

Making Waves

When you can't surf the real thing, head for a rad pool

BY MIKE GOLDYS

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IT'S 30 DEGREES on a freezing winter morning in New Jersey. Put on all your layers ... then head off to American Dream shopping mall in East Rutherford, to shed your heavy coat and put on your swimsuit. That's right, surf's up no matter the time of year, thanks to the **Skudin Surf at American Dream** indoor wave pool.

Located 5 miles from the heart of New York City, this place will make any surf adventurer's dream a reality. Will Skudin, professional big wave surfer and founder of Skudin Surf, has brought his vision of perfect year-round wave conditions to fruition.

Public wave pools have opened in California, Florida and Texas, with others in operation and under construction in the

U.S. and abroad. I've had the opportunity to ride waves in four domestic pools and two internationally.

What is it about an artificial wave in an enclosed pool that makes this a growing attraction around the world? Kyle Swaneveld, a board shaper for Cygnet Surfboards, has surfed three wave pools in the U.S. and he explains the allure. "The appeal for me is the consistency," he says. "Having a consistent wave to practice the same thing over and over has a skatepark feel ... as opposed to the ocean where you can only work with what you're given."

While ocean surfing is a feeling most riders describe as unmatched, these

pools offer different advantages, such as wave quality (length, power, size), guaranteed wave count and the ability to advance your surfing skills quickly no matter your experience level.

Additionally, wave pools offer a consistent environment free of ocean hazards, such as jellyfish, sharks, rip currents and reefs. For many riders, the best part is they can book a surf session when it's convenient. Forget relying on tides, swells, daylight and optimal weather.

Wave pools were only a concept for many groms (young



Writer Mike Goldys tackles waves at Skudin Surf at American Dream.



surfers) in their formative years. "Growing up in Pennsylvania, I dreamed of surf pools my entire life," says Rob Kelly, professional surfer and operations coordinator for wave pool manufacturer American Wave Machines in California. "Bringing an authentic surfing experience to people who might otherwise never have a chance to get to the beach or are too scared to give it a try in the ocean is something special. I have seen a lot of grumpy >



Surfers head for the pool, left, and Mike Goldys hangs out with niece Mila at Disney's Typhoon Lagoon in Orlando, Fla.



surfers in the ocean, but I've never seen a surfer in a wave pool without a giant smile on their face. Once you try it, you're hooked."

Wave-making history

It's debatable who created the first wave pool. Accounts from the 19th century tell of Ludwig II, King of Bavaria, who built an underground labyrinth with waterways that produced artificial ripples.

If you ask a veteran surfer, they would say the first modern wave pool was Big Surf in Tempe, Ariz., which opened in 1969 and produced small, but surfable waves. For me, the dream of surfing a pool producing consistent artificial waves became a reality in 1989 when **Disney's Typhoon Lagoon Water Park** opened in Orlando, Fla., offering bright blue rideable waves to the general public.

Fast forward to the 2000s and

several wave pools popped up around the world, but not for the sole purpose of surfing. It wasn't until 2015 that Surf Snowdonia (now **Adventure Parc Snowdonia**) opened as the world's first full-size dedicated surf lagoon in the heart of Wales, producing wave rides roughly 12 seconds long. America's first commercial wave pool dedicated to surfing opened in 2016 in Austin, Texas. Cleverly named Nland, it only operated for three years before it went obsolete and superior artificial pools opened around the country.

One of those wave pools, **Waco Surf** (formerly BSR Surf Resort), which opened in Waco, Texas, in 2018, ushered in a new era of artificial wave technology. "Whether you're taking on the PerfectSwell surf for the first time, or you're here to train fast and hard, we have such a variety of people coming to visit us daily," says David Taylor, co-

owner of Waco Surf. "We'll have a group from Hawaii who have flown specifically to see us and practice their backhand turns, to a local family that lives down the road and wants to learn how to surf, all on the same day."

Action attraction

These wave-producing venues are equipped to host customers of any skill level or ability. Wave size and power can be manipulated and appropriate skill-level surfboards are available to rent, as are wetsuits and other gear (boots, gloves, hoods) to keep you warm.

