



The Ultimate Guide to

Seasonal Theme Park Events



Let this document serve as a guide, and even a loose checklist for everything you'll need to pull off a large event at your venue, whether you're a theme park, zoo, aquarium or botanical garden. We'll walk through the entire process, from brainstorming to planning and then to execution.

We've also combined our years of experience and outlined some best practices and tips to keep top of mind.

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Why Events?

Let's face it, new rides or exhibits or big park renovations require a significant amount of capital investment. Events are a great way to draw a significant number of visitors and provide a unique experience without a large capital investment. Events are unique from your everyday operation because they provide a sense of urgency and a sense of "for a limited time only" in a guest's mind. Events also allow your venue to be experimental – especially in your off-season. There are third-party event producers that specialize in off-season event production, making your "downtime" all of a sudden super profitable!

The Big Idea

You're looking to host an event at your venue – something big. Give your team some brain space to think up something new and exciting that your venue has never done before. The attractions industry is very cyclical, so don't get bogged down in the same routine each year, and don't let certain moments-in-time come as a surprise!

Your entertainment and events crew should have a full calendar of events. So check out the largest holes and consider if there is an opportunity you're missing. The biggest moments to capitalize on typically include:

- **Holidays and moments-in-time (Halloween, the Christmas season, Chinese New Year)**
- **The off-season**
- **School breaks**



If there's not an opportunity you're missing, then consider your standard events or celebrations and see which one is just missing the mark. Event revenues typically generate a large part of your venue's profits. If you have a tired event that's still in rotation, but has lost the wow factor, consider replacing it.

To get your big ideas swirling, do some research. What types of unique events have been successful for others in your industry, and what features do they include? Consider what makes your venue unique and capitalize on that. Whether it's your weather, natural beauty, location, amount of open space, or audience makeup, use them to your advantage when planning your event.

Pro Tip: Take a look at your surroundings, too – is your venue located in a region that's doing some really cool things? Use the reputation of other large brands in your region and consider a partnership or tie-in.

So you've got your idea – let's now discuss actually putting pen to paper and planning out the big event. We know we're preaching to the choir, but build extra time into your schedule for project delays. First up – who's actually supposed to attend?

Audience Targeting

Now that you've looked at the calendar and identified opportunities for your venue to pull off your "big idea" and generate additional revenue, consider who the target audience should be. The way you identified an untapped area of your events calendar – is there an untapped audience segment in your region?

Your venue likely has a ton of data about your most frequent visitors, so take a look at that and consider how you can move outside of that comfort zone a little. Pay attention to those untapped audiences, but make sure your event is well-rounded and will appeal to a large number of guests.

The broader the appeal of your event, the larger the potential audience. While it's important to have a target in mind, make sure your event has facets that will appeal to a broad range of attendees. This not only helps set expectations from a guest perspective, but makes marketing easier, social media chatter more consistent, and public relations opportunities targeted to the right crowds.

Pro Tip: If your event is working to target a very different crowd from your usual, make sure to explicitly detail what the event will be like and what attendees can expect.

Planning Process

You've got your event idea, now begin expanding on the other details. Your event is a large tree trunk, and we need to flesh out the branches. We've rattled off some top-of-mind questions to ask when planning out the details and finalizing your project plan. By no means are these all of the key points to pulling off an event, but some of the bigger questions to consider.

Structure

- How many square feet or even square miles are required for your event?
 - You could have an isolated area, or a walkable experience that sprawls throughout your venue
- What structural details are required?
 - Electricity, water, lighting

Setup

- How long will it take to set up, and how can you get it done with minimal disruption to everyday park activities?
 - Do you need any special permissions?
 - What park resources need to be re-allocated to pull this off?

Tickets

- **Is your event included in a general park admission, or is it an additional cost?**
 - Special events provide such an incentive for visitors to come back and get a different look at your venue

Pro Tip: If you are working with an outside event partner, second gate ticket sales allow for a smoother mutually-beneficial relationship. You could also encourage your promotional partners to sell tickets on behalf of the park.

