

Top 10 Hotel Waterpark Resorts with Meeting Facilities

By Jeff Coy, ISHC

When I was asked which hotel waterpark resorts were my favorites, I chose the resorts with abundant meeting facilities --- because I think the owner-operators of these meeting resorts are among the smartest in the industry.

To achieve the highest possible occupancy, hotel and resort owners need to attract a balanced mix of customers from each of four major segments:

Individual Business	Group Business
Individual Leisure	Group Leisure

Different types of customers want different things and visit at different times. For example, individual business travelers want a business center and a fitness center in the hotel and tend to stay on weekdays. Individual leisure travelers look for indoor waterparks and family entertainment centers, and they visit on weekends and during the summer when kids are out of school. But to fill certain low occupancy periods, a hotel or resort needs groups.

Many hotel waterpark resorts have been built with little or no meeting space, and that's a mistake in my opinion. They run full on weekends with families, but they run a low occupancy during the week due to a remote location, a lack of business travelers and a lack of meeting space. If you lack a business clientele, the only thing left are groups --- groups, such as meetings, conferences, expositions and sporting events. If you have no space for groups, you are trying to operate with one hand tied behind your back.

Therefore, in my opinion, the smartest hotel waterpark resort owners have an appropriate amount of meeting space to capture the group market. Here are my favorites in North America:

Top 10 Favorite Hotel Waterpark Resorts with Meeting Facilities								
Name	Location			Meeting SqFt	Hotel Rooms	OWP SqFt	IWP SqFt	Open Date
Fallsview IWP at Sheraton, Brock, & Skyline Hotels	Niagara Falls	ON	CAN	200,000	1,110		125,000	2006
Chula Vista Resort	Wisconsin Dells	WI	USA	200,000	620	120,000	110,000	1999
Wilderness Smokies River Lodge & Wild Waterdome	Sevierville	TN	USA	200,000	472		60,000	2008
JW Marriott Hill Country Resort & Outdoor Waterpark	San Antonio	TX	USA	140,000	1,002	261,360		2010
Kalahari Waterpark Resort & Convention Center	Wisconsin Dells	WI	USA	125,000	738	75,000	125,000	2000
Grand Harbor Resort & Waterpark	Dubuque	IA	USA	120,000	194	0	25,000	2002
Kalahari Waterpark Resort & Convention Center	Sandusky	OH	USA	95,000	884	270,000	173,000	2005
Split Rock Resort's H2Oooohh Indoor Waterpark	Lake Harmony	PA	USA	77,000	650		53,904	2008
Holiday Inn Central & CoCo Key Waterpark	Omaha	NE	USA	60,000	383		60,000	2007
BW Ramkota Inn, Convention Center & IWP	Sioux Falls	SD	USA	60,000	226		17,000	2005

Source: Jeff Coy, JLC Hospitality Consulting, 480-488-3382.

- Fallsview Indoor Waterpark is connected to three hotels, Sheraton, Brock & Skyline, with 1,110 rooms and 200,000 square feet of meeting space. Built on top of a parking structure that overlooks Niagara Falls from the Canadian side, the Fallsview Indoor Waterpark is a 125,000 sf facility that opened in 2006. Great place for meetings and family fun!
- Chula Vista Resort is nestled within acres of pines along the Wisconsin River. It has 620 rooms with 200,000 square feet of multi-function meeting space for groups of up to 2,000 guests. In 2007, owner Mike Kaminski opened a 90,000 sf domed sports center, the perfect place for expositions and sporting events. Other meeting spaces include two 14,000 sf ballrooms, an 8,000 sf conference center and 25 breakout rooms. In addition, there's a hot springs spa, 18-hole golf course and thrilling outdoor and indoor waterparks. Chula Vista's waterparks feature 27 waterslides, 14 pool areas, lazy rivers, wave pool, kiddie pool and activity pool. Plenty to do for meeting attendees, spouses and the kids.
- Wilderness Resort opened in 2008 in Sevierville TN, gateway to the Smoky Mountains. River Lodge has 472 rooms, and the Wild Waterdome is a 60,000 sf indoor waterpark. The resort built 200,000 sf of meeting space. A great meeting destination with family fun!
- JW Marriott Hill Country Resort in San Antonio TX opened in 2010 with 1,002 rooms and a conference center measuring 140,000 square feet. It also features an outdoor waterpark that covers 261,000 square feet. Marriott knows meetings, and it knows how to attract the family market with facilities that capture a balanced mixture of customers that fill in the low occupancy periods throughout the year.
- Kalahari Waterpark Resort & Convention Center in Wisconsin Dells WI offers an exotic safari experience for both meeting attendee and families. It is one of the largest meeting facilities in the state of Wisconsin with 100,000 square feet including 20,000 sf and 17,000 sf ballrooms, two junior ballrooms, 15 breakout rooms and 4 board rooms. Meeting services include teambuilding services, audio-visual, Wi-Fi , on-site catering and four restaurants.
- Grand Harbor Resort in Dubuque IA has 194 rooms with a 25,000 sf indoor waterpark. The hotel is connected to a 120,000 sf convention center that it operates for the city.
- Kalahari Waterpark Resort & Convention Center in Sandusky OH has 884 rooms, 270,000 sf outdoor waterpark, 173,000 sf indoor waterpark which opened in 2005. In 2006, owner Todd Nelson completed a 95,000 sf convention center. In March 2011, Nelson broke ground on a \$22 million expansion that will more than double the size of the convention center --- resulting in 215,000 square feet. Kalahari's convention business has expanded so rapidly the new space is needed. The resort is now a large regional player. As a meeting planner, I held a 3-day meeting for 300 people at Kalahari Resort Sandusky. I did not hear one negative about our entire meeting. In my opinion, Kalahari's sales and service team showed a "can-do" attitude that impressed all of us in

attendance, which reflects well upon Todd Nelson's leadership effectiveness. For a guy that loves development more than operations, I am very impressed with the level of service that he and his family have attained

- Split Rock Resort in the Pocono Mountains has 650 rooms and a 53,000 sf H2Ooooh indoor waterpark, which opened in 2008. The resort has 77,000 square feet of meeting space, a good reason for meeting planners to invite the whole family.
- Holiday Inn Central in Omaha NE with 383 rooms and a 60,000 sf indoor waterpark has 60,000 sf of meeting space --- to attract business, leisure and groups.
- BW Ramkota Inn of Sioux Falls SD already had 226 rooms and 60,000 sf convention center. Then the owners decided to convert a 17,000 sf pool area into a mini-waterpark in 2005 --- achieving a more balanced mix of customers that fill certain low periods during the year.

Some industry observers will tell you that business suits and swim suits don't mix. And that's true, BUT as a hotel waterpark owner-operator, you need them both to achieve maximum potential occupancy.

To prevent meeting attendees from tripping over wet kids in swim suits, you just have to design your meeting facilities away from your waterpark facilities. It's not that hard to do!

My favorite hotel waterpark resorts are the ones whose owners have successfully created a product that appeals to all different types of customers without conflicts to achieve a high-quality experience with maximize results--- and that's why they are the smartest.



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