



# Why do you go to a surf park?

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## Abstract

Out-of-ocean surfing is now possible thanks to the advancement of technologies, which include artificial waves and surf parks, all over the continent. This study aimed to see the preference of surfers when they were given options to choose surfing in the ocean or at a surf park. However, the result seems to show that the pros and cons of surf parks seem to be compensated with those of surfing in the ocean. In conclusion, surfers are going to surf at the surf park in order to intensely focus on improving their surfing skills with wave counts and line up being ensured but also going to surf in the ocean to test their skill improvement or to face another level of challenges that nature gives them.

**Keywords:** *Surf parks, theme parks, wave pool, surfing*

## 1. Introduction

Ocean rarely provides what surfers want as they have to keep an eye on the wave chart to check the height of the waves, wind directions, or the forecast for dangerous typhoons(Kim, 2020). However, out-of-ocean surfing is now possible thanks to the advancement of technologies, which include artificial waves and surf parks, all over the continent. How well these technologies have evolved will not be discussed here but will be evaluated by the customers of the surf park. Among the various surf parks of the world, Wave Park in South Korea adapted technology from the Spanish company, Wavegarden, and was launched in 2020 as

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the first wave park in the country. However, unlike many other countries where surf culture is a national tradition, South Korea had to gradually develop a surfing tradition from a small number of surfers among its population. Therefore, the advancement of wave-making machines is much slower to be adapted into the surf culture of Korea compared to naturally surfing in the ocean. In this regard, the primary competitor of Wave Park is not other surf parks with different technologies, but the ocean itself. This article will analyze the surfing behaviors of people living in Korea whether they prefer surfing in the ocean or at Wave Park, which factors attract them to particular places, and the pros and cons of surfing environments at surf parks.

## **2. Method**

We designed a survey that contained questions concerning ocean surfing and wave pool surfing experiences. To examine the surfing behaviors of participants, how often participants went surfing was assessed in each different question whether in the ocean and at Wave Park, how many surfboards they currently own, and how long their time in the water during their average surf session was asked. Then, the strengths and weaknesses of each of the two experiences were assessed consisting of ten options to choose from each question followed by their ideal wave height and anticipated daily time spent on a day surfing in the ocean and at the surf park.

The most appealing aspects of a surf park include: wave quality guarantee, options of wave heights, guaranteed wave count, ability to advance skills quickly, lack of ocean hazards (stingers, sharks, reef), hassle-free surfing, presence of lifeguards, reservation of surfing at a convenient time, water quality, presence of skilled surf coaches, heated water during winter time. Dickerson (2021) stated that the investment in wave-making technologies would return quality, flexibility and number of waves per hour, which are the keys to successfully surfing at a wave pool. Therefore, the wave quality, wave heights, and wave

count that correspond to his idea are somewhat proven benefits of a surf park. On the other hand, the most appealing aspects of ocean surfing were: environmentally friendly, the ability to advance skills quickly, less cost, unpredictability of waves, enjoyment of surf trip, beach cleaning after surfing, options of surf shops, learning surfing lineup etiquette, bringing pets to the beach, and surfing anytime without restriction of sessions.

The most unappealing aspects of the two experiences were also recorded as well. For the surf park experience, unnatural sounds from wave generating machines, cement walls and floor, cost, always having the same waves and line up, no options of surf shops, no duck-diving, location, limited opening hours from 9 am to 6 to 7 pm, prohibition on pets, wetsuit damage from chlorinated pool water and the presence of spectators(Figure 1).



Figure 1. Wavegarden in San Sebastian, Spain (Estrada, 2019)

For ocean surfing, they are the lack of a guarantee of wave quality, no options for wave heights, no guaranteed wave count, presence of ocean hazards, restricted leisure zone during summer, hassling, absence of lifeguards, water pollution, variance of surf coaches, and water temperature changes. In other words, the weakness of the two experiences directly corresponds to the strengths of the alternate experience.

