

international projects 101

a primer on the many amazing projects opening in **Asia**.

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Y*ou will have to travel.* I smile as I reflect upon these words. They were offered to me by my then perspective boss while interviewing for my first role as Production Manager in this industry. Though many years later these words still echo true, and are perhaps even more relevant now than at any other time in my career. In fact, I would offer up the same advice to anyone looking to build a business or perhaps even remain afloat in these uncertain times.

The lackluster attendance figures of U.S. theme parks and attractions that are attributed to the weakened economy have, for the most part, squelched plans for costly improvements in the way of new shows, attractions and rides. And although the global market is feeling the pinch as well, it seems that many Asian venues are increasing rather than decreasing their offerings. In fact, the emerging Chinese Theme Park marketplace has recently surged into the

mainstream of the billion-plus residents as they are steadily growing in both popularity and attendance.

Chinese Theme Park operators such as OCT and Chimelong have continued their growth patterns and have added both show attractions, rides and even new gated parks in recent years. OCT owners and operators of Happy Valley Theme Parks are looking to open two new parks, "Happy Valley Chengdu" and "Happy Valley Shanghai" within the next year alone. As the operators of mainland China's most popular theme park chain they are quickly becoming a powerful player on the global theme park stage.

One of our clients, Ocean Park, Hong Kong has steadily increased their attendance year over year, thanks in great part to their focus on special events geared toward the local clientele and culturally relevant experiences. Last year,

Utopia worked with the park to create and produce a brand-new show, "Sea Dreams!" to provide the ever-growing guest population with a new show production to enjoy while the park undergoes major construction for the much anticipated park redevelopment. Ocean Park, Hong Kong is in the throes of a major park-wide overhaul to the tune of 5.5 billion (HKD) and when completed the entire park will receive a face-lift, resulting in the development of two main zones, the Waterfront (formerly the Lowland) and the Summit, (formerly the Headland) and shall feature new shows, attractions, animal encounters and a brand-new funicular experience that transports guests to and from the upper park. We hope to continue working with the OPHK team to bring the 30 year old park into the 21st century by offering their guests the latest in technical and theatrical developments.

Though Ocean Park, Hong Kong continues to experience unprecedented attendance, it's no secret that Hong Kong Disneyland has experienced lower visitation than expected since opening their gates in 2005. Nevertheless, Disney's attendance figures also continue to climb supporting the fact that the expanding middle-class of China possesses both disposable income and the desire to be entertained.

Perhaps it's time to travel to China.

Further south, the growth in the marketplace has spurred the development of a brand new park, Universal Studios Singapore. Part of the new expansion of the Resorts World at Sentosa, which ultimately will include a new maritime museum and marine life park, Universal Studios is providing work for many U.S. designers, producers, fabricators and consultants. With a planned opening of 2010,



The "Magical Starlight Parade" at Universal Studios Japan brings the night alive with color, lights and music.

Universal Studios Singapore will feature six themed areas and new rides based on movies like Madagascar, Jurassic Park, The Mummy and Waterworld. The park will no doubt continue to add shows and attractions over the years, providing our industry with another great source of economic opportunity.

In addition to the growth at Sentosa, Singapore has recently unveiled the Singapore Flyer, the world's largest Ferris Wheel which soars 541-feet above the Singapore Harbor. The multi million dollar project hopes to capitalize upon the anticipated tourist visitation increase generated by the expansion of Resorts World at Sentosa and is also evidence of the country's confidence in the growth of the leisure industry.

Is it time to travel to Singapore?

South Korea has also become a hot bed of activity for the leisure industry and is currently playing host to several new developmental plans. Upon the Southern Island of Jeju, a theme park is being developed based upon the country's myths and legends and is expected to open in 2011. The park will of course feature rides and shows, but addition to this, guests will be able to experience cultures from around the world in an international zone.

Movie giant MGM is also slated to develop a theme park in South Korea by the year 2012 and if successful it will be the company's first theme park development outside of the U.S. MGM Studio Park Korea will be developed on a site encompassing some 1.5 million square meters adjacent to the Incheon International Airport, one of the largest airports in Asia.

Another client of Utopia's, Paramount Pictures and Daewoo Motor Sales Corp. have also

announced plans to build a theme park in Incheon, near Seoul. The park is to include a film studio, a 300-room hotel and a shopping mall.

Lotte Group has recently announced their plans to develop its second Lotte World theme park in Shincheon-Dong, Seoul, South Korea. It has been reported that their plans call for the construction of the main tower of Lotte World II to be 112 stories tall, which would make it one of the tallest buildings in the world. The construction of the new park should be completed around 2014.

Finally, movie and theme park giant Universal Studios has also announced plans to build a \$3 billion theme park at a seaside location near Hwaseong, southwest of Seoul. The park is to include attractions featuring Korean films. The complex will also include hotels, golf courses, and a shopping mall.

But movie-themed experiences aren't the only rage in South Korea as the Commerce Ministry hopes to draw interest to its burgeoning robotics industry by creating robot theme parks. They recently announced a proposal to build two Robot Parks by 2013. Their reported goal is to combine culture and entertainment with robot technology and to help promote the robot industry in the process, which is a key area for economic development in the region. The parks are slated to be constructed in Incheon, and the port city of Masan.

Maybe you should travel to South Korea?

Our firm recently had the pleasure of once again working with Universal Studios Japan to develop the recently premiered, "Magical Starlight Parade!" This mega lit, mega hit production features over 30 colorfully-

lighted units based upon popular fairy tales and features fantastically illuminated floats, amazing costumes, props, special effects and an incredible sound track. Universal Studios Japan continues to enjoy increased attendance, (2008 saw 8.3 million people pass through the gates) and due to their success, continually looks for new ways to entertain their visitors.

Home to some of the most popular parks in the world including Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo Disney Seas, Japan boasts some impressive visitation figures. According to the 2008 TEA/ERA Attendance Report, the top 5 Japanese theme parks (The three mentioned above plus Yokohama Hakkeijima Sea Paradise & Nagashima Spa Land), are attributed to entertaining over 43 million visitors last year.

So, it might be a good time to travel to Japan.

Though the global economy has certainly led to a slow down in our industry these projects, or variations of them, may actually come to fruition in the coming years thus providing more opportunities for industry business in the region. Last year's attendance for theme park visitation in the Asian/Pacific Rim was nearly 67 million people. It's certainly safe to say that the region is anything but stagnate and many corporations and municipalities seem to be poised and ready to catch the new wave of leisure growth once the global indicators rise to a crest. If you want to experience the growth in this region and if you want to ride this wave - you will have to travel. **ipm**

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