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Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum (both images)

Where Water Meets the Air

Wings and Waves Waterpark opens at the Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon

by Harriet Baskas

The country's newest and perhaps most unusual waterpark opened June 6 in a surprising place: on the grounds of the Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon.

The museum is best known for being the home of the giant Howard Hughes HK-1 "Spruce Goose," which made a short, single flight back in November, 1947, as well as a wide variety of spacecraft, helicopters and military, commercial and personal aircraft. An extensive firearms collection, historical artifacts, and IMAX 3D theater and many educational exhibits are also on-site.

So while it may seem strange that an aviation museum would build its own waterpark, it makes perfect sense that an aviation-themed waterpark is what got built. And the aviation-theme is impossible to miss: the new Wings and Waves Waterpark has as its centerpiece a Boeing 747-100 airplane mounted on the roof of a 60-foot tall building. Inside the building, there are colorful, scream-inducing slides, a giant wave pool, a water vortex and a multi-level play structure with slides, water guns, spouts and buckets and a helicopter that hovers overhead and occasionally dumps 300 gallons of water on those below. The park even has its own museum: the H2O Museum has more than two dozen interactive exhibits and explains concepts such as Bernoulli's Principle, the water cycle and jet propulsion.

Splashdown Harbor, the 91,000 wave pool, sits in the center of the waterpark and offers swimmers eight different wave motions as well as depth charges and bubblers. A 20-foot wide high-resolution video screen by the pool is slated to show everything from NASA splashdown videos to feature films during the park's planned "Dive-in" movies events.

And, then, of course, there are the rides. The park has 10 water slides, with four main slides coming directly out of the belly of the rooftop airplane. The yellow Sonic Boom slide, with its open top, is designed for novice riders. The green Nose Dive is just that: a two-person inner-tube ride that starts with a big drop and winds its way to the pool. The fully-enclosed blue Tail Spin speeds riders through a series of tight, figure-eight, high banking curves. And then there's the Mach 1: described as a "test your mettle ride," this high-speed, enclosed-body slide requires riders to descend 60 vertical feet on their backs, with their arms and legs crossed.

Sound like fun? Here are the details: The Evergreen Wings and Waves Waterpark sits just west of the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum, which is 3.5 miles southeast of McMinnville, Oregon, on Highway 18. It's about an hour from Portland and 40 minutes from Salem.

Hours: The park is open daily from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Admission: Under 42": \$25. Includes the H2O Museum, the wave pool and play structures. Over 42": \$30. Includes access to all areas of the park. \$10: entry to the H2O museum. Children under 3 enter free.

Lifejackets: Guests are welcome to bring their own Coast Guard-approved lifejackets or use the complimentary lifejackets available at the park.

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