

Disney's new dinosaur-themed restaurant opens

Scott Powers

Sentinel Staff Writer

October 14, 2008

T-Rex is the kind of restaurant where parents might encourage their children to go dig in the dirt before dinner.

"It's nice dirt. It's clean dirt," said Keith Beitler, Landry's Restaurants' senior vice president and chief operating officer for specialty restaurants. "It's Disney dirt."

T-Rex is a big, brash dinosaur-themed restaurant that opens today at Downtown Disney with seating for more than 620, a couple of dozen life-size robotic dinosaurs and real fossils encased in the bathroom walls. Dishes include mushroom ravioli simmering in lobster cream sauce, with Roma tomatoes and fresh spinach.

Collaborators Landry's Restaurants, Schussler Creative and Walt Disney Imagineering, the team that brought Rainforest Cafe to Walt Disney World, aimed at going way beyond that themed restaurant, to create a more interactive mix of décor, show, dining and educational flourishes that Beitler called "eattainment."

Beginning with a children's fossil-dig pit -- where an entire set of replica T-Rex bones is buried -- the restaurant combines activities, prehistoric-themed shows of light, sound and robotic creatures, and American cuisine.

"When you build the Rainforest Cafe, and we did 45 in seven years, and you do Yak & Yeti, the expectations are pretty high," said Steven Schussler, whose company developed the T-Rex concept, just as it did concepts for Landry's Rainforest Cafe chain and Disney's Yak & Yeti restaurant. "People want to know: How do you outdo yourself? How do you make it even better? We tried -- we really tried -- to go over the top."

Expectations are indeed high. The Disney T-Rex occupies a front-and-center spot at Downtown Disney, and is Disney's first big new development in its plans for a new, more family-oriented dining, shopping and entertainment area. Just last month, Disney closed six Pleasure Island nightclubs, and their more-family-oriented replacements will be up to two years away, increasing an already-apparent deficit of dining space.

"T-Rex adds some of the needed seat capacity that we are so lacking down here at this point," said Downtown Disney Vice President Kevin Lansberry. "Plus it's unique . . . highly differentiated, interactive for kids, and it fills an almost attractionlike concept as well as a dining concept."

With T-Rex, open for lunch and dinner, and with prospects for breakfast parties, Beitler hopes it can serve 2,500 to 3,000 diners a day -- as many as 1 million per year.

Landry's, which operates 31 restaurant concepts including Landry's Seafood House, and The Chart House, adapted much of the menu from its other properties, tweaking them for prehistoric flair, Beitler said. Entrées include salads, soups, meat dishes such as the Mega Mes-O-Bones ribs, pastas, seafood and sandwiches. They run from \$11.99 (for an 8-ounce Bronto Burger) to \$29.99 (Triceratop filet.)

"We took everything we had, and put it around the theme of the restaurant," Beitler said. "We also understand that we are feeding middle America, and we're feeding overseas. We've got to do who we are. We've got to do American cuisine, with a prehistoric flair."

There's also a full-service bar (the Shark Bar) featuring \$9.99 T-Rita Cotton Tinis, and a large gift shop that features a Build-A-Dino enterprise created by Build-A-Bear Workshop, where people can put together custom-made plush toys, starting at \$15.

Schussler said the restaurant was designed so that first impressions would be "wow!" The outside decor features an exact life-size replica of a 140-foot long Argentinosaurus.

Inside the front door, visitors find a panorama of the Shark Bar with its glowing glass bar, 5,000-gallon shark tank and giant, robotic octopus; a life-size, robotic, tyrannosaurus rex; themed dining areas such as the Geo-Tech Room with its flaming walls; and Ice Cave with its glowing walls.

"Obviously, people come for the 'wow' factor, but they'll come back for quality food and service that Landry's provides," Schussler said. "Without that they wouldn't be coming back."

