

The Top Ten Guest Experiences in US Amusement Parks

from the editors of *InPark Magazine*:

Martin Palicki, Mitch Rily, Bill St. Yves & Brian Szaks

10. Friendly Folks at Adventureland Park Des Moines, IA

There's gold in today's mature workforce. Poet Ogden Nash once wrote "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker." When seeking seasonal staffers, some locales wisely pursue the wiser and refined senior generation. At Adventureland Park, seniors are a staffing cornerstone and they help give the park its laid-back, relaxed atmosphere and flavor. The park boosts its summer senior recruiting efforts by offering plenty of RV space. Retired couples who enjoy traveling the country also enjoy the peacefulness of Iowa and the extra money brought in by working at the park. Their life experience brings with it a steadiness and reliability that helps assure guests they will be well cared for.

9. Cypress Gardens Winter Haven, FL

The typical park guest doesn't want to go, go, go all day long. Let's face it: everyone needs a little respite from the average theme park agenda. As an industry, we often are so caught up in concerns about providing enough high-end attractions that we end up encouraging our customers to only seek out said experiences. But while we want our guests to feel thrilled at the end of a day, we don't want them to be exhausted. The perfect solution can be found at Cypress Gardens. Sure, there are thrill rides, but the park also boasts one of the most beautiful garden areas in the South. A quiet meandering stroll calms the nerves and rejuvenates the mind. Experiencing the gardens from the serene and unique Sunshine Sky Adventure, which gently raises riders 16 stories in the air, provides a fun option for the whole family. The gardens leave everyone feeling energized and relaxed, exactly what a day at the park should do.

8. Canobie Lake Salem, NH

If you can package up nostalgia, do it...and then sell it!

Many traditional, old amusement parks have had a difficult time establishing themselves, particularly as larger chains gobble up smaller properties. Canobie Lake has made a name for itself by doing nothing but remaining true to its roots. While still periodically adding modern attractions, the park has held on to a dying breed of old amusement park attractions. The Caterpillar, a circular spinning ride that becomes covered by a folding canopy during the ride, is a prime example of that special kind of attraction that elicits great memories. In addition to the rides, the lush landscaping and winding walkways are reminiscent of a bygone era. The result is a modern, successful park that attracts visitors with its timeless charm and pleasant memories.



7. Rockin' Roadway at Dollywood Pigeon Forge, TN

Product differentiation takes place in all areas of a facility.

Many parks offer U-Drive-Em cars – but that doesn't mean yours can't be special. The modestly sized Rockin' Roadway's ingenuity and attention to detail provide the fuel to make this joy-ride memorable. Riders enter a faux used-car dealership and queue through the showroom before moving into a loading station designed to look like a garage, complete with control panels set into tool cribs and chests. The cars, themed to 1950s speedsters, have real horns, and the dashboard radios play 50s hits, adding further to the authenticity. As the cars wind through the elaborately themed track, advertisements for actual food locations in the park are passed off as commercials on the station.

6. Haunted Mansion Holiday at Disneyland Anaheim, CA

Branding and brand synergy offer opportunities to build, leverage and build some more.

There's something special about rides and attractions built from scratch that create their own individual brands. And from those brands, whole worlds and universes can grow. Disney presents outstanding recent examples with Pirates of the Caribbean, the attraction that spawned a movie franchise that in turn has spawned updates to the attraction. And Disney's Haunted Mansion attraction, refreshed with elements of the Disney film *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, is a blast. The synergy between the two is obvious, and the result has generated new legions of fans.

