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Indoor water parks lure customers from state's cold weather

By Nathan Phelps

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It's the kind of weather you dream about in Wisconsin in November — humid and in the 80s.

Under those conditions Green Bay residents Pam Galvin and R.J. Collen got rid of their winter clothes and got soaked in their swimsuits.

Of course, outside the Tundra Lodge Resort & Waterpark in Ashwaubenon Green Bay, the temperature was only 30.

"It's different — an indoor water slide in Green Bay," said Collen, who was at Tundra for Galvin's 29th birthday.

Eyeglasses just in from the cold outside fog over in seconds, and the sound of splashing water is a constant background noise. So is the sound of people shooting through slides or drifting down the "Lazy River."

Water parks have gained momentum as both destination attractions for travelers and added amenities for some hotels that have incorporated water park concepts into their facilities.

For example, the Tundra Lodge has had all 161 suites full most weekends since opening Sept. 1, according to Paul Kaczrowski, president of Prestige Realty of Green Bay and an investor in Tundra Lodge.

Wisconsin now has 28 indoor water parks, 10 of them outside the Dells, according to **JLC Hospitality Consulting Inc.**, a research and consulting firm based in Rochester, Minn.

Another six indoor parks are under construction in the Badger State, and seven more are being planned.

Mike Jarentowski and his family made a weekend trip to Tundra Lodge.

"For one thing, it's 30 degrees outside and it's not good for yard work or anything else," the 32-year-old Sheboygan resident said. "It's just a good getaway. My son just turned 3, and it's something we can do as a family."

Tundra Lodge Resort & Waterpark

<http://www.tundralodge.com>

Cost: \$5 million for the water park

Size: 30,000 square feet

Capacity: 600 people

Slides: two 250-foot-long slides

Attractions: Lazy River, 300-gallon bucket that dumps water every 12 minutes, splash pad, indoor and outdoor whirlpools and hot tubs

Water: approximately 200,000 gallons

Lifeguards: 5 to 8 depending on the number of guests

Ramada Plaza Hotel

<http://www.ramadagreenbay.com>

Cost: About \$1 million

Size: 20,000 square feet

Capacity: 300 people

Slides: two

Attractions: Plunge pool, zero access pool, recreation pool

Lifeguards: 2 to 4

Microtel Inns & Suites

<http://www.landmarkrealestateanddev.com/microtel/pool.htm>

Size: 3,304 square feet

Capacity: 82 people

The Tundra Lodge isn't alone in the game in the Green Bay area. Both the Ramada Plaza Hotel and water park and Microtel Inns & Suites in Ashwaubenon include water parks as part of their operations. Tundra is the largest and newest of the three.

Jerry Lintz, a managing partner at Ramada in Ashwaubenon, said the hotel is focused on being a corporate hotel, but opted to put in a water park as an added amenity for weekend travelers. The water park, which was part of a \$5 million hotel renewal, is open only on weekends for most of the year, but for the 90 days of summer, it's open every day.

"It's an added amenity. It's something that separates us from most other area lodging facilities," Lintz said. "Ours is not Wisconsin Dells-size, but at the same time it's very comfortable."

But he noted the operation can be expensive to run and to build, with increases in costs for pool chemicals and insurance.

"It's not free," Lintz said. "It's not 'Build it and they will come.' It's not automatic."

For Chad and Jennie Pavlat of Algoma, a weekend spent in the controlled climate of the Ramada's water park saved them hours in the car and gave them a break after harvest on the family farm.

"It's a good way to get away," Chad Pavlat said. "We normally go to Wisconsin Dells, and you don't have to drive so far. It's closer to home. It's a lot closer and it's probably a lot cheaper."

They were there with their daughter, Haliegh, and in-laws who gave them the weekend at the hotel as a Christmas gift.

Microtel Inn & Suites opened with a water park concept included in its building plans about four years ago. It's been a destination for travelers coming from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

"It's a getaway for them. They come and do some shopping," said Gina Hartl, director of sales at the hotel. "It increases winter occupancy where notoriously it's been very low for hotels. It's a way of ... being more of a revenue-producing property year-round and not just the big summer months."

The ability to control the weather inside is a plus in both winter and summer.

Slides: one 12-foot-long slide

Attractions: Swirlpool, whirlpool and volcano and dolphin in pool

Water: 31,610 gallons

Lifeguards: None on duty.

What they like:

Jessica Sizemore, Green Bay, 15

The slides at Tundra

"They're fun, and the Lazy River is cool, too. You just get to sit and relax."

Caryn Schmitt, 15, Wheaton, Ill.

The rooms and decor, like the lodge feeling, and of course the water park at Tundra

"It's like a kid's dream come true."

Brad LeClair, 16, Two Rivers

The slides at Tundra

"It's pretty cool."

Mike Jarentowski, 32, Sheboygan (no headshot)

The slides

"The speed."

Mandi Beard, 14, of Bear Creek and Tara Gattuso, 14, of Ashwaubenon

The outdoor hot tub and the bucket of water that pours over Tundra's play equipment

Peter Engstrand, 14, of Bloomington, Minn.

The slides

"They're pretty fast and they're longer than a lot of the ones I've gone on before."

Matthew Campbell, 10, Racine, and Sarah Naegeli, 9, Coleman

"We are expecting summer to be just as busy. Kids are out of school. It's the travel season," said Mark Kiar, water park director at Tundra Lodge. "Being that we have an indoor water park, the weather is not a factor here. You can have a rainy day outside, but it's always 86 and clear skies in the water park."

But talk of destinations, winter occupancy rates and driving fall by the wayside for kids and adults in swimsuits in November.

"It's awesome," said Brandon Detrick, 12, of Green Bay and Adam Vandertie, 10, of De Pere, in unison.

Several people drew comparisons to the Dells. Some said there is no matching the Dells, while others saw a clear advantage to a smaller, local water park.

"It's crowded there. Here it's perfect," Cullen said.

— Gannett Wisconsin Newspapers

In unison and looking at each other: "the waterslide" at Ramada

Jennie Pavlat, 27, Algoma

The slide at Ramada and the whole water park concept and the hot tub

Carey Pavlat, 37, Algoma

The slide at Ramada: the fast action; hot tub and sauna; relaxing

Whitney Pavlat, Algoma

The slide and hot tub