

Suriname

A Place To Revisit

by Ralph Pollack

Suriname is the smallest independent country in South America. It is situated between British Guiana on its east and French Guyana on its western border. The country of Brazil is the southern most border, while the Atlantic Ocean is its northern border. Suriname was previously called Dutch Guyana and its principal export was and still is alumina (bauxite), the primary ingredient in aluminum. Other exports include lumber, gold and shrimp. The official language is Dutch and all Surinamese speak Sranatongo (or taki taki), the local lingua franca. In late February 2004 I arrived in Aruba for some relaxation and the following week flew to Suriname. You may ask why Suriname? Well, I wanted to explore the area where Jake Kozloff and Clifford Jones started gaming in 1962 at the Torarica Hotel. These two pioneers were instrumental in opening casinos in Antigua, Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao and St. Maarten in the Caribbean and in Quito, Ecuador.



There were multiple reasons why Suriname was included in my year 2000 book as part of the Dutch Caribbean. First of all, several textbooks, touring guides and also the above stamp, include Suriname as part of the *Caribbean Organization*. I suppose it is and was due to the enor-

mous world trade that still makes Suriname a valuable world asset and its close Dutch connections.

After traveling One Thousand Six Hundred miles I landed in the evening at the Johan Adolph Pengel Airport which was about an hour away from the capitol city of Paramirabo. Since Suriname is a few degrees above the equator, the heat reminded me of a visit to Palm Springs, CA when the temperature was 117 degrees during the day and at night the radiant heat from the sidewalks drifted up towards my face. I then knew what a pizza is like in an oven, however, here in Suriname it was hotter and more tropical. The trip from the airport was on a narrow highway passing small towns and one was Lely. I noticed that the signs on stores and gas stations were either in Chinese, Hindustani or Dutch but always included a translation in English. I am still unable to understand why the English language is so prevalent.

That night I stayed in a hotel in a small town about eight kilometers outside of Paramirabo called Leonsberg. The name of the hotel was the Stardust Hotel, yes, the Stardust Hotel! The people were quite friendly and the next morning the breakfast included delicious fresh breads, eggs of any kind and a mango-like juice. That morning it was raining quite heavily and I headed to the Torarica Hotel where I met Mr. Marcel Mook, the casino manager. He was kind enough to give me a tour of the city and explained some of the history and heritage of the country.

In 1962, the Torarica Hotel and Casino hosted the Surinam Casino with roulette chips bearing its name, see, SUR – B HCE.2* and a pair of dice also with the Surinam Casino logo. The chips that were used for Blackjack and Roulette were the beautiful H.C. Edwards “H” mold chips (SUR – 1 HCE.1) with the sunrise logo and the location ‘West Indies South America’ and the famous ‘C.J. J.K.’ initials. Mr. Frank Robles, the current hotel manager was kind enough to speak to me regarding the history of this premier hotel. He has the great distinction of being present and working at the opening of the hotel in 1962 when Queen Juliana of the Netherlands came for its inauguration.



SUR-B HCE.2



SUR-1 HCE.1



TOR-50G T.1

A few months after the Surinam Casino opened, Jake opened the 'J.K.. C.J. Casino', about 1/8 th of a mile from the Torarica Hotel, in the Palace Hotel. The Palace Hotel was named because it was opposite the spacious lawns of the Government's Palace. The roulette chips bear their initials (PAL - B HCE.1), while the chips from the table games had the EWING mold with a PRC # PAL- 5 EWI.1. In 1968, the Franklin Mint issued tokens in fifty-cents and one Dollar denominations (PAL - .50 T.1). At the present time a government convention center constructed primarily of glass occupies the former Palace Hotel location.



PAL-B HCE.1



PAL-5 EWI.2



PAL-.50 T.1

For about a decade the Palace Casino stayed open, then abruptly closed, while the Surinam Torarica Casino still exists in the same location and is now the Torarica Casino. After several decades no new casinos opened until the past five years when eight new ones appeared. The Macao Casino owned by Mr.R. Ryker was across the street from the Torarica Hotel so I walked over, met with Mr. Ryker and chatted about his experiences in Suriname. All of his chips bear his initials, 'R R', PRC # MAC - 5 CPO.1. There are two different currencies used for chips in most of the casinos, one in the US Dollar and the second in Surinamese Florins, PRC # MAC - 500 ATT.1.



MAC-5 CPO.1



MAC-500 Sf ABT.1

I was fortunate to have met with Mr. Henk Sallons, an assistant casino manager, who was gracious enough to take me around to many of the casinos. The first stop was the Ambassador Casino. This casino had chips with the Scroll mold and a Bud Jones type mold. The generic 2 1/2 chip is a plain yet attractive chip used as a \$1.00 progressive-type bet similar to the side bet in Caribbean Stud Poker. In January 2004, the currency was revalued with a new Surinamese currency where for every old 1000 Sf this would equal to a 1 SRD. The exchange rate in early 2004 was One US Dollar = 2800 Surinamese Florins = 2.8 SRD. To this date, none of the

casinos except one, re-ordered new chips with the new currency values.



AMB-2.5 SCR.1



AMB-2500 Sf SCR.1

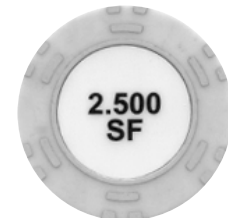


AMB-1 ABT.1

Our next visit was to the Mirage Casino that is an up scale casino. This casino has a colorful \$2.50 chip and its counterpart in Surinamese Florins in the 2.500 Sf chip.



MIR -2.5 LIB.1



MIR-2500 Sf LIB.1

The Golden Dragon Casino has some interesting chips, plain yet to the point.



GDR-1 DOL.1



GDR-10.000 Sf DOL.1

The Palace Casino (not the original 1960's casino) is the fanciest one in Paramirabo. Its chips deserve an award as to their beauty! The flower is the Bird of Paradise which is beautifully demonstrated in its center logo.



The Torarica Casino's chips have a great South American jungle logo depicting the indigenous Carib Indian's heritages.



TOR-2.5 H&C.1



TOR-5 H&C.1



TOR-10,000 Sf H&C.1

The newest casino is the Tropicana Casino with very colorful and attractive chips. These chips have the new SRD Surinamese currency, see PRC # TRO – 2.5 SRD.1.



TRO-1 LIB.1



TRO-2.5 SRD LIB.1

There is a small casino in a small town between Paramiribo and the JAP Airport in Lely. It is the Lely Hills Casino that has Chipco chips. Unfortunately, all these chips are worn.



LEY-10,000 Sf CPO.1

There are two casinos four to five hours west of Paramiribo in the coastal city of Nickerie. The Regency chips are Chipcos without a location of a city or country. The other casino has only slot machines.



REG-2,500 Sf CPO.1

In each of these casinos I was allowed to purchase some chips to add to my collection. I was escorted to the cage where the manager would help me obtain only a few chips. I did not, nor would I be allowed to, buy a hoard of chips. I respected their wishes and left the casinos with glee that I was able to obtain these great chips! My short visit was over. I met many pleasant individuals and am looking forward to return to this interesting and exciting country.

* The reference codes used to describe chips and tokens in this text are derived from Pollack's Reference Codes (PRC) in "The Casinos of Aruba~Bonaire~Curacao~St. Maarten~Suriname, *The Dutch Caribbean*".