

Betting on Luxury Atlantic City

By Mary Haban

Photography by Dale Sanders

The stakes were high. It had never been done before. And the odds didn't look good. But this was one gamble Dino Dounoulis was willing to take. He had a lot riding on this venture, and nothing – not even the naysayers -- would deter his vision.

As the General Manager of Bungalow Lounge and Restaurant, located along the main drag of Atlantic City's burgeoning boardwalk, Dounoulis saw an untapped potential in expanding this mighty city to new heights. And it would start with bringing his popular restaurant across the boardwalk and onto the beach, then elevating it with an upper sun deck so visitors could peer out at the Atlantic Ocean without anything blocking their view. Armed with his best poker face, he took the ultimate plunge -- putting all his chips on a bet many thought would never pay off. And what happened next was inspiring.

Jackpot

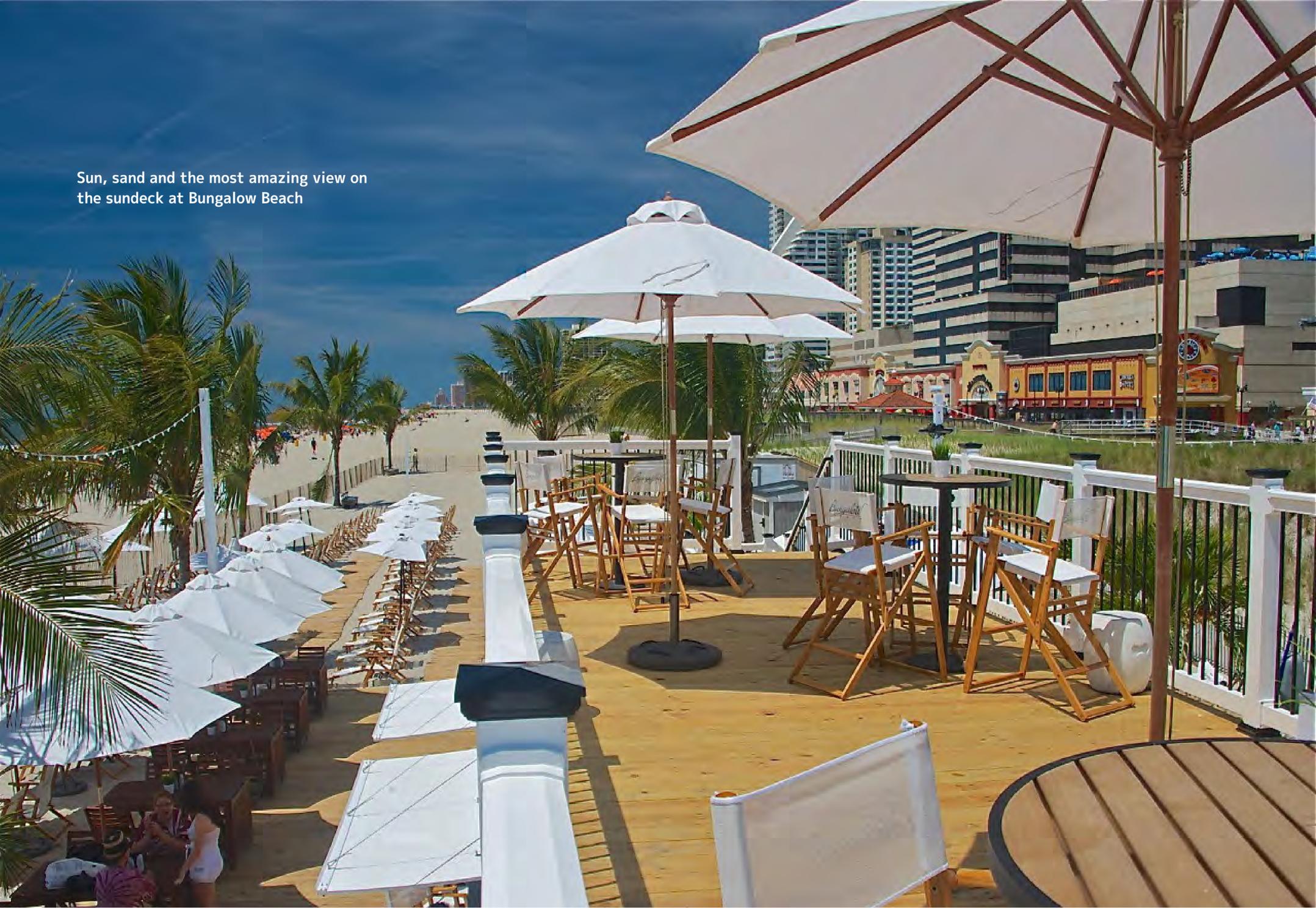
A sense of "coolness" wafts through the air at Bungalow Beach. Open since June, it's the hottest new spot to hit the beaches of Atlantic City. Soft, supple sand surrounds this 6,000 square foot sanctuary, while modern dune fencing, white umbrellas, clean planks and matching beach furniture give it ultimate curb appeal. First impressions are in full regalia with servers donning stylish shades, meticulously dressed in monochromatic hues of black or bright white, and moving to the beat of jazz house tunes. Thirsty? How about champagne with strawberries delivered to your lounge chair? Feel like noshing on something delicious? Choose from an abridged bar menu or scoot back across the long wooden walkway off the Boardwalk around California Avenue for the full spread of Mediterranean and Greek infused cuisine at the main restaurant. Both places have the hip factor and play it to a tee. Cap off your day on a white, comfy daybed or make your way to the sun deck for a bird's eye view of the waves.

