

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

The Newest Must-have Resort Amenity Is Redefining the Beach Vacation Experience—and It's Not Ocean Access

Hotels and cruise lines alike are embracing engineered turquoise lagoons for families and travelers.



Colorful day beds sit along the lagoon and beach at OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark.
Credit: OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark

Last year, just months after [Okana Resort & Indoor Waterpark](#) opened in Oklahoma City, waterpark general manager Brian Szydloski fielded an unexpected request: could a couple hold their wedding on the sand of the resort's artificial lagoon?

"The groom uses a wheelchair and traveling to the beach wasn't possible," Szydloski told *Travel + Leisure*. But the couple still wanted the feel of a seaside celebration. They opted for the next best thing: Okana's 4.5-acre lagoon, designed by Aquatic Development Group to resemble the Gulf and edged with 90 truckloads of imported white sand—a coastal-inspired destination wedding set hundreds of miles from the sea.

That moment hints at a wider shift underway in the resort industry. Resorts around the world are building vast, engineered lagoons designed to deliver the pleasures of a beach vacation without requiring an actual ocean.

For families, the appeal is obvious.

Unlike the ocean, lagoons offer calm, controlled water free of rip currents, shifting tides, and jellyfish warnings. Younger children can splash along shallow sandy edges while older kids swim or paddle nearby. Grandparents can ease into the water rather than bracing against breaking waves. Add in cabana service and a hotel room just steps away, and the result is a prime beach experience — only smoother, safer, and far easier to manage for a multigenerational crew. In addition, many lagoons, including Okana's, are designed with zero-entry (walk-in) shores instead of steps or ladders, an approach that allows resorts to offer a more accessible, inclusive water experience for all guests, Szydloski says.



The lagoon and hotel exterior at OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark.
Credit: OKANA Resort & Indoor Waterpark