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## OAHU: SWEET SPOT

**NEW BRAUNFELS:**  
All-American Town

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**THE STELLA HOTEL:**  
The New Standard

**PAIN MANAGENT:**  
Don't live with it

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Luxurious  
Mountain Golf  
in Colorado



# The Stella Hotel, Checking in

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I have to admit that being an alumnus of the University of Texas, I've never really had a good reason to travel to Bryan, College Station. In fact, I have many friends that attended A&M University, but except for the occasional important sporting events rarely visit their college town themselves.

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ince my introduction to the Stella Hotel on the outskirts of Bryan Texas, I've had to reevaluate my desire to make the trip and even consider making it a recurring event.

On a sunny spring morning, a friend and I made the roughly hundred mile trip from Austin and found it to be a very pleasant and comfortable drive. Highway 290 was dotted with beautiful trees in that bright chartreuse color of new leaves mixed with the dark green of pine trees. We passed dozens of fields carpeted with wildflowers; coral colored Indian paintbrush, pink butter cups, countless bright yellow wildflowers, and gorgeous patches of bluebonnets.



In this part of Texas, it's not surprising to see fields of cattle, but on this trip, we saw a pasture with a small herd of actual bison, farms with ostriches and goats, and even some fields with exotic longhorn Indian cattle varieties. It felt a bit like a safari, only at 70 miles per hour.

We approached the hotel via an immaculate neighborhood called "A&M Traditions" which seemed like miles of manicured lawns with bridges, ponds, vintage light poles and a good number of security gates. Tucked away in the center of 900 acres of grand homes and parkland is the private Traditions Club at A&M, with its impressive Clubhouse facilities and a Jack Nicklaus and Jack Nicklaus II Design championship golf course.

On the edge of the Traditions neighborhood is the Lake Walk/Atlas development which is a planned 200-acre community with new and attractive corporate buildings and the beautiful Stella Hotel anchored along the manmade Lake Atlas.

The hotel designed by Dallas-based Fab Studio architects is six stories of sharp modern architecture clad in metal, wood and finished concrete. The new facility, not quite a year old, boasts an impressive 20,000 square feet of ballroom and conference space and has 176 standard rooms and suites including two impressive presidential suites.

The first thing that hits you about the location is the wonderful quiet. The site, though close to both Bryan and College station still has a rural feeling and is surrounded by sweeping views of the Brazos River valley, again very pretty in springtime.

Directly across the hotel parking lot is a small shore area with a large modern pavilion for concerts and weddings and according to assistant manager Jordan, a good number of marriage proposals. At night the lake is beautifully lit up with several large fountains bathed in intense color. Adjacent to the pavilion is a semi-paved area that hosts a Farmer's market on Tuesdays and is just an excellent place to enjoy the lake views from picnic tables.

The most impressive feature of the shore area is the observation tower. The steel and galvanized steel structure stands 75 feet tall and has a 336 square-foot observation deck and three individual lookouts at different levels.

Checking into the hotel is your first clue to the upscale experience to follow. The lobby does feature some rustic touches, but with very modern geometric walls, art chandeliers, and a giant geometric wooden sculpture the feel is very fresh. Farther into the lobby is an imposing marble table that serves as the check-in desk.

The check-in process was quick and welcoming and provided by a good number of very professional staff.

Our hotel room was a comfortable standard unit, but it nicely appointed with a soft palate of earth tones accented by beautiful blues. Throughout the hotel, particular attention has been paid to a wide variety of textured ceramics mimicking travertine in the floors, white marble and even rustic barn wood in the walls. The effect in the sleek, bright bathroom was so convincing that I thought the walls at first were indeed made of reclaimed wood.





Additional nice touches in the room were the luxurious Italian Frette robes and bath supplies by California based 'Lather' which obsessively specializes in unique natural ingredients in their products.

Our room had a grand view of the lake and an impressive golf facility just beyond (sadly only available to the A&M golf team). In the evenings, the view was equally stunning with lovely sunsets and later the amazing fountains in the middle of the lake.

Although we had arrived at midafternoon, the hotel's restaurant, Campfire, provided us with the first of several very nice meals. A lunch of lobster bisque and Cobb salad with a French chardonnay made an excellent start to our stay.

