

intelligent forms of lifestyle

Forces of ATTRACTION

ORLANDO-AREA THEME PARKS KEEP IN STEP WITH THE TECHNOLOGY BOOM.



»» Technology is all around us in Central Florida. From cutting-edge research facilities to top-notch medical centers, Orlando is home to some of the greatest technological advances being made today. The region, best known for its visitor appeal, also happens to lead the way when it comes to innovative attractions. Several local theme parks have recently completed exciting projects or have something underway. Here's a glimpse at the latest and greatest.

SPACE CADETS

Every year more than 1.4 million people tour the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex. It's one of Central Florida's most popular destinations, and the focus of its tours, exhibits and rides is to bring visitors face-to-face with the technology and milestones of NASA.

From touring the launch pads to meeting an astronaut, the Visitor Center offers rare opportunities for people to get behind-the-scenes insight into what it takes to make space exploration a reality, and what it's like to be a space explorer. One of its newest rides is doing just that in a pretty spectacular way.

Opened in the spring of last year, "Shuttle Launch Experience" at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex is the culmination of three years of development by veteran space shuttle astronauts, renowned attraction experts and a design team under the guidance of NASA. The attraction takes visitors

through a simulated launch into Earth's orbit from Kennedy Space Center, the birthplace of American space exploration. Through sophisticated motion technology, special effect seats and high-fidelity visual and audio presentations, visitors are immersed in the sensations of launching into space – complete with going fully vertical in the process.

The attraction can accommodate 44 “crew members,” who begin their journey by entering the shuttle launch simulation facility, a massive structure that's architecturally consistent with the space shuttle facilities at Kennedy Space Center. Astronaut testimonials greet the crew. Veteran shuttle commander Charlie Bolden delivers the pre-launch briefing, explaining the launch sequence step by step. Now it's time to enter the crew cabin, sit back and strap in for launch — an extremely realistic simulation of the space shuttle's eight-and-a-half minute ascent into orbit. Custom-designed crew cabins, high-definition audiovisual effects and high-tech seating maximize the realism of the experience, which was designed and engineered to be the most realistic launch simulation ever created. After an adventure like this, you'll never look at space travel in the same way again.



MODERNIZING THE FUTURE

Since Disney's Epcot® center — an acronym for Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow — opened in 1982, its icon has been the gigantic silver geosphere. The park reflects

Walt Disney's desire to showcase new technologies emerging in American industries. If the park is iconic of Disney's view of the future, then the ride within the geosphere, “Spaceship Earth,” is iconic of Epcot® itself.

In 2007 and early 2008, Spaceship Earth was closed for seven months of detailing and reconstruction designed to modernize and enhance the park's focal point. Presented by Siemens, the attraction now boasts a number of updated elements: new scenes, costumes and sets; new lighting and special effects; a new musical score and narration; and a completely re-themed interactive post-ride show.

The ride takes guests on a trip through time to learn how each generation has shaped the future for the next one, and how the spirit of innovation has helped move people “from the caves to the cosmos.”

New scenes depict a family in the 1960s watching the moon landing on TV; a garage in the early 70s where the personal computer is born; and a “tech tunnel” where guests become part of a digital data stream.

In order to make the audio-Animatronics figures more realistic, they received makeovers to their hair, costumes, and even their movements. The narration got an upgrade too, and guests now can choose one of six languages in which to listen.

Perhaps the most impressive new upgrade happens near the end of the ride. Interactive touch screens in the ride vehicles light up with a series of questions about the guests' preferences concerning the future and where they would like to live and work. They then receive a personalized view of themselves in their idyllic future.

After disembarking, guests are invited to visit “Project Tomorrow” presented by Siemens, in which interactive exhibits bring to life the technologies the company is developing. There are games and displays that showcase innovative technologies, such as “Innervision” — a look into the future of medical diagnostics in the home — and “Body Builder,” a 3D game that enables players to assemble a digital human body,

simulating the Siemens technology developed to perform remote surgeries.



HEAD FOR SEAWORLD'S AQUATICA

SeaWorld® Orlando will open its own water park just in time for spring. Billed as a “whimsical, one-of-a-kind water park,” SeaWorld's Aquatica™ offers a lazy river and numerous waterslides, but it's the way its designers fold animal encounters into the usual rides that separates it from other area water parks.

The signature places to get up-close and personal with marine life include a 300-foot-long enclosed waterslide that plunges riders down a 42-foot drop and through a lagoon populated by black-and-white Commerson's dolphins. “Loggerhead Lane,” a relaxing lazy river ride that winds through the colorful park, takes guests past waterfalls, exotic birds and the single aquarium of fish on display in Aquatica™. In addition, the 59-acre attraction boasts one of the world's largest interactive water play areas, which includes a 60-foot-tall “rain fortress” and a 15,000-square-foot pool, as well as several smaller slides and water cannons.

Clearly a great deal of work went into the design and construction of the park, which is the only one of its kind that offers such close contact with flora and fauna, and exotic species to boot. Aquatica is the first new park in Orlando to open since SeaWorld created Discovery Cove® in 2000.

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UNIVERSAL'S NEW UNIVERSE

The Harry Potter series of books has become a global phenomenon that spawned five films, and now a mini theme park in Orlando. The books by author J.K. Rowling have been translated into 65 languages and have sold more than 325 million copies in over 200 territories around the world. Universal Studios hopes to bring that kind of success to Central Florida.

Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Universal Orlando® Resort are teaming up to create the world's first fully immersive, Harry Potter-themed environment, based on the bestselling books and blockbuster films from Warner Bros. Described as "a theme park within a theme park," this new environment will be called "The Wizarding World of Harry Potter" and will be built within Universal's Islands of Adventure® theme park.

Plans remain secretive, but one thing that's widely known is that these companies are going all out in order to transport guests into the world of Harry Potter and his friends in a way true to that depicted in the movies. In fact, Academy Award®-winning production designer Stuart Craig, who worked on all of the Harry Potter to movies to date, leads the creative design for the area to ensure that it remains faithful to the look and feel of the films.

"The Wizarding World of Harry Potter" will be a fully immersive, themed land where guests can visit some of the most iconic locations found in the books and films, including the village of Hogsmeade, the mysterious Forbidden Forest, and even Hogwarts Castle. Expected to open in late 2009, the area will feature rides and interactive attractions, as well as experiential shops and restaurants that will enable guests to sample fare from the wizard world's best-known establishments.

Also debuting will be a state-of-the-art attraction designed to bring the magic, characters and stories of Harry Potter to life in an exciting way that guests have never before experienced. They might not be revealing what's up their sleeves yet, but with Universal and Warner Bros. involved in the project, it will no doubt be yet another successful addition to Orlando's unparalleled and tech-savvy experiential parks. 