



(Left) SesamoAventura is a Sesame street-themed zone for families; (above) Furyus Baco, one of the park's rollercoasters

► **EUROPEAN FOCUS**

The four hotels play a significant role in the plans to establish PortAventura as a genuine challenger to the likes of Disneyland Paris and Europa Park. While the launch of Shambhala will no doubt appeal to groups of hard core coaster enthusiasts and a younger generation looking for a white-knuckle adrenaline rush, Feder still sees parents and their children as the park's main target group – and that often means overnight stays.

“First and foremost we're a family park, proved by the fact that more than 70 per cent of our visitors are families,” Feder says. One of the first investments made using the €80m provided by the new owners was to bolster the family offer. “In 2011 we introduced an entirely new area in the park purely for families – SesamoAventura. The €15m (£12m, \$18.5m), 13,000sq m Sesame street-

themed zone features 11 attractions with the focal point being a 12m-high magic tree. As a result, we saw attendance increase by 500,000 to 3.7 million visitors, which was the park's best year ever.”

The success of SesamoAventura and the record crowds vindicated the investment made in the park. It also helped ensure that future investment plans would go ahead as planned. While Shambhala breaks speed records, Feder and his team came close to breaking spending ones. “In total, €30m (£23.7m, \$37m) was invested in 2012 – the most the park has spent in one single year for a decade,” he says.

“We spent €25m (£19.7m, \$40m) on Shambhala and also created a caravan park (€0.6m, £0.5m, \$0.7m), the driving school (€0.5m, £0.4m, \$0.6m) and redesigned 500 rooms at Hotel PortAventura (€2.5m, £2m, \$3m). Then there were the new catering and shop

fittings and updating 80 per cent of our live shows. Our strategy is very simple: we want something brand new for every year.”

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The future of the park has no doubt been secured by the arrival of Investindustrial. In the short term, Feder has his eyes on attracting four million visitors a year. The park might even achieve that during 2012, as the launch of Shambhala was supported by a massive marketing campaign in Spain and generated great media interest around Europe. Feder isn't, however, planning to add another landmark ride just yet.

“We have no desire to beat Shambhala with another ride. Shambhala is unique,” Feder says. “Our plan is to continue to develop what the park has to offer, to give visitors a reason to keep coming back, and focus on new attractions that will serve as a benchmark for the rest of Europe.

“The key to our success is that the park has become an all-round leisure and holiday destination to suit everyone, particularly families, with a clear focus on customer service and quality. At a branding level, the main aim of PortAventura will always be to offer a range of experiences, which are reflected in the diversity of the park and its six zones.”

As I leave the offices and enter the warm Catalan evening sun, I cast my eye at the imposing silhouette of Shambhala, towering above everything else at the park. The prospect of riding it the following day thrills me. But not as much as Feder will be thrilled if it helps him reach his goal for PortAventura – to tower above other European parks, as a destination for all. ●

**ABOUT SHAMBHALA**

Feder describes the challenges: “The location of the ride was a considerable challenge. We wanted it to cross Dragon Khan, the park's other steel roller coaster, to create a new skyline and emotions different to those of other hypercoasters.

“The job of intertwining the two structures has been almost like a surgical operation, starting with the foundations, some of which are up to 18m (59ft) deep. Then it was necessary to execute an incredible logistics operation to posi-

tion all the columns, as they had to be integrated with the structure of the other, existing rollercoaster.”

- Ride manufacturer: Bolliger & Mabillard
- Build engineer: PGI-Boma
- Theming: Claudio Mazzoli
- Height: 76m (249ft)
- Track length: 1,650m (5,410ft)
- Top speed: 134kmh (83mph)
- Capacity: 3 trains, with 32 seats each
- Approximately 1,680 riders per hour