

Las Vegas has always been where superlatives are the unabashed norm. The biggest and the best are tossed about as freely as gambling chips on a hot craps table.

But as the Tropicana Las Vegas nears completion of a \$180 million makeover, its executives are taking a different approach. In fact, that's the very word being pushed at the

Tropicana - different.

One of the biggest differences is the clientele that the remodeled 53-year-old grande dame of the Las Vegas Strip hopes to attract. Countering the recent Vegas trend of catering to an upscale crowd, the Tropicana is making its pitch to the mid-market guest.

"That's where the most opportunity is because it's the largest segment of the market," says Brandie Feuer, the Tropicana's vice president of marketing. "And to do that successfully, it's not necessarily about being the best, it's about being different."

Since emerging from bankruptcy last year, the Tropicana Las Vegas - which is not affiliated with any other resort of the same name, including the one in Atlantic City - has redone most of its 1,658 guest rooms and suites. The 850-slot, 25-table casino has gotten a face-lift, with new carpeting and fixtures, although the famous stained-glass ceiling remains for now. Already opened or opening in the next few months are a South Beach-themed steak house, a poker room, and a state-of-the-art sports and race book.

The final touch will be the transformation of the swimming-pool area into the world's largest Nikki Beach.

The Trop's pool area, although older, has always been one of the better swim areas along the Strip, featuring mature tropical landscaping and swim-up blackjack.

But Nikki Beach will take it to another level, like its clubs in such exotic international spots as Saint-Tropez, France; St. Barts; and Marbella, Spain. The Nikki Beach at the Tropicana Las Vegas is scheduled to open in the spring, with an ultra lounge, a nightclub and restaurant, the

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Cafe Nikki, which will serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The overall flavor of the renovated Tropicana is South Beach. White and beige are favored colors throughout the property, including white plantation shutters in guest rooms, and splashes of orange, red, and brown. Designers have tried to achieve what Feuer describes as "an organic" mood, with liberal use of wood in the rooms and public spaces.

The new centerpiece restaurant, Biscayne Steak, Sea & Wine, which opened in August, carries out the tropical ambience with appetizers such as lamb eggplant tacos (the lightly breaded eggplant is the taco shell) and conch fritters with an avocado and tequila aioli.

In reaching out to a mid-market demographic, price is a key factor, and the Tropicana is offering the completely remodeled rooms, which include 42-inch plasma TVs and 300-thread-count linens, for about \$47 to \$63 midweek and \$87 and up on weekends. Two-room suites are about \$107 to \$123 midweek and start at \$139 on weekends.

Entertainment at the Tropicana includes the Brad Garrett Comedy Club, anchored by Garrett, best known as Ray Romano's brother, Robert, on the TV comedy Everybody Loves Raymond. Other comics also perform there.

One of the more intriguing additions to the Tropicana will be an attraction called the Las Vegas Mob Experience, slated to open in late December. Costing \$25 million to \$30 million and occupying 26,000 square feet, the immersive exhibition will tell the story of organized crime's role in creating and developing Las Vegas.

Visitors will travel through 31 rooms that depict three "acts": the mob's origins, its heyday running Sin City, and its eventual fall as law enforcement closed in and corporations assumed control, says Jay Bloom, one of the attraction's executives.

A typical stop in the attraction will center on an artifact - for example, gangster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel's 1933 Packard limousine, Bloom says.

"People will find themselves transported to a desert highway beside the limo," Bloom says. "They'll feel the warm breeze and smell the sage, and then they'll see the apparitions of Ben Siegel and 1/8mob financier3/8 Meyer Lansky. Lansky is talking about how they can finally be legitimate like the Bronfmans and the Kennedys and the Astors. Bugsy will talk about Monaco in the desert. And the visitors get to eavesdrop on this conversation"

Bolstering the authenticity and insider feel of the attraction will be contributions by Lansky's grandson and granddaughter, Siegel's daughter, and relatives of other gangsters such as Tony Spilotro and Sam Giancana.

There will be interactive phases of the exhibit, and visitors will learn their fate, which can include becoming a "made" member of the mob, being sent to prison, being placed in witness protection - or getting whacked.

The attraction will cost \$29.95, with discounts for seniors and children.

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