

# 6 Kalahari Resort, Sandusky, Ohio

by Rin-rin Yu



**Year opened:** 2005  
**No. of waterparks:** 2  
**Square footage:** 157,000  
**Amenities:** Miniature golf, dry-play area, spa, fitness center, arcade, conference center, outdoor aquatic area

Few businesspeople would expect to see an African carving on their conference table during a meeting, but at the Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, the conference center features just that.

“It’s heavily themed in high-end furniture [and] trees. There are no pillars, and it doesn’t have a convention center feel when you walk in,” says Todd Nelson, owner of Kalahari Waterpark Resorts.

This resort is the second location for the Kalahari enterprise, and it benefited from the trial-and-error experience of its sister resort in the Wisconsin Dells. Because its conference center is relatively new, the Sandusky hotel receives approximately 70 percent families. But Nelson expects the guest list will shift to 50 percent families, 50 percent businesspeople as the convention market matures.

Of course, families that stay here are looking for indoor aquatic play. There’s an elegantly themed river that flows through the park, and a line for the surf machine. A limited number of outside visitors are permitted as well. In addition to its waterpark, the resort has a dry-play area and game room, plus miniature golf.

To keep up with his parks’ expansions, Nelson has even started his own company to build slides. This alleviates the wait time from manufacturers, who are so busy filling orders as the waterpark resort industry continues to grow. He also jets back to South Africa to pick up new art deco furniture and sculptures for his resorts, keeping it as authentic as possible.

“They’re labors of love for me,” Nelson says. “Nobody else is doing Africa. It’s a wonderful theme as long as we’re willing to make the commitment to go over there. And we’ll stay on top because of our level of commitment.”