Downtown Disney's new restaurant appeals to the 'wow' factor

600 Employees

30,000 Square feet in size

620 Seats

\$11.95 to \$29.95 Entrée prices

\$9.99 Cotton-candy

"Cotton-Tini" cocktail

7,000 Gallons of aquariums

140 Species of fish

-- Source: Schussler Creative

Scott Powers can be reached at spowers@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5441.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

Image 1 of 24



New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

The iconic T-Rex animatronic dinosaur looms over the gift shop area as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

Image 2 of 24



New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

The Ice Cave is flooded with blue light as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at [Downtown Disney](#), Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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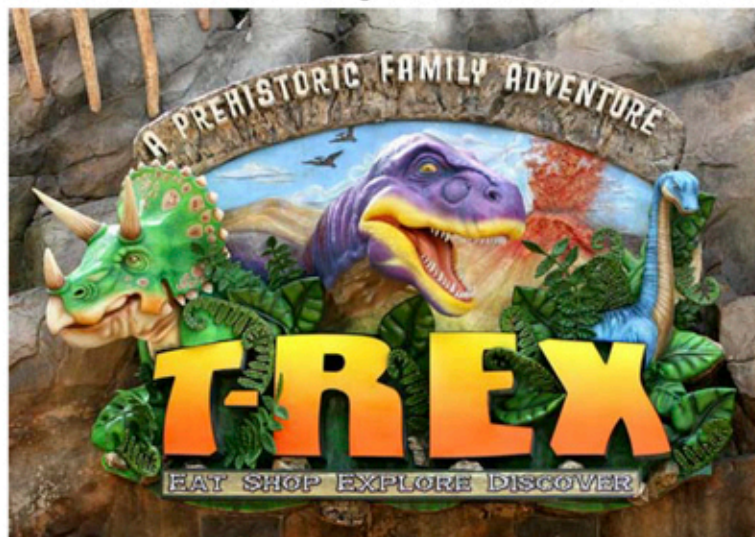


New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

Steve Schussler, T-Rex creator and founder of Rainforest Cafe, and Keith Beitler, COO of Landry's Restaurants, chat outside of T-Rex as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at [Downtown Disney](#), Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at [Downtown Disney](#), Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Coral reefs, giant squid and jellyfish at the bar area as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Twins Layla and Jonah Rabren, 3, with their mother Maxine Rabren of Orlando, watch the activities from the front of the restaurant as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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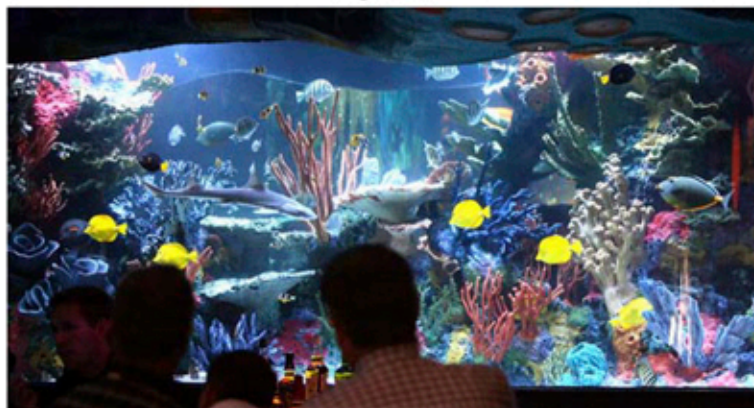
New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Exterior view of T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

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(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

One of the giant tropical habitats, as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Steve Schussler, T-Rex creator and founder of Rainforest Cafe, and Keith Beitler, COO of Landry's Restaurants, in the paleontology play area of T-Rex as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Dessert items, including warm donut holes (left), at T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

An animatronic dinosaur as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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The icon T-Rex dinosaur as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

Paleo-guide Linda Leflis (left) shows guests the dig zone in the paleontology play area of T-Rex as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

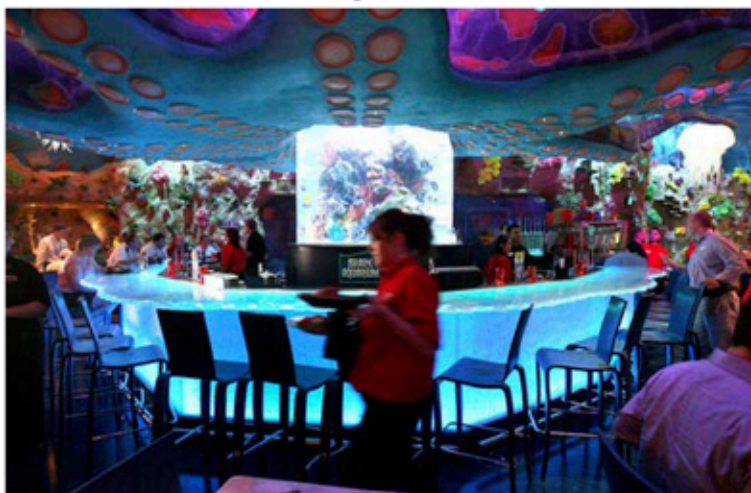
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The iconic T-Rex animatronic dinosaur looms over the gift shop area as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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(Joe Burbank, Orlando Sentinel / October 13, 2008)

