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ATLANTIC CITY VACATION

Atlantic City is a love story for Bob & Tanya, and their stay at Caesar's Atlantic City Resort & Casino and Seaview across the bay brings new life to an old enchantment / **BY BOB & TANYA WAITE**

People often ask me why Tanya and I are always going to Atlantic City. It's a fair question. We have written articles about a couple of the hotels and restaurants there already and now for a third time we again end up in AC. You see for Tanya and me, Atlantic City is a love story. It is where we go to let down our hair, to sit in the high tower of a hotel and watch the Ferris Wheel on the Steel Pier change colors at night. It is where we take walks from one end of the boardwalk to the other, smelling the boardwalk food, watching the people from all walks of life and stopping to strike up a conversation with total strangers. It is there where we laugh and sometimes after playing the slots, cry.

Tanya is already packed. I am amazed. I'm the one lagging. I always forget something I need, so I am sure something is missing. I look again: shaving cream-check, toothpaste-check, swim trunks-check and down the list. We are ready to leave and I say, "What did I forget?" Tanya says, "Let me see." Within seconds she asks me, "Do you plan on wearing socks?"

We go a little later than we expected, but we do have time to make our 12-noon appointment with the VIP check-in at Caesars Atlantic City Resort & Casino. Along the way we stop for some coffee and donuts and talk about our double header—Caesars in Atlantic City and Seaview across the bridge in Galloway, New Jersey. We are going stay overnight at Caesars, eat at KWI and Buddakan, and then spend two days at an amazing resort called Seaview. We are psyched.



CAESARS ATLANTIC CITY RESORT & CASINO

Walking into Caesars we are greeted by the 10-foot tall sculpture of Caesar Augustus standing on a large platform with his staff in left hand and his right hand pointing forward to represent his rule over the ancient Roman Empire.

We go to the VIP check-in and are met by Sharia Brown, who not only checks us in but



also holds our bags while we go to KWI Noodle House, where we have a 1 p.m. reservation.

We arrive at KWI on the ground floor of Caesar's, known for their "trend forward Asian cuisine." I can't wait to try some. Tanya, a little skeptical of any Asian restaurant that isn't Wing Wah's in Levittown says, "Babe, you think they will have something I like?" I say, "Sweetie, we will surely like the food here, just like we have at other Asian restaurants we have gone to while away." She threatens, "You better be right." Scared by her threat, I walk up to the hostess, tell her who we are and we are seated at a comfortable table in the back away from the other diners.

Our waitress is so pleasant and polite that I think Tanya wants to take her home with us. Her name is Skylar Hua. She brings us tea and asks us if we want anything else to drink. We order Crispy Calamari with Chile Peppers & Onions as an appetizer. Tanya then orders the Seafood Basket, which is made from rice noodles and contains shrimp, scallops and crabmeat. I order the Garlic Sauce sautéed Lamb Chops.

As we wait for our calamari, Jerry Beaver food and beverage director for Bally's and

Caesar's visits our table and introduces himself. Then one of our servers, Ling brings us the calamari dish, which looks delightful. Our waitress already warned us there might be a lot of heat coming from the chilis, but we find them to be just right. The calamari are tender and the light breading is crispy. While we are eating our appetizer, Raymond Wong, the restaurant manager visits our table and asks if everything is good and if we are pleased with our waitress. He generously smiles when we tell him just how great everything is.

Our main courses are too good to even describe. Tanya cannot finish all hers and takes some home. My lamb chops are delectable, tender and cooked to perfection. Our dessert is Green Tea Tiramisu.

After lunch we pick up our bags and go to our room. Our room is beautiful. Tanya is immediately taking photos to show her friends and family. We have a corner room, way up, almost the top floor, and it has bay windows facing the ocean ... wonderfully comfortable. We rest on the large comfortable king size bed and watch a little TV, before going to Bally's Beach Bar.

