

Designing the Best Family Park

Preferences, Trade-Offs, and the Structure of an Ideal Experience

Dr. Maksim Godovykh

Abstract

This study moves beyond attribute importance and asks parents to configure an ideal family entertainment park. Respondents chose among experience mixes, programming rhythms, personalization approaches, parent environments, desired child outcomes, price points, and explicit trade-offs. The results indicate that families prefer broad experience platforms rather than narrowly specialized concepts. They strongly favor changing programming, want the parent experience to be comfortable without displacing investment from children's attractions, and overwhelmingly choose a more unique destination even when it requires a longer drive. Fun remains the primary desired outcome, while learning and development are more compelling when embedded inside entertainment.

Study design and analysis

Parents first described their ideal park in an open-ended format and then configured a preferred concept across several design dimensions. Two forced trade-offs tested how families allocate equivalent improvement value and whether uniqueness can compensate for additional travel time. Analysis combines choice shares with thematic analysis of the vision statements and follow-up comments.

Results

No single activity mode dominates the ideal park

Preferred experience	Share
Balanced play + exploration + creation	31.4%
Mostly active entertainment	31.4%
Play + exploration / learning	31.4%
Play + creative making	5.7%

Three configurations were effectively tied: mostly active entertainment, play combined with exploration and learning, and a balanced mix of play, exploration and creation. Pure creative-making emphasis was much less common. The pattern favors a multi-engine experience system over a narrow creator-only or education-only proposition.

Changing programming is a strong revealed preference

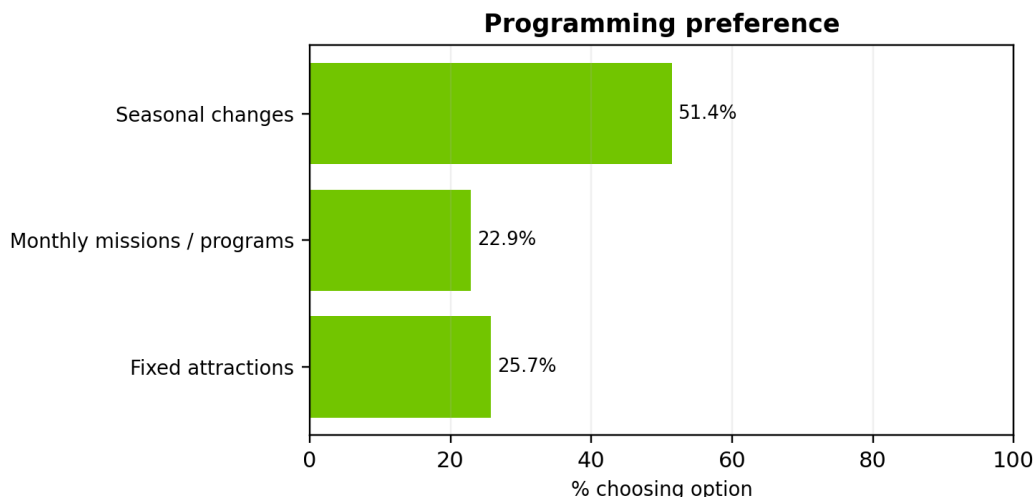


Figure 1. Preferred programming rhythm.

Seasonal changes were the most common choice, and monthly missions or programs added another substantial group. Taken together, nearly three quarters chose some form of changing programming rather than a fixed-attraction model. This result is especially important when read alongside Study 1: “reasons to return” are not always top-of-mind in abstract rankings, yet families actively select refresh mechanisms when they design the experience.

“Kids change interests so fast. The park would have themes that could easily change from month to month.” — Changing interests and refresh

“That way we could visit our favorites and then also get something new each time.” — Stable favorites + novelty

Personalization works better as guidance than as deep progression

Personalization model	Share
Personal recommendations	45.7%
Same experience for everyone	37.1%
Saved projects, profiles and progression	17.1%

Light personalization in the form of recommendations was preferred most often, while persistent profiles and progression attracted a smaller share. This suggests that personalization should initially reduce decision friction and improve relevance before it becomes a prominent loyalty mechanic.

