



HOME & AWAY

Texas Sweet

This Galveston candy factory puts the sugar on The Strand.

By Karen Eakins

Let me offer two words of warning to those planning to visit La King's Confectionery in Galveston, Texas: Heads up when going by the taffy maker and bring willpower. 'Cause you're gonna need both.

On a girlfriends' getaway with my friends (and cousins) Linda and Mona, we went exploring from our downtown home base at The Tremont House. It didn't take long to reach La King's on the Victorian-era Strand. It was right

around the corner – a pro and a con because that made it convenient. An enticement a chocolate lover trying not to overindulge doesn't really need.

That being said, though, it was the first place we visited. My visions of every luscious dark-chocolate pour featured in a TV commercial were fulfilled right in front of me. Heaven help me.

Nearly a Century of Sugar

La King's actually got its start in 1927 in Houston – where Dad, Jimmy King, learned the trade from old-world candy makers. Son Jack moved to Galveston



Handmade fudge, gummy fruit slices, peanut brittle, divinity, pralines, turtles and hand-dipped chocolates fill wooden, glass-faced display cases.

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learned the trade from old-world candy makers. Son Jack moved to Galveston, taking along the 19th-century recipes, methods and equipment, in 1976 to set up shop on the Strand. That legacy is evident in the shop, where some of the equipment is still visible and used, along with a working 1920s soda fountain.

The ambience is early 20th-century as well, with decor featuring well-trodden wooden flooring, old-fashioned iron ice-cream dining sets and ceiling fans to cool customers on a hot day. Not to mention those long wooden, glass-faced display cases brimming with handmade fudge, gummy fruit slices, peanut brittle, divinity, pralines, turtles and, of course, hand-dipped chocolates. It's like stepping back in time.

The shop makes more than 50 candies from original, century-old recipes, but visitors will also find novelty candy found only in shops such as this – for example, ribbon candy (a holiday favorite), pillow candy, rock candy, what was once penny candy in sticks, even bubble-gum cigarettes and cigars. It's all enticing, but the number-one seller here? Saltwater taffy.



Ernest Torres guides a ribbon of colorful taffy out of La King's ancient taffy machine.

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More Than Chocolate

The ancient taffy machine creates a fair amount of racket in the back of the store, and I stopped to ask about the machine and how much taffy a batch produced. Ernest Torres – actually the shop's master candy maker but filling in on taffy production for a while – told me a batch is 40 pounds, roughly 3,000 pieces, and takes 45 minutes to pull, spin and wrap. They make roughly four batches a day and during those sultry Texas summers, they sell about 100 pounds of it a day. Then he tossed me a freshly made piece. I'm not a taffy lover, but I went back for seconds.

Customers who buy more than 10 pounds get a 10 percent discount. And I understand they'll scoop some straight out of the processing batch if a customer asks, which Mona recommended. They tend to toughen

up as they cool – not hard by any stretch of the imagination – but that freshly

pulled and wrapped confection is hard to resist when it's soft and warm.

There are other diversions often found at touristy stops in the store as well, such as antique arcade machines, a hobby horse and a stretch-a-penny machine with four designs.

Sugar Shock and Caffeine Dreams

Running along the final wall in this 150-year-old building are two more temptations – the soda fountain/ice cream counter and the coffee bar. The soda fountain serves up Purity ice cream, Texas' first (founded in Galveston in 1889). La King's has an exclusive – it's made on the building's third floor, and this is the only place to get it.

Visitors can sidle up to the bar for authentic old-fashioned malts, shakes, sundaes and more. Those who opt for ice cream alone can choose from 36 flavors. There's even a King Split – a pound of the patron's choice of ice creams, topped with whatever he or she wants, served with as many spoons as needed. Or just one spoon for really enthusiastic ice-cream fans.

Those who take their caffeine in liquid form will find the coffee bar stocked with seven freshly brewed Duncan Coffee choices daily. It's possible to buy the beans, too, and La King's will even grind them. Although, how anyone manages to buy coffee here daily and not buy chocolate is beyond my imagination – we even hit up La King's one more time the next day before we embarked on a cruise ship. And I just discovered they ship to customers' homes – oh, my.

Planning Your Trip

For more information on La King's Confectionery, contact (409) 762-6100 or www.lakingsconfectionery.com. To learn more about Galveston, contact www.galveston.com.

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