

Making a splash

Take the worry out of water parks with Laura French's survival guide

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Get it right and a water park trip can be one of the most exciting family breaks - there aren't many places where you can raft down a river one minute, surf crashing waves the next and follow it up with a freefall plunge down a vertical drop slide. And if it does go to plan it can work pretty well in your favour - happy clients mean happy agents (and hopefully repeat bookings).

But get it wrong and the idyllic image of parents basking in the sun while kids go off to splash around under tumbling buckets of water can quickly escalate into something a little more hectic.

To help avoid the pitfalls we've compiled the ultimate survival guide, with tips on how to boost your commission while making sure customers get the best out of the experience. Pens at the ready.

ON LOCATION

First off, it's worth considering which parks to send your clients to - there's no point suggesting one where everything has a height restriction to a family with five toddlers, so find out what they're looking for and tailor things accordingly.

For younger children (aged 12 and under), Annabel Cove, head of trade sales and





LEFT:
Daytona
Lagoon

RIGHT:
Typhoon
Lagoon,
Walt Disney
World Resort

BELOW:
Legoland
Florida



PICTURES: TONY GIESE; DIANA ZALUCKY

➔ marketing at Do Something Different, recommends Legoland Florida, located in the main theme park around an hour from Orlando. “The park has fantastic attractions for families, including the Build-A-Raft River, where guests can imagine, design and build a unique Lego vessel and set afloat on a maiden voyage,” she says.

If you have parents with slightly older children though, look towards Universal’s new Volcano Bay, designed to cater to a mix of ages when it opens on May 25.

“While your adventure-seeking teenagers can enjoy the Ko’okiri Body Plunge – a 125-foot drop-door descent – the little ones can play among the splashy slides and fountains,” says Alison



Find out which parks have new attractions that might tempt customers to stay longer

Montague, managing director for EMEA.

It doesn’t only have to be about the big players, of course. For families heading to the US on a budget, suggest one of the smaller, lesser-known options such as Daytona Lagoon, which recently underwent a \$2.3 million renovation and offers attractions to suit a variety of ages (entry

is \$49 for an all-day ticket). Elsewhere there’s Gatorland, a smaller theme park that’s home to Gator Gully Splash Park, complete with several fountains and smaller slides that are included with general admission and remain something of a secret (\$27 for adults and \$19 for children).

▶ ALL ABOUT THE UPSSELL

Whichever park you end up sending clients to, take advantage of upselling opportunities such as extended stays, advises Malcolm Davies, product destination manager for Funway Holidays. “Find out which parks have new attractions that might tempt customers to stay longer,” he says. “The opportunity to experience the

new technology and fiery lava effects at Volcano Bay might turn an overnight trip into a two-night stay, for example.”

Alternatively, highlight longer-stay tickets with special deals. Walt Disney World Resort offers an Ultimate Ticket that grants unlimited entrance to its six parks – including the two water parks Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach – for 14 days, and SeaWorld Orlando has a similar 14-day deal as part of its ‘three parks for the price of two’ offer.

That means clients can head home when the younger ones get fidgety and come back the next day for any slides they missed out on, so word it that way and you’ll secure a higher-value booking that will boost your commission. ➔



▶ THINKING AHEAD

When it comes to getting these deals, booking ahead is key, according to Dave Ody, director of sales and marketing for SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, UK & Ireland. “Advise clients to book their park tickets as soon as possible once they’ve booked their holiday. Pre-booking tickets to SeaWorld Parks offers the best value for money for guests in the UK,” he says.

It’s not the only way to help clients make savings, of course – family tickets, hotel packages and free shuttle buses are all worth taking into account. Disney guests staying at an on-site hotel in Orlando with a dining plan, for example, will get food vouchers they can use in the parks, so pull out these options when selling and you might just find yourself securing a bigger booking.

In Dubai, guests staying at Jumeirah Beach Hotel will receive unlimited complimentary access to Wild Wadi water park, and those at Atlantis the Palm will



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have entry to Aquaventure. Both can be used as powerful USPs for the hotels, helping you upsell to families swayed by the prospect of included activities.

On that front, don’t forget to look into other commissionable add-ons that you can pre-arrange to make visits more practical for clients. Tricia Birmingham, senior product manager for the Middle East and Indian Ocean at Gold Medal, suggests booking tickets that include locker hire, for example. “That way, clients don’t have to worry about finding a free one when they arrive at the park,” she says.



TOP:
Legoland
Dubai
Water Park

LEFT:
SeaWorld
Orlando

Or for an even higher-value add-on, consider an extra-special package. Legoland Dubai Water Park offers cabanas that can be booked in advance for groups of up to four guests, adding a bit of luxury to the usual experience with towels, water, soft drinks and a safe box all provided for around £110.

SeaWorld’s Discovery Cove has its own version, with cabanas featuring a host, private stocked fridge, snacks and seats for up to six people – think tables, chaise longues and rolled towels elegantly displayed under some all-important shade. It’s worth suggesting for clients at the higher end of the budget, especially if they’re celebrating a special occasion, and there’s an Elite Package that throws in the cabana with a photo frame, bag, photos and – wait for it – a personalised message delivered on a buoy by a dolphin (for \$459).

▶ PRACTICAL ADVICE

Once you have secured the booking, it’s worth giving clients some recommendations, such as arriving early to beat the crowds – especially in peak season – and making the most of queue-jump options. For example, Legoland Dubai Water Park has a Q-Fast add-on as well as multimedia entertainment for those who do find themselves in a line, while

Volcano Bay has a TapuTapu wearable device that enables guests to queue up virtually – so highlight these when selling.

When advising clients what to bring, waterproof sunscreen, a spare change of clothing, towels and snacks are all no-brainers, but don’t neglect the less obvious things, says Tricia Birmingham of Gold Medal. “Agents should tell clients to bring shoes that they aren’t concerned about leaving at the side of the pool,” she says. “The ground can get quite hot and kids’ feet can burn.”

Funway’s Malcolm Davies suggests taking a pushchair for toddlers who might not normally use one but will tire after a few hours’ walking round the parks – they can often be rented on site. “It’s a lot of walking, even for grown-ups, and the pushchair gives young children a place to rest, as well as being a nice place to put everything,” he says. “I’d also recommend a waterproof phone case. Clients will want a phone for taking photos and keeping in contact, and the case can also be used for storing credit cards or cash; suggest one with a strap attached to stay hands-free.”

That way, kids and parents can enjoy the attractions without having to worry about logistics – and you’ll get credit for helping everything run as smooth as the slides they’re tumbling down. **TW**