

World's best roller coasters according to Brisbane's 'roller coaster academic'

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QUT "roller coaster academic" Malcolm Burt enjoying his research. Photo: Supplied

Malcolm Burt has every kid's dream job. The self-styled roller coaster academic has spent the last three years travelling the world's best theme parks to study thrills rides.

His goal was to answer a question few had previously thought to ask; why do roller coasters exist?

Mr Burt talked to more than 100 sociologists, psychologists, futurists, theme park managers and coaster nuts in Australia, and countries throughout Asia and the US.

The 42-year-old who'd loved theme parks since childhood also managed to make time to ride "several hundred" roller coasters, despite being afraid of heights.

"I'm terrified of heights, which makes it me sort of crazy person to drive this research," he said.

"But I can hardly put myself out there as knowledgeable about it in some way if I can't get on these damn rides."

The simple answer, he found, was modern humans needed the thrill hit they provided and theme park owners made bucket loads of money from them.

"The world has changed enormously since the industrial revolution and we haven't... we're still the same twitchy cavemen that we always were but now we live in a lazy, consumerist society," the Queensland University of Technology masters student said.

"I know that sounds nasty but when you think about it, we pay go to the gym. We pay to simulate manual labour because we don't have that any more."

The professional video producer's research, yet to be externally assessed and published, identified a strong psychological need to experience so-called thrills otherwise missing in modern life.

He wrote a thesis and produced a half-hour video, available to watch below, to present his findings.

The Ipswich man said it was no surprise people were choosing the safe, accessible and relatively cheap option of a coaster ride over a much more difficult challenge such as climbing Mount Everest.

"When you get off a really scary ride, the really big ones, the monster ones, the biological response engendered by your body is very comparable," he said.

Dave Cobb, creative development vice president at Californian theme park and resort developer Thinkwell Group sums it up succinctly in *Signature Attraction*, Mr Burt's documentary accompanying his masters thesis.

"Fear minus death equals thrills," he says.

Mr Burt has already begun work on his PhD, where he aims to study the future of theme parks, with the help of an Australian Postgraduate Awards scholarship.



Roller coaster academic Malcolm Burt's top five roller coasters

1. [Top Thrill Dragster](#) - Cedar Point, Ohio, USA



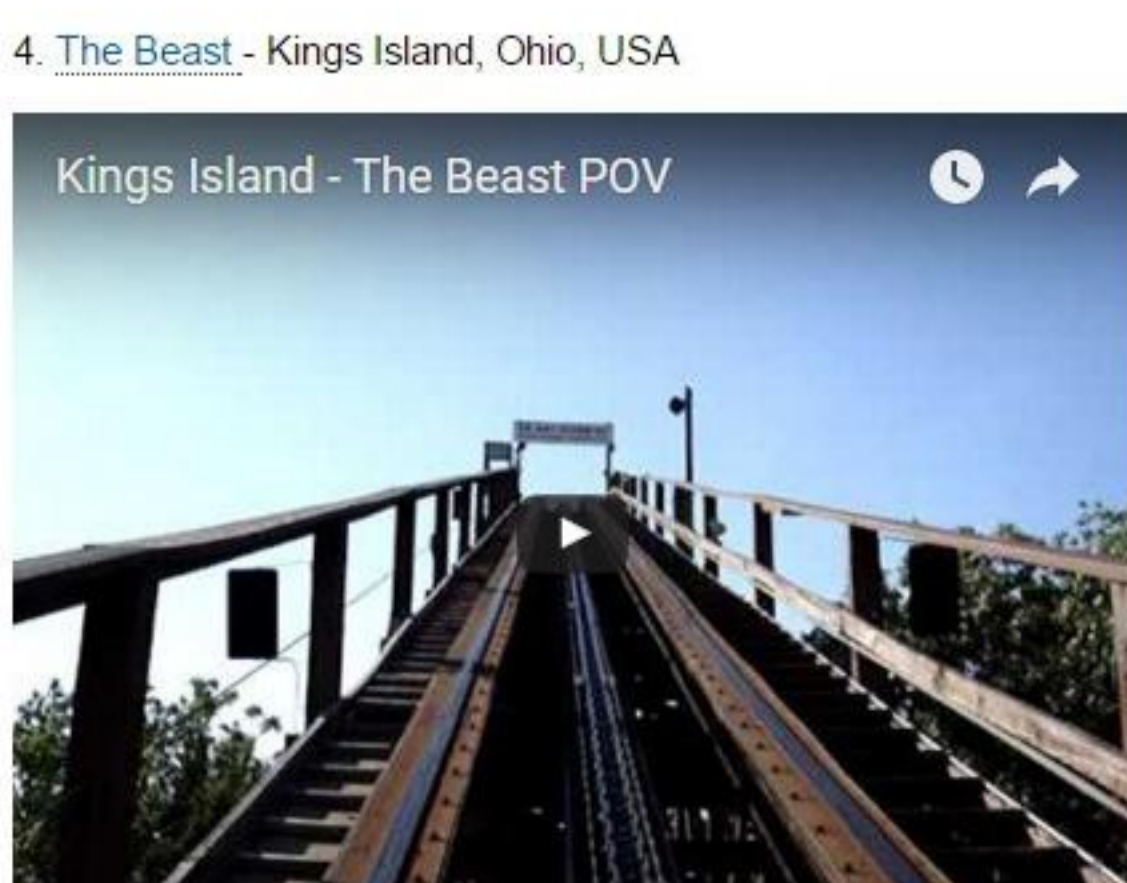
2. [Maverick](#) - Cedar Point, Ohio, USA



3. [El Toro](#) - Six Flags Great Adventure, New Jersey, USA



4. [The Beast](#) - Kings Island, Ohio, USA



5. [Takabisha](#) - Fuji-Q Highlan, Fujiyoshida, Japan



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