

Moody Gardens a Texas Treasure

by Sheldon Dingle, Alhambra, California

Just as Texas, the “lone star state” stands alone among the 50, so Moody Gardens stands alone in Texas. It is a veritable one-of-a-kind jewel that you’ll never forget once you visit.

Galveston Island, home of Moody Gardens, is just a pleasant 45 minute drive from Houston. As you approach the island you’ll see across the bay great pyramids amidst the lush greenery. And just beyond the three pyramids lies a tall stately hotel surrounded by the palms and plants that put the “garden” in Moody Gardens.

Moody Gardens can be an outstanding day-trip that will fascinate the kids as well as the adults. But, in truth, one day won’t really do it. To see all there is and to absorb the wonders within the pyramids, do yourself a favor – stay several days.

Moody Gardens is not just a garden in the traditional sense – it is an exciting adventure in the world’s seas, jungles, and even outer space. And it has an exquisitely comfortable hotel that can serve as your headquarters while exploring. I speak from experience. I had the pleasure of visiting Moody Gardens earlier this year.

The Hotel

Your first stop will be the newly built, nine-storey, 303-room hotel with *all* the amenities. I’ve stayed in hotels throughout the world and have never been more delighted and happy than at the Moody Gardens Hotel. Comfortable is the word.

Even the lobby will grab you. In addition to cascading waterfalls, a lagoon, and tropical plants abounding, it has a floor-to-ceiling aviary filled with plants and birds including the technicolor Gouldians and some Diamond doves whose coos

resound from the bar to the check-in counter. I gazed long at the cheerful birds zipping around their space, as did many other guests. The lobby sets the mood for the rest of the stay.

The first floor lobby bar (just a little beyond the aviary) was the perfect setting for a relaxed evening of good conversation and camaraderie while the Terrace Restaurant was just the place for an excellent breakfast the next morning. And for the more formal festivities, the ninth floor Shearn’s Restaurant provides dining elegance and Shearn’s Lounge is the place for after dinner drinks and social affairs.

Your large room will surpass your expectations in comfort and convenience. Mine had a wonderful view of the pyramids, the grounds, and the bay. Or you can duck out and enjoy the full service spa and salon, workout center, or even the ballroom. You won’t lack for things to do or places to go. This is a hotel to rank with the finest.

An excellent view of the pyramids from the writer’s room.



Photos by Sheldon Dingle



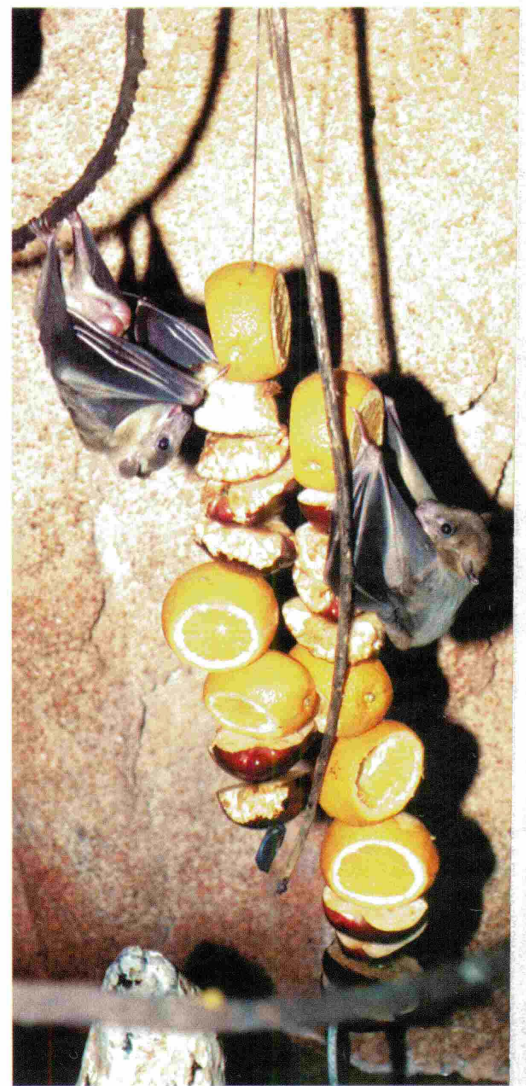
A guest in the Moody Gardens Hotel enjoying the aviary in the hotel lobby.

The Discovery Pyramid

With your headquarters secured, it’s just a short walk to the pyramids. Come and explore the extraordinary world of science at the Discovery Pyramid. Spectacular traveling exhibits from around the country await your arrival. Satisfy your insatiable hunger for knowledge with live interactive demonstrations of remarkable science experiments. The world of science sur-



A look at some of the Mayan ruins in the Rainforest Pyramid.



Authentic Mayan ruins always have lots of bats.

Photos by Sheldon Dingle



AFA President Dr. Benny Gallaway (left) and Pat Sharkey, Moody Gardens Curator of Birds and Mammals, chill out in the King Penguin display.

