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I-Drive 360

NEW DEVELOPMENT Orlando is now the wheel deal. The Orlando Eye, a new 400-ft.-tall observation wheel modeled after the London Eye, can be seen towering over International Drive with its capsules spinning starting May 4. A project two years in the making, the attraction is the central focus of a much larger 20-acre, \$200 million retail development.

"We're somewhere between an entertainment complex and a theme park," says John Stine, director of marketing and sales for I-Drive 360, Orlando's newest entertainment district. He adds that planners can make use of its "passive attractions" (he calls them passive because they're not extreme rides, and everyone can enjoy them) like Madame Tussauds, Sea Life Orlando Aquarium, Skeletons: Animals Unveiled and the Eye for events.

Neighboring that fabulous foursome of attractions is a slew of recognizable shopping destinations, as well as restaurants and nightclubs that haven't been previously represented in Orlando. Tin Roof, out of Tennessee, is a casual, live music joint that has a Southern-infused menu with Mexican and Cajun influences mixed in. Cowgirls Rockbar from Seattle has the only mechanical bull in town, a la "Urban Cowboy." Then there's Naru, a Brazilian sushi concept out of Sao Paulo that will be an original—not only to I-Drive 360, but also to the United States.

Group business already on the books for I-Drive 360 includes an event for a local MPI chapter; the 2015 International Pow Wow; an education association conference; and the 60,000-person International Plastics Showcase, NPE 2015. If the unique restaurants and attractions aren't enough to woo planners, I-Drive 360's proximity to the convention center (a four-minute drive) and hotels like Wyndham Orlando Resort International Drive, a 613-room property a block away, ought to do it. —Stephanie Davis Smith

I-DRIVE 360, JW MARRIOTT

Insider Tip

If you have a very large group, Stine advises a buyout of Sugar Factory or Madame Tussauds, booking a dine-around meal option and adding tickets to ride the Eye.