Parents want comfort and flexibility, but attractions win the investment trade-off

Parent environment	Share
Relax, work or participate	45.7%
Comfortable cafe lounge	34.3%
Basic seating	14.3%
Cafe / lounge / work area	5.7%

Where families would put an equivalent improvement budget

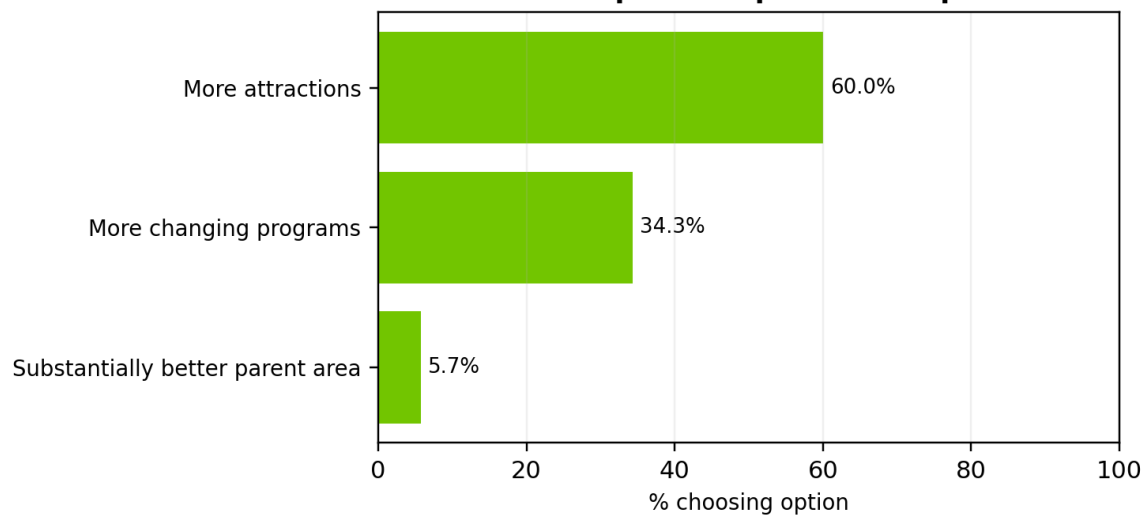


Figure 2. Allocation of an equivalent improvement budget.

The apparent contradiction is useful. Families clearly prefer a parent environment better than basic seating, but only a small share would prioritize a substantially improved parent space over more attractions or more changing programming. Parent comfort therefore behaves like a support condition: it can raise total family value, but it should not crowd out the child-facing experience.

Fun is the outcome parents buy first

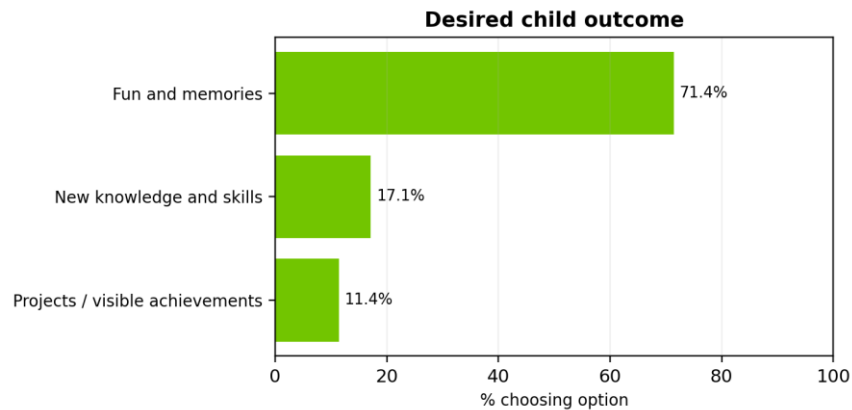


Figure 3. Preferred child outcome from the visit.

Fun and memories were selected far more often than explicit knowledge, skills or visible projects. This does not imply rejection of learning. It implies that development is more commercially powerful when delivered through entertainment. The principle is consistent with the FEC Gap framework: development-rich design does not require a venue to resemble school; challenge, creativity, collaboration and problem solving can be embedded inside play.

“Just have things be as educational as possible but fun for all. I want the kids to get a real sense of fun but learn at the same time.” — Entertainment first, development embedded

