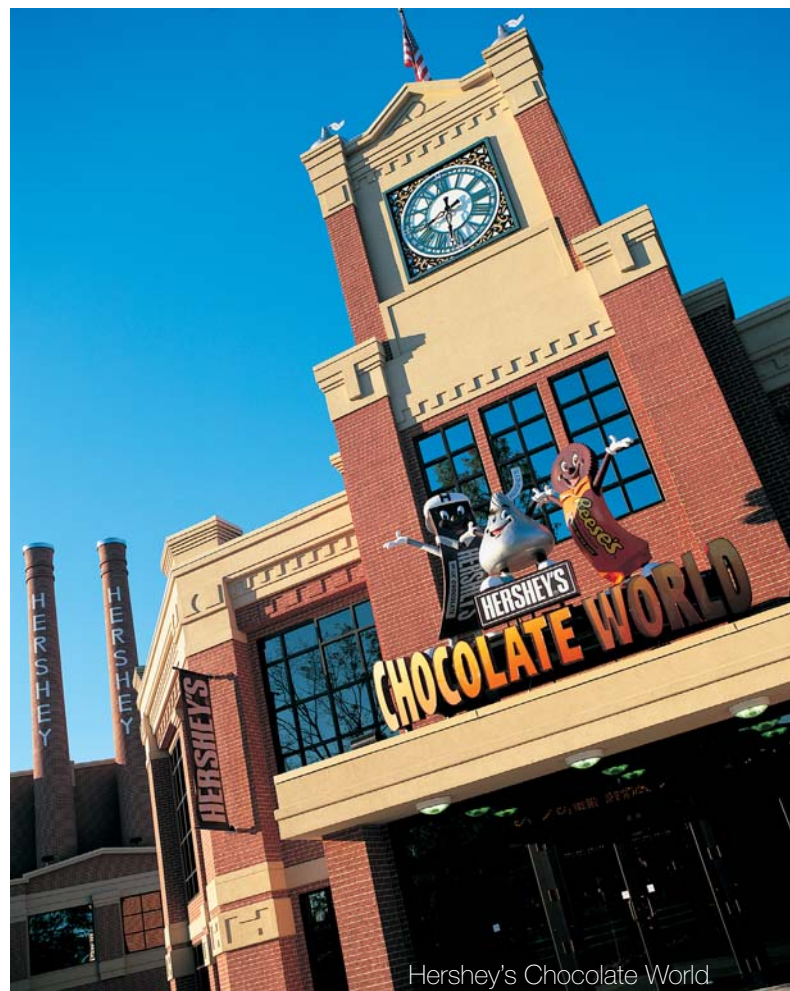


Take a sweet trip to Hershey

Pennsylvania town has something for everyone, including chocolate spa treatments

By Mary Welch



Hershey's Chocolate World



The Spa at the Hotel Hershey



Hershey Park roller coaster

Disneyland may be the happiest place on Earth, but if you need a break from people who are merely smiling and happy, jump on a plane to Harrisburg, Pa., and drive over to Hershey, which touts itself as the “sweetest place” on the planet.

And with Hershey Kisses all over the place – including on street lamps – visitors can have a great time and a sugar fix. A trip to Hershey is similar to one to the land of Mickey Mouse. At the amusement park, you get animated characters greeting guests – except at Hershey it’s a Hershey chocolate bar or a Twizzlers stick or a Reese’s peanut butter cup. There are lots of rides. In fact, there are more than 60 rides and attractions, including 10 thrilling roller coasters, six drenching water rides and more than two dozen kiddie rides.

The area also has a variety of accommodations, everything from budget to one of the country’s most renowned resorts, The Hotel Hershey. Like Orlando, Hershey attracts quite the convention and sales meeting crowd, so there are plenty of facilities to accommodate the business traveler – and plenty to keep the family occupied while mom has a business meeting.

And to top it all off, the hotel boasts a world-class spa whose products incorporate – you guessed it – chocolate.

There is, however, a different feel to Hershey that goes back

to its founding by Milton Hershey, a real version of Willy Wonka. His chocolate factory opened in 1905, and with his success came a deep sense of moral responsibility to his employees. He created a town with affordable homes, an inexpensive public transportation system, great schools and extensive recreational facilities. As part of his desire to provide recreational facilities, he started a park that included amusement rides and a swimming pool. Hersheypark, in fact, just celebrated its 100th anniversary.

The “Candy Man’s” benevolence still permeates the town, especially since Hershey left his fortune to his foundation to continue helping the town. Despite its growth, it still has the sense of a town built on a utopian philosophy that is heartfelt and real.

Before you even enter Hersheypark, you make a stop at Chocolate World, which is a center full of food, shops and entertainment, all devoted to chocolate. A highlight is the free ride in a coca bean-shaped car that gives you a realistic idea of how chocolate is made, complete with smells, close-up video shots of production lines and free samples. The nearby Hershey Museum covers the history of the product.

After learning how chocolate is made, go down the walkway to Hersheypark, which TripAdvisor® rates as the best amusement park outside of Disney World and with good reason. Prices are

cheaper and lines not nearly as long as at the Florida park.

If you are a fan of roller coasters, then this is the park. The park boasts 10 roller coasters, six of which give a ride described as “aggressive.” Take the Lightning Racer, which is the first racing/dueling coaster in the country. The Lightning Racer has a double wooden track with two staggered lifts of approximately 90 feet per lift, 15 drops at speeds exceeding 50 mph and gravitational forces in excess of 3.6g. The two coasters race side by side and then curve to face each other, creating a “duel.” Just as the riders come face-to-face with the opposing train, the track splits. As the trains race toward the finish line, they speed toward a rushing waterfall; the tracks swerve and the riders avoid being drenched, but are misted by the cooling waters.

Another favorite is the Roller Soaker, which is an ultimate aerial water ride, because it also involves the people on the ground. Yes, the Roller Soaker features water curtains, water blasters, and exploding geysers but here’s the really fun part — each rider can at will dump up to four gallons of water on spectators below, and the spectators can direct huge water sprayers toward the riders, offering a drenching interaction for everyone.

Often named one of the most exciting coaster rides in the

country is the Storm Runner, which will launch you from 0 to 72 mph in two seconds flat, 18 stories straight up and then straight down. And that’s just the beginning.

Let’s just say that it might be better to go on the roller coaster rides, then partake of the goods offered throughout the park.

The park offers many low-key adventures as well as a zoo that Milton Hershey started in 1905 when he rescued 12 prairie dogs and a bear cub. Now called ZooAmerica, the 11-acre park can be visited independently or with a ticket to Hersheypark.

Let’s get back to chocolate – as in the spa. The Hotel Hershey opened the Chocolate Spa in 2004. Guests of the hotel or just visitors can just such treatments as the whipped coca bath, the chocolate fondue wrap and the chocolate sugar scrub. The hotel itself, built by Hershey in 1933, is a wonderful resort and has received the AAA four-diamond award for 27 consecutive years as well as the Mobil four-star distinction for more than 16 years. The hotel boasts 230 guest rooms as well as 23,500 square feet of meeting and banquet space with four certified meeting professionals on the staff to assist.

Even if you have a bit of a sugar overload, there is plenty to do in the area, including visiting the nearby Pennsylvania Dutch country and, a little bit farther, the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield. ♀