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MENALAC
VENDOR TALK

JULY 2021



The Edutainment segment has been expanding rapidly in the last few years. This is partly due to the discovery that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), especially when taught through exploration is vital for children's development. Moreover, learning through self-discovery and independent effort not only increases core literacy and comprehension skills but also encourages children to continue learning.

This trend-enhancing learning through entertainment is a great opportunity for FECs to provide real value beyond fun to both parents and their children. However, products that are truly designed for Edutainment are rare and mostly stuck in museums. On the other hand, the Entertainment industry is ever chasing the newest attraction and experience. This need is how Artificial Caving was created.

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Caves are a remarkable opportunity for exciting discovery and an experience that is fun and educational at the same time. Moreover, an **artificial cave experience** – a combination of thrilling exploration and learning is a much safer and accessible alternative to traditional speleology.

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NATURE-INSPIRED AND REALISTICALLY RECREATED

The realistic rock surfaces of some artificial caves come with authentic cave features: stalactites and stalagmites, fossils, lava, and sumps. Artificial Caves are predominantly manufactured with one of two materials. The first being glass fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC), which means sculptors shape the concrete on the spot. And the second – glass fiber reinforced plastic (GFRP), composed of molds taken by natural cave rocks.



The authenticity of the cave experience doesn't end with just the way they look. GFRC can recreate any artistic impression while GFRP eases the process dramatically since it requires no work on the field. The choice between them is not intuitive as both can do the job, but if you aim at building a cave that can be an anchor attraction, GRP is preferred.

MORE THAN CAVE WALKS

As with most things in life, first impressions matter in caves too. If done right, customers' experience, from the first step till the end, feels like a real adventure. The tour starts with the operator's briefing, and then, depending on the length and complexity of the cave, it can continue as a guided or non-guided tour.

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A guided tour adds value for parents and educational institutions as it gives kids both the adrenaline of the discovery walk and the richness of knowledge they receive. The key to maximizing the experience is having someone guide the dozen excited kids in a dark, tight, enclosed space and tell them where to stop and pay attention to different sites – as hand marking or animal painting. This way, the kids have the chance to explore the wonders of speleology while walking through topic-related chambers dedicated to ancient life or stalactites. On their way, they will pass through various rock formations and learn about the

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underground world formed by nature. They will be crawling through narrow tunnels with multiple routes in some places, squeezing through tiny holes, and passing different obstacles that will challenge them physically, just like in a natural cave. The experience has that “wow” effect on people and is outstanding thanks to the variety of activities offered to the visitor. And as with many edutainment experiences – the more, the better.



GAMIFICATION

What really elevates the caving and learning experience is Gamification. Features such as the **Gamifier platform** encourages kids to collect points by hunting for hidden fossils or filling the volcano with lava as fast as they can. Other games include repeating the pattern of shining lights or choosing fossil animals or plants – an excellent way for the kids to learn while playing.

REAL, SCARY, FUN, BUT ALSO COMPLETELY SAFE

During their cave visit, kids are treated just like the little explorers they are. They receive helmets, headlamps, knee and elbow protectors, as well as torches. They can see and touch what a natural cave is like and enjoy the sound and special lighting effects.

Last but not least, it's important to remember that caves are enclosed spaces, and as such, safety considerations are a must. The cave must have an excellent ventilation system and emergency exits for every 10 meters of the tunnels. To maximize these measures, you can also add LED emergency lights and fire-resistant GRP.

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It is also important to work with your local authorities to ensure compliance with the local regulation and guidelines.



To sum up - artificial caves when done right are an excellent way to provide your visitors with a fun and secure encounter with knowledge about this world and provide a truly memorable experience.

***Author Credit:** This article is contributed by Mr. Borislav Atanasov, Sales Manager Walltopia & Rollglider. When not building active entertainment and caving experiences for all ages, Borislav loves to go scuba diving and explore the underwater world.*

***Disclaimer:** The advice shared above expresses the expert views, best practices, thoughts, and opinions of our author, and not necessarily those of the author's employer or MENALAC.*