The sea-creature themed bar as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at Downtown Disney, Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

The Ice Cave is flooded with purple light as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at [Downtown Disney](#), Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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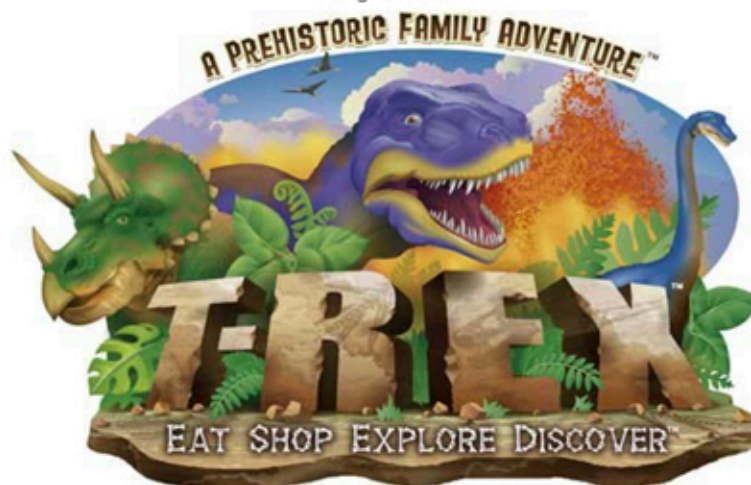


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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(JOE BURBANK, ORLANDO SENTINEL / October 13, 2008)

The Ice Cave changes colors as Disney cast members preview T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure restaurant at [Downtown Disney](#), Monday, Oct. 13, 2008. The dinosaur-themed restaurant opens to the public Tuesday.

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T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney
(WALT DISNEY CO.)

[Downtown Disney](#) guests can dine face to face with a dinosaur at T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure, A Place to Eat, Shop, Explore and Discover, which combines table-service dining and retail in an interactive prehistoric environment built around water, fire and ice. The restaurant is operated by Landry's Restaurants.

New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney photos

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T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney

(KENT PHILLIPS, WALT DISNEY CO. / August 13, 2008)

A 2-story tall dinosaur is transported on a flatbed truck past a pedestrian crossing sign at the [Downtown Disney](#) entertainment district at [Walt Disney World Resort](#) in [Lake Buena Vista](#). The dinosaur will be featured inside a new restaurant, currently under construction, called "T-Rex: a Prehistoric Family Adventure." Developed by Schussler Creative, Inc. and operated by Landry's Restaurants, the 600-seat restaurant will feature dinosaurs, waterfalls, bubbling geysers and a fossil dig site. "T-Rex" will open in mid-October at Downtown Disney.

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T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney

(KENT PHILLIPS, WALT DISNEY CO. / August 13, 2008)

A 2-story tall dinosaur is pulled by forklift into the [Downtown Disney](#) entertainment, shopping and dining district at [Walt Disney World Resort](#) in [Lake Buena Vista](#). The dinosaur will be featured inside a new restaurant, currently under construction, called "T-Rex: a Prehistoric Family Adventure." Developed by Schussler Creative, Inc. and operated by Landry's Restaurants, the 600-seat restaurant will feature dinosaurs, waterfalls, bubbling geysers and a fossil dig site. "T-Rex" will open in mid-October at Downtown Disney.

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New T-Rex restaurant at Downtown Disney

(SCOTT POWERS, ORLANDO SENTINEL / September 5, 2008)

A construction worker lifts a piece of fabricated dinosaur bone into place near the entrance to T-Rex, a big family restaurant set to open in late October at [Downtown Disney](#). T-Rex, developed by Schussler Creative, Inc., which also created Rainforest Cafe and Yak & Yeti at [World Disney World](#), and operated by Landry's Restaurants, Inc., will feature dining and retail in a 30,000-square-foot, 600-seat interactive prehistoric environment.

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