

USA RESORTS

EAST COAST HAVENS AND SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY



On a recent visit to the East Coast of the USA, I had the pleasure of staying at two iconic locations, both landmarks in their own right.

KING & PRINCE BEACH AND GOLF RESORT

Tucked away on a corner of an island off the southern coast of Georgia, accessible via a causeway, lies this postcard-perfect resort right on the edge of the Atlantic. Once on the island, one ventures along leafy avenues, lined with a mix of colonial and more contemporary housing.

Dating back to the 1930's, the property was rebuilt after a devastating fire. Refinements and improvements have been added over the years, yet it has managed to retain an old-world charm that is now subtly blended with tasteful modern conveniences. Its location on the water's edge is spectacular, with views from the main dining room and many of the rooms directly over the waves and out to sea. Whatever the weather, the ocean provides an ever-changing canvas that is hard to tire of.

My luggage extracted from the boot by the doorman, I ventured through the main entrance. Upon entering the vast atrium-styled lobby, there was an immediate impression of space and light. Beyond the immaculately appointed reception desk lay a myriad of options, from the indoor swimming pool to a Starbucks coffee lounge. A gift shop provides on-the-spot shopping, very handy for those who are too relaxed to venture into the suburbs that dot St. Simons Island. I was then whisked up to my room where I unpacked at leisure, dwelling for long spells at the large arched windows overlooking the beach below.

Part of the charm of staying at the King & Prince is being able to explore St. Simons Island at leisure ... a delight whether accomplished on foot, by car or pedal pushing on a bicycle. Shopping was top of the list, as all good women know. The hardest part was making my final selections based on what would fit in my luggage ... there were so many pieces of art, antiques and outdoor accessories that it would have been fairly easy to max out the credit card and fill a shipping container, but I know at least one person who wouldn't have been too impressed! From classy boutiques to knickknack souvenirs, from new to second-hand, there was a great selection for every taste and budget.

Dining on the island is as varied as shopping. At the King & Prince, Starbucks offer light snacks, whilst the *Tavern* provides homely bar-style meals. The *Delegal* dining room is set against a backdrop of outstanding and historic stained glass windows and offers the island's only true waterfront dining experience. Elsewhere on the island one can dine from a vast array - from casual burgers or fish and chips, through to succulent steaks, Mexican dishes or pizzas. An island must-do is a visit to the *Crab Trap*, where the crab soup was the best I've ever had. *Crabdaddy's* next door provided me with a Surf 'n Turf that really hit the spot. When in the South, one simply has to indulge in freshly squeezed lemonade and I made my sampling at the *Beachcomber BBQ & Grill*, accompanied by delicious smoked ribs.

Golf is a favoured past-time on the Island and the King & Prince offers guests access to The Hampton Club, which was ranked by Golf Digest as amongst the top ten new resort courses when it opened in 1990. The layout of the course was designed by Joe Lee and boasts four signature holes located on marsh islands accessed by elevated cart bridges.

Back at the hotel, I was afforded a tour of the accommodations



on offer. The 188 guest rooms offer a range of oceanfront rooms or cabanas, ocean view, or resort view, as well as a selection of beach villas. The Cabana Rooms in the historic main building are extremely popular. Set on the ground floor, they have the addition of step-down parlour area which in turn leads to a private patio and direct access to the lawn overlooking the beach. The Tower Rooms above feature incredible cathedral ceilings. There are three guest houses situated within the resort's grounds which offer a variety of settings and are perfect for either romantic interludes, families preferring more the option of self-catering facilities or small corporate outings. They feature separate bedrooms, large living spaces, fully-equipped kitchens and private gardens. Amenities include Wi-Fi access, King or Queen beds, desks, television and DVD.

The resort grounds are beautifully landscaped with lush plantings able to withstand the coastal conditions. The four swimming pools provide ample water play if the ocean itself doesn't tempt one. Two tennis courts are tucked behind the exercise room for those who simply can't holiday without a workout.

Whether you remember the sparkle of daybreak out over the Atlantic, the soft whisper of waves on the shore, the twittering of birds or the sight of a baby turtle making its way to the water, the King & Prince resort will leave you with a desire to linger longer. Romance, grandeur, sedate luxury and fine attention to detail

will ensure your private holiday or corporate function is one to remember. Visit www.kingandprince.com for more information.

CASA MONICA

My stay in St. Augustine was typified by the warm welcome I received from the staff at Casa Monica. The atmosphere is one of restrained elegance. Situated in the heart of St. Augustine, the castle-like fortress stands proud. Dating back to the late 1800's, the property was restored in 1999 and now blends a rich tapestry of its history with contemporary amenities and services.

The 138 guest rooms offer accommodation that features a stunning blend of Spanish-styled wrought-iron, solid mahogany and sea-toned fabrics ... soothing, restful and pampering ... and beautiful bathrooms. Luxury suites are situated in five towers, and provide many extras, including a wet bar, luxurious robes and views of both the pool and the historical downtown area. Top of the range are their Signature Suites, their names alone conjuring visions of the building's rich history ... *Anastasia, St. Francis, Franklin, San Marco, Flagler* and *Ponce de Leon*. The most opulent, the *Kessler*, is a four-storey suite that has played host to the King and Queen of Spain. It can accommodate six, with the third floor given over to a large bedroom suite and private bath area. The suite has an entire floor dedicated to living and dining.

Also on offer are complimentary newspapers, imported feather duvets, high speed internet access, telephones with voicemail, Wi-Fi, a concierge, business centre with complimentary email, valet laundry and parking, and much more.

Dining at Casa Monica is a mouth-watering experience. 95 *Cordova* is highly rated, offering three dining rooms lavishly decorated with antiques, handcrafted chandeliers and baronial chairs which are sublimely comfortable and the perfect position from which to partake of the eclectic cuisine. The *Cobalt Lounge* has become a hot spot offering cocktails and live entertainment. The menu here is light, but one can also order from the main

restaurant's fine selection. One thing I loved was the very extensive list of wines available by the glass. A scrumptious selection of desserts, pastries, coffee and more is on hand at *Café Cordova*, open from breakfast to late at night. Lastly, of course, there's the room service and poolside service. Room service here is distinguished from other establishments in that they also offer packed gourmet lunches for those wishing to spend the day out and about exploring. Thought has gone into the design of these, with additional extras which include lip balm, disposable cameras and sunscreen.

One of my favourite experiences was relaxing poolside. The pool area sits in a central courtyard that has been decorated as another room ... glamorous day beds are the perfect spot to top up the tan ... oversized, comfortable and canopied if you do need a shade. The spa remains constantly heated and service is attentive.

All in all, this is a wonderful hotel to base yourself, whilst exploring the history and culture that makes St. Augustine the treasure that it is. Be pampered, be central, be entertained. ■

Visit www.casamonica.com for more information.



Casa Monica