



PHOTO: DAVID CAMP

“Operators have realised that the historic drive to increase visitor numbers is not necessarily the answer to a better business”

David Camp, Senior partner, D&J International Consulting

PHOTO: EUROPA-PARK



The firm worked on the Rulantica waterpark at Europa-Park

This year, D&J International Consulting celebrates its tenth anniversary. Launched by David and Julie Camp in January 2013, the consultancy’s first project was helping the Mack family plan the Rulantica water park at Europa-Park in Germany. Since then, the pair have consulted on a range of projects including the recently launched Lift 109 experience at Battersea Power Station, London; the expansion of Puy du Fou worldwide; Kalahari Resort, Round Rock, US; Infinity des Lumieres, Dubai; Gorewada Zoo & Safari, India; and the i360, Brighton, UK.

The company specialises in providing market and financial feasibility services to the visitor attraction and real estate development sectors, offering planning and development advice for theme parks, sports venues, visitor attractions, tourism destinations, mixed-use developments, brandlands, museums and entertainment developments.

Here David Camp looks back at a busy decade, and shares some of the biggest lessons he has learned with *Attractions Management*.

Can you share one or two of your highlights during the past 10 years?

It’s always satisfying to see projects that we’ve worked on reach fruition and open to the public. We were very fortunate that our very first project was at Europa-Park with the Mack family who wanted some assistance assessing the potential of their planned waterpark.

They obviously knew their park and hotel business well but were concerned as to whether the waterpark would cannibalise theme park visits

PHOTO: PUY DU FOU

D&J consulted on the expansion of Puy du Fou worldwide



and how it might impact hotel demand. Through a process of research and analysis of their historic business, along with lessons from a range of international theme and water park operations, we were able to reassure them that the waterpark would add to the total resort guests and increase hotel demand. The number of visits to the water park in 2022 were also slightly higher than our original projections, which is always good to hear.

One of our other highlights has been our work with Eden Project International. We have been working alongside the development team there helping them with planned projects in England, Scotland, Ireland, Greece, Colombia and New Zealand. Every one of their schemes is different so the design, research and assessment process needs to reflect this.

What positive impacts do you see emerging post-pandemic?

The pandemic has led to a massive change in behaviour patterns, perceptions and motivation among both operators and consumers.

Operators have realised that the historic drive to increase visitor numbers is not necessarily the answer to a better business. Providing a quality experience to fewer visitors leads to increased guest satisfaction which in turn leads to increased spending. Gröna Lund in Stockholm changed from a low-priced park admission ticket operation pre-COVID to a pay one price park and limited the number of guests. In 2022, guest satisfaction was higher than ever, visitors were spending more in the park and this led to more income than before the pandemic from 20 per cent fewer guests.