The Beach Bar is hopping. The band is

Opposite, Bob & Tanya standing in a garden at Seaview. Top left, the walkway into Bally's Beach Bar on the Atlantic City Boardwalk. Top right, inside Caesar's Atlantic City Resort & Casino on the lobby level. Bottom left, the serene atmosphere of KWI Noodle House located at Caesar's. Bottom right, a stunning large statue of Buddha looks over a long table in Buddakan, which is located at the Pier Shops at Caesar's.

Lefty Lucy and the lead singer is Lucy DiBlasio, who seems to have pulled energy out of the air. It is hot, but people cannot contain themselves and start to populate the space between the bar and the tables to dance. She belts out a couple of folk rock songs with a bluesy Janet Joplin voice, but her repertoire has plenty of dance songs and the atmosphere is like a magnet to Tanya, who, by herself starts dancing in front of the stage. I go up too, and in the spirit of Lefty Lucy, I present my two left feet for one song.

Kelly, a guidance counselor on a trip with a group of teachers asks Tanya to dance. At first, she says, "Maybe later." But Kelly is persistent. She says, "My friends are white and they dance like it, but you're all black Mommy and you do it right." So Tanya again goes up and dances with her new found friend. They dance up a storm and then Kelly comes to our table and sits. She even takes a sip of Tanya's drink. They are instant girlfriends.

We go back to the room for a break. At 8 p.m. we are going to Buddakan, a restaurant that we patronized once and now cannot wait. We have an hour to rest.

Ah Buddakan! This restaurant located at the Pier Shops at Caesars is a sight to behold. Walking in is a long table leading to a huge statue of Buddha in the back of the restaurant. The atmosphere and decor remind one of an Asian village. The ceiling is painted to look like an evening sky full of stars. We are seated immediately and are given a wrap-around booth that faced the other diners.

The Buddakan menu is difficult. There are so many wonderful dishes that we are confused and not sure what to get. We peruse it several times. We decide on the Chef's Tasting for Two. This included appetizers; Chicken and Ginger Dumplings, Edamame Ravioli and Cantonese Spring Roll.

Our first course comes, Asian Caesar Salad, and it is so much better than a mere Caesar salad. Since Caesar is Tanya's favorite salad, this put her into culinary ecstasy, especially the spicy cashews and the hints of Asian flavor. It's love at first bite.

Our second course is Wasabi Crusted Filet Mignon, Pan Seared Sea Bass and Vegetable Fried Rice. The Wasabi Crusted Filet Mignon is spectacular. The sliced filet is crusted with

wasabi and Asian flavored breadcrumbs. It is served on top of mashed white sweet potatoes. Also on the plate are Chinese eggplant and shiitake mushrooms. The effect of this dish on me is, "Let's get to know each other better."

Tanya, who likes fish better than steak, tastes the steak, but goes right to the Pan Seared Sea Bass. The dish is amazing. It is so light and the truffle jus is just there, not overpowering. It is served with butternut squash, haricots verts, and best of all maiaike mushrooms—something Tanya picks out and I savor.

As much as we wanted to eat more, we skip dessert. I believe there is always room for dessert, but we cannot eat another bite. We leave after a brief conversation with Amanda Rembelinsky, an assistant general manager. Ah Buddakan, we love you!

coffee rolls and our Java fix. Tanya, who is always excited about travel asks, "What is this going to be like?" "Beats me," I reply. All we really know is that it is a hotel and golf course and that a lot of famous people stayed there, including a couple of presidents, golf luminaries like Sam Snead, governors, movie stars, and even the Rolling Stones.

My GPS leads us past the resort, so we have to retrace our steps. Finding our course, we see this magnificent building, a grand hotel in classic style. It is white and has the appearance of an English manor. Tanya takes a deep breath and I almost hit a post while gawking at the building's façade.

The valet takes our car and we enter Seaview. We do not carry our bags—



SEAVIEW, A DOLCE HOTEL

Tanya and I never knew such a place as Seaview even existed. We have been to Atlantic City countless times, but never really paid much attention to what is going on in the small towns across the bay bridge, west of Atlantic City. We are ready to go and find out.