Luck of the Draw

Small bites yield big flavors at Fin in the Tropicana Resort, where succulent seafood steals the show, but not before winning your taste buds. Step off the casino floor and into the care of culinary veteran George Fleming, Fin's Gourmet Restaurant Manager, whose kind demeanor and personal interaction with each guest deserve more than a mention. A visit from Chef Albert

Embrace your inner child at the Steel Pier

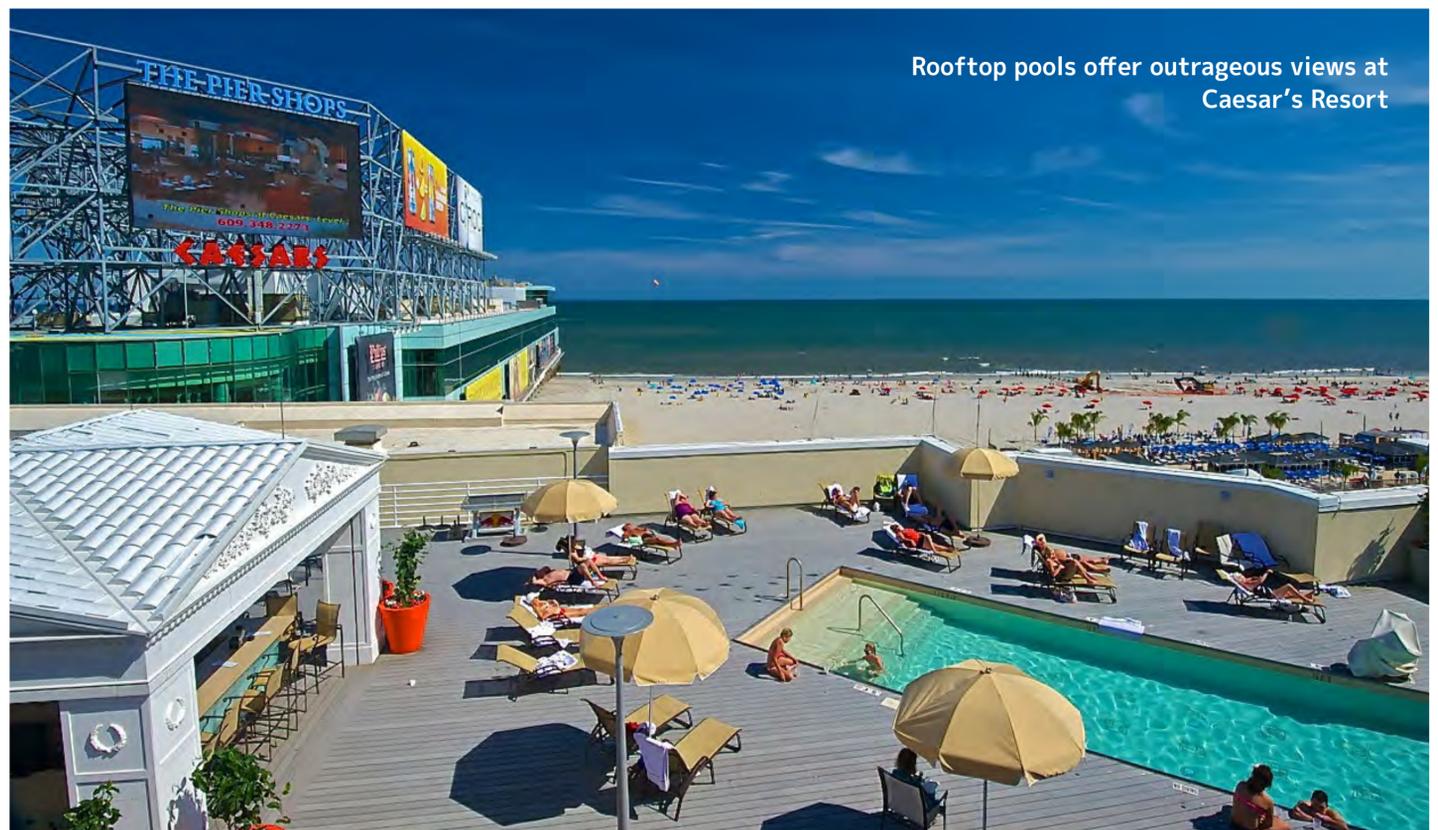
Sun, sand and the most amazing view on the sundeck at Bungalow Beach



