Walt Disney World News

Fun with Fossils! Rides, Slides and Cretaceous Creatures Highlight DinoLand U.S.A.

LAKE BUENA VISTA, FLA. — It's a land where prehistoric beasts stalk primeval forests, great fossils are unearthed and guests venture back in time to discover living, breathing survivors of a magnificent era some 65 million years ago.

It's a kaleidoscope of dino-kitsch with whimsical rides and a midway teeming with Cretaceous craziness.

It's a place where bone-searching professors and grad students inhabit wooden cabins, rec halls and Quonset huts, over time forming a quaint and playful, albeit slightly peculiar, celebration of America's fascination with dinosaurs.

DinoLand U.S.A. at Disney's Animal Kingdom is your deluxe prehistoric playpen.

After a short crossing from Discovery Island, the park's main hub, guests enter DinoLand U.S.A. beneath a 50-foot-tall brachiosaurus straddling its entrance.

It's a land with a past that dates to 1947 and the discovery of dinosaur bones by an amateur fossil-hunter. Realizing the importance of the find, the bone-hunter contacted some scientist friends who banded together to purchase the site, which included an old fishing lodge.

For over 50 years, the story goes, the fossil-rich site has been inhabited by scientists, volunteers and grad students who have left a paper trail around the site of notes, theories, questions and answers about the lives of the vanished creatures. With a palpable sense of humor and rebelliousness, the site is open to the public as a "fossil discovery park" under the ownership of The Dino Institute.

The paper trail of paleontologists' notes, sketches and findings leads deeper into DinoLand U.S.A. and The Dino Institute, to those long-lost giants of 65 million years ago in the park's high-speed, heart-pounding adventure, DINOSAUR.

Guests board time-traveling vehicles that tilt, turn, bump and careen through a dark prehistoric forest brimming with extraordinary lifelike dinosaurs as a fiery asteroid powerful enough to wipe out life on Earth speeds closer and closer.

Dinosaurs of the cartoon variety inhabit the area's mini-land, Chester & Hester's Dino-Rama! The story goes that, to make a fast buck, these two entrepreneurs decided to turn their gas station into a fossil souvenir business — Chester & Hester's Dinosaur Treasures — an "Emporium of Extinction" and delightfully gaudy roadside stand complete with rubber dinosaurs and plastic knickknacks. A recent expansion takes guests on a time-warp adventure aboard Primeval Whirl, a crazy coaster with free-spinning cars and colorfully corny dinosaurs that zips along a twisting track of tight turns and short drops. TriceraTop Spin treats riders to a whimsical whirl aboard triceratops vehicles that rise and tilt as they spin around a giant top. On the Fossil Fun Games midway, time travelers can try their luck at Whac-A-Packycephalosaur, a prehistoric spin on the familiar critter-whacking game; Dino-Whamma!, a mallet strength game; Fossil Fueler, a water-squirt game; and other classic dino-diversions.

Digging into the past is something done quite literally at The Boneyard playground. Presented as the original dig site, this rambling open-air space, rich with replica bones, fossils and reconstructed skeletons, is the place to excavate fossilized findings and slip, slither, slide and crawl through a discovery-oriented play-maze of skeletal remains of Tyrannosaurus rex, triceratops and other giants of the dinosaur age.

Cretaceous Trail offers a pleasant stroll past cycads and other plant survivors of the prehistoric world.

Restaurantosaurus, the dig site's former old lodge, is plastered in class notes and tacky collectibles and transformed into a fun dining spot presented by McDonald's where dinosaur-size appetites are satisfied with sandwiches, salads, soft drinks and such.

DinoLand U.S.A. is presented by McDonald's.

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