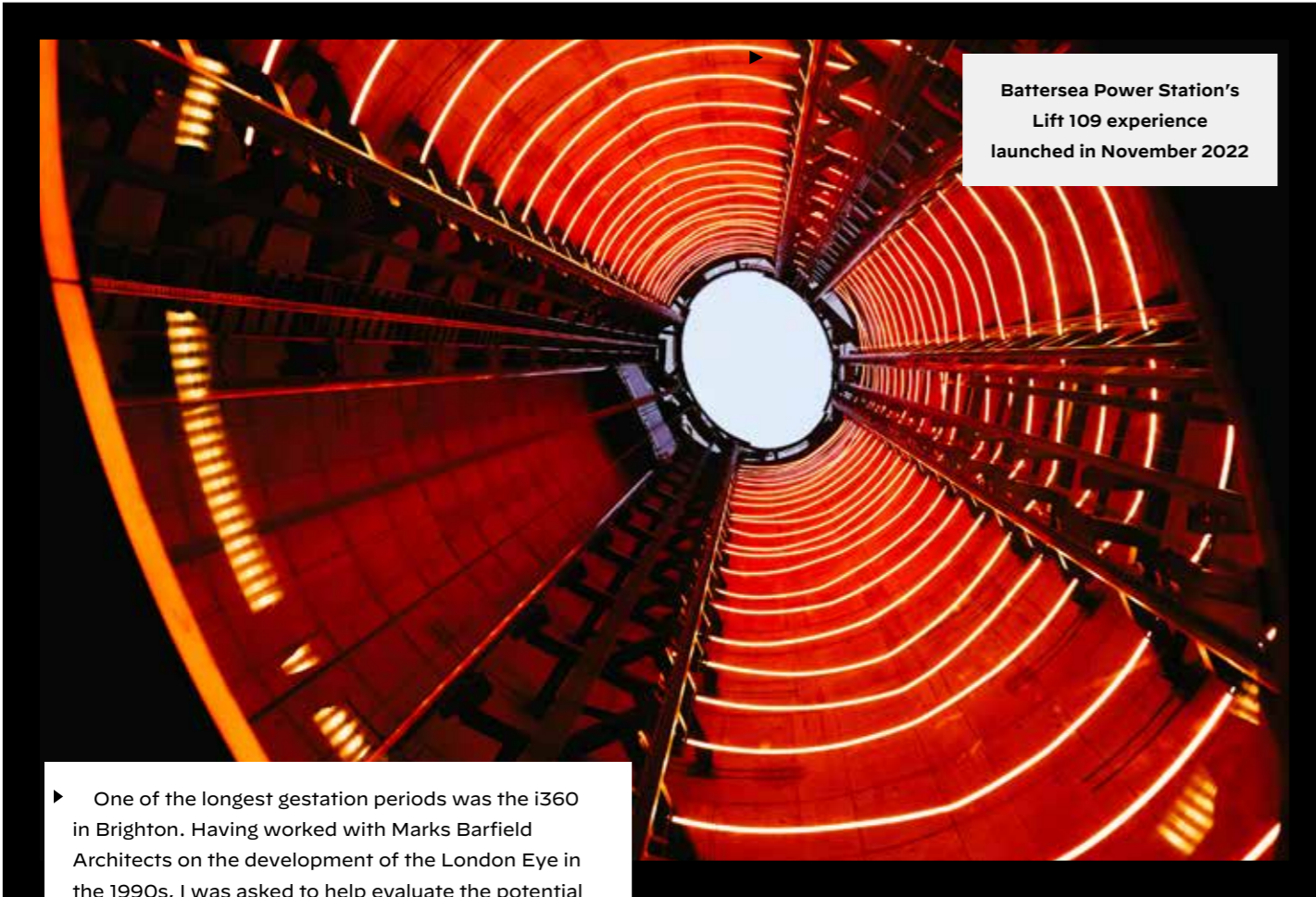
With many people spending most of the past three years working from home, there’s a strong resistance to returning to the workplace in the same way as before the pandemic. People want to maintain the increased flexibility and freedom that home working has offered, and many companies seem to be open to this.

This increased flexibility offers opportunities to change some of the traditional seasonal visitation patterns that have impacted demand at attractions. There will still be the school holiday peaks in demand from families, however more and more attractions will look to operate seasonal or dynamic pricing systems and take a more active role in managing guest visitation patterns and experiences.

Which project has had the shortest lead time between initial enquiry and opening. And the longest?

One of the most frustrating aspects of working on feasibility studies for attractions is the length of time that it takes for projects to be realised. There are a host of reasons for this, and unfortunately the vast majority of the projects that we’re involved don’t go on to be developed.

One of the fastest developments I worked on was Ferrari World in Abu Dhabi. I undertook the feasibility study for the park in 2006 and the park opened in 2010. Major factors in the relatively rapid pace of development was that Aldar, the original developer of the park, had control of the land, was supported by significant state-related funds, and had appointed a strong team of masterplanners and other consultants to fast-track the process.



Battersea Power Station's Lift 109 experience launched in November 2022

► One of the longest gestation periods was the i360 in Brighton. Having worked with Marks Barfield Architects on the development of the London Eye in the 1990s, I was asked to help evaluate the potential for a smaller observation attraction. We looked at a number of different locations around the world and in 2006 a site in Brighton was identified. The development process for that attraction encountered a series of setbacks but the design team stuck with it and the iconic attraction finally opened in 2016.

What are your favourite attractions and why?

In terms of European attractions, my two favourite theme parks are Puy du Fou and PortAventura. We're fortunate to have worked for both of these parks and that's enabled us to get an insight into the operations and how hard the teams work to deliver the guest experience.

When I first saw the Le Bal des Oiseaux Fantômes bird show at Puy du Fou it took my breath away. Numerous handlers walking through the audience attract the birds to fly low across the stands and the finale – with more than 100 birds flying around the ruins – has to be seen to be believed.

