

NEWS

Dino-mite time as prehistoric creatures of Jurassic Quest roam DCU Center this weekend in Worcester — here's what to expect if you go



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WORCESTER — The snarls and growls of prehistoric creatures could be heard as children and their families waited to walk beneath the faux stone archway with the words “Jurassic Quest” sitting on top and into the convention center floor Friday at the DCU Center.

Through Sunday, dinosaur fans and families can check out the different dinosaur-themed activities of Jurassic Quest, a traveling tour of life-size and scientifically accurate dinosaur animatronics and statues that includes performances by “Dino Trainers” as well as games, rides and activities.

“Jurassic Quest is where the big dinosaurs live and it's part of my job to help take care of them, look after them and introduce you guys to not just our full-grown dinosaurs, but our baby dinosaurs as well,” said Caleb Hughes, who's known as Captain Caleb when he's interacting with kids and families attending the show.

Hughes said that in addition to teaching about dinosaurs and answering kids' questions, he and other dino trainers are also responsible for “scooping dinosaur poop and everything in between.”

After entering the convention space, families traveled back in time as they walked through the dark, winding path of dinosaur statues while taking in the massiveness of a Triceratops, or watching as a Kosmoceratops moved and growled using animatronics.

During this walk, people can read more about the different dinosaurs and begin the “quest” aspect of the day — looking for the 10 quest clubs spread throughout the space which, if completed, include a prize at the end.

“I didn't realize they were gonna be life-size. That was pretty cool,” said Mandy LeClaire, who brought her 6-year-old son, Bennett, and daughter Natalie, 1. “We think it's great.”

Bennett, who was dressed in a safari hat and a T-shirt with dinosaur fossils, said he was excited to see the dinos, while Natalie wanted to get a closer look at a Tyrannosaurus rex statue.

“I'm excited. My favorite was the long neck one,” Bennett said of the Brachiosaurus.

The LeClaire family was joined by their friend, Amy Levins, and her 8-year-old son, Joey, who said they had been looking forward to the event for over a month.

Trainers offer dino education

At the end of the trail, families were given the opportunity to learn about fossils or meet a baby Triceratops named Trixie from one of the several dino trainers on site.

“I perform with the baby dinosaurs and I host the raptor shows,” J.D. Smith, one of the dino trainers, said. “I’m also a fossil expert.”

Smith, who was performing with Trixie, said the trainers take turns rotating through the different performance roles during the event.

He said his favorite part of his job is “definitely being able to travel the country and spread joy to families and children.”

After completing the first leg of the event, attendees were able to bounce around to the different stations situated throughout the convention center floor.

In one area, children could ride life-size dinosaurs, which moved their heads and tails up and down, while toddlers too small for the ride could have fun on stationary riding dinos, or take a ride down a slide in an area called “Tricera-tots.”

Along the back of the event space, kids could run through inflatable play spaces that were dinosaur-themed or watch a performance of Diego the Raptor — who may roam the space and chase a couple of kids, despite promising his dino trainer he would not do so.

Mostly a fun, family affair

At the end of their day, families could make a quick stop by the oceans exhibit to see a 55-foot Megalodon statue and other marine reptiles, a coloring station, or shop at one of the two souvenir stands.

Parents Fox and Stephanie Gonazlez wore matching "Jurassic Park" T-shirts, along with their two daughters, Remy, 4, and Aurora, 3, and 7-month-old son, Fox, Jr.

Another parent, Gina Anderson, watched as her 4-year-old son, Rocky, dug through a sandbox in search of fossils. Anderson said she was happy to be able to bring Rocky to something local, rather than in Boston.

“We love when things are in Worcester,” she said. “I’m happy to be out again. We like having things local.”

Anderson said their day at the DCU Center was their first outing in two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Standing guard at the sandboxes was Worcester's Amber Josephson, who was recently hired by Jurassic Quest to help with the event.

“The people here are really nice. They’ve given me some form of comfort considering this is my very first job ever,” Josephson said. “The fact that it involves kids — I love kids, so to make them happy, and make them smile and see that it's honestly an amazing feeling.”

Josephson said that, if given the opportunity by Jurassic Quest, she would consider joining them as a traveling employee.

“I’m really excited to see where that could go for me,” she said. “I could learn so much stuff about myself and get that opportunity.”

Although popular with locals, some of the guests traveled from surrounding towns and states to join in on the fun.

An awesome field trip

Teri Blanchard traveled two and a half hours from Claremont, New Hampshire, with her daughter, Laura Jericka, and two granddaughters, Harper, 2, and Remi, 5.

“The girls have been into dinosaurs,” Blanchard said. “It’s pretty cool, pretty realistic looking.”

The trip also served as a reward for two area students in eighth-grader Hunter, 15, and sixth-grader Aiden, 12.

“They have just done a science project on the geologic timescale,” said Kristen Perry, an instruction assistant at Luther Burbank Middle School in Lancaster. “And especially they did the Jurassic Period.”

Perry said she works with Cherly Lonardo in the Personalized Academics and Community Education, or PACE, program at the school, which focuses on working with special education students in grades six through eight.

“It’s a great opportunity for the students to take what they learned in the classroom and then carry it over into the community setting and learn from a different place,” Lonardo said.

Aiden and Hunter both said their favorite part of the trip was seeing the life-size dinosaurs, with the Stegosaurus being Hunter’s favorite out of the bunch.

“I’ve really been looking forward to it and it’s really nice that it was able to come to Worcester,” Lonardo said. “The timing of it tying in with what they’ve just been working on in science was amazing.”

Jurassic Quest continues until 8 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday; and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. For more information, including tickets, go to dcucenter.com.