



A History of Kings Island

Kings Island opened its gates on April 29, 1972, serving as a replacement for Coney Island, an immensely popular amusement park located on the Ohio River 10 miles east of downtown Cincinnati.

Old Coney Island began sedately in the 1870's when an enterprising apple farmer named James Parker began to invite groups of people to picnic on his property along the banks of the Ohio River. His 400-fruit bearing trees tempted river travelers to stop and relax, and soon he was renting the place.

Captain William F. McIntyre bought the grove from Parker in 1886 for \$17,500. He built a dance platform there, created the Cincinnati Steamboat Company, and called the venture Ohio Grove – Coney Island of the West.

Coney Island came upon hard times, however, in the early 1920's when its steamboats were destroyed by fire at the Cincinnati wharf. (The first excursion boat to Coney Island was The Guiding Star, 1887. Others that followed were The Queen, 1907; The Morning Star, 1915; The Princess, 1918; The Island Maid, 1922; The Island Bell, 1927; the first Island Queen, 1932, and then a few years later, the second Island Queen.)

Then a Cincinnati shoe merchant named George F. Scott, together with a group of local businessmen, including William Cooper Procter, bought out the financially troubled park. With considerable new capital and great imagination they built the modern Coney Island.

Edward L. Scott, George's son, was named president of the park in the 1940's and 50's. His brother-in-law, Ralph Wachs, was president in the 1960's. In 1969, the park was sold to the Taft Broadcasting Company of Cincinnati due to the threat of competition from the new emerging "theme" parks and the annual flooding which took place there.

The purchase of Coney Island led Taft into the theme park industry, and due to frequent flooding, the company decided to build a replacement for Coney Island – Kings Island – in Kings Mills, Ohio 24 miles north of Cincinnati. Coney Island closed September 6, 1971. Almost all the rides were relocated to Kings Island.

Kings Island broke ground June 15, 1970. Taft Broadcasting created the name of its new park from the previous landlord, the defunct King Power Company, which founded the town of Kings Mills for its workers.

The star attraction when Kings Island opened was the twin-track Racer roller coaster. Designed by legendary designer John Allen, the Racer is credited with starting the second golden age of roller coasters. In 1982, the trains on one side of the Racer were turned around backwards making it the world's first full-length backwards-traveling wooden roller coaster. The backwards side was turned back around forward after the 2007 season.

Other roller coasters that opened with the park in 1972 were the Bavarian Beetle, a steel coaster brought over from Coney Island (removed in 1979), and Scooby Doo, a wooden coaster which was renamed “The Beastie” in 1979 and renamed again as “Fairly Odd Coaster” in 2006.

Also opening with the park in 1972 were the Antique Cars, Der Spinning Keggers, Enchanted Voyage, Grand Carousel, Haley’s Comet, Kings Island and Miami Valley Railroad, Log Flume, Monster, Turnpike Cars, Rotor, Scrambler, Sky Ride, and Witch’s Cauldrons.

The centerpiece of Kings Island in 1972 and still today is the Eiffel Tower, a one-third replica of the original Eiffel Tower in Paris, France.

The park received some of its first nationwide exposure from two ABC sitcoms that filmed episodes at the park: *The Partridge Family* in 1972, and more famously, *The Brady Bunch* the following year. While they don’t mention the name of the park, they do refer to it as “a new park outside Cincinnati.”

In 1984, Taft Broadcasting Company sold the company’s Amusement Park Group, including Kings Island, to Kings Entertainment Company (KECO) which was formed through a leveraged buyout of the attractions by several members of Taft’s APG management team. In 1987, the park was purchased by American Financial Corporation but continued to be operated by KECO through a management contract. Kings Island was sold again in 1992 to Paramount Communications and renamed Paramount’s Kings Island. Two years later, Viacom purchased Paramount, then in 2006 split into two different companies – Viacom and CBS Corporation, with CBS inheriting Paramount Parks, which included Kings Island, before selling them in June 2006 to Cedar Fair Entertainment Company.

The sale of Kings Island to Cedar Fair Entertainment Company made Kings Island sister parks with another major Ohio amusement park, Cedar Point in Sandusky.

Kings Island has meant a lot of things to a lot of people over the years, but one thing it has always been known for is roller coasters.

