

The Suburban

magazine

JANUARY 23, 2015

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Dave & Buster's becomes a new tourist attraction in Albany

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

ALBANY, NEW YORK - For us, fabulous shopping at the Crossgates Mall and the Colonie Center always served as incentives to spend some time in the New York's Capital City of Albany (<http://www.albanyny.org/Visitors.aspx>). Now we can add the closest Dave & Busters and Cheesecake Factory locations to our lists.

Dave & Buster's (www.daveandbusters.com) is recognized as America's leading venue that combines dining and entertainment. The 33,000 square foot restaurant and game room location in Albany opened on August 24, 2013 at the Crossgates Mall and it has served as a magnet for visitors ever since. My family has enjoyed visiting the Toronto locale, but when we heard the franchise had set up shop in Albany it did indeed encourage us to stay over on our way back from New York City.

The company itself was founded in 1982 to provide a high-quality, high-energy venue where families and adults can "Eat Drink Play®" all in one location. Currently, Dave & Buster's is the largest national chain offering a full casual dining menu and a wide selection of non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages together with an extensive assortment of entertainment attractions, including

skill- and sports-oriented games, video games, interactive simulators and other traditional games.

The restaurant, game and special event areas are open seven days a week, Sunday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to midnight and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 2 a.m.

Dave & Buster's chef-crafted menus combine fun and flavor as well. Popular items include Black Jack Burgers, Baked Chicken and Shrimp Alfredo, Bacon Wrapped Beef Medallions & Grilled Shrimp and the very popular adult signature cocktails including Snow cones, Walk the Plank and Million Dollar Margarita. The restaurant has special menus for children and people with allergies. There is a special eat and play option. When choosing selected items you can add \$10 or \$20 power cards to your order, which represents an immediate saving when you hit the games area. The legendary goldfingers, crispy chicken strips served with fries, work well with the eat and play option. Our party also shared the tasty pretzel dogs (meaty all-beef franks wrapped in sweet pretzel dough, fresh baked and served with spicy habanero dipping sauce) and my personal favorite, the four bar burgers (sliders) and wings platter. We switched the fries for the superb mashed potatoes.

Popular new games at D&B include Temple Run, Cut the Rope, Dark Escape, Dream Raiders,

Harpoon Lagoon, Dizzy Chicken and Milk Jug Toss. Guests can play to win tickets in the arcade for a variety of prizes, including iPods, Nintendo games, grills, sports items, stuffed animals and even an electric guitar. Traditional games like bowling, shuffleboard and billiards are combined with newer options such as Derby Owners Club-World Edition, Fruit Ninja, Guitar Hero, Dance Revolution and Big Bass Wheel. We favor Deal or No Deal, skee ball, air hockey, floppy tickets and the different slot machine-like games which give you a bit of a Las Vegas feeling

More than two dozen large-screen, high-definition televisions provide the perfect backdrop for everyone's favorite college sporting events and professional games. The Albany location is also available for private parties, birthdays and corporate functions. Structured team building activities, company challenges and the ultimate quest are popular programs to help build corporate camaraderie. We had a great time and consider the arrival of a D&B here enough for us to stay an additional evening next time we visit. The locale is fully wheelchair accessible, with access from inside the mall and curbside. You can call them directly at 518-313-4500.

Cheesecake Factory

There is no question that the



Cheesecake Factory ranks as one of my favorite restaurants in the USA. The Albany location opened on August 29, 2006 at the Colonie Centre. This 10,800 square foot locale seats 300 diners. "Albany was the 113th location to open," General Manager David Albert told me. "We have 184 locations now and this year The Cheesecake Factory made the Forbes 100 best places to work also."

The Cheesecake Factory (www.thecheesecakefactory.com) is known for its extensive menu, generous portions and legendary desserts. In fact, there are more than 250 menu selections and this includes more than 50 lower calorie "SkinnyLicious®" selections- all handmade, in-house with fresh ingredients - and more than 50 signature cheesecakes and desserts. Favorite choices include appetizers, pizza, seafood, steaks, chicken, burgers, pasta, specialty items, salads, sandwiches, omelets and the desserts.

We have always appreciated the excellent service at the Albany location. This is the closest Cheesecake Factory to Montreal and I know many people who stop here on purpose just to enjoy the experience. If you do not study the menu online before you arrive, then you will need some time to look it over before ordering. It is so well balanced that if you are here for more than a few nights you can come back for several days and have something completely different each time. We started off by sharing the Thai Lettuce Wraps and one member of our party also had Caesar Salad. While the Southern Fried Chicken Sliders are listed as an "appetizer," they more than serve as a hearty meal. We appreciate the SkinnyLicious offerings, especially the turkey burgers. I tried something new, the Herb Crusted Filet of Salmon, with mashed potatoes. It was truly out of this world.

This Cheesecake Factory is a real winner and I highly recommend you stop by. You can call them directly at 518-453-2500. There is a large Barnes & Noble bookstore in the mall, a great pre or post dining stop.

Other Attractions

Shopping in Albany, the capital of the State of New York, has always been a joy for my family. Crossgates Mall and the smaller, but equally impressive Colonie Center, can keep you busy for a couple of days.

Albany has attracted visitors for





400 years with historic sites, fabulous attractions, family-friendly amenities, and entertaining events. World-class museums, unique galleries, stunning architecture, those enticing restaurants, and welcoming accommodations can indeed keep you busy for days. Enjoy everything from boating to skiing and biking to snow-shoeing. Albany lies at the foot of the Adirondacks and Catskill Mountains and is at the tip of the historic Hudson Valley Region. Within a short ride are neighboring Cooperstown and Saratoga Springs.

Be sure to check out the Million Dollar Staircase, the awe inspiring "Egg" at the Empire State Plaza and many diverse examples of historic house sites and public spaces such as the Pruyn House and the first Shaker Meeting House. You can visit the magnificent Gothic structure, now the Administrative Center of the State University of New York, the Delaware and Hudson, and the Albany Evening Journal Buildings, located at the base of State Street.

There is an abundance of professional theatre, music, dance, sports, and a backyard full of recreational splendors. As the crossroads of the northeast, Albany is easily accessible by car, train, and plane and is located less than three hours from New York and Boston. I have also heard very good things about the Albany Aqua Ducks & Trolleys (www.albanyaquaducks.com), an amphibious tour and trolley tour company featuring historic tours of Albany. The Ducks offer unique, educational and fun-filled tours. You can see the historic sites and then splash into the Hudson River for a mariner's view of the city's skyline and others

who call the Hudson "home" including the USS Slater and Dutch Apple Cruises. The Trolleys operate a seasonal Trolley loop tour and are available year round for charters and events. The Ducks and Trolleys are available for parades, festivals, family reunions, bar/bat mitzvahs, corporate events or any special occasion that needs to be "Just Ducky!"

The Crossgates Mall is home to 250 stores, restaurants and kiosks, including big box tenants Macys, Sears, Dick's Sporting Goods, JC Penney and now Lord & Taylor. The vast majority of entrances are ADA accessible with ample parking distributed throughout the site. You can rent a wheelchair at the information desk near the Macys entrance.

Where to Stay

When in Albany we enjoy staying at the Cresthill Suites (www.cresthillsuites.com), an extended stay hotel located at 1415 Washington Avenue. It turned out to be most convenient for us. There are large Hannaford's and Price Chopper grocery stores nearby, as well as plenty of restaurants, the Crossgates Mall, the Colonie Center and two movie theatre complexes. Cresthill is in fact part of a small chain, with other locales in Syracuse, NY and Wichita, Kansas. It recently came under the auspices of a new management company, which is already sprucing the place up. There is new lighting in the main lobby and dining area, rooms have been freshly painted and new flooring installed in the kitchens and bathrooms. There is no smoking permitted in any rooms and pets are no longer permitted. Sofa beds in each room are being upgraded.

I would strongly recommend this place for families. Our spacious two bedroom suite had all of the comforts of home, including a fully equipped kitchen with a fridge and appliances and free wireless internet. We had a comfortable living room, with a couch, sitting chair, small dining room table with chairs, three flat screen TVs and plenty of cupboard space. Whether you're staying for a night or a month in any one of these suites, the hotel offers an array of services to accommodate your travel needs. In the morning, you can enjoy a complimentary breakfast, and in the evening, a light fare reception and social hour is available every Monday through Thursday. The quality of food has been enhanced as well, with a variety of homemade meal choices such as grilled chicken, chicken parmesan and different Italian specialties.

There is daily housekeeping, same-day valet service, a grocery shopping service, free guest laundry, a fully equipped fitness center and a seasonal courtyard, with a pool, patio and grills. The property has a regular clientele who stay there for long periods of time, be it people working on big projects in town and in construction, those relocating, fire victims and of course vacationers who want to enjoy all of the comforts of home. The hotel has a number of handicapped accessible rooms and handicapped parking spots at the front door. There is elevator access to each floor and level crossings in the hallways.

I found the staff at the front desk exceptionally helpful. While the room was very comfy, I also enjoyed spending time in the large lobby

area and sinking into the big sofa in front of a TV. A self service coffee, tea and hot chocolate is available 24 hours a day. For more information call 1.888.723.1655 or email info@cresthillsuites.com. You can also register online.

At The Movies

The Albany area has some wonderful movie theatre complexes, each operated by the Regal Entertainment Group (www.regmovies.com). We have a particular fondness towards the Regal Colonie Center Stadium 13. This six year old movie complex encompasses around 64,000 square feet, with more than 2,800 seats in a total of 13 auditoriums. It is right next to two of my favorite restaurants, PF Chang's China Bistro and the Cheesecake Factory and a huge Barnes & Noble. The seats at this theatre are very comfortable as they swivel. We actually stopped by the evening before our show to pick up tickets in advance. You can also purchase them online at fandango.com.

Once in the theatre we were entertained by a feature called First Look, which included previews of upcoming film releases, a special Disney feature of homemade short movies and a series of very amusing commercials. You can also log on to www.fandango.com and purchase your tickets online. On our last day in town, we decided at the last moment to see another movie at the much larger Regal Theatre at the Crossgates Mall.

Hearing impaired devices are available upon request and the complex is very wheelchair friendly, with elevators at every level, ramps in each theatre and handicapped seating.