

14<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Consumers in the UK and US are Ready to Return to Theme Parks

**Research from Oracle and Merlin Entertainments shows consumers are looking for a safe and enjoyable experience as they return to their favourite theme parks and attractions**

- US and UK consumers value screen-free experiences
- Great customer service and an effortless customer journey essential for US and UK customers
  - 80% of UK and US consumers are 'optimistic' to get back to leisure activities
    - 1 in 3 travellers are staying closer to home in the US
    - 25% are booking more short stays and weekend trips in the UK
  - Visitors looking for more control, comfort and the ability to personalize their visit
- Joy of Looking Ahead ('JOLA') phenomenon sees guests planning and purchasing ahead in greater numbers
  - 54% say food and drink pre-ordering and pick-up should be the new standard

**LONDON, UK and AUSTIN, Texas – July 14, 2021** – New [research](#) shows consumers in the US and UK are ready to return to theme park adventures in their droves. Consumer confidence is on the rise as guests experience the 'JOLA' phenomenon – the Joy of Looking Ahead. In the US, consumers (between May and June) showed a jump in confidence to get back to leisure activities, from 68% to 80%. In the UK confidence remained high, with 80% saying they are 'optimistic' about the prospect of spending quality time with families and friends at leisure attractions. As part of the JOLA phenomenon, families and groups increasingly want to book ahead to have an outing to look forward to. This includes everything from planning and paying for activities in advance to pre-ordering food and drinks.

The research from [Merlin Entertainments](#) and technology provider [Oracle's Food and Beverage](#) looks to understand how consumers are buying, behaving and even booking differently this summer, whilst COVID-19 still continues to dominate headlines and holidays across the globe. The research<sup>1</sup> highlights how new technologies will enhance the experience for visitors at their favourite Merlin Entertainments theme parks and attractions such as [LEGOLAND®](#), [Alton Towers](#), [SEA LIFE Centres](#) and the [London Eye](#).

## New behaviours for new adventures

'Togetherness & Escape' are most valued by UK & US customers when visiting attractions. Consumers in both countries also value the chance for screen free experiences and see good customer service as well as an effortless customer journey as essential.

1 in 3 (US) and 1 in 5 (UK) travellers are staying closer to home, while 20% (US) and 25% (UK) are booking more weekend trips and shorter stays than previously seen.

Visitors are also increasingly looking to plan and personalise their visit to make the most of it. Using data and technology can go a long way in providing visitors the control and comfort they crave.

For example, the research shows that:

- 54% would love to plan their itinerary in advance so they can beat the queues.
- 59% of families would favour some sort of "fast pass" system which provides priority access to food, shops and facilities.
- 40% of families would pay extra to be able to pre-book their day's activities in advance.
- 48% of millennials would be keen to provide preferences in advance to receive relevant offers on the day.
- 58% of respondents would like to be able to see hotspots on a map in order to avoid the busiest places in a theme park or attraction.

"After a difficult year, with limited entertainment, guests are excited about a summer of fun. With the **'Joy of Looking Ahead'** effect in full flow, our customers want to plan and purchase ahead too. Pre-ordering meals, refreshments, photos and checking-in online are all happening before they even arrive," **said Lee Cowie, Chief Technology Officer at Merlin Entertainments.** "Our guests are excited for feel-good experiences, but they want to feel safe and in control at the same time. For Merlin, the pre-planning technology we're bringing in offers guests the ability to tailor and personalise their stay while allowing us to flex our business to allow for things like social distancing, staff support and food and beverage pre-ordering."

## Ice Cream on demand

Nearly 80% of consumers agree that refreshments are an integral part of their theme park experience and [technology](#) will play a key role in ordering moving forward. Over half (52%) of customers would purchase more if they could avoid queues all together, and 54% of consumers say they think food and drink pre-ordering and pick-up should be the new standard. Families are especially supportive of this idea, with 55% of parents with kids under 12 wanting to schedule food or drinks before arriving at a theme park. In addition:

- 41% of families would love to interact with the park via a dedicated mobile app.
- 24% of Gen Zers noted that using a QR code system is their preferred system for ordering food and drinks.
- 28% of Boomers still favour staffed-concessions for food and drinks orders.

"Nearly 70% of consumers want to visit a theme park as soon as possible and technology will play an increasing role in delivering a memorable experience," **said Simon de Montfort Walker, senior vice president and general manager, Oracle Food and Beverage.** "As patrons return, [Merlin Resort Theme Parks \(RTPs\)](#) are well prepared to meet new customer expectations, such as using technology to order food ahead, while driving additional revenue streams."

## Partnerships are paramount

Building a strong network of nearby partners can provide theme parks with the ability to earn additional revenue, and perhaps more importantly learn more about their customer. Creating package deals with nearby restaurants and hotels offers parks an additional opportunity to gather customer data that can inform marketing and loyalty programs for compelling personalised experiences.

Consumers are more than open to the package idea as well: 67% said they would be likely to visit nearby hotels, restaurants and bars if they received a personalised offer as part of their theme park trip. Meanwhile, half of millennials and Gen X audiences would love to get mobile notifications with personalised offers for nearby food or drinks outlets.

Source: [Theme Park Trends 2021, Oracle Food and Beverage](#)

B-roll is [available here](#).

**Ends**

### For media enquiries:

Oracle  
Scott Porter  
Oracle Corporate Communications  
+1.650.274.9519  
[scott.c.porter@oracle.com](mailto:scott.c.porter@oracle.com)

### Merlin

Brunswick Group  
Isabelle Saber / Elena Georgantzi at Brunswick Group  
+44 (0)20 7404 5959  
[Merlin@brunswickgroup.com](mailto:Merlin@brunswickgroup.com)

OR

Merlin Entertainments  
Chloe Couchman  
Corporate Communications Director  
+44 (0)7885 827836  
[chloe.couchman@merlinentertainments.biz](mailto:chloe.couchman@merlinentertainments.biz)

### Notes to Editors

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#### About Merlin Entertainments

Merlin Entertainments is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number one and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin operates over 135 attractions, 21 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 24

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countries and across four continents. Merlin's purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its millions of guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its employees.

See [www.merlinentertainments.biz](http://www.merlinentertainments.biz) for more information and follow on Twitter [@MerlinEntsNews](https://twitter.com/MerlinEntsNews).

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## About Oracle

### **About Oracle Food & Beverage**

Oracle Food and Beverage, formerly MICROS, brings 40 years of experience in providing software and hardware solutions to restaurants, bars, pubs, clubs, coffee shops, cafes, stadiums, and theme parks. Thousands of operators, both large and small, around the world are using Oracle technology to deliver exceptional guest experiences, maximize sales, and reduce running costs.

### **About Oracle**

Oracle offers integrated suites of applications plus secure, autonomous infrastructure in the Oracle Cloud. For more information about Oracle (NYSE: ORCL), please visit us at [www.oracle.com](http://www.oracle.com).

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