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# memory lane

the netherlands' efteling park corners  
the market on nostalgia  
by Martin Palicki

utilizes common theatrical effects to engage and amaze visitors. Pepper's Ghost illusions, fiber optics, fog and snow machines are just some of the "standard" tricks put to use in this charming land. It is easy to imagine a young parent bringing their children to Efteling to see the stories and fairy tales that they experienced at the park with their parents years ago. And so the cycle continues. And it grows.

Efteling Park can't help but be nostalgic. Visitors approaching the imposing House of the Five Senses entrance building may be struck by its fantasy and whimsical grandeur, but once inside the gates, one is reduced to a fanciful child, exploring the forests and fairy tales contained within.

For many Dutch, Efteling is the theme park they grew up with, having opened in 1952 as a garden and fairy tale land. The heart of the park is its presentation of various fairy tales. Scattered about a heavily wooded path, each vignette brings to life a specific story, and

Efteling is regarded as the largest theme park in The Netherlands and one of the most well regarded in Europe. Each year the park hosts over 3 million guests, and has trended upward since its opening. First reaching 1 million guests in the 1960's, the park nabbed 2 million visitors in the 1980's and has consistently brought in over 3 million guests since 2000.

As attendance has grown, the park's attractions have also expanded to meet the capacity needs. The park has stayed close to its roots, though, by applying advancing technology to time-tested stories. The boat ride Fata Morgana, for instance, takes guests through the world of 1001 Arabian Nights, where 140 animatronics

perform as boats float by. Droomvlucht (Dream Flight) uses a suspended dark ride system to carry guests through mystical fairy-tale lands and culminates in a nearly 40 foot spiraling drop through a nymph-populated rain forest. In 2007, the park premiered the most adventurous of its offerings, De Vliegende Hollander (The Flying Dutchman), a heavily themed Kumbak Coasters water coaster. Inside the attraction, guests board boats in a charming port village and come face to face with the legendary Flying Dutchman, before being hurtled down and undulating track and finally splashing down outside in front of the attraction building.

But even as the rides have become more adventurous and advanced, they still maintain a simplistic charm. Moreover, all of the attractions at Efteling are adept at telling a story, oftentimes without using language at all. While some of the narratives are classic and well-known, many others use music, scenery and props to tell a story. 2002's PandaDroom engages guests in a narration-less 4-D movie on conservation, and as guests exit the theater they are presented with playgrounds and

**Pedal power (above) on the ground and (below) an automatic version in the air at Eftling. Next Page: The Flying Dutchman splashes down.**



exploratory areas taken directly out of the movie. Even without language, the message is clear.

Oftentimes at the park, however, the “story” is simply about having a good time with loved ones in a relaxing, beautiful environment. Whether it is floating around the lake in swan boats, pedaling miniature cars through a fantasy forest, or riding high above the make-believe village of Volk van Laaf (The Laaf People) on a monorail, memories are made with children, parents and grandparents time and time again. And if that isn’t nostalgic, I don’t know what is.



## WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM EFTELING?

- 1) Don't underestimate the power of nostalgia. Providing wonderful experiences for customers today will bring them, and their descendants, back for years to come.
- 2) It's okay to return to your "roots." Theme parks evolved from gardens and storytelling. Provide great experiences in both areas.
- 3) Tell a story without words. Global tourism is expected to increase. Tell stories that appeal to different demographics, and do it in a way that doesn't rely solely on your guest having a strong command of the English language.
- 4) Leave room for the "classics." Whether you operate an FEC with a vintage PacMan game, or run a museum with a popular and timeless exhibit, remember there are people who will be coming just for the "classics." If you pave over your history for all new attractions, you will lose a portion of your customer base.
- 5) Make a great first impression. What your guests see when they first approach your park will set the tone for the rest of their day. A venue positioned to provide a spectacular experience should have just as spectacular an entrance.



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