An Instagram invitation to complete an electronic form of the survey was sent to the followers of the coaches at Wave Park for two days on July 23 and 24, 2022(Figure 2).

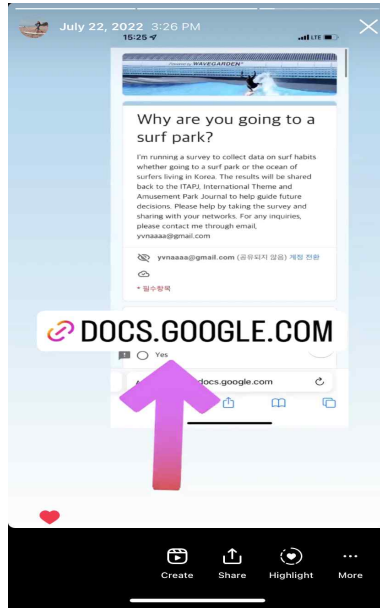


Figure 2. Instagram invitation for the survey (Kim, 2022)

A total of 95 surfers responded by the collection date on July 25 and three of them never experienced surfing at a surf park, and were, therefore, excluded from the analyses.

### 3. Result

56 males and 36 females responded to the survey. 48.9% of them were in their 30s and 33.3% of them were in 20s followed by people in 40s(Table 1.). 44.4% of them are living in Gyeonggi or Incheon where Wave Park is located. 28.9% of them live in Seoul, the capital, while 12.2% of them are living in Busan, Ulsan, and Gyeongnam, the southern region of the country, and

in the farthest distance from Wave Park except for Jeju Island. For the level of surfing, the participants responded by the years they started surfing. 31.1% of them have less than a year, 22.2% more than a year and less than two years, and 14.4% more than two years and less than three years. 12.2 % of them answered they have more than 6 years of surfing experience meaning they are expected to be at an expert level. Parallel to their level of surfing, the number of surfboards they own shows a similar ratio: 30% of them do not own any surfboards, 26.7% own one surfboard, and 23.3% have two surfboards. 10% own three surfboards, 6.7% own more than five surfboards, and lastly, 3.3% own four surfboards.

Table 1. Survey participants(N=92)

Category	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	56	60
Female	36	40
<b>Age</b>		
11-19	4	4.3
20-29	30	32.6
30-39	46	50
40-49	10	10.8
50-59	2	2.1

When comparing the surfing experience in the ocean to that of the surf park, the participants were given questions such as average days of surfing in a month, average hours of surfing at a time, benefits and disadvantages, preferred wave height, and average daily spending for surfing.

41.3% of the participants go surfing one to five times a month during the summer season and 29.3% of them six to ten times. However, if they specified the numbers of surfing either in the ocean or at the surf park, the results showed a similar result with 52.2% go surfing one to five times a month in the ocean and 55.4% go surfing one to five times a month at the surf park. While the average hours of surfing at each visit were

slightly longer when surfing in the ocean. 34.8% of them would surf for two to three hours, while 46.7% of them would surf for a maximum of two hours at the surf park. Since they all have visited Wave Park whether they are loyal customers or one-time goers or not, they are assumed to be able to compare and distinguish the differences between ocean surfing and surf park surfing.

## 결과 표 넣기

### 4. Discussion

Pros and cons of surf parks are very obvious but the result proves and clarifies them.

#### 4.1 Pros of surf parks

Finally, the top three most appealing factors of the surf park were the wave quality guarantee by taking 40.2% followed by the number of waves, improving surfing levels. On the other hand, the most unappealing factors of surfing at the surf park were obviously the cost taking 70.7% of the answers. According to the answers that summarized the experiences of the participants, three factors were identified as the pros of surf parks.