Beyond the waves and equipment, these surfing destinations offer amazing programs. Skudin shares, "Because we are in such a new era of surfing that hasn't been explored much, it has been really exciting testing out all sorts of different programs and events here."

Skudin's wave pool offers

Past the Pool

► Worn out from great wave riding? No problem! Often, the wave pool is part of a larger water park attraction like at **The Wetlands at Waco Surf** in Texas, **American Dream's DreamWorks** in New Jersey and **Disney's Typhoon Lagoon** in Florida.

► "On the Wetlands water park side (at Waco Surf), we have groups traveling from all over the country to launch themselves down the **Wedge water slides** as well as local families looking for a staycation and just relaxing in our **lazy river** that circles the surf lagoon," says co-owner David Taylor. The property is a 500-acre ranch that features a **Perfect-Swell wave pool**, **wakeboard/waterski cable park**, and the water park claims to be home of the longest lazy river in the United States.

► In New Jersey for a surf in the **Skudin Surf at American Dream** wave pool? Take a stroll inside the spacious **DreamWorks water park** and choose from a spin on one of the **Nickelodeon Universe** rides, a putt on the **blacklight mini golf course**, a skate on **The Rink** indoor ice rink, or ski down North America's first and only indoor snow mountain, **Big SNOW**.

► Or perhaps you made your way south for the winter to surf **Walt Disney World's Typhoon Lagoon Water Park**. You could enjoy the **waterslides**, **raft rides**, or **lazy river** surrounding the wave pool during public park hours. Beyond the water park, you are surrounded by several large theme parks in Orlando, Fla., so there's no shortage of entertainment for the whole family.

programs to improve skills, like Performance Coaching Nights, where surfers receive immediate feedback and video analysis during their session. Or you can opt for just plain fun programs like Get Wavy with Gravy, featuring New Jersey's own surfing influencer, Ben Gravy. If riding with a professional surfer is too intimidating, then book Barrels with Bronson and surf with rap artist Action Bronson.

Waves for All

Watch the 1987 surf-themed movie *North Shore* and you will gain some insight to local exclusivity that can be prevalent at renowned wave beaches around the world. But venture to a wave pool, and you'll find inclusion and acceptance thrive within the surf community. Nick Hounsfield, founder of **The Wave** in Bristol, England, says, "Surfing hasn't always been the most accessible sport, but by bringing it inland we hope to bring the joy of surfing to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities."

Dedicated sessions for female surfers, nonprofit clubs and competitions for special needs wave riders, and surf therapies can be found at The Wave and Skudin Surf wave pools.

The Wave even worked with sustainable clothing brand Finisterre to develop the Seasuit, a full-coverage suit with an available hijab designed by and for women to help overcome religious and cultural barriers to surfing, says Hounsfield. The makers say the suit also aims to help with issues linked to body consciousness.

"Surfing is a chance to escape everyday life and reconnect with

nature," Hounsfield says. "We want visitors to leave feeling happy in their mind and body — and feeling alive. We hope that ... camaraderie, unpolluted water, predictable waves, diversity of surfers and the positive vibes mean that everyone walks away feeling revived and rejuvenated."

Sustainable Swells

Environmental impact for any large-scale attraction is always a concern. But the sport of surfing has always been rooted in environmental consciousness. Newer wave pool technology and venues have championed sustainability. "The Wave is always assessing the impact of our decisions on the people around us and the planet we share, whilst being financially sustainable for the long term," Hounsfield says. "We already use 100 percent renewable energy ... (and) we have funding and planning permission to build a solar array, battery storage and solar car charging points that will produce more energy than we use — making us net zero in terms of operational energy."

As new wave pools are being planned, built and commercialized, factors such as renewable energy sources for power, water conservation, sustainability initiatives and environmental learning opportunities are taken seriously. Adventure Parc Snowdonia is filled with pure Welsh rainwater piped in from the reservoirs of Snowdonia National Park.

"No matter which direction the surfers are going, they're going to have a stunning backdrop," says Adventure Parc Snowdonia photographer Glen Williams. ■

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SURF'S UP
Make a splash
at these rad
wave pools

Surfer Mike Goldys
at Waco Surf in Texas

ROB HENSON