



Heide Park

The Wall came down and everyone was ready for some fun. Once a park trying to attract visitors, Heide Park's new challenge is handling its phenomenal growth.

More than 2 million European tourists looking for big German amusement parks made the trek to Phantasialand and Europa Park last year. And more than a million others, looking for theme park excitement, headed over to Sierkdorf's Hansa Park. And for good reason, these parks are some of the finest examples of the quality-oriented German amusement industry.

But those park-goers that were looking for big amusement park fun, 210 acres big, headed to Heide Park. Heide Park is not only the biggest amusement park in Germany it also boasts the largest number of attractions. As of 1999 there are 43 and counting.

The first two things you actually note when entering the park is that a) it is very big and b) it is very German. Just so you know, the 210 acres previously mentioned do not in-

clude parking or services areas.

Despite its size, Heide is not one of the best known parks either locally or internationally. Phantasialand, Europa, and Hansa have all generally received more attention than the big park. Klaus Müller, the park's public relations manager, is determined to change that. His active database now includes more than 1,000 names of press contacts all over the world; magazines, daily and weekly newspapers, trade magazines, TV channels, and radio stations.

And Müller's determination is beginning to pay off. Last year the park was mentioned 1,000 times in the press. This year that figure has more than doubled. When referring to the park the press no longer does so with a vague "German leisure park," but rather as "Heide Park." "What we want to communicate," Müller says, "is that we are a facility for the whole family, that we are a combination of

amusement and family. On one side we have the most rides in Europe (confirmed by the German consumer association) and on the other side we have landscaping." The landscaping comes as a natural for the park as it lies within the landscape protection area of the Lüneburger Heide. Forty full-time landscapers are at work to make sure the park looks great throughout the year.

History

The park's owner is Hans-Jürgen Tiemann, who started his career in the leisure industry by operating other people's attractions at fairgrounds. Together with his father he wanted to put all the traveling to a hold and put attractions into an area where they would look better. The family looked for a strong partner

by Mark Wijman

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and agreed on a partnership with the Mack family to develop an amusement park in southern Germany. The park, named Europa Park, opened in 1975 near the village of Rust.

But Tiemann's father passed away six weeks before the opening of the park, and the Mack company elected not to continue the arrangement, a decision Tiemann understood. He then moved up north and when he saw an advertisement in a trade magazine showing the site, the idea of Heide Park was born.

The facility opened in August 1978 with 6 small rides. Tiemann financed the rides himself and is still the only owner of the park. Two years after opening, Tiemann added a flume ride, which became an instant success, followed by yet another crowd puller in 1983—*Big Loop*, a looping coaster. "I had planned the park to be wide and big from the very early days," says Tiemann. "I never wanted the park to look like a trade show floor or a crowded city center; you can never speak of a leisure park when your park is always full of people. People come here to relax and have a good time."

The Big Loop satisfies the need for speed.



The Kinderlok Old 99 makes the rounds at a modest pace.

A Sudden Injection

The size of the park resulted in a certain lack of atmosphere in the early days. There just wasn't enough there yet. But for the first 10 years of operation the park worked doggedly on improvement focusing specifically on

the green areas and the atmosphere. During the mid 1980s the attendance grew to 1 million. Then in '88-'89 the iron curtain opened and attendance surged. From that point on the prime concern became handling the enormous crowds. New high capacity rides and attractions were added: Germany's largest white water rafting adventure, *Mountain Rafting*; Europe's largest bobsled ride; and a second flume ride a "bit" bigger than the first one at a height of 23 meters (75 feet), rides you would expect at a park of this size.

Of course the rides were not the park's only concern. All those new guests had to buy tickets and all other sorts of things before starting their day. Thus the Heide Dorf (Heide Village) was built as the new red-walkway. On an area of five acres, this romantic village holds not only the admission area but also an animatronic show, a teacup ride and a Biergarten.

From this starting point Tiemann indulged his fascination for Dutch architecture and built the Holland Dorf, a 5-acre village based on the

Netherlands' most beautiful buildings from the time of Rembrandt van Rijn. Windmills, canals, an open air stage, and a restaurant were all built in-house with a sharp eye for detail. I can imagine that the Dutch soldiers who reside in nearby Seedorf do not feel the need to go to Amsterdam once a week.

"Everything in the park is about quality," says Tiemann. "This is one of the most important things for people when they decide if they want to buy your product, especially here in Germany." The product that has the best quality/price balance will survive. In the park business you can see it literally: if you decide to build real Hollywood film sets in Germany, you will notice that they will collapse. Our climate asks for strong and thus expensive materials, but people see that and they will appreciate that you have done so much effort for them.

