



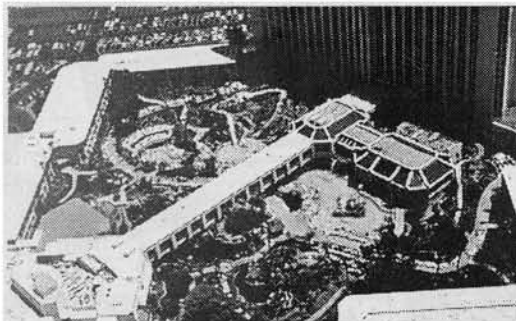
Where Las Vegas Begins

by Melissa Wolcott and Al Martino

MGM Grand. Luxor. New York. Paris. Aladdin. In recent years our heads have been turned by these new mega-resorts sprouting up all over the strip. They are all wonderful, to be sure, but tend to make us overlook some of the older established casino/hotels with rich Vegas histories, such as the Tropicana.

The Tropicana's slogan "Where Las Vegas Begins" is both literal and figurative, as it's history goes back to its opening on April 4, 1957 — and it is the first major casino you come to on the east side of the strip driving in from the south. The \$15 million, 34 acre, 300 room hotel/casino was dubbed the "The Tiffany of the Strip" upon its opening. Many expansions and renovations later, the Trop still holds its original allure.

We had the occasion to stay at the Tropicana recently and realized what a treasure it is. Located on "The Four Corners" — one of the busiest intersections in the world — the



Trop enjoys a great address. Bordering the corners with the Tropicana are Excalibur, New York New York, and MGM Grand. It's an easy walk to Luxor, Mandalay Bay, Monte Carlo and Aladdin.



The guest rooms are located in one of two towers, or 3-story villas surrounding the pool area. We stayed in the Paradise Tower, which has been totally refurbished, and offers non-

smoking rooms (which we chose.) We found our room to be more spacious than some of the standard rooms in the newer resorts, and had a great view of the strip.

Along with the Trop's super location are its great room prices. This is definitely the best deal in the area. If you go to their website on the internet today (www.tropicana.lv.com), you will find offers starting at \$45.95 per night! Check out the other resorts in the area, and you will see what a great deal that is.

Which brings us to joining the "Winner's Club." All the Casinos offer "players" clubs or "slot" clubs. They are all free to join, and, based on how much you play, you receive comps for food, shows, entertainment, and rooms. We always join the players clubs as soon as we step foot in a casino, because eventually you will get something back for the money you have "invested" in them. They are not concerned with whether you win or lose, but rather how long you play. We were pleasantly surprised by the liberal returns offered at the Trop. Neither of us are really big gamblers — probably even less than average, so we were not prepared to receive the jackets, t-shirts, comps, and cash we got during our stay.

Slot Tournaments are very popular in Vegas, and most of the casinos offer them. The Trop has three tournaments coming up: May 27-30, June 13-16, and July 7-10. Prizes range from \$10,000 to \$30,000 in the different tournaments. A typical entry fee of \$199 gets you a complimentary 3-night stay, dinner, and tournament play. For more information about the Winners Club benefits, call 702-739-2711.



Located in the Tropicana is a real gem called the Casino Legend's Hall of Fame. It is a museum dedicated to the history of Las Vegas, and is fascinating. More than 738 casinos are represented, 550 of which no longer exist. Old photographs of downtown and the Strip are amazing. I visited Las Vegas in the 60's and barely remember that the strip was only a 2-lane highway. I

"borrowed" some ash trays back then from various casinos, and was surprised to see their value today (hello, ebay!) There are chips, artifacts, star's contracts, video presentations, and many interesting and enlightening things to see. The adjacent gift shop sells some artifacts as well. The museum takes you from the beginning days of legalized gambling in Nevada, through the "mob" years, and to the present. The \$4 admission fee is well worth it.



