

TRAVEL WEEKLY

BY NORTHSTAR

HOTELS

Man-made lagoons bring the beach experience to just about anywhere

By Christina Jelski | Oct 18, 2025

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Guests in kayaks at the Evermore Orlando Resort. Photo Credit: Evermore Orlando Resort

Orlando has everything from theme parks and world-class dining to live entertainment and luxury hotels. One thing it doesn't have is a beach.

So the **Evermore Orlando Resort**, a vacation rental and hotel complex that opened near Walt Disney World last year, decided to build one. Developed by Dart Interests, the 1,100-acre resort is centered around an 8-acre artificial lagoon known as Evermore Bay.

Featuring turquoise water and 20 acres of sandy beach, Evermore Bay is convincing enough that some guests choose the Evermore over actual beach destinations, said Dart Interests president Chris Kelsey.

"The Evermore Bay experience is a pretty darn good facsimile of what it's like at a Caribbean beach," Kelsey said. "And some people seem to [prefer] it because it doesn't have anything dangerous or dirty, or waves."

And beyond standard beach amenities like cabanas and kayaks, Evermore Bay has hot tub boats, a 12-foot-deep swimming hole with a rope swing and floating pickleball courts.

Kelsey said that Dart Interests invested roughly \$2.5 million per acre in its lagoon. So far, the return on investment appears to justify the outlay. Kelsey credits Evermore Bay with helping drive rate across the property's rentals and 433-room Conrad Orlando hotel: A search for early November rates showed the latter was commanding higher prices than the nearby Waldorf Astoria Orlando.

Additionally, Kelsey said, the resort's top-tier cabanas with overwater hammocks, which start at \$650 per reservation, often go for more than the cost of its accommodations.



The Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark in Oklahoma City has a man-made lagoon with a sand beach. Photo Credit: Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark

Crystal Lagoons a market leader

Evermore Bay was developed in partnership with Crystal Lagoons, a company founded by Chilean biochemist Fernando Fischmann, who began developing his patented lagoon technology as part of a real estate project more than 20 years ago.

He launched **Crystal Lagoons** in 2008, and the business has since expanded to over 80 operational projects globally.

His son, Benjamin Fischmann, the company's U.S. regional director, said Crystal uses 2% of the energy of traditional swimming pools for water treatment and about 100 times fewer chemicals.

While Crystal keeps the specifics of its technology under wraps, the concept's core advantage is efficiency at scale, Benjamin Fischmann said, with the lagoons filled once and operated in closed circuits.

"Once you fill it up, we reutilize the water year-round," he added, saying each lagoon uses precisely dosed chemicals applied "at strategic points in algae development and cycles throughout the day."

Among Crystal's latest hospitality projects is a 2-acre lagoon under development at the **Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Villas** near San Antonio, Texas. The lagoon is part of a major renovation.

"Water was top of mind," said King Scovell, managing partner at Woodbine Development Corp., the resort's owner and developer. "We knew we couldn't move the resort to water, but with the lagoon, we could bring water frontage to the resort."



A lagoon is under development at the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Villas near San Antonio. Photo Credit: Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort

A similar philosophy prompted the **Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark** in Oklahoma City to debut a 4.5-acre lagoon. The 404-room property, which opened in February as part of a \$450 million development by the Chickasaw Nation, partnered with waterpark specialist Aquatic Development Group to develop a lagoon that features a real sand beach to match the Gulf Coast.

Brian Szydoski, Okana's waterpark general manager, said the feature is a breakout amenity for guests looking to build sand castles and lounge in beach chairs -- just as they would at an actual beach. "It's the closest you're going to get to a pristine beach experience without having to load up the minivan to drive down to one of our coasts," he said.

Fun for families

Landlocked destinations are not the only ones embracing artificial lagoons. Although Carnival Cruise Line's **Celebration Key private island** offers plenty of natural Grand Bahama beachfront, the \$600 million development has two lagoons -- the adults-only Calypso Lagoon and family-friendly Starfish Lagoon -- that together span close to 7 acres.

The cruise line partnered with Martin Aquatic to deploy the firm's **Blue Mar Basins** system, creating what Keith Carr, a global development executive for Carnival Corp., described as "a smart pool on a very large scale." The Blue Mar Basins technology uses sensors to monitor and treat water in real time, isolating specific areas for chemical dosing, Carr said.

(Crystal Lagoons sued Martin Aquatic in federal court in 2023 for an alleged trade-secret theft related to Blue Mar Basins. The case remains active.)

The system even anticipates demand based on ship schedules.



Carnival Cruise Line's Celebration Key on Grand Bahama. Photo Credit: Carnival Corp.

"If we know what ships are coming to Celebration Key, we know the bather load that is supposed to be expected, and we can program the system to be ready," Carr said. "And from an operational standpoint, if the seas get rough, guests then have the opportunity to come off the ocean and into our lagoon."

For families with young children, the lagoons often become a primary draw.

"I've got a 15-month-old and 3-and-a-half-year-old," said Carr, who visited Celebration Key with his family shortly after the destination's debut. "They absolutely loved it. We spent the whole time in the lagoon."