

# Steampunk Rhode Island: We Are Not Amused



Fresh off the successful and widely acclaimed introduction of a new logo and slogan, “Size Doesn’t Matter,” the state tourism agency announced plans to convert Rhode Island into a theme park.

“Once we discovered that the Rhode Island economy was so far in the tank that we couldn’t afford electricity, we decided to make the best of it and embrace a Steampunk motif,” Governor Gina Raimondo said in announcing the development. “We’ll be creating a unique public-private partnership, XXXVIII Studios, to reimagine the Victorian Era into the modern world in ways that make absolutely no rational sense, which is what Steampunk is all about.”

She added, “It will be bigger than Disneyworld, and I mean that literally. After all, they’ve only got 43 square miles.”

Public transit will be shifted away from diesel-powered, exhaust-spewing buses to coal-fired streetcars, according to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, creating jobs as each carriage will require a fireman in addition to a driver. “Streetcar service has been on our drawing boards for years,” an agency spokesman said, “and we are thrilled to make riding RIPTA a featured part of the tourist experience.”

Much of the economic boost is expected from a perpetual state of construction, but, once the streetcar tracks are laid, a spokesman from the Department of Transportation projected substantial savings because it will no longer be necessary to conduct road maintenance or fill potholes.

The state is already well served by interstate rail lines, but visitors looking for more upscale travel accommodations will have the opportunity from a convenient, centrally located mooring at the 428-foot “Superman Building” on Kennedy Plaza to make use of connections to Boston and New York City via twice-daily Fung Wah luxury dirigible flights.

The iconic Waterfire art installation that already draws thousands of visitors into Downcity Providence to walk along the river will modernize to coal instead of wood. According to creator Barnaby Evans, dense black smoke will cause attendees to choke and cover them with soot, evoking the city in its

Gilded Age glory. “We’re trying to get the necessary permits to dump raw sewage into Waterplace Park for 19<sup>th</sup> Century verisimilitude,” Evans said.

Hasbro Children’s Hospital was reported to be excited to be part of the project and is already raising money to open new units for diphtheria and whooping cough patients. “This expansion was already on our radar with the rise of the anti-vaccination movement,” a spokesman said. “We couldn’t really envision a better integration with public policy to treat conditions that should have been wiped out almost a century ago, and we’re exploring the untapped revenue potential of charging admission for public displays of malnourished, crippled children” — possibly in a collaborative endeavor with the Providence Children’s Museum, who said they had not previously considered exhibiting actual children.

Arts organizations are trying to play their respective strengths. The Steel Yard and Big Nazo are reported to be jointly working out the technical difficulties making a series of giant iron puppets. AS220 is considering encouraging acoustic music performances. RISD has been asked to prepare the official guidebooks, although they still have not come to terms as the designers want to use the Papyrus font for a more distinguished look and the tourism agency prefers the Comic Sans font for a more fun and playful look.

Federal Hill, believed to harbor the most dense collection of restauranteurs in the world, plans to offer Victorian culinary delights ranging from quick service take-away gruel all the way up to lavish five-star gruel. Dunkin Donuts expects to offer drive-through gruel. Competitor Starbucks is rumored to have a parallel brand in the early stages, with a menu undisclosed at this time, under the name “Queequegs.”

Several of the state’s trade labor unions expressed concerns about the effects of a return to Victorian standards, but were reassured by the governor that there would be a relatively generous minimum wage of \$5 per day and their membership would be expanded by lowering the minimum age for full-time employment to six years old. Besides, she told them, someone needs to mine the coal.

Although the governor said she still wants to take a “wait and see approach” to legalizing recreational use of marijuana, she conceded that it would be difficult to attract Victorian-oriented tourists without at least tolerating cocaine, opium and laudanum.

Neighboring states have tried similar theme parks with varying results, including the world-renowned Connecticut “Gambling Land” and the somewhat less successful Massachusetts “Traffic Jam Land.”

Admission fees for the theme park will be collected by a network of cameras mounted on toll gantries, recording the car registration plates of each visitor as they move around the state. The system was already planned to prevent residents from leaving Rhode Island without first obtaining an exit visa, but can easily be expanded beyond its original purposes.

The governor concluded, “This state needs nothing less than a Cultural Revolution.”