Photos courtesy of Cedar Fair, Holiday World, and InPark Magazine

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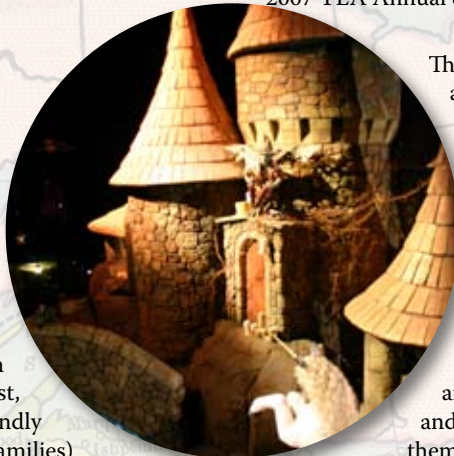
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5. Wizard Quest

Wisconsin Dells, WI

Parents want to play – with their kids.

Helping them do that is a recipe for repeat visits and customer loyalty. Children glued to high-tech consoles aren't interacting with their parents, and adults don't like to be shut out any more than youngsters. Enter Wizard Quest, located in ultra-family friendly Wisconsin Dells. Teams (of families) enter the facility and play together infused with a mission to release the four Wizards trapped within their realms of Air, Water, Land and Fire. Players are engaged and challenged physically as well as mentally and they leave the 90-minute experience wanting to come back and take the challenge again - together.



4. Cedar Point's Halloween Fright Zone

Sandusky, OH

Whatever you do, don't neglect the holidays.

A holiday (even a relatively obscure one) mixed in with a little bit of creativity can become a special (and financially rewarding) event. But it has to be thought out. As much as we like Halloween events, we have to admit, they have become somewhat formulaic. That's why we're impressed with Cedar Point's haunted offering that comes in the form of a Fright Zone. Tranquil by

day, the park's Frontier Trail becomes home to the regular assortment of ghouls and goblins at night. What makes this experience better than any others out there is how effectively the park plays with lights, fog and shadows to scare everyone - not just the hyper teenage girls, but the big burly football jocks as well. Low-lying lights shine up behind silhouetted tombstones, while fog swirls everywhere. The result: an eerie atmosphere with limited warning of what scare-actors lay ahead.



3. Sizzling Skillets at Silver Dollar City

Branson, MO

Never underestimate the power of human hunger.

Food is supposed to help keep guests in the park longer, but mediocre dining choices can have the reverse effect. That translates into a perfect opportunity to quickly build a great reputation with the public, and that's exactly the case at Silver Dollar City. On the Midway, traditional aromas mingle with the scent of savory sausage dishes, harvest potatoes and succotash, all cooked in giant skillets.

The kiosks can't help but draw people in with the sights, sounds and smells of fresh food. It's the way theme park food should always be: unique, fast, and flavorful.

2. Dr. Frankenstein's Haunted Castle

*Indiana Beach Amusement Resort
Monticello, IN*

Classic thrills and a sense of continuity help retain and grow a loyal customer base.

Set in the so-called Riviera of the Midwest, Indiana Beach's old-fashioned haunted house is a permanent fixture in the park and a beloved classic. It's a favorite place for regulars to get "lost" and quickly achieves popularity with newcomers. An elaborately themed faux elevator takes guests to a dungeon where, alone with each other and their imaginations, they must fend for themselves amid props, stunts and gags such as the room of doors in which they must find the correct passage or, apparently, be lost forever. In a day when most parks are removing walk-through attractions and replacing them with thrill rides, Indiana Beach has maintained its sense of heritage, sticking to what they know best: keeping the family entertained for more than 80 years.

1. Holiday World for FREE

Santa Claus, IN

Freebies that convey generosity on your part while raising per caps on the guests' part are a win-win.

Though industry pros might joke that the folks over at Holiday World are giving the park away, a look at their attendance and profit figures shows a different story. The park's revolutionary policies of providing free soda, free sunscreen and free inner-tubes have earned Holiday World a spot in the record books - all while seeing a rise in their guests' per cap spending! Though it really is located in just about the middle of nowhere, the park draws crowds of people from around the country. While other facilities successfully remind people just how much money they are going to spend that day by charging \$15 to park, Holiday World succeeds by giving their guests a great experience with a perceived value that is enhanced by the giveaways.



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