Hughes isn't uncommon either. "We pride ourselves on Jersey fresh products," he boasts, while wielding a plate of fresh cracked crab legs. "The food speaks for itself." And, really, it does. Try the soft shell crab, the assortment of fresh sushi and leave knowing it was worth your time.

After dinner, head downstairs to the Tropicana's quarter, where you can try your luck on the dancefloor at Cuba Libre Restaurant and Rum Bar. Sultry salsa dancing and late night Latin floorshows await your arrival, as do 70 premium varieties of rum. Grab a handcrafted cocktail or fresh mojito and test your best set of moves. You'll have plenty of room in the 12,000-square-foot space, which envelops you in the essence of 1950s Cuba.

One of the oldest and most historic restaurants in all of Atlantic City may also be one of the area's most popular. The Knife and Fork takes diners back in time to its Prohibition era roots, with rich mahogany millwork, hand-painted ceilings, a sweeping staircase, and lushly appointed dining rooms. Try the



Rooftop pools offer outrageous views at Caesar's Resort

maple-and-pecan crusted salmon, served atop sweet butternut squash, Swiss chard, caramelized onions and dried cranberries.

High Rollers

Want to roll like a VIP? Atlantic City

can make that happen with luxury resorts that'll leave you feeling like a million bucks. First up, Borgata Casino and Spa. Sleek designs tempt your senses as an array of vibrant colors fill the lobby with opulent artwork that mirrors a modern

museum. The 2000 room resort delivers the finest in food and entertainment with popular chefs like Bobby Flay and Wolfgang Puck, and music legends like The Rolling Stones, Sting and Jay-Z leading the pack.



Just steps away, you'll discover the Water Club Hotel an 800 room, \$400 million hotel featuring 43 stories of sheer luxury. Slip into Immersion, a two-story spa for a Thai massage or ayurvedic treatment, then relax at one of the five heated pools and get some retail therapy at Hugo Boss or Just Cavalli.

A long afternoon calls for more relaxing at Sunroom Lounge, just off the main lobby. Sit beside a roaring fire pit and sip on white sangria topped with plump raspberries.

No checkout is complete without a stop at Borgata Baking Company. Cast your eyes upon mouth-watering "sweets and eats" housemade by former White House Executive Pastry Chef, Thaddeus DuBois. Try his soft and crunchy French Macaroons, creative Cake Pops or go rouge with a Cheesesteak Croissant. For a late night cocktail or succulent snack, drop by Izakaya. Think modern Japanese in a sensual setting with foodie favorites like the dumpling spicy tuna cracker.

Next up...Revel where billions, not millions, brought this ultra-mod resort to life at the end of 2012. Towering high above the famed boardwalk, a steel sculpture sits quietly. Walk by and you'll see the throngs of tourists looking up – admiring the sheer magnificence of this architectural feat. Inside, a shimmering welcome, as guests ascend on a high-powered escalator to the lobby and casinos.

