

Maybe take this ride before lunch

COASTER

Busch Gardens reveals plans for the new coaster Tigris - for the 'bravest' in the family.

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Busch Gardens will open Florida's tallest launch coaster in spring 2019, company officials announced Wednesday. The triple-launch, tiger-themed roller coaster called Tigris will hurl riders 150 feet into the sky, turn them upside down and swirl through curves at 60 mph. It will also move backward.

Is losing your lunch the park's new business model?

'We like to have a portfolio for every member of the family,' said Busch Gardens president Stewart Clark. 'But with Tigris, it will only be the bravest members.' Clark also revealed that a 'big attraction' is coming in 2020 in the space now occupied by the closed wooden roller coaster Gwazi, a pretty large footprint to fill.

The announcements coincide with parent company SeaWorld Entertainment's promise from interim CEO John T. Reilly to make the parks more oriented toward thrill rides, in addition to featuring animals. This, leaders say, will help the parks better compete with rivals Disney and Universal, which have beloved movies to call on for attraction appeal.

Here's how project manager Andrew Schaffer described Tigris: 'It's going to launch you forward out of the station, up the tower. It's going to stop and then

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The triple-launch Tigris coaster will send riders up, backward, then up again before turning upside down. It opens next year.

Busch Gardens

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SeaWorld has been in a long attendance slide and revenues since Harry Potter arrived at Universal Orlando in 2010 and animal rights activists questioned SeaWorld's treatment of orcas. This year, the company has been showing positive attendance and earnings.

station and launch you backward up the other tower. You'll get about three-quarters of the way up that tower and then come back down again and launch over 60 mph one last time, forward through the station. And that will take you one last time up to the top of the ride, 150 feet in the air. Then you will have a slow inversion called a heartline roll.' 'And that,' Schaffer said, 'is when you are going to lose your lunch.' The ride will have a 54-inch height restriction and a lap belt restraint.

Busch Gardens has the most roller coasters of any theme park in Florida: Cheetah Hunt, the park's longest coaster; SheiKra, a 200-foot-tall floorless drive coaster; Falcon's Fury, a 335-foot-tall freestanding drop tower; Montu, an inverted coaster; Kumba; and Cobra's Curse, the most recent addition opened in 2016, a family coaster that also goes backward and spins.

Tigris will be in the Stanleyville area of the park, in the spot formally occupied by Tidal Wave, an African-themed boat ride that got riders soaked on its chute drop. That ride closed in 2016. Tigris will be adjacent to Jungala, which houses the park's endangered Bengal tigers.

Analysts have credited the company's discount ticket and pricing strategy, plus some of the new ride openings. Reilly told investors earlier this year the company plans to offer a new ride, attraction, show or event in every park, every year.

Soon after the good revenue news, the company announced 125 job cuts in a restructuring plan, which Clark said affected Busch Gardens a small amount.

'But it's something we don't take lightly as one of the Tampa's top places to go for hospitality and tourism. We are always dedicated to keep moving forward.' The company philosophy, he said, is focused not just on firsttime guests but its pass member base, which is large in Tampa, to have a reason to revisit. He looked at the Tigris ride as a much-needed 'facelift' before the park's 60th birthday next year.

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