

Ocean Park's Strategic Shift: From Theme Park to Conservation and Education Destination



Source: Unsplash (2018)

Background

In early 2021, Ocean Park announced a strategic plan to reposition itself as an education and conservation destination (Ocean Park Hong Kong, n.d.a). Since then, the park has increased its efforts to fulfill its mission of becoming a nature-based attraction enriched with elements of adventure and leisure.

A key initiative in this transformation is the Ocean Park Academy, the educational arm of Ocean Park, which offers over 30 different courses for teachers and students across kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school levels (Ocean Park Hong Kong, n.d.b). Through a vibrant array of immersive resources, students can learn about animals, conservation, liberal studies and physics via interactive activities and the unique experience of fun learning in nature (Ocean Park Hong Kong, n.d.b). To strengthen its ties with the education sector, the academy recently established a Teachers Working Group, comprising principals and teachers from participating schools. This group convenes regularly to explore how Ocean Park's facilities and educational resources can better support students' learning (Ocean Park Hong Kong, n.d.c).

In 2023, Ocean Park introduced a new conservation advocacy initiative – Mission R, which aims to reverse the trends of species extinction through encouraging the public to change and work collectively towards a sustainable future (Ocean Park, n.d.d). Following the introduction of Mission R, Ocean Park soon announced the inauguration of the Seahorse Rangers campaign, empowering over 2,500 students and teachers from 178 local schools to become conservation ambassadors (Ocean Park, 2024a).

Besides that, the park also invested on many in-park conservation projects, such as the new “Sloth and Friends Studio” featuring a new animal habitat for sloths, an art gallery displaying AI-generated animal images, and an education corner aimed at raising awareness on conservation solutions and saving endangered species from extinction (Ocean Park, 2023).

Furthermore, Ocean Park recently welcomed the birth of the first-ever giant panda twins in Hong Kong as the city’s beloved giant panda, Ying Ying gave birth to one female and one male offspring at Ocean Park on 15 August 2024 (Ocean Park Hong Kong Facebook, 2024). In addition, Ocean Park has been selected to house two new giant pandas gifted by the Central Government. “The arrival of the new giant pandas will not only enhance Hong Kong’s tourism appeal but also expand the breadth and depth of Ocean Park’s conservation and education work”, said the Chairman of Ocean Park Corporation (Ocean Park, 2024b).

Challenges

While Ocean Park’s strategic shift toward conservation and education represents a forward-thinking transformation, changing public perception may prove challenging. Some visitors continue to associate the park primarily with traditional amusement park experiences and may resist the shift toward educational content. As such, while developing conservation-oriented programs, Ocean Park must also preserve its original identity as a theme park offering fun and thrilling attractions. Striking a balance between education and entertainment is essential to retaining its diverse customer base and ensuring long-term success.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some innovative ways Ocean Park can integrate conservation messages into its thrilling attractions to appeal to both novelty seekers and conservation enthusiasts?
2. How can the birth of the giant panda twins and the arrival of new giant pandas be leveraged to boost both tourism and conservation education at Ocean Park?
3. How can Ocean Park measure the success of its strategic shift towards becoming an education and conservation destination?

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Keywords

- Conservation Education
- Edutainment
- Repositioning
- Theme Park
- Experiential Learning
- Nature-based Attraction

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