

Thrings meets...

Sara and Richard Mancey, owners of Paultons Park



located in Ower near Romsey, Paultons Park is one of the country's most successful and best-loved theme parks. Owners Sara and Richard Mancey discuss tourism, social media and Peppa Pig with Thrings partner, Mary Chant.

What can you tell us about Paultons' history?

Richard: When my family moved to one of the farms on the 3,000-acre Paultons Estate, my father discovered it was designated within local plans as a country park. We started in 1983 with woodland walks, gardens, animals and a large collection of water fowl. Over the years we added museums, playgrounds and crazy golf, introducing the first rides – including an Astroglide – six years later.

Is there a secret to running a successful theme park?

Sara: It has to be a fun and easy day out for families. We want to provide them with a great experience and lasting memories. We visited attractions when our own children were young and their feedback was invaluable. Through this, we decided we needed as many rides as possible with no minimum height restrictions for the whole family to enjoy together. We are happy to leave the market for 15-25-year-olds to others.

Safety must be a major priority

Richard: Visitor safety is at the forefront of everything we do. Our equipment is designed by expert manufacturers and inspected, checked and tested by an independent body. We know absolutely everything about our rides – where the steel and fibreglass is from, who made the bearings, the thickness of the paint, even the welder's qualifications.

How did Peppa Pig come about?

Sara: We needed something unique, and had witnessed Peppa's popularity from one-off meet-and-greets at the park. It's a lovely brand with fantastic family values. Peppa has also propelled Paultons Park forwards to the extent that we're now a national attraction: about 70% of our business is now 'non-local'.

You're also a large employer

Richard: We have 122 permanent members of staff – including our own three children – working in areas as diverse as catering, ride operations, retail and engineering. They regularly come up with great ideas which help us move the business forward. Many started in junior positions and they have gone on to fill management roles. We also employ about 700 seasonal staff.

Is tourism still a popular career choice?

Sara: It's the UK's fourth largest employer and makes a huge contribution

to the exchequer, yet tourism and hospitality's profile as a career option remains relatively low. Our staff are well qualified, highly skilled and have plenty of opportunities to develop their careers. A number, but not all, have been to university. A degree isn't the only way to get into the sector. Many of our staff have found that starting at the bottom and gaining practical and customer-facing experience is a great way to climb the career ladder.

What impact has social media had on Paultons?

Richard: There are now far more ways for us to interact with visitors. We respond promptly and appropriately to feedback on social media, offering resolutions where we can. We aim to run everything seamlessly, but with more than a million visitors every year, issues will inevitably crop up. Being named the UK's number one theme park by TripAdvisor, Which? and Mumsnet suggests we're doing something right!♦

