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Giant slides cap renovations at resort



PHOTOS BY MEGAN MAY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Above, Orlando World Center Marriott has completed a multimillion-dollar refurbishment with the addition of 3 new water slides to the pool. The new features debuted last weekend. At right, Lilla Fisher, 1, plays with her mother, Jennifer Fisher, at the Splash Zone.

Video, photos

Go to OrlandoSentinel.com to see more on the water slides.



The Orlando World Center Marriott is making a big splash on the local-resort scene.

The 2,000-room resort, which towers above the landscape alongside Interstate 4 opposite Walt Disney World, has finished a multimillion-dollar refurbishment with the addition of three new water slides to what was already an award-winning pool.

The new water features, which debuted last weekend, include a steep, 90-foot-long "drop" slide and a pair of 200-foot-long curvy slides for guests staying at the giant hotel.

"People love this pool," General Manager Doug Ridge said. "We hear the kids don't want to go to the theme parks; they want to go in the pool."

The three slides replace the single, 109-foot-long slide that resort-goers had been using since 1986. The new slides, which all have a minimum height requirement of 48 inches for those using them, offer a lot more thrills and a lot more water: 437 gallons a minute on each of the two winding models and 427 gallons a minute on the speedy drop slide. All three are accessible from a single, 104-step tower.

"We traded up," said Gary Dybul, the resort's director of sales and marketing. "We lost the history of it but added a whole new experience."

Ridge said J.W. Marriott Jr., chairman of Marriott International, was the impetus for the upgrade. "Mr. Marriott came and asked, 'What are two things people love the most about the resort?' I told him they love the pool, and they love the buffet. ... So he said, 'Let's do something with the pool,'" Ridge explained.

In checking out the local competition, such as the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate and the JW Marriott Grande Lakes, Ridge said, it was noted that they all had "lazy river" features.

"Everyone has a lazy river. We've got to do something different," he said. "We said to ourselves, 'What one thing could we do that would set us apart that nobody has in Orlando or, quite frankly, in Florida?' We said an iconic slide — a big slide tower — something that will keep people coming back time and time again."

The three slides are slight compared with those featured at the area's water parks but are among the tallest and fastest resort slides in the state, Ridge said. They don't have individual names as yet, but Ridge said the resort plans to let readers help name them in a contest on Facebook.

The new slide tower joins a pool that was already ranked among "The World's 20 Coolest Hotel Pools" by Forbes magazine in 2011.

In addition to removing the old slide, the project eliminated two lagoons, which were converted to a fire-pit area near a new bar and an event area for everything from weddings to weekly visits from Gatorland for animal presentations. The old poolside bar has also more than tripled in size and now has 180 seats.

The main feature is still the curvy, 564,000-gallon, palm-lined pool with multiple waterfalls. But the refurbishment also included an upgraded, zero-entry children's pool and a children's activity center.

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