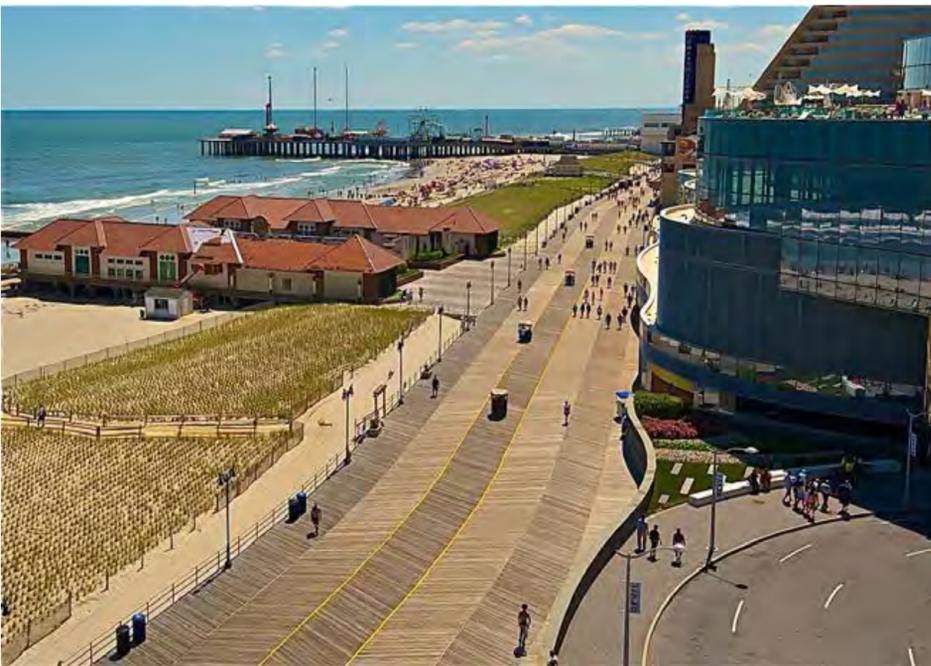
Call it the wow factor – the Revel gets that a lot with 1,399 ocean view rooms, masterful indoor and outdoor pools, serene gardens, a 32,000-square-foot luxury spa, and designer boutiques. Nightclubs, a dayclub, live entertainment venues and 14 restaurants serving world-

class cuisine add nicely to this resort's total package. Guests can carve out their own piece of paradise by renting exclusive cabanas at the private VIP pool, featuring top-shelf bottle service.

Double or Nothing

A trip to Atlantic City isn't complete without stepping inside one of the area's most famous casinos – Caesar's. Situated along the boardwalk and connected to the Pier Shops, the hotel offers a prime location to experience the sights and sounds of this active beach town. For one of the best views around, visit Caesar's rooftop pool, which offers a panorama you won't soon forget. As the day comes to a close, rich, dramatic skylines give way to superb sunrises, making this property a place to cash in on making memories.

The sun dances on the water, giving way to a yacht named Boardwalk in the marina adjacent to the Golden Nugget. The view seems appropriate given the winning streak Atlantic City has been on. Touting the luxury product has been one wild card they'd hope would pay off. And this resort is betting on that gamble as well.



TOP
Indulge your alter ego aboard one of these in the Golden Nugget Marina

ABOVE
Opportunity as far as the eye can see along Atlantic City's famed Boardwalk

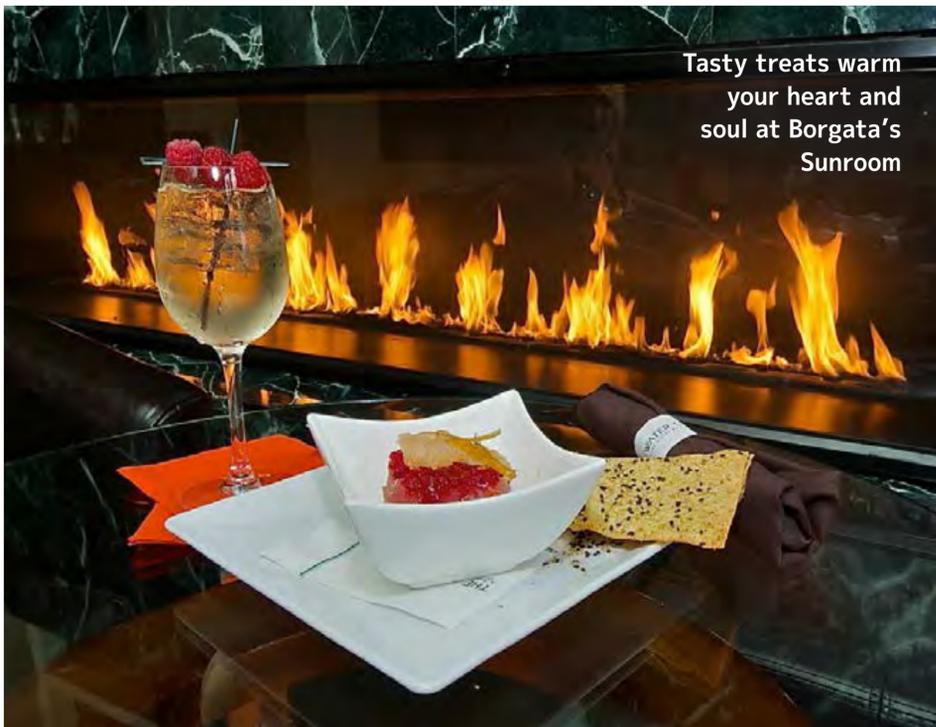
