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5 Meetings-Friendly Water Parks

Nashville's Gaylord Opryland has opened a new music-themed water resort; plus four more parks where groups can get wet.

by Matt Alderton | December 7, 2018

Nashville's Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center is a giant in the hospitality industry -- literally. Spanning more than 40 acres, the resort's massive campus includes 2,888 guest rooms and 758,911 square feet of meeting space -- the size of more than 13 football fields.

The generous size means Gaylord Opryland can pack in ample amenities. Along with 18 bars and restaurants, for example, it offers 9 acres of indoor gardens, a 20,000-square-foot spa, a 3,500-square-foot fitness center, three swimming pools, an 18-hole golf course and even flatboat cruises along a quarter-mile-long indoor river. Still, the jam-packed resort apparently had room for at least one more attraction: SoundWaves, an upscale, music-themed water park for both kids and adults, debuted on Dec. 1.

Designed to mix water with music, SoundWaves features a year-round indoor area and a seasonal outdoor area. Indoors, the temperature will be maintained at a tropical 84 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Gaylord, which describes the space as having "a modern design, sleek finishes and thrilling rides intertwined with living walls and plant beds." Totaling 111,000 square feet, the waterpark includes a multislide tower; an indoor surfing attraction; both rapid and lazy rivers; an activity pool with rock climbing, an obstacle course and basketball; restaurants; a pool, a bar and lounging areas exclusively for adults, and private cabana rentals. Spanning 106,000 square feet, the outdoor area will open in summer 2019 with another multislide tower; a 315,000-gallon wave pool with a giant LED movie screen; a kids' pool with a multilevel play structure; multiple dining options; a second adults-only area with a pool, bar and lounging areas, and more private cabana rentals.

Finally, for small groups, the venue also has three party rooms for 10, 16 or 30 people that can be reserved for four hours at a time.

"With the addition of SoundWaves, there's one more reason to visit Nashville and Gaylord Opryland," said John Adams, vice president and market general manager for Gaylord Opryland Resort & Attractions. "We are proud to offer this premier water and music attraction you can't find anywhere else. Our team has worked diligently on every detail of the design and guest experience from crafting unexpected dining options to ensuring exclusivity, as well as creating an ambience that families, couples and groups find both inviting and upscale."

Four more water-park destinations for meeting groups

Gaylord Opryland isn't the only place where groups can accomplish serious work while also having serious fun. Here are four other wet-and-wild waterparks that marry play with productivity.

• **Kalahari Resorts Pocono Mountains (Pocono Manor, Pa.).** This property exemplifies Kalahari Resorts & Conventions' dual specialty in water parks and convention centers. Opened in July 2015, Kalahari Resorts Pocono Mountains has 457 guest rooms, an outdoor water park, a 30,000-square-foot family entertainment center and a 100,000-square-foot convention center. To entice groups even further, the property recently embarked on a meetings-facility expansion. Scheduled to open in late 2019, the project will more than double the center's current footprint, adding 105,000 square feet of meeting space, including a 38,000-square-foot ballroom, a 12,000-square-foot junior ballroom and 18 meeting rooms, bringing will bring the facility's total to 205,000 square feet. Currently the resort has two ballrooms spanning 25,000 and 9,000 square feet, respectively, and 15 meeting rooms.

• **Blue Harbor Resort & Conference Center (Sheboygan, Wis.).** Thanks to its prime lakeside location, water is omnipresent at this Lake Michigan destination. The liquid stuff isn't just a source of great vistas, however. It's also a source of great fun, thanks to Breaker Bay, Blue Harbor's year-round indoor water park and entertainment area. Like Gaylord Opryland's SoundWaves, Breaker Bay is temperature-controlled to a balmy 84 degrees Fahrenheit. Totaling 54,000 square feet, it includes a surf simulator, a 79,000-gallon recreation pool, water basketball, a 3,600-foot-long lazy river, a giant whirlpool, a seasonal outdoor pool, two three-story tube slides, indoor and outdoor cabana rentals, and a four-story water-activity center with suspension bridges, cargo nets, web crawls and more than 60 guest-activated water effects. To round out the package, the resort has 180 guest rooms, 64 villas, five eateries, a spa and salon, and 16,800 square feet of meeting space.

• **Great Wolf Lodge (LaGrange, Ga.).** Already North America's largest family of indoor water-park resorts, Great Wolf Resorts is in the midst of a major expansion, having recently opened properties in Illinois and Minnesota, with two more planned for California and Arizona. Another recent addition is the Great Wolf Lodge in LaGrange, an hour south of Atlanta. Opened in May 2018, the resort has a nearly 100,000-square-foot indoor water park with features such as a group raft ride, a lazy river, a wave pool, a tube-racing slide and an adults-only outdoor pool -- as well as a 40,000-square-foot adventure park with attractions such as a ropes course and a climbing wall. There also are 457 guest suites, eight restaurants and 18,000 square feet of meeting space.

• **Disney's Typhoon Lagoon (Lake Buena Vista, Fla.).** Disney is a household name both in theme-park entertainment and in meetings and events. What planners might not realize, however, is that Disney also has its own water park -- the Typhoon Lagoon at Walt Disney World in Orlando. Near the Disney Springs dining, shopping and entertainment district, the park is available for both full- and partial-park events. Offering 2.75 million gallons of water spread across numerous attractions, the attraction features Crush 'n' Gusher, a raft-based roller-coaster; Castaway Creek, Disney's take on a lazy river; Humunga Cowabunga, a water ride with a five-story vertical drop; Mayday Falls, which is the park's highest and longest water slide; and Miss Adventure Falls, the longest ride in the history of Disney water parks. Groups in need of meeting space and accommodations are just a short drive from Disney convention properties like the Grand Floridian Resort & Spa and the Coronado Springs Resort.

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