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Courtney Johnson, left, and Sweetie Pacarro get into the party mood with balloon hats.

Expect fun

There's endless partying -- plus the allure of the unexpected -- at Señor Frog's

By Jason Genegabus
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It's a Mexican fiesta, Hawaiian style, at the second Señor Frog's location to arrive in the United States.

Despite an unexpected closure within its first few days of operation (due to a government-issued occupancy permit mix-up), the third-floor restaurant and bar in Waikiki's Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center is already drawing steady crowds of both tourists and locals.

Señor Frog's

At Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center

Call: 440-0150

"One of our mottos is 'Expect the Unexpected,' " said Señor Frog's Waikiki marketing manager Suzy Ford. "You're going to be entertained from the moment you walk in the door."

OR EVEN AS you're riding up the elevator, as is the case for pedestrians walking by the corner of Kalakaua and Royal Hawaiian. A lifeguard chair and beach umbrella are set up near the street level doors that provide dedicated access to Señor Frog's upstairs.

Local residents will likely utilize the main entrance, which is easily accessible from the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center's garage. Expect to pay \$2 for two hours of parking, although Ford says free validation will be available soon.

This new Honolulu outpost opened two years after Myrtle Beach, S.C., welcomed the first Señor Frog's to the United States. They follow 14 other locations in Mexico, the Caribbean and South America; Las Vegas is the next stop for the chain owned by Cancun-based Grupo Anderson's.

A giant frog peers over the roof on the third floor, with garbage cans camouflaged by stacks of life preservers to maintain the beach vibe. Two choices await once you make it inside Señor Frog's Waikiki: Follow a hostess to a table, or hunt for a seat at one of three bars.

The sheer size of the room is the first definitive sign of party-raging potential here.

The second? A highly-coveted 4 a.m. liquor license.

A main bar extends throughout the central portion of the restaurant, with satellite bars wisely situated at opposite ends of the room. Live music and group performances by Señor Frog's employees bumper party jams from the '70s and '80s to present day hits spun by resident deejays.



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The swing bar is one of three at Señor Frog's in Waikiki.

THE GOAL here, we're reminded time and time again, is to cut loose, drop your guard and just have fun.

While adults rule during the late-night hours, families with children are invited to check out the action during the day.

"By day, we're very family-friendly," said Ford. "And Sundays will be 'Kids Day,' where families can come in and have a good time until 7 p.m."

A pau hana happy hour is also in the works, with a reggae night planned for Tuesdays and local promoters Vertical Junkies stepping in to host on Thursdays. Ford expects to have the entertainment lineup locked in by the end of the month.

For now, the Señor Frog's staff itself is entertainment enough. About half of the restaurant's 200 employees are local, with a core management group from Señor Frog's locations in Mexico imported to lead the way.

Sporting T-shirts with the words "Party Saver" across the back, they blow whistles and lead conga lines. Limbo contests and choreographed dances on stage with the Señor Frog's house band are the norm.

"People come here to party," Ford said. "They're here on vacation ... and our employees all get into it.

"They're up on the stage dancing, encouraging the guests to get up on their chairs. They've got a bunch of different routines, at least 10 or so."

And then there's Bogar, the single-named balloon artist that spends six nights a week twisting his creations for customers. Another Señor Frog's Mexican import, he goes through anywhere from 600 to 1,000 balloons per evening from 6 p.m. on, until he runs out.

With a turnout of about half tourists and half local residents over the first few weeks of operation, Ford is confident that Señor Frog's will enjoy the kind of success in Honolulu that other major chains have seen. The restaurant hopes to cement its place as a cornerstone for the party scene in the heart of Waikiki.

"We'd just like to show people what it is that Señor Frog's does so well," said Ford. "I couldn't really even wrap my brain around it (myself) until I saw it myself."



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Duane "Dog" Chapman and his wife, Beth, paid a visit.