

In Oregon water park, Evergreen Wings & Waves, visitors slide from inside a 747

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By Rob Owen, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

McMINNVILLE, Ore. -- Eye-catching roadside attractions come in all shapes and sizes: a doughnut on top of a Los Angeles bakery, the world's biggest ball of twine in Darwin, Minn., the Longaberger office building shaped like a giant picnic basket in Newark, Ohio.

Drivers passing by Oregon's new Evergreen Wings & Waves indoor water park will also do a double take.

A 747 airplane appears poised to launch off the top of a building that houses the indoor water park. Stare a bit longer, and you'll notice enclosed waterslide tubes jutting out the side of the plane's fuselage before disappearing into the building below.

Great Wolf Lodge indoor water parks, such as the one in Sandusky, Ohio, may be becoming ubiquitous, particularly in the Midwest, but they can't boast that their slides begin in the belly of a jumbo jet.

Dave Garske, operations manager for Hoffman Construction, the company that built the park, said the idea for a 747 on top of the building came from Delford Smith, founder of Evergreen International Aviation, which operates the water park and the adjacent Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, home to Howard Hughes' enormous wooden plane, the Spruce Goose.

"What sets it apart is the environment that surrounds the rides," Mr. Garske said. "You're inside a 747. There's a bi-plane for a ticket counter. The whole experience is a lot different from just climbing stairs and riding the ride. When you stand in the stair tower and look at that 747 and climb into the fuselage and see the plane and experience getting in the tubes and going out of the plane, it's fantastic."

Mr. Garske said the project began 31/2 years ago as a way to appeal to the younger visitors who tour the air and space museum next door while maintaining the same theme. A lodge will be built on the property over the next few years to cement the notion of the entire campus as a destination. To add some educational value, the water park includes H2O: Life Needs Water, a small children's museum with interactive exhibits.

The most interesting education -- for children and adults -- might be the construction of the water park itself. Although the 747 appears to be sitting on the roof, it's actually resting on a steel support structure that was installed first. Much of the building was constructed around the plane's supports.

Visitors waiting in the queue before plunging down one of four lengthy waterslides pass the time with a video showing how the plane -- a Pan Am jet turned cargo freighter -- came to reside at the water park. Mr. Garske said technicians first stripped the 747 of many nonessential components in Arizona before flying it to Oregon and landing it at the McMinnville airport, located across a highway from the water park. The airport's small size required the pilot to burn up as much fuel as possible and brake hard on landing, lest the plane slip off the short runway, which was not designed for large planes.

Engineers then had to consult with the Oregon Department of Transportation about hauling the 350,000-pound plane across the highway without causing damage to the road's infrastructure. Engineers also had to figure out a way to keep the plane securely fastened to its support structure so it doesn't accidentally take flight during wind gusts.

The story behind the plane and its journey to the water park is affixed to the stairwells visitors climb (110 steps) on their way up to enter the fuselage.

"Slide attendants, prepare for takeoff," says a recorded announcement.

Three of the four slides require riding on an inner tube (riders must be at least 42 inches tall); the fourth, called Mach 1, is a fast-moving but not particularly steep body slide (riders must be at least 48 inches tall).



Evergreen Wings & Waves water park in McMinnville, Ore.

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If you go

Evergreen Wings & Waves

Where: McMinnville is about an hour southwest of downtown Portland, Ore.

Hours: Evergreen Wings & Waves water park is open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. daily in the summer. After the summer vacation season, the park will likely have different hours and be closed some weekdays.

Cost: \$30 if you're taller than 42 inches (\$25 for shorter visitors) with a \$5 per ticket AAA discount available; the H2O Museum on its own is \$10 or free for those younger than 3.

Details: 1-503-434-4185 or www.evergreenmuseum.org/waterpark.

PG MAP

• McMinnville, Ore.

Keep body slide (there must be at least 10 inches tall).

The most popular slide, Nosedive, takes riders through a green tube with sounds and holographic effects that give the impression the rider is about to slide into the spinning blades of an airplane jet engine. Instead, the rider passes right through the image and drops into a 50-foot diameter bowl, circling it a few times before re-entering another slide tube.

The yellow Sonic Boom slide is open inside the building, while the blue Tailspin slide is mostly in the dark (it's been compared to Disney's in-the-dark coaster Space Mountain).

"We want each slide to have a different personality," Mr. Garske said. "We wanted to go from a slide with a slower ride kids could handle to a fast, wedgie slide the older kids could enjoy. We didn't want just four slides that are the same."

In addition to the slides coming out of the plane, the water park also features a wave pool, a play fort with a 300-gallon splash bucket that dumps water every minute 20 seconds, a hot tub and a vortex pool with a current that sends swimmers floating around in a circle. Both the air and water temperature inside the building are set at 84 degrees.

"We really worked on the environment and the education," Mr. Garske said, "but the bottom line is if it isn't fun, people won't come back."

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