Exterior view of the Rainforest Pyramid and grounds.



rounds you.

On May 29-August 12, Moody Gardens presents Mad Science at the Discovery Pyramid. Mad scientists – Professor Pruvitt and Crash, take science out of the classroom and into the real world to better understand physics and chemistry. Using wacky experiments, special effects, and zany antics, these science gurus demonstrate how science relates to everyday life. Audience members are invited to join Professor Pruvitt and Crash on stage as they explore the concepts of molecular movement and exothermic reactions.

If you miss the program ending August 12, you'll just have to see what's in store for you when you get there. The museum changes its exhibits regularly,

The Aquarium Pyramid

The Aquarium Pyramid houses one of the largest aquariums in the world. It is fantastic – with over 130,000 square feet of building space and a million and a half gallons of water, it can easily take a full day to experience all. There are bright, colorful fish by the thousands (actually over 10,000) and you can go nose to nose with sharks – look into their merciless eyes, if you dare. Of course the glass will keep them from gnawing your nose but you'll feel as though you were really under water with them.

You can visit the four oceans ranging from the North Pacific through the Caribbean and South Pacific to the frigid waters of the South Atlantic where you'll find the penguins. Penguins in *Texas*? Indeed, dear friend, and you better hadn't miss them. Pat Sharkey, Curator of Birds and Mammals, himself went to the southern tip of the world to gather the eggs. Then the chicks were housed in a specially built quarantine facility until they moved into the Moody Gardens Aquarium. Now they are full grown and mighty impressive.

The King Penguins' exhibit has the ice flows and freezing waters of their natural home. The air is kept at

a chilly 35° F. while the water is a little warmer. The penguins are most ungainly on ice or land but veritable paragons of grace and symmetry while in the water. It is a great wonder to realize that these flightless, underwater torpedoes are actually birds related to those we see flying and nesting in trees. You can spend hours watching these penguins behaving like the amazing creatures they are

But my years in Alaska cured me forever of the cold (I was invited to go *inside* the chilly display and visit the penguins up close and personal while freezing my tail). Hence, when Pat Sharkey observed that I was about frozen solid, he kindly escorted me to the Rainforest Pyramid to thaw out. Not to worry, unless you get *inside* the penguin parlor, you'll be perfectly comfortable throughout all the displays.

The Rainforest Pyramid

Aaaaah! A warm 85° with 85% humidity – just what I love. The Rainforest Pyramid is my favorite place at Moody Gardens. It is huge – a 10 storey glass greenhouse, if you will, filled with exotic palms, ferns, vines – indeed, over 12,000 species of plants. There are ponds, a 50-foot high canopy, and birds, birds, birds – to say nothing of the myriad butterflies and bats. The butterflies may actually land on your sleeve but not to fear the bats, ladies, they are in their own cave behind glass and won't pester you.

There are three rainforests blended together in the pyramid, African, American, and Asian. All of the birds, however (except the macaws who stay on their perches), are free to wander about the whole complex and cross borders with impunity. They totally messed up my mental map.

The American rainforest is obviously "south of the border" and features Mayan ruins scattered about with Blue and Gold, and Scarlet Macaws perching here and there as though completely at home – which they are. Other species from American rain-

forests include the Orange-winged Amazon, Piping Guan, Panama Yellow-crowned Amazon, Hyacinth Macaw, Military Macaw, Jandaya Conure, Green Aracari, and a few more. Keep in mind that not all the species are necessarily in the rainforest at the same time and even when they are, they are not always easy to spot.

There is a Japanese-style structure that hints of Asia if not quite the tropical rainforests found a little further south in the Philippines, Malaysia, or Indonesia. But many of the birds are certainly from Southeast Asia. Species include the Palawan Peacock Pheasant (didn't see any on my last trip to Palawan), Nicobar Pigeon, Luzon Bleeding-heart Pigeon, Bartlett's Bleeding-heart Pigeon, Moluccan Imperial Pigeon, and several additional fruit doves.

The Amazon parrots and the macaws hang around their respective perches and are thus not overly destructive to the foliage. The Asian parrots are missing, I suspect, because they are highly mobile and chew up the plants aggressively.

Representing Africa are some whydas, several species of ducks, Senegal Parrot, Livingston's and Red-crested Turacos, assorted waxbills including Orange-cheeked, Black-crowned, and Black-rumped. There were other finches I couldn't place.

Because birds are beautiful and exciting to watch, Moody Gardens has generously included a few species of birds from outside the rainforest habitats. You may notice a wonderfully tame and friendly Princess of Wales Parrot, an Eastern Rosella, and the Hooded Parrot, residents of the Australian drylands – and the Baikal Teal is from the Siberian wilderness. But it is to our advantage and pleasure to see as many species as possible. This pyramid is a bird lover's delight.

Indeed, the whole Moody Gardens experience is a delight. I spent a couple of days there and just scratched the surface. I hope to return with my wife (she'll love Moody Gardens) and spend another few days of quality time. 