A unique destination can overcome distance

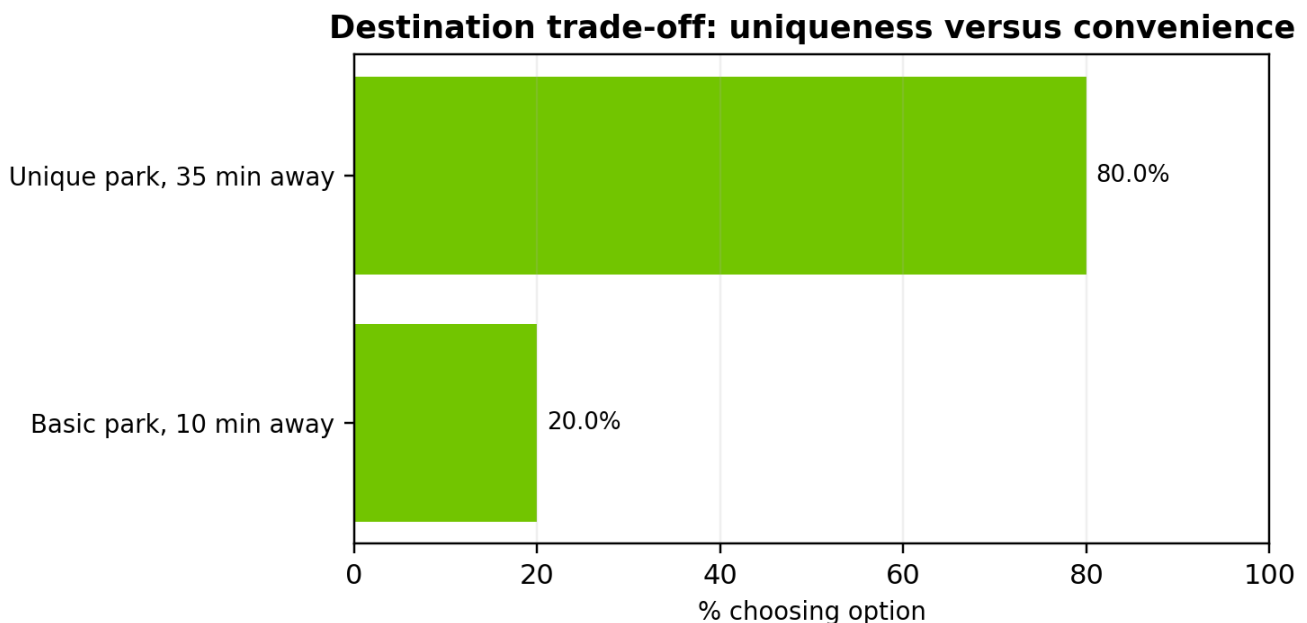


Figure 4. Trade-off between a nearby basic venue and a farther unique destination.

The distance trade-off is one of the clearest strategic results. Four out of five respondents chose the more unique park even though it was positioned substantially farther away. The implication is not that location is unimportant. Rather, concept strength can expand the practical trade area when the experience is meaningfully differentiated.

“I favor driving a further distance in order to have a better experience.” — Destination value

“I don’t think the cost or distance would deter us as long as the park is a place that everyone in the family would want to go to.” — Whole-family destination appeal

Price sensitivity remains visible

Preferred child admission	Share
\$24	42.9%
\$29	37.1%
\$39	20.0%
\$49	0.0%

The lower two tested price points accounted for most selections, while the highest price point attracted no selections. Stated price preferences should not be interpreted as a direct willingness-to-pay curve, but the result reinforces the importance of perceived value and family affordability found in Study 1.

Qualitative design categories

The open-ended vision statements show how respondents combine features rather than think in isolated categories. Recurring themes included physical play and rides, parent comfort and food, variety and multi-age appeal, changing content, technology, learning, affordability, convenience, and safety. Several responses explicitly asked for both indoor and outdoor elements, shorter queues, shade or seating, quiet spaces, healthy food, lockers, accessible restrooms, and age-separated areas.

"I would want the park to be both indoors and outdoors. Physical activities, games, maybe go-karts or bumper cars. And digital experiences: virtual reality rides, 3D educational videos and such." — **Physical-digital balance**

"There should be a bit of education to it, but it should still be entertaining for children and adults alike." — **Whole-family edutainment**

"Having more shorter experiences with fewer lines would've been better." — **Journey design and throughput**

A data-driven design formula

Taken together, the results point to an idealized formula: a broad active-play foundation; meaningful exploration and learning; selective creation; seasonal and monthly refresh; light personalization; comfortable parent infrastructure; a strong fun-first promise; accessible pricing; and enough uniqueness to justify destination travel. The formula is not a fixed attraction list. It is an operating architecture designed to balance novelty, whole-family usability, developmental value and repeatability.

Design implication

The strongest future park may not be the park with the most technology or the most educational content. It may be the park that combines familiar physical fun with changing discovery, making and technology in a way that feels fresh but still immediately understandable to families.

References

- Godovykh, M. (2026). FEC gap taxonomy. <https://research.futureexperiencepark.com/#library>
- Godovykh, M., Kovsharov, P., & Parker, A. (2026). How to build the best activity park: A complete guide for owners, operators, investors, and franchisees. KFW Publishing.
- Godovykh, M., & Tasci, A. D. A. (2020a). Customer experience in tourism: A review of definitions, components, and measurements. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 35, 100694. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100694>
- Godovykh, M., & Tasci, A. D. A. (2020b). Satisfaction vs experienced utility: Current issues and opportunities. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(18), 2273–2282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1769573>
- Godovykh, M., & Tasci, A. D. A. (2021). The influence of post-visit emotions on destination loyalty. *Tourism Review*, 76(1), 277–288. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-01-2020-0025>
- Pine, B. J., II, & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the experience economy. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4), 97–105. <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20182058. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>