We are expected to check in early to go on tour. Our breakfast that day consists of a fast stop at Dunkin Donuts for

something allowed but unthinkable when entering such a classy, classic hotel. As our bags and car are being taken we survey the grounds. Turning from the stately building we look on past the incredible golf course and can see Reeds Bay in the distance. From a different vantage point we see the Atlantic City skyline. All 670 acres of this magnificent resort are embellished with colorful gardens, distinctive trees, winding paths and interesting structures.

We are checked in by Heather



James, the guest services supervisor, who not only checks us in, but also arranges for a tour of the facilities and grounds. She is all smiles—hospitality incarnate.

Entering our room, we find out it isn't a room—it's a suite with a large living room that has a giant screen TV, a dining area with a dining table and chairs where breakfast or lunch can be served. The room is so spacious, we remarked that it is bigger than our apartment, with comfortable chairs, sofas and a large desk. The suite has a long hallway connecting the living room, two bathrooms and bedroom. There are amenities such as a refrigerator and a Keurig coffeemaker. The bedroom is large and has a very comfortable king-size bed, two chairs, appealing art and a nice view of the grounds. We are pleased and ready for a tour of Seaview.

Our tour guide is Stephany Mazzone, sales manager and a graduate of Stockton College of New Jersey, which for a while owned Seaview and used the resort as a training grounds for its Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies.

Stephany interned at Seaview and returned after a short stint in a high powered marketing career in Atlantic City.

Our tour begins in the main lobby in the Clarence room where Presidents Warren G. Harding and Dwight Eisenhower once sat. The history of Seaview is incredible. It began with Clarence H. Geist, a golf enthusiast who did not like the nearest golf clubs, so he decided to build his own course outside Atlantic City. This club, now Seaview, began with an old farmhouse, in what was then known as Absecon, now Galloway. The farmhouse is still part of the large hotel built around it and is where the Coastal Grille Restaurant is located.

Big important golf tournaments have always found a home at Seaview. In fact our stay, Stephany tells us, is right after an LPGA tournament. Stephany is great, discussing history as she shows us around Seaview. We see the Oval Room, which was where Grace Kelly celebrated her sweet 16 birthday party.

There are ballrooms and patios that have been used for weddings. One spot Tanya loves

Opposite, during dusk, a view of Seaview's classic exterior. Top left, the bathroom in one of Seaview's suites. Top right, the roomy bedroom in one of Seaview's suites—very much like the one where Tanya and Bob stayed. Bottom left, a living room in one of the suites where there are tables for chatting, dining and just relaxing. The living room also has a refrigerator and Keurig coffee maker. Bottom right, Tanya, after a refreshing dip in the outside pool, is getting ready to walk into the outdoor Jacuzzi.

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is the patio off the Oval Room that is surrounded by a beautiful garden.

Seaview just finished an amazing multimillion dollar upgrade that include the full renovations of all 296 guest rooms and public spaces and updates to dining and meeting areas throughout the hotel. This makes the classic hotel more up-to-date, without losing its historic appeal.

Beautiful chandeliers and light fixtures are everywhere. The bars are cozy yet spacious. Al Capone, it is said, visited the Coastal Grille and had his drinks lit up, presumably to test the quality of the alcohol. Many in the staff come from generations of people who have worked at Seaview. In fact there are people working there who have been with Seaview over 40 years.

There is a museum full of beautiful paintings and a wall with signed photos of famous people, such as Thomas Edison, several governors of New Jersey, Presidents of the United States, celebrities, champion golfers, and others.

Stephany takes us to the indoor pool that is spacious and surrounded by beach chairs. There is a changing area and plenty of fresh towels for the guests to use.

We tour the grounds and notice that there is an outdoor refreshment stand for golfers and others to grab a quick snack. We walk through gardens and see beautiful outdoor settings for weddings and other events. We walk paths and fall in love with the natural beauty surrounding Seaview.

