



Gaining on the swings and roundabouts

Play areas at pubs and restaurants can be a huge draw for families. **Andrew Don** finds out how to operate them safely and effectively

A vast choice of stimulating apparatus is available, from timber ships to forts, but children are unpredictable: they do dangerous things that no sane adult ever would.

Pubs that attract families must be conscious of this and make safety paramount when installing a play area.

Hygiene is key, too, as staff at the Waterfront Inn, in Westward Ho!, Devon – which has Nipperz indoor soft play zone and Beeracuda outdoor play area – know only too well.

John Cooke, operations director, says:

“Kids will jump and play in the ball pit... and don't want to leave when they need to go to the toilet.”

But don't let that put you off! The Association of Play Industries (API) says an increasing number of pubs have been installing play areas during the past 12 to 18 months.

The API says the typical starting spend for a high-quality outdoor play area for a pub tends to be £20,000 to £30,000.

This will buy a high-quality, focal-point piece of multi-play equipment plus ancillary items.

Slides, interactive panels and

springers are typically popular, but the design is dependent on the location, space and position available.

The API says the benefits of quality play areas are:

- Increased footfall
- People staying longer and spending more
- A competitive edge and brand distinction
- Repeat business

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In short, happy children, which means happy, relaxed parents, which in turn equals more spend.

Pub operators should inform their insurance companies about play equipment and it is their responsibility to ensure apparatus is properly maintained, says API chairman John Hoenigmann.

Hoenigmann explains: “Insurers will underwrite each risk on its own merits and features according to the exposures present.”

Cover needs to be arranged to cover possible “material damage” to the equipment and liability exposures in respect of bodily injury or harm to employees, customers and their property, he continues.

A good robust inspection and maintenance regime is crucial.

RPII-specified maintenance regime

- Routine visual inspection – observation of the play space by a trained member of staff looking for obvious hazards. This should take place weekly in low season and daily in high season
- Operational inspection – a more detailed structural examination of wear, tear and

stability of equipment by a trained staff member. This should take place every three months in low season and monthly in high season

- Annual main inspection by a qualified external RPII annual outdoor inspector to ensure compliance with standards

Tapping into toddlers' wishes

The Cotswold Water Park Four Pillars Hotel worked with Sutcliffe Play to introduce new play facilities to its Old Boathouse pub to encourage more trade from passing families.

The Toddlerzone Boat Climber includes many features to give the feeling of being at sea: binoculars, ships steering wheel, megaphone, wave and sail panels. It includes an easy climb-up ramp, which makes it suitable for a wide age range.

Kellie Appleyard, resident manager, says: "It has already had a very positive impact on customers' experience and is working well to increase dwell time and spend on both drink and food, as children are kept entertained, which makes parents happy."



In a spin: play equipment must be inspected regularly

Before opening a new play area, the pub should commission a Post-Installation Inspection undertaken by a registered and certificated annual outdoor inspector from the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII).

"Once this inspection is complete and satisfactory, responsibility for safety passes to the pub operator who must put in place a rigorous inspection regime, as set out in BS EN 1176, the standard for play equipment," Hoenigmann says.

Outdoor play areas are generally unsupervised and many operators choose to install CCTV.

"This can be an added security benefit and can also assist in the

defence of potential claims," Hoenigmann says.

He adds that it is normally the responsibility of parents to supervise children, but staff should be on hand to provide general help and monitor the areas.

£20k

the low-end cost of a high-quality outdoor play area at a pub

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the number of daily visual inspections vital in high season

Playing to win

The Plough Inn, Normanton on the Wolds, Nottingham, had the Origin range from Proludic installed at the end of last September. The cost came to almost £20,000.

Mark Hughes, landlord, says: "We were concerned that our existing play area was well past its best... we wanted to replace it with something high quality in keeping with the standards that we offer our clientele."

With the benefit of his experience, Hughes says that play areas should have a

climbing structure with enough challenge for older children, while allowing younger children to access the steps and a slide. He offers the following advice:

- Spend as much as you can afford because the investment will pay off
- Research your supplier. The most reputable companies will be members of the API
- Don't go for cheap because families have high expectations and will stay longer if the children are happy

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