

HIGHER EDUCATION

The ultimate dream for the waterslide world: virtual reality

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Save



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Working on the assumption that fun parks aren't scary enough, Queensland's so-called "rollercoaster academic" has added virtual reality to the mix.

Queensland University of Technology student Malcolm Burt has been recruited by German waterslide company Wiegand-Maelzer to consult on its world-first virtual reality waterslide.

Wiegand-Maelzer contacted Mr Hurt after its head engineer watched the documentary Signature Attraction, which the Queenslander created as part of his research masters project on why roller-coasters exist.

He is now embroiled in his PhD, which seeks to define the elements required to deliver the ultimate VR theme park ride.

The research has won him partnerships with amusement park companies including Texas-based Six Flags, which has given him access to data from attractions including VR roller-coasters and a 125-metre VR drop ride.

"What's really exciting about the waterslide, though, is that it is not just about data collection on an existing attraction," he said. "My research is feeding into the development of the ride from the beginning.

"This mix of research and industry consultancy is what I plan to do more, of once I finish my doctorate."

Mr Hurt said that while design elements were "still being ironed out", the waterslide was expected to open in Bavaria later this year.

"(It) is in testing and there is nothing else like it in the world," he said. "It doesn't have a name yet but we are working on ideas that tie in with the story the ride tells.

"Essentially it's a waterslide, but when you ride, you're wearing VR goggles which intensifies many elements of the experience. Using research into VR immersion, and how to trick the brain into believing it is danger, every twist, turn and launch is magnified."

The approach "makes for more of an adrenaline kick", he said. "By adding practical effects to the mix, the ride can also make you feel as though you are doing things like riding a lava flow and dodging volcanic eruptions.

"Volcanoes are very hot right now in the world of theme park rides."