Coming back to our room, we take a nap and then go out to eat. We want to explore the area, so we get into the car and head for Smithville. We didn't make any reservations, so we ride back to Route 30 and find a dinner where we eat breakfast for dinner.

Returning again to our room, we see the beds turned and candy is left for us. After watching a movie on the giant screen TV, we go to sleep. Ready for our next big day.

We are now on our own. Waking up we eat the breakfast buffet in the main

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dining room and then take a walk on the grounds. We enjoy the gardens and quiet serenity of Seaview. Sitting outside we watch golfers going to the course, including a group of U.S. Marine veterans who are especially friendly and ready tee off.

In the afternoon we decide to go to the outdoor pool, which we haven't seen yet. Tanya, is always fixing her face, making sure her colors match and so on. I say, "Hon, we're going swimming, not to the grand ball." She says, "Very funny, ha, ha." I quell my impatience to dive into the cool water waiting for us.

The pool is surrounded by the hotel. Beach chair recliners, tables and umbrellas circle the area, and the pool is clean and inviting. There is also a hot jacuzzi right next to the pool. The water in the pool seems cool to my toes, but I cannot resist going in, so I simply take the plunge. Tanya, however, is tiptoeing into the water, down the steps and swears if I come near her she will scream. I am tempted to splash her but defer to her aversion to cold water.

Eventually we are both in the water. I do a few laps, but Tanya is content to walk around, bobbing up and down and simply relaxing in the water, which now feels quite comfortable. I cannot help diving under water and grabbing Tanya's feet. She calls me an idiot but is laughing and enjoying the time we have in the pool. After swimming, we relax in the jacuzzi and go back to our room.

We have reservations at the Costal Grille for 7 p.m. Arriving at this restaurant, which was once part of the original farmhouse, we notice the unique candelabra light fixture, the tiled floor, old fashioned bar and rustic ambience. We are seated and a friendly waitress visits our table and takes our drink order.

After perusing the menu, we are ready to order, but instead of the waitress coming back to our table, Chef Sean Freeman, the executive sous chef, comes to our table and wants to personally cook for us. He says he would like to cook for

continued on page 122

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Getaway

continued from page 91

us some things that are on the menu and some that are not. He will choose and bring each dish personally to see what we think. I say, "You made us an offer we can't refuse."

With each plate comes something different. Small servings of many things. The first is Salmon Nachos with smoked crispy light salmon and wasabi crème. We are dazzled, but it continues to get better with each delicious dish: Crabmeat is served in an Arrabiata sauce with blistered tomatoes, and then we have Shrimp Tempura with garlic sauce, lime juice and seaweed salad. We are overwhelmed and the plates keep coming out. We also have steak fries, smoked green corn, a 12 oz. New York Strip Steak that is so tender it can be cut

with a butter knife. My favorite is Dayboat Scallops fresh from Cape May that very day.

We find out that Chef Sean has been

With each plate comes something different. Small servings of many things. The first is Salmon Nachos with smoked crispy light salmon and wasabi crème.

cooking since his childhood. The son of Italian American parents in South Jersey, he learned how to choose vegetables, make

sauce and many other things at a very young age. He never lost his desire to please and his culinary history shows that he is and always has been a sought after chef that enjoys nothing more than cooking for people who appreciate good food.

Stuffed, we walk around the hotel, taking our last stroll before we leave in the morning. It is a romantic night with moonlight guiding our path, time seems frozen.

We wake up early. Our Atlantic City vacation is over. As we leave Seaview, we remember the great time we had at both Caesar's and Seaview. We are heading back to Bucks County, a getaway for many people and for us, home.

BOB WAITE IS THE EDITOR OF BUCKS COUNTY MAGAZINE AND TANYA IS HIS WIFE, TRAVEL COMPANION AND THE CO-WRITER OF THIS DEPARTMENT.