If the goal is minimal driving, there is a variety of options available right at the hotel. In addition to a small gym, there is a large beautiful swimming pool area, and complimentary bicycles are available for guests for rides along the lake and into the surrounding neighborhood. For the more adventurous wanting to take advantage of the lake, complimentary paddle boards are also available.

We decided on a short walk, and then hiked to the top of the observation tower for the views and then spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying drinks and the nice fire pit at the outdoor patio at Campfire.

Back at the hotel, we found a lively crowd enjoying both the inside and patio bars at Campfire and live music in the Victorian-styled bar called Hershel's.

The following morning was brisk and windy, but a light breakfast and strong coffee at the Coffee Shop called POV adjacent to the hotel was a good choice given the excess of the previous evening.

I had requested a tour of the property, and Manager David C. walked me through several of the large and unique rooms of the hotel. A beautiful ballroom with a capacity of 250 sits just past the main restaurant on the ground floor with access to a vast exterior courtyard.



PHOTOS BY NICK SHIMONTE



PHOTOS BY DE WARD AND BARD

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The room has a stunning collection of 12 large chandeliers that the staff had the, we'll call it fun, of building in the early days leading up to the hotel's opening. The immense snowflake-like fixtures took the staff (managers and all) the better part of a day to assemble just one. When fully lit, the effect is stunning. In addition to the ballroom several smaller conference rooms are available, all with audio-visual capability and some with separate cooking facilities. In its short year, the hotel's facilities have been used by everything from the US military during Hurricane Harvey to a week-long fashion event hosted by a nearby county.

On our second day, we explored shops and bookstores in nearby College Station and that evening had booked a reservation at the hotel's main dining room. The restaurant has a young but professional staff that genuinely makes you feel welcomed.

We started off dinner with a delicious Little Gem Caesar salad with crisp croutons, shaved parmesan and a great dressing with traditional anchovies. We followed with a Tarte Tatin of red and golden beets. The perfectly roasted beets were sweet, nutty and served on toasted brioche that had been spread with a fantastic 'imperial goat cheese'. This was a terrific start. For our mains, we opted for the bone-in Berkshire pork chop and the Roasted Red Snapper. The pork chop was perfectly tender and nicely dressed with an apple, rosemary and red wine reduction and accompanied by tender sweet potatoes, and sweet potato purée. The Red Fish was simpler in its preparation, nicely roasted, but paired with a beautiful assortment of baby root vegetables. We paired the meal with a 2014 Flowers Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. It went beautifully with the pork but was

light enough to be enjoyed with the snapper. We finished our meal with a sweet deconstructed Smore (owing to the Campfire theme) and a delicate Mayan Vanilla Cheesecake; the latter served with Cointreau marinated strawberries and thin almond tuile cookies.

Our goal for the evening was to spend a good amount of time at Hershel's Bar. Named for Hershel Burgess whose land the entirety of Traditions, Lake Walk and The Stella occupy, the bar is a throwback to a 1920's speakeasy complete with leather sofas, vintage mementos, distressed brick and an impressive Victorian looking bar.

The main attraction is the close to 60 Bourbon varieties, almost 40 Scotches, a selection of pricey Japanese Whiskies and a good number of other spirits. The bar is presided over by bartender Alex C. whose knowledge of his inventory is matched by his passion for mixing drinks and exploring both classic and new combinations. We were not disappointed by the selection though stopped well short if the \$220 glasses of Macallan's 25-year-old Scotch. The very best part of Hershel's is the ability to enjoy a few drinks and take an elevator home.

Our last day at the hotel, we enjoyed an excellent breakfast again at Campfire with a nice selection of à la carte items like Eggs Benedict Stella with shaved Prosciutto, sautéed spinach, and Hollandaise sauce. Additionally, there is a good breakfast buffet with Irish oatmeal, pancakes and some really excellent (and popular) thick cut bacon.

The overall experience The Stella Hotel was fantastic. The hotel is beautiful; the staff is efficient and friendly, and it makes for a nice quiet getaway any time of the year – possibly with the exception of A&M home games.

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