



Characteristics of a Successful Theme Park

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The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World has a very effective theme that suspends reality for visitors.

Almost everyone knows about Walt Disney World (disneyworld.disney.go.com) in Florida. Most Americans, and many international visitors have either gone there or know people who have. It's one of the most popular theme parks in the world and the standard by which all others are judged. In short, Disney has it all figured out when it comes to the characteristics of a successful theme park.

Fun For All Ages

Theme parks are often thought of as first and foremost for children. This is true to an extent, but it's a mistake to assume that everything in the park is designed for the little ones. If mom and dad or the grandparents don't enjoy being there, there's less chance they'll bring the kids next year. The key characteristic for theme park success is making it fun for people of all ages to be there. "Milder" rides for little kids are a must, but thrilling rides for older kids and adults are also needed. Park sections can be specifically dedicated to certain groups based on age. Toon Town at Disney World, for instance, is just for little kids, while Pleasure Island is an adult playground.

Location and Weather Friendly

Location is obviously an important part to the formula for success at a theme park. The facility has to be accessible to large numbers of people and not too far off the beaten path or too far from a major airport. Physical location also has to do with the weather; it's no surprise that the U.S.'s most successful theme parks are in Florida and Southern California, two areas featuring mild year-round climates. Theme parks located in areas with cold winters are limited to operating seasonally.

Great Attraction Elements

Theme parks live and die by the quality of their attractions. Some attractions live on for generations, like Space Mountain, while others end up getting retired because they just didn't hold the public's interest. A successful theme park must be anchored with memorable attractions that people want to ride or see over and over again. Great attractions are inclusive and aren't overly restrictive. They should have great storytelling elements and put visitors into unique situations or settings. Engaging all the senses, random outcomes and the addition of memorable music may also make attractions especially successful.

Successful Theme

The difference between a theme park and an amusement park is the theme. Amusement parks are just collections of rides and games, while a theme park is meant to put visitors into a fantastic place where reality is temporarily suspended to some degree. The Magic Kingdom or the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando (universalorlando.com) are theme park sections designed to do exactly that. This suspension of reality and a well-conceived theme is key to their success.