

THINGS TO DO

Dinosaurs descend on Mission Valley with opening of massive ‘Jurassic World’ exhibition



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A animatronic Brachiosaurus moves around in its enclosure in the Jurassic World: The Exhibition, now in residence in San Diego at the Westfield Mission Valley shopping center. (Courtesy of Universal Studios and Amblin Entertainment Inc.)

The long-term, 20,000-square-foot exhibition features large animatronic adult dinos, human-powered adolescent dinos and hand-held puppet baby dinos

BY PAM KRAGEN

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Thanks to movies like “Jurassic Park,” the idea of dinosaurs existing today has been a popular, but improbable, fantasy for paleontology fans. But a massive new exhibition that opened Friday in its West Coast premiere in San Diego offers visitors the best chance they’ll ever get of seeing, hearing and even touching “live” dinosaurs up close.

“Jurassic World: The Exhibition” re-creates the look, feel, sound and scaly characters of the fictional Jurassic Park, the live-dino theme park on mysterious Isla Nublar in the 1993 Universal Pictures film “Jurassic Park,” and the 1990 Michael Crichton book that inspired it. The immersive, tented walk-through exhibit in the Westfield Mission Valley mall parking lot is in town through April 16.

Rather than just a mix of movie props and stationary dinosaur robots, “Jurassic World” puts ticket-buyers inside the theme park itself, where actors playing park docents and animal handlers encourage visitors to touch a baby Stygimoloch, feel the gooey consistency of dinosaur poop and watch a training session with Blue, the slightly less dangerous Velociraptor featured in the most recent films in Universal Pictures’ “Jurassic World” franchise.



Dinosaur handler Adam Daniel holds Bumpy, a baby Ankylosaurus in Jurassic World: The Exhibition, which opened Oct. 21 in San Diego. (Pam Kragen/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Visitors can also explore a nursery where they'll see dino eggs and young hatchlings; meet Bumpy, the baby Ankylosaurus featured in Netflix's animated "Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous" series; and watch a feeding demonstration with an Indominus Rex, a genetically modified dinosaur in the Jurassic World: Evolution video game series. The 16 dinosaurs in the exhibit range from elaborate hand puppets to a fast-moving human-size raptor with an adult puppeteer inside, and gigantic animatronic beasts that not only have fully functioning eyelids, mouths and necks, but also move around rooms and produce the foghorn-like roars heard in the films.

But — as in all "Jurassic World" stories — humans' selfish desire to re-create often-lethal extinct creatures can have consequences. The exhibition's grand finale involves a truly gigantic robotic Tyrannosaurus Rex that gets loose from its enclosure and mayhem ensues.

Over the past five years, experiential exhibitions have become a worldwide sensation. In San Diego, last year's immersive "Beyond Van Gogh" projection-mapped exhibit at the Del Mar Fairgrounds was so popular it was extended by an extra month. And in Anaheim, Disney spent an estimated \$225 million building its most ambitious experience attraction Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance at Disneyland.

"Jurassic World: The Exhibition" launched in 2016 in Melbourne, Australia, and has toured internationally in the years since. There are now three touring companies including one now operating in London and another in Japan. The San Diego visit is the third stop on a four-city American tour.



A massive and mobile animatronic Tyrannosaurus Rex gets loose in Jurassic World: The Exhibition, which opened Oct. 21 in San Diego. (Pam Kragen/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Ellie Armitage, who bills herself as the exhibition’s lead dinosaur ranger, said it’s hard to gauge which experience is the most popular with guests. Although the T-Rex finale is a hit, Armitage said most visitors are “astonished” when they disembark from the “water ferry” that motors them to Isla Nublar and they encounter a towering 12,500-pound animatronic Brachiosaurus at the park’s entrance.

“The most awesome moment for many people is when they come off the boat, the music is playing and they come through the gates and enter the land of giants. It’s a big wow moment,” Armitage said.

While Armitage said the staff undergoes “scared child protocol” training for toddlers who can’t separate fact from fiction, the exhibit is designed for all ages, with particular appeal for children ages 8 to 10. Beyond the dinosaurs themselves, there are dozens of video and touch screens where visitors can learn more about the various dinosaur species, their diets, habitats and unusual physical features. Docents are also trained to answer visitors’ questions. There’s also a gift shop, where a staffer said the \$40 plush toy of Blue the velociraptor is the top-selling item.

Exhibition tickets are sold online by timed entry, with a maximum of 60 visitors admitted every 15 minutes to avoid overcrowding. Visitors can stay as long as they like, but the average visit is 45 to 60 minutes. The exhibit is set up on the east side of the mall’s former Macy’s department store, near Broken Yolk Café and the seasonal pumpkin patch.

Jurassic World: The Exhibition

Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays. 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Fridays. 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays. Closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Through April 16

Tickets: Weekday admission is \$29.50 for adults and \$19.50 for children ages 3 to 15; weekend admission is \$34.50 for adults and \$24.50 for children

Online sales: jurassicworldexhibition.com

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