

# Drayton Manor Theme Park: Views and Trends

Drayton Manor Theme Park was first opened to the public in 1950 by co-founders, husband and wife, George and Vera Bryan. Almost 60 years later, Drayton Manor has been transformed into an award-winning attraction located in approximately 280 acres of beautiful countryside on what was formerly the estate of the Peel family, including Sir Robert Peel, who served as Great Britain's Prime Minister twice between 1834 and 1846. In an interview, **Colin Bryan**, managing director, looks back at 2008 and comments the coming trends in the theme park industry.



**How was the year 2008 for the Drayton Manor Theme Park? Did you see any impact of the global recession?**

Drayton Manor Park had a record year last year with a staggering 1.25 million visitors coming through the gates. We had a 41 per cent increase on 2007 season and 30 per cent of visitors were new to the park and came from all over the UK, Ireland and Europe. Due to the economic climate we see more people choosing to stay in the UK and opting for days out with the family as opposed to traveling abroad.

Situated in the centre of the UK, near to motorway's and close to Birmingham International Airport, Drayton Manor is a lot closer to people than they may think, which is one reason why we are seeing more visitors come to the park.

Last year, we launched Europe's first Thomas Land based on one of the world's top children's toy brands, Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends. The attraction is aimed at younger children who can

go on the themed rides with their family and has been a roaring success in its first year, opening Drayton Manor Park up to an even wider family audience.

### **What do you think the theme parks can do to fight the economic crisis?**

Put simply, offering a great product is why we see so many people come to Drayton Manor Theme Park - the wide range of different rides suitable for the whole family to ride together, like Apocalypse and G-force, unique attractions such as Thomas Land and Shockwave - Europe's only stand up rollercoaster and a great choice of food and drinks outlets.

Service is a priority, ensuring staff are fully trained and are visibly on hand to help customers with any queries. This goes a long way to ensuring people keep coming back to the park again and again.

Also, it is imperative we offer discounts online - this crucially ensures customers get even more value for money and also encourages more traffic to our website, therefore keeping users informed of our latest events and news. We have maintained our online booking price for the third year running. For the "pay once" entry price, all visitors can enjoy the theme park, Thomas Land and our zoo which has over 100 species of animal, proving that there is something for everyone to enjoy at Drayton Manor.

### **Can you distinguish any trends in the theme parks industry?**

Regarding the travel & tourism industry as a whole, we anticipate more families taking shorter breaks and again, staying in the UK meaning that theme parks should be a top request for families this year.



The theme parks that will perform strongest are those that offer the widest variety of attractions - there must be an even mix of white knuckle rides, younger children and family orientated rides and

a program of entertaining events and shows. Drayton Manor's banqueting facilities and future 150 bedroom hotel due to open in March 2011, shows that we can offer much more than entertaining and thrilling rides.

More people are using the internet for research and offers of best prices for their days out and for where they choose to go, so there will inevitably be a marked increase in online and social media marketing to reach out to customers.

**You have recently opened a new 4D cinema. Do you plan any other additions for 2009?**

The 4D cinema, which is a traditional 3D film with the added excitement of moving and vibrating seats, smells and wet spray, has been a great success so far, offering yet another attraction included in the entry price.

To celebrate the first birthday of Thomas Land, we introduced a new engine, Rosie who has already been a hit with the younger visitors showing that the engines cannot all be male and she's very easily seen as she is pink! She came to keep the boys in order, taking her role as second engine to Thomas and Percy easily.

We now have newly rebuilt "Chicken Diner" serving our own chicken meals and also a new coffee stop fitted out like a 50's American Diner with Wurlitzer music, all centered along our new Art Deco Street. Plus a major refit of our big beef-burger restaurant has been added to our extensive catering facilities, giving visitors a greater choice of food and refreshments.

**What was the biggest success of the Park last year?**

Thomas Land and its merchandise shop was an exceptional success which we fully intend to build upon this year. Our record 1.25 million visitors speak volumes, we now relish the challenge to maintain that success for years to come.



Our Christmas with Thomas & Friends in Thomas Land was highly successful and will be repeated this year too.

Also, we are in the process of acquiring planning permission for our needed Hotel, featuring a Thomas Land Playroom, themed Thomas and Friends rooms, Brasserie, a restaurant and a function suite, situated within the grounds of the park right next to the Theme Park gates which is sure to be a great success.

**And failure?**

Not being able to control the weather!

**What is your vision for the Park?**

We aspire to offer something for everyone - from the very young to the not so young, we provide "total family entertainment".

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