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Battle of theme parks hots up

Sentosa's \$20m VolcanoLand set to join the fray when it opens in December

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By Kalpana Rashiwala

VOLCANOLAND, the latest attraction on Sentosa, will start erupting in December, spewing smoke 10 metres into the air.

Its opening marks what is shaping up to be an explosive battle among the growing number of theme parks in Singapore for customers.

VolcanoLand, costing \$20 million, is developed by local company Leisure Park (S) Pte Ltd.

For entrance fees of \$10 for adults and \$5 for children, visitors can experience the thrill of seeing a 20-metre-high "volcano" erupt every half-hour.

There are several other attractions as well. For example, visitors can ride a "pit cage" which will simulate a "descent into the bowels of

the earth".

In addition, there is a bonarium featuring fossils, including some genuine pieces, and a street that is styled after the ancient Maya civilisation.

Leisure Park's assistant general manager, Mr David Tan, expects the park to attract more than one million visitors annually, half of whom will be tourists.

Once local curiosity-seekers are satisfied, tourists are expected to form the bulk of visitors.

VolcanoLand is just one of several theme parks that are sprouting up all over Singapore.

The \$54-million Fantasy Island, boasting 31 water-slides modelled after the water attractions at Disneyland, will open in November, also on Sentosa.

The 71,000-sq m project is

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owned by the Kuwait Real Estate Investment Consortium, Promet chairman Brian Chang and local entrepreneur Solomon Fang.

It will also offer interactive rides from movies such as Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom.

By the end of this year, Sentosa will have about four theme parks, including Underwater World and Asian Village.

On the mainland, Wywy is involved in a virtual reality

theme park at Suntec City that is set to open in 1997.

And three parties have submitted tender bids for a 19-hectare theme park site at Marina South.

These newcomers will be competing with existing theme parks like Haw Par Villa and Tang Dynasty City.

Can they all be viable commercially? Which ones will make it?

Mr Christopher Wong, from leisure industry consultants Horwath Asia-Pacific,

says the critical factor is quality. The attractions have to be unique, not just to Singaporeans but to regional visitors as well, he explained.

"If a Malaysian has similar attractions in Kuala Lumpur, he will probably not want to see the same thing when he comes here."

The Economic Development Board (EDB) says interactive parks that involve visitors' participation, including those targeted at families, stand a higher chance of becoming a success.

"They need not be mega projects and can be located even in suburban areas, nearer population centres," said an EDB spokesman.

Underwater World's executive director, Mr Jerry Tan, emphasised the need to attract tourists because of the small domestic market.

Furthermore, "Singaporeans

are not likely to visit the same place too often", he said.

Fantasy Island, however, is counting on Singaporeans to form 70 per cent of its visitors.

The theme park plans to vary some of its attractions periodically to encourage repeat visits.

The operators of the existing and new attractions on Sentosa — which will see the biggest cluster of theme parks — say the parks will complement each other, rather than compete, creating a critical mass that will enhance the island's attraction as a tourist destination.

"If a tourist has a short time here, he will probably go to the place with the most attractions near each other, and that will be Sentosa," said Mr Fred Loyd, who is general manager of Fantasy Island.