Date & Time

- **Are you hosting this event in the off-season, or maybe during park after-hours?**
 - This method can increase your target audience outside of regular park visitors
- **Is there a kickoff event, or some type of headline element?**

Food

- **Is there a unique menu that you could incorporate that has a logical tie to the theme of your event?**
 - If your event is meant to be a cultural experience, incorporating food is a great way to complete the visitor experience

Activities

- **Are there both passive and active things for guests to do? If your event is one single thing, how can you get visitors involved in the action?**
 - Hands-on experiences for young children is always a great way to attract families

Building the Hype

You're putting in a ton of work and dollars into this event to make sure it goes off as planned. There are a lot of elements necessary to provide your guests with a unique experience. If this is going to be the event of the year – then dust off your megaphone and build the hype with your target audience.

Use a combination of paid, earned and owned channels to build the hype for your special event.

Traditional Advertising

- In-park signage and advertisements
- If out-of-home makes sense in your region, take advantage (billboards, mall advertising, etc.)
- If print, television and radio are effective in your market, consider if these channels will reach your target audience



Online Presence

- Utilize your venue's website to highlight your big event
- Get in touch with your area Chamber of Commerce, county or state travel and tourism agencies and community calendars and list your event

Social Media

- Utilize your venue's social media channels to build the hype by posting in-progress photos and updates
- Use your social profile images to give a glimpse into the visual impact of your event
- Running paid social media ads are super effective and highly targeted to reach your audience

Pro Tip: If your event is educational or cultural, start a social media conversation about what guests can expect with either fun facts, or “did you know”?

Public Relations

- If your production is extensive, get in touch with area news stations and coordinate opportunities for interviews and live in-progress footage

Be sure to treat your event the same as you would a new capital investment or park announcement in terms of marketing effort. You don't want to get to the other side of a poor event and hear that attendance was low because no one knew about it.

Pro Tip: Have a fun name for your event – be creative! Positioning it as an exclusive event that's happening at your venue will give it extra weight.

Delivering a Memorable Experience

Don't build a hype that you don't plan to deliver on. All of the elements must work in tandem to deliver a great guest experience, from the front gate through the main areas to the performance space. Consider the first impression, the in-the-moment experience, and the lasting impression you want guests to have.

There will always be areas of improvement post-event, but deliver on the promises that you communicated in your marketing materials and make it clear to guests that your team paid attention to every little detail.

Pro Tip: You'll want to review event success, so have some type of survey response mechanism to gauge if guests had a memorable experience.



Review & Repeat

First – congrats, your event is complete!

Evaluate the event afterward to determine what worked and what didn't work. This will help your team determine if this event is worth doing again, and if so, what improvements can be made. Remember the tree branch metaphor? Consider each of the branches and how each of them can be improved.

If your event was successful and worth repeating, there's potential to reuse some resources and materials to spread out the cost for subsequent years.

Although difficult to explicitly measure, did your guests have the experience that you expected them to?

Special events are a great way for theme parks and entertainment venues to generate additional profit. It's important to put in the upfront work to plan and prepare for your event and work with a partner that will make the process as seamless as possible.

With the right research and wow factor, you'll deliver a memorable guest experience. Hang on to this guide to review each time you're planning a special event.



About Us



DDM Entertainment & Events, Inc.

DDM Entertainment and Events, Inc. is a Canadian company specializing in cultural events and entertainment.

Our team consists of experienced theme park and cultural venue professionals with years of experience to offer. DDM has successfully provided events in North America and Europe and is well-versed in the attraction and festival marketplace. We offer innovative financial models that may require little or no upfront cost to your venue.

We have a long-standing relationship with the Vya Creative Lantern Company of Zigong, whom we work with to plan and produce magnificent Chinese lantern festivals and events. Attract new audiences to your venue with the world's #1 Chinese Lantern Festival.



Say hi. We're friendly.