- 1) Finely programmed and guaranteed number of waves
- 2) Unlimited practices to make perfect
- 3) No drop in waves

The most appealing benefit of the surf park is the finely programmed waves that break at different heights and speeds and the guaranteed number of waves in each session and each set of waves. So, the wave making machines using technology such as Wavegarden, achieved their goals to satisfy the surfing community. And, these perfect waves create the perfect grounds for practicing to improve surfing ability, which ranked third in the same question.

Wave Park smartly leveraged the pros of the wave pool and launched its inaugural edition of the Wave Park Surf League, WPSL, in 2022. The league lasted the entire summer, and surfers got to compete for seven rounds which took two months because each round was held only during weekends, while shortboards, longboards, and beginner sessions took turns occupying the Cove. The league allowed surfers to hone their skills throughout the summer as they approached the final rounds with competitive practices.

Lastly, the third benefit is linked to the first one which is no dropping in waves meaning the 'one wave and one surfer' rule is strictly enforced. The wave pool allows only one surfer in the lineup. The rest of the surfers are lined up along the wall of the machine and surfers who finish their riding do not cross the middle of the cove to line up again but turn a detour along the periphery of the cove and line up. However, the lineup in the ocean is quite busy and bumpy with surfers, and the local surfers who read the waves much better than new surfers will take the lead to get on the waves. So, the wave pool made it fair and clear to the fundamental rule of lineup.

## **4.2 Cons of surf parks**

The cons of surf parks could be easily guessed when compared with the pros of surfing in the ocean. These cons seem to outweigh the pros of surfing at surf parks and are likely to bring surfers to the ocean instead of surf parks.

- 1) Cost
- 2) Anti-nature machine environment
- 3) Predictable waves

When the Urbnsurf in Melbourne opened, surfers estimated that each artificial wave costs \$5. That's the calculation which came from a one-hour session costs around \$50 and surfers get to catch an average of 10 waves in one session. This one wave costs turbulent depending on weekdays and weekends when



people are crowded and also the level of surfers who would be put in the same session. If one of the surfers failed to catch his or her wave but is still stuck in the lineup, the next waves are wasted. And, intermediate or advanced surfers are not satisfied with just an average of 10 waves in a day, so they will book two to three sessions. 44 out of 92 people answered they book two sessions which account for 47%. Regarding the cost, it would be a mistake to compare it with the costs of surfing in the ocean but this should be compared to theme parks or other sports activities such as skiing or snowboarding. Because surfing in the wave pool is now categorized as a theme park or sports park. The ocean is not an alternative to wave pool surfing but it coexists harmony to one another.

Surfers enjoy endless and finely breaking waves in crystal clear wave pools but the sound of wave-generating machines is quite unpleasant. The gentle breeze, relaxing scent of the ocean, and wave-breaking sounds are all replaced by the regular machine sound s generated from a wave machine. Waves are slowly rising and coming near to the lineup but it seems the machine seems to chase surfers pushing them to nosediving.

The last unpleasant factor of the wave pool was selected predictable waves meaning surfers start to get bored with the same waves. It helps you practice but surfers will get used to the same artificial waves which not found in the ocean where every wave breaks in different ways.

Surfers seem to be torn between the pros and cons of the surf park but it doesn't mean the cons are bringing surfers to the ocean.

## **5. Conclusion**

Prior to the survey, it was expected that the rise in surf parks would create an equal rate of decline in time spent surfing in the ocean. As such, this study aimed to see the preference of surfers when they were given options to choose surfing in the ocean or at a surf park. However, the result seems to show that the pros and cons of surf parks seem to be compensated with

those of surfing in the ocean. In conclusion, surfers are going to surf at the surf park in order to intensely focus on improving their surfing skills with wave counts and line up being ensured but also going to surf in the ocean to test their skill improvement or to face another level of challenges that nature gives them. So, it is not the case that surfers are packed at surf parks and result in the ocean being empty. But, people are choosing to surf in the ocean and at surf parks depending on their convenience and preference. Instead of the ocean, perhaps it is ski resorts, theme parks, and tennis courts that should be worried about losing their customers to surf.

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