.

### The takeaways

Emotions form the key to making experiences memorable and to determining how they are remembered.

When steering towards memorability, as an attractions manager, you consciously need to





PHOTO: PORTAVENTURA WORLD

# How a designer wants visitors to feel is not necessarily how visitors truly feel

think about what emotions will be effective in the context of your attraction and what emotions you want to evoke when. Then, study whether those emotions are actually evoked at the desired level and examine how the emotions at the various points in your attraction are related to its overall evaluations.

Managing memorability is difficult – in the end, it's a process that takes place within the visitor. But while the process itself might be difficult to unlock, using the best-fitting key will be the best shot towards turning it to your advantage. ●

Wim Strijbosch published his doctoral thesis, *Experience unpacked: On the temporal dynamics of emotions in tourism and leisure experiences* in October 2022.

"The research was concerned with the study of how emotions wax and wane over the course of tourism and leisure experiences, and how these 'temporal emotion profiles' relate to how people remember their experiences," said Strijbosch. "I used both a newly-developed questionnaire method and state-of-the-art electrophysiological equipment to measure bodily properties of emotion."

The research involved studying emotions over time during the viewing of a 15 minute virtual reality movie, studying emotions for the duration of a 90 minute musical theatre show and studying the brain processes related to being emotionally moved by engaging with artworks.

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# Product Innovation

Suppliers tell *Attractions Management* about their latest product, design and technology news



Immersive Gamebox has a range of IP partnerships



The deal will launch with locations in Australia and Germany

## Merlin Entertainments and Immersive Gamebox announce global partnership

Merlin Entertainments has announced a multi-million pound and multi-territory partnership with immersive group gaming platform Immersive Gamebox.

Merlin and Immersive Gamebox will launch their global partnership with two initial Gamebox locations in Merlin's existing sites in Sydney, Australia and Oberhausen, Germany. The collaboration sees potential for a significant roll out plan across the Merlin Estate including the UK, US and APAC. Each Gamebox will host eight free-standing Gameboxes per location, each of which can accommodate two to six players per play session, and run games lasting between 30 and 120 minutes.

The partnership creates a new platform for collaboration with

Merlin's leading IP and brand relationships including HASBRO's Peppa Pig, Sony Pictures Entertainment's Jumanji, Ferrari and Cadbury, alongside its long-standing exclusive relationship with the LEGO® Group.

Immersive Gamebox – co-founded by CEO Will Dean and CFO David Spindler – has a suite of iconic family-driven IP partnerships with leading entertainment studios including Paramount, with whom they created PAW Patrol: New Recruits, the world's first immersive game for kids 3+, Rovio Entertainment where they produced a life-sized slingshot Angry Birds game; Aardman for Shaun the Sheep, and streaming giant Netflix where they created an

immersive Squid Game based on the hit TV-show. IGB also recently announced a collaboration with Merlin's long-time partner Sony Pictures Entertainment via Columbia Pictures Location Based Entertainment, on a new Ghostbusters game.

"Will Dean is an extraordinary entrepreneur who has built a world-class team, developed cutting-edge technology and partnered with iconic IP," said Merlin Entertainments CEO Scott O'Neill. "This new, exciting chapter is being executed with the hope that with success will come a deeper rollout throughout our global estate."

**attractions-kit keyword**  
**Merlin Entertainments**



The Primordial dark coaster has opened at Lagoon Park

## Triotech launches new dark ride Primordial

Media based attractions creator Triotech has announced the opening of its latest attraction, a next generation interactive dark coaster installed at Lagoon Park in Salt Lake City, Utah, US.

Named Primordial, the 6,600sq m (71,000sq ft) ride has been developed together with Lagoon Amusement Park and other industry leaders. It is a 3-level roller coaster combined with an interactive dark ride featuring 8 media-based scenes and an alternate ending storytelling.

The project scope, completed by Triotech's in-house studio,

engineering, and R&D teams, includes design, story, show, theming, audio, special effects, as well as the development of a new blaster concept that can withstand the twists, turns, and falls of the new coaster.

"Primordial is pushing the boundaries of the dark coaster concept" said Ernest Yale, president and CEO of Triotech. "We've included interactivity, pushed the immersion to an astonishing level and most importantly, we've included alternate paths as well as multiple different story twists. These



PHOTO: TRIOTECH

Triotech CEO Ernest Yale



PHOTO: TRIOTECH

The ride features multiple different story twists

different endings will keep guests guessing, and of course, keep them coming back to the ride to experience all its variants."

The ride is set in the 'mysterious world of the Dolomite Mountains, where visitors embark on a journey to free Dragon Dragnor.'

attractions-kit keyword

Triotech



IMAGE: MAURER RIDES

## Maurer Rides presents new Speed Chaser concept

Rollercoaster designer and manufacturer Maurer Rides presented its new Speed Chaser coaster concept at IAAPA Expo Europe.

The Speed Chaser is an adaptable ride designed for a small footprint that allows passengers to determine their own speed. One of its key features is the ability to accommodate two different vehicle types: Racer as a two-

seater or Train for up to eight passengers. This means operators can use different vehicles depending on visitor frequency or give passengers the choice.

Riders can control the speed of their vehicle, with the option of stepping on the gas or taking it slow. The seats also have a 45-degree tilt function, which can be triggered anywhere on the track, either by the riders or

programme controlled. A throttle and boost button provides additional thrust, bright brake lights alert, and the engine sound is speed-dependent and freely configurable.

Other features include tilting seats, boosters, gaming, shooting and light gates.

The ride is designed with Mature Spike® technology, and requires a space of just 60m x 50m.

A spokesperson for Maurer Rides said: "Gone are the days of the passive co-pilot. The co-pilot activates the track light gates, with the integrated targets on top, and with the shoot button it's time to collect points. The onboard video system (with touchscreen display, of course) can generate additional income for the park.

"The Speed Chaser has so many possibilities." ●

attractions-kit keyword

Maurer Rides

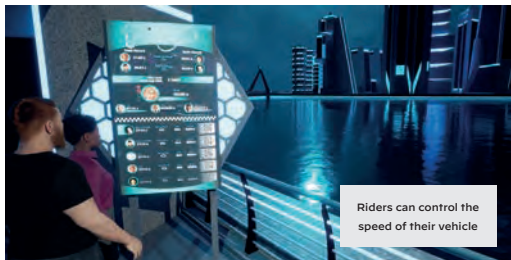


IMAGE: MAURER RIDES





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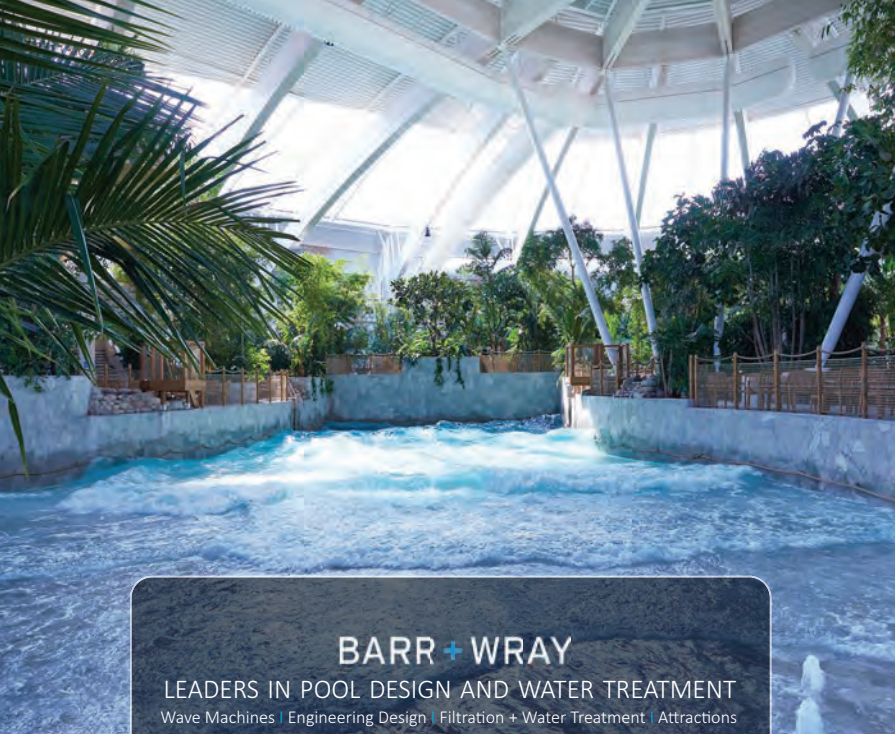


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