In 1979, Kings Island unveiled The Beast – the tallest, longest and fastest roller coaster in the world at the time. Entering its 30th anniversary season, The Beast still holds the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest wooden roller coaster in the world at 7,418 feet.

In 1981, Kings Island introduced the world’s first suspended roller coaster, The Bat. The ride, while immensely popular with park visitors, was plagued by mechanical problems and only operated for parts of two seasons. The Bat sat dormant in 1983 and 1984 before being removed.

In 1984, the park introduced King Cobra as the world’s first stand-up roller coaster. The ride remained in operation until 2002.

In 1987, Kings Island’s new Vortex roller coaster set a new world record as the first coaster with six inversions. The ride continues to be one of the most popular attractions at the park today.

Son of Beast, the sequel to the Beast, opened in 2000 and continues to hold the world record as the tallest and fastest wooden roller coaster on the planet. The coaster opened with a vertical loop making it the first-ever wooden coaster to incorporate a steel loop in an otherwise wooden structure. The loop, however, was removed after the 2006 season when the park switched to lighter, more comfortable trains.

In 2007, Kings Island debuted Firehawk – Ohio’s only flying roller coaster. This innovative coaster propels willing test pilots 115 feet in the air and through five inversions at speeds of more

than 50 miles per hour – all while facing the ground, experiencing the inconceivable feeling of human flight.

New for 2009 is Diamondback – the tallest, fastest and meanest roller coaster to ever strike Kings Island. The ride stands 230 feet at its highest point with a first drop of 215 feet at a 74-degree angle. Riders snake their way around 5,282 feet of track at speeds up to 80 miles per hour!

Today, Kings Island has 15 thrill-inducing roller coasters and a number of family-fun flat rides. The park has won the Golden Ticket for Best Kids Area in the World for eight years running.

In 1989, Kings Island introduced Water Works, which today is known as Boomerang Bay. One of the top water parks in the world, the 15-acre water park features more than 30 water slides, tropical lagoons, rushing rivers, surfable waves, a 36,000 square-foot wave pool, three family activity areas and careening waterfalls surrounded by lush landscaping. Boomerang Bay is included free with park admission.

In addition to its world-class rides, shows and attractions, Kings Island has also been known for its special events.

On October 25, 1975, daredevil Evel Knievel successfully jumped 14 Greyhound buses at Kings Island, setting a new audience viewing record for ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, garnering a remarkable 52 household share when his performance was broadcast live. Knievel landed on the 14th bus, but managed to hold on in one his last big jumps.

On July 4, 1976, Kings Island played host to the wedding of Paul Revere of the pop rock band *Paul Revere & the Raiders*.

In 1982, Kings Island introduced a Christmas event called Winterfest, which ran from Thanksgiving through December 31. The International Street Fountains were turned into an ice-skating rink. The train and Carousel operated during Winterfest, which also featured Holiday-themed shops and restaurants. The event ended after 10 years in 1992, but returned for one additional season in 2005.

In 2007, Kings Island unveiled Halloween Haunt – the most immersive horror experience in the Midwest. The bloodcurdling horror and nightmarish madness of Halloween Haunt features more than 500 ghastly creatures emerging from the darkness, 13-highly intense and bone-chilling attractions and some of the most hair-raising rides on the planet.

On May 24, 2008, Robbie Knievel, the son of Evel Knievel, successfully jumped over 24 Coke Zero trucks in the Kings Island parking lot, setting a new world's record.

On July 4, 2008, high-wire walker Rick Wallenda, the grandson of the great Karl Wallenda, set a new world record for the longest skywalk at 2,000 feet, walking from the Eiffel Tower and over the Royal Fountain and Front Gate and back again. Karl Wallenda had set the previous world record of 1,600 feet at Kings Island in 1974.

On August 31, 2008, Brady Bunch stars Barry Williams (Greg), Susan Olsen (Cindy) and Mike Lookinland (Bobby) returned to the park for a Very Brady Reunion, performing four live song and dance shows and telling Brady Bunch stories for guests in the Kings Island Theater.

Entering its 37th season in 2009, Kings Island has grown to be the largest amusement and water park in the Midwest, entertaining approximately 3 million guests annually.