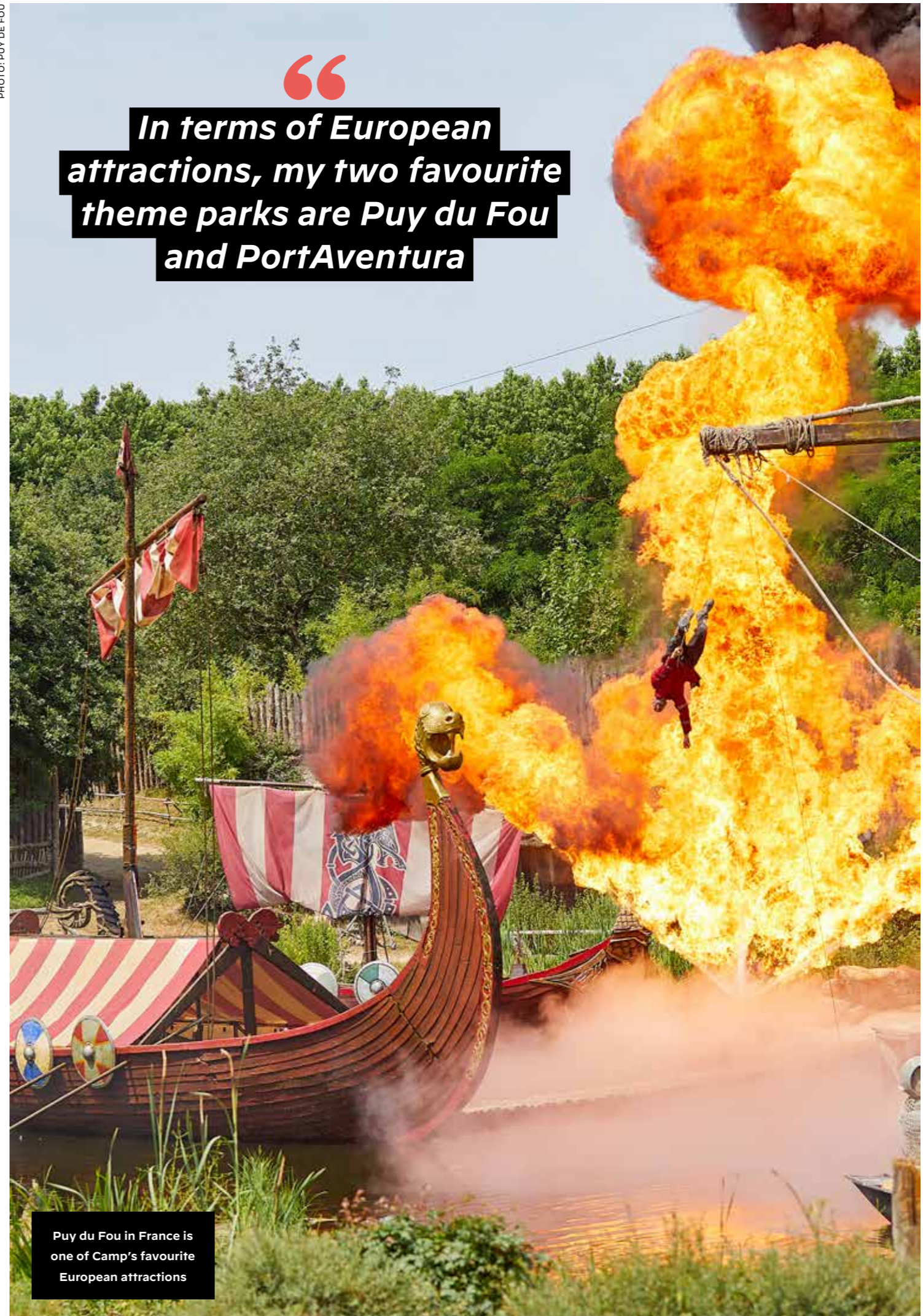
For me, Port Aventura is about great coasters. Dragon Khan's eight inversions was a world record when it opened in 1995 and offered amazing views across the park. It was my favourite coaster until I rode Shambala in 2012. I had never ridden

anything so fast or that delivered so much air time, and with only a lap restraint to hold the rider in place. An incredible experience.

I am a Harry Potter fan and so find the Warner Bros Studios Tour in Leavesden fascinating, but I was awestruck when I first entered Diagon Alley at Universal Studios in Orlando. I was there with a host of attraction professionals as part of the IAAPA Expo and every single person gasped in awe as they walked through the station entrance and first glimpsed the Diagon Alley buildings arrayed in front of them, and the dragon atop Gringott's Bank. While the rides in the area are fantastic, it's the environment that's the real star of that part of the park.

What are you working on now?

In terms of current projects, we're working with Eden Project International on their Dundee development, helping the team there with the business planning for the scheme. We have also been working with Gröna Lund in Stockholm evaluating the potential impact of their planned park expansion on attendance levels and business volumes. ●



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Puy du Fou in France is one of Camp's favourite European attractions