

# expo expert

**gordon linden** weighs in on the most important world's fair in decades

*Shanghai, China has hosted Expo 2010 billed as the largest Expo in history. In our last issue, InPark reviewed the Expo from a unique park-based perspective. In order to get some deeper insights into the event and its significance to the visitor attraction industry, InPark caught up with Gordon Linden, author of the Expo Book and current consultant to the City of Edmonton, Canada for its bid to host Expo 2017, who recently visited the Expo:*

**IPM: Give us a little background on the claim that Shanghai's Expo is the biggest in history.**

GL: Since World War II, there have been 20 Expos held mostly in Europe, North America and Asia. In 1970 Osaka organized Expo 70 which had an attendance of over 60 million which was the largest such event up until this year as Shanghai will exceed that mark with an attendance of over 70 million. It's also a fact that attendees at many of the prior Expos had season passes and came to the site many, many times, driving up the overall attendance numbers, but since they were not "unique" visitors the results look more impressive than they actually were; the season pass policy also had other undesirable consequences such as reducing per capita expenditures. Shanghai sold 7 day passes, but, due to the cost of attending, probably the majority of visitors came once or twice. In fact, although the Expo is limited by the rules of the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE) to a six month run, they could probably continue for another six months and still have mostly unique visitors.

**IPM: With the global economic downturn, did this reduce the interest in participation at Expo 2010 in Shanghai by countries and companies?**

GL: On the contrary, China's importance to the rest of the world as a producer and consumer made it imperative for countries and companies alike to be present in Shanghai not only to generate goodwill but also to make business connections which are essential in the highly competitive global marketplace. With the success of the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008, it was evident that China was more than capable of organizing a world class megaevent. Shanghai has set the record for participation at an Expo with 200 countries and international organizations in a variety of exhibits including large, self-designed and built pavilions as well as smaller presentations in buildings built by the organizers. Also, a new innovation is the Best Practices Area which featured exhibits from various cities from around the world including Madrid, Hamburg, San Francisco, and several from China.

**IPM: What was the visitor experience like in Shanghai?**

GL: First, although the Olympics were a major success in China, the fact is that a relatively small number of people were actually in attendance at the Games and most Chinese experienced the event via television. The Expo, being a visitor experience, offered up a whole new range of possibilities and expectations which were unique in Chinese history. Although there are obviously a good number of affluent, well-traveled Chinese, there are many more people who have had little or no opportunity to experience a face-to-face encounter with someone from a country which is far away and seemingly quite exotic, like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or South America. Thus, there was an interest in the Expo among lots of people which presold it and made it a "must-see" experience. Shanghai's summer weather is hot and humid with some rain, but visitors to the Expo seemed to take it all in stride as they lined up, sometimes for hours, to visit the various pavilions, to ride the ferry boats crossing the Hunapu River which divides the site, to eat in





Photos courtesy of Edward Wills

restaurants, to enjoy shows and entertainment and to purchase souvenirs; in addition to the wide variety of merchandise available on-site, many stores and shops in Shanghai had entire sections devoted to Expo goods, some of which was quite expensive. Major investments in transportation infrastructure, including a new metro line, eased the daily ebb and flow of visitors, staff, and supplies to the site.

**IPM: Is there anything which is new at this Expo which we're likely to see in future Expos?**

GL: The aforementioned "Best Practices Area" is going to be a component of the upcoming Yeosu, Korea's Expo 2012. In Shanghai, which had the theme "Better City, Better Life", the Urban Best Practices Area featured cities. In Yeosu, which has the theme "The Living Ocean and Coast: Diversity of Resources and Sustainable Activities" will feature an Oceans and Coast Best Practices Area (OCBPA) which will accommodate, according to preliminary plans, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and private institutions or corporations. The other major innovation – The Virtual Expo – is certainly the most interesting idea to come along in many years and one that is sure to make the Expo experience more accessible to more people throughout the world. Basically, the Shanghai Expo Online, which has been produced by Crystal CG, the official multimedia provider for Shanghai Expo

2010, allows anyone, anywhere in the world with a computer to enter the Expo site and the individual pavilions. The 3D modeling is quite realistic; three months into the Expo, the website had experienced 43 million clicks, so that tells you something about how popular this feature was in Shanghai.

**IPM: We published 6 chapters of material from your book, "The Expo Book: A Guide to the Planning, Organization, Design & Operation of World Expositions" in our magazine over the past couple of years. How is that project coming along?**

GL: We're delighted that the book is now completed and contains the latest information about Expos up through Shanghai Expo 2010. It will be first published in China this year through the sponsorship of Crystal CG. We will subsequently be offering it for sale worldwide on major online retailers such as Amazon where it will be available in a variety of printed and electronic formats. Stayed tuned to our website for details – [www.theexpobook.com](http://www.theexpobook.com). We're already planning another book which will document the legacies of past Expos exploring the various outcomes – physical, financial, impact on branding, etc. – which various cities have experienced.

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