Future

"At this point," says Tiemann, "we are ready to build some new powerful attractions," for the 1999 season we will open *HangLooping*, Germany's first inverted coaster. To keep the balance there will be a



The Mississippi Boat plies the waters around the park's Statue of Liberty.

fairy-tale boat ride and the park will continue to build on the admission area of the park. For the year 2000 a mile-long wooden roller coaster is in planning stages.

But Tiemann does not think about attractions and shows alone: Next to the park, on a site of 120 hectares (300 acres) he plans a bungalow village, the first phase to be completed in 2000 - 2001, featuring 720 houses. This resort will be

themed after the North Pole, meaning all the apartments will represent a country surrounding the North Pole. In the middle there will be an indoor water theme park as well as a shopping area.

For the village Tiemann is looking for an outside partner: "To be very honest, the park itself keeps me busy enough and although I want it to be linked properly with the bungalow village, I do not want to be in it for the full 100 percent financially. The park itself has more than enough opportunities, we have one-of-a-kind expansion possibilities. For the park alone we can add about 70 hectares (170 acres) and then I am not including the expansion area we have for our service and parking areas."

So what are the plans for this area? "We are looking for a combination between the park, the water-park, the bungalow village and the hotel. Something like Futuroscope has for example." A lot of parks are now looking into adding a second or third gate. "When you look at turnover," says Tiemann, "a second or third gate is of course very interesting, but I feel that the guest satisfaction is turned into something of a more limited importance. We feel

Mountain Rafting winds through the park's lush landscape.



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that expanding the present park is better for our guests. I am of the opinion that one should never plan too far in advance. At present there are a lot of trends and thoughts in our industry, but that is not of so

much importance, one should only look at the guests, what they think is the most important thing.”

The Canal Boat ride's architecture borrows classic lines.



Layout

The park is rectangular in layout and has two main lakes. On the first, a Mississippi boat is surrounded by action on all sides with a 110-foot-tall copy of the Statue of Liberty, which even got the attention of President Ronald Reagan when it was unveiled on independence day in 1986.

On one side of the lake there are seven rides from German manufacturer Huss, which you would normally find at an Oktoberfest or—in other parks—far away from each other. Not here: *Enterprise*, *Rainbow*, *Break-Dance*, *Magic*, *Topspin*, *Flipper* and *Condor*. All in the same white and green colors, they make up an unusual but very attractive site.

Following along the lake we arrive

in yet another well-populated ride section. *The Big Loop*, bobsled, and *Flume Ride II*, decorated as a mountain, reside here in close proximity. It is here that the new ride for this season (1999) will reside: *HangLooping*, a model of the popular Suspended Looping Coaster and the first of its kind in Germany. Together with the *Big Loop*, which will have the same paint job, it will most certainly make for an interesting view of twisted white track.

Across the lake from *Big Loop* is yet another mountain village. This one is home to the already mentioned *Mountain Rafting*, the *Mountain Blitz*, a runaway mine train styled attraction, and the monorail which loops around the lake.

The surroundings of the second lake are more family-oriented. Attractions that might not seem exciting by themselves are grouped for

a very impressive sight. The landscaping has been done so well that appreciative visitors can actually miss a few rides the first time through, providing for new discoveries on a second pass later in the day.

Special Events

For the past two years the park has been the site of the world-championship Pole Sitting. The record, now at 62 days, will again be challenged next year. The event has been followed by all major German and European newspapers and has proved to be a real crowd-puller for the park, which is rapidly becoming the "Pole Sitting Capital of the World." This year's event will begin on May 22. The event's close is up to sitters. More than 500 have already applied even though the park limits the competition to 14 participants.

Admission Policy

The park features a pay-one-price admission system. Admission for adults is 36 German Marks (\$22.80 USD) a two-pass sells for 52 Marks (\$32.93 USD). The park does not sell season passes. "I simply never had the feeling that I had to," explains Tiemann. "For the current admission price we offer our customers a lot. If you compare us to other European parks we are the cheapest park in Europe. I do not want to start special rates for certain groups, on certain days, with certain limitations or anything. Everybody can of course do his own thing, but I feel that when you have a good park you should not take season passes as a starting point."

With its growing reknown, room to grow, and ballooning attendance, Heide Park appears to be a park to keep an eye on.

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