

PENNSYLVANIA | AMUSEMENT PARKS

Kingdom
Coaster

Awesome Amusement

These theme parks offer fun for all ages

By Robin Roenker

COASTERS, CORN DOGS AND carnival rides offer a surefire recipe for summer fun. In Pennsylvania, theme-park thrills are easy to find, since the state boasts more than a dozen premier amusement and water park attractions.

Home to the world's oldest operating roller

coaster — Leap-the-Dips, built in 1902 in Altoona's Lakemont Park — as well as scores of record-breaking modern steel coasters, Pennsylvania's theme parks are beloved by both vintage ride devotees and hard-core coaster enthusiasts.

With so many to choose from, working your way through the state's thrilling rides might take some time. These not-to-miss highlights will help get you started:

DUTCH WONDERLAND Lancaster

Home to more than 35 rides and attractions — including the family-favorite water park Duke's Lagoon — Dutch Wonderland specializes in coasters like Merlin's Mayhem and Kingdom Coaster, which deliver kid-size thrills that are still fun for all ages. "All of our rides are very family friendly, and we offer lots of rides that families can go on together, rather than just small kiddie rides where children go on alone," says public relations manager Lynsey Winters. Guests can book a room at nearby Cartoon Network Hotel, which opened in 2020, for discounted admission tickets and easy access to the park.

BEYOND THE RIDES

Pennsylvania's theme parks offer plenty to smile about, even if you're not a huge ride or coaster fan.

FUN FOOD

- ▶ At Knoebels, head to The Alamo for the park's famous chicken and waffles.
- ▶ Don't end any visit to Kennywood without trying fresh french fries from The Potato Patch, which you can customize with toppings like cheese and bacon, gravy or vinegar.
- ▶ Grab a giant pretzel, a pretzel sandwich — or both — at the new Penley's Pretzel Pub at Dutch Wonderland.
- ▶ Cool off on even the hottest day at Hersheypark with a chocolate-laden milkshake sure to satisfy every sweet tooth.

GREAT SHOWS

- ▶ Most all Pennsylvania theme parks offer a wide range of family-friendly shows and live entertainment, so you're guaranteed a day full of fun, even if you never step on a ride. The Diving Shows at Dutch Wonderland, for example, have long been a visitor favorite.

HOLIDAY EVENTS

- ▶ An ever-growing lineup of holiday events — such as Halloween "scare" festivals and themed light displays — mean Pennsylvania's theme parks aren't limited to summertime fun. "We're always looking for ways to add more reasons to visit and enjoy the park," says Nick Paradise, Kennywood's director of communications.

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DUTCH WONDERLAND

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Phantom's
RevengeGrand
Carousel**KNOEBELS****Elysburg**

Knoebels is America's largest free-admission amusement park; you only pay for ride access tickets, which range from \$1.50 for kiddie rides up to \$4 for thrill rides. "So, grandparents could join the family in their visit, without paying a penny to step foot into the park," explains Stacy Yutko, the park's public relations director. Don't miss tried-and-true favorites like the antique cars and log flume, as well as The Phoenix, often ranked as one of the world's best wooden coasters. And be sure to visit the park's beautiful Grand Carousel, built in 1913 and one of the largest of its kind. While atop one of the 63 hand-carved horses, try your hand at catching the brass ring to earn a free ride.

KENNYWOOD**West Mifflin**

In 2023, Kennywood will celebrate its 125th birthday. The milestone celebration begins this year with park enhancements and special events like the Bites and Pints food and drink festival, scheduled on Thursdays through Sundays from late May through late June. Vintage coaster buffs from all over the globe trek to the park to sample its three wooden coasters built in the 1920s, among them the Jackrabbit, which is beloved for its rare, 70-foot double-dip drop. For modern coaster fun, head to Phantom's Revenge, which clocks speeds of 85 mph, earning it the title of Pennsylvania's fastest coaster. Steel Curtain is the state's tallest coaster and, with a flip at 197 feet, lays claim to the "tallest inversion that you'll find anywhere in the world," says Nick Paradise, the park's director of communications. Child-friendly Thomas Town, which opened in 2018, caters to the park's youngest visitors with rides themed around Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends.

HERSHEYPARK**Hershey**

With its 210-foot ascent and 76 mph top speed, the new Candymonium ride, which opened in 2020, is the tallest, fastest and longest of the 15 coasters at Hersheypark and the cornerstone of the new Chocolatetown area, which is front and center as soon as you arrive. "It's so fun to watch families come and literally stop dead in their tracks to watch it, as they get pulled into the energy of the space," says Quinn Bryner, director of public relations for Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company. There are also plenty of less intense, family-friendly rides at the 116-year-old theme park, which offers an 11-acre water park and access to ZooAmerica, home to more than 200 animals. One ticket provides admission to all three parks.

Water park
attractions