

WORLD PARK

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Immersed in water



Park World hears from Julie Kline, marketing manager at Aquatic Development Group (ADG), the designer and builder of water parks and water attractions

Guests love water rides because they are able to immerse themselves in ... water! People have a natural affinity for it - and whether you are a guest looking for a thrill ride, a more relaxing experience or a skill-based adventure, all guests at a water park are seeking a water-based experience.

While our affinity for water is long-standing and unchanging, water ride attraction trends continue to evolve every year. One example of advances in water ride trends is the slide. Vendors are creating small versions of the large water slides for the younger generation to 'grow into' at their water parks. Not only is this a great way to engage a younger demographic - allowing them to experience the 'big kid slides', but it also helps retain them at their local water park for years to come.

Technology is another big trend in water ride attractions. Whether this be related to lighting, virtual reality or even sound, immersion in water parks is continuing to be a popular and evolving trend.

Yet another trend is more in-water experiences! Looking for creative ways to beat the heat and enjoy being in water sounds simple, but when guests are spending hours waiting in the lines for rides, they aren't getting that in-water fun they are

looking for. Some examples of in-water experience trends can be action rivers, swim rivers, dual beach wave pools, adventure pools, flat water adult pools, swim up bars, boogie boarding pools and more.

Surf's up

Finally, perhaps the biggest trend in water rides is incorporating surf. Surfing is the fastest growing sport in the world, in part due to its involvement in the Olympic games, as well as the media exposure it has received over the last several years - and guests are looking to experience the sport and the joy of surfing.

With most countries being landlocked, water ride suppliers have developed different forms of surf experiences for those who would never otherwise have access to the sport. Whether this be a standing surf wave or the big surf lagoons, this is a growing trend that we will continue to see over the next several years to come.

We'll also see the continued growth of immersive experiences. As technology continues to evolve and companies look for new ways to differentiate themselves from the competition, I think we will see more immersive experiences at water parks that are technology driven. Whether this be more simulation, or virtual reality, or advanced project displays, I think over the next decade we will start to

see water parks really pushing the boundaries and setting a new standard for combining technology and water ride experiences.

Mixing it up

The challenge in designing your water ride mix at a water park is combining the right amount of in-water experiences versus thrill water ride activities. Another challenge is ensuring that there is a great enough mixture of water rides at a water park to tailor an experience for guests of all ages and needs - as well as enough experiences to fill a day at the park. If there are only three slides at the park, a guest is either not going to go, or will only be there an hour. The goal of a water park operator is to bring in guests, have them stay, play and spend - and then come back again.

Soaky Mountain Waterpark in Sevierville, TN is a great example of a mix of in-water versus thrill experiences within a park. It also showcases the trend of the kids area mimicking smaller versions of the bigger slide complex at the park.

Meanwhile, Island Live in Orlando, FL is a great example of a park that has incorporated technology into the design. There are water slides with light and sound experiences, plus a technology system that allows for access to selfie booths, and cashless payments for guest convenience throughout the park.