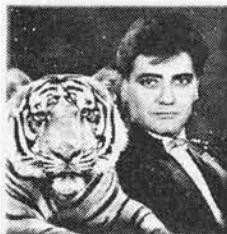
The Tropicana has Las Vegas' longest running show with the famous Folies Bergere. The newly revamped show contains some

of the award-winning numbers from past Folies, along with new production numbers. They also offer a "family" version at 7:30 PM, and a "adult" (topless) version at 10 PM.

Different kinds of shows are performed all day, for all tastes and time conveniences. There is the "Bird Man of Las Vegas," world renowned animal trainer Joe Krathwohl who presents some rare, exotic and beautiful birds in three early afternoon shows. Joe has appeared on Jay Leno's and David Letterman's shows.



Magician Rick Thomas performs illusions with rare tigers in a dazzling vanishing act. Rick was crowned Stage Magician of the year at the World Magic Awards. His two shows are held in the afternoon.



In the evening you can catch up-and-coming as well as established comedians at the Comedy Stop with two shows available.

Dining at the Tropicana is also a treat, ranging from fine dining to quick bites, and everything in between. The Savanna Steak House serves steak, seafood and chicken dishes from around the world. Mizuno's is a Japanese Steakhouse serving meals from an open grill, and, of course, there is the Island Buffet overlooking the lush garden and pool area.

We found the pool areas to be a real pleasant experience, as they are surrounded by tropical trees, vegetation and waterfalls. We enjoyed the "adult" pool (no, not topless) but quiet and relaxing, with tree shaded sections. An inner Island area features five separate ponds and lagoons, featuring fresh water for live fish



and aquatic life. Two hundred Koi fish inhabit the ponds. There is even an indoor pool with swim-up blackjack tables for those who cannot seem to get their fill of gambling! The tables have a special waterproof layout and the drop boxes are heated to dry paper money. We didn't get to try our luck this time, as the tables are only open

between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

We will definitely return to the Tropicana on a subsequent visit to Vegas, for the convenience of location, great price, and that bit of Vegas nostalgia.

The Tropicana Resort and Casino is located at 3801 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas, NV 89109. For information on visiting the Tropicana, head to their website: <http://www.tropicana.lv.com>, or call 1-888-826-TROP(8767)

For a fascinating and detailed history of the Tropicana and all of the strip casinos, visit the website: <http://www.lvstriphistory.com>



M&M's WORLD



The yummiest attraction in Las Vegas has to be M&M World conveniently located next to the MGM Grand, in the Showcase Mall. The marquee overhead draws in visitors with everyone's favorite M&M characters depicted three dimensionally. Once inside you discover they "really DO exist" in the form of everything you can imagine that you can put a logo on, filling 4 floors and 26,000 sq. ft. of the building.

Visitors will enjoy a selection of one-of-a-kind logo merchandise at M&M World, an Ethel M Chocolates gourmet chocolate store, the "M&M's" Academy, an "M&M's" Racing Team retail store and Red's Pit Stop Café. "M&M's" fans can purchase more than 3,000 "M&M's" Brand items including everything from T-shirts and designer jackets to designer dresses, jewelry and furniture, and "M&M's" Chocolate Candies found in 21 different colors. The different colors are popular for mixing



and matching for special occasions - such as weddings, birthdays and parties featuring school colors. We even managed to find M&Ms in the Bucs colors of red and pewter!

Ethel M Chocolates are fine chocolates to rival Godiva and Ghiridelli, packaged very attractively. Ethel M Chocolates has been manufactured in Las Vegas since 1981. Venture up to the fourth floor to Ethel M Chocolates Dessert Bar for a real treat.

M&M World has a fun 3-D movie starring Red and Yellow on their trip to Vegas. Red loses his "M" at a poker table and the movie concerns their travails at getting it back.

If you're a kid (or ever were one) this is a fun stop while in Vegas.

M&M World is located in the Showcase Mall, 3785 Las Vegas Blvd. South. Admission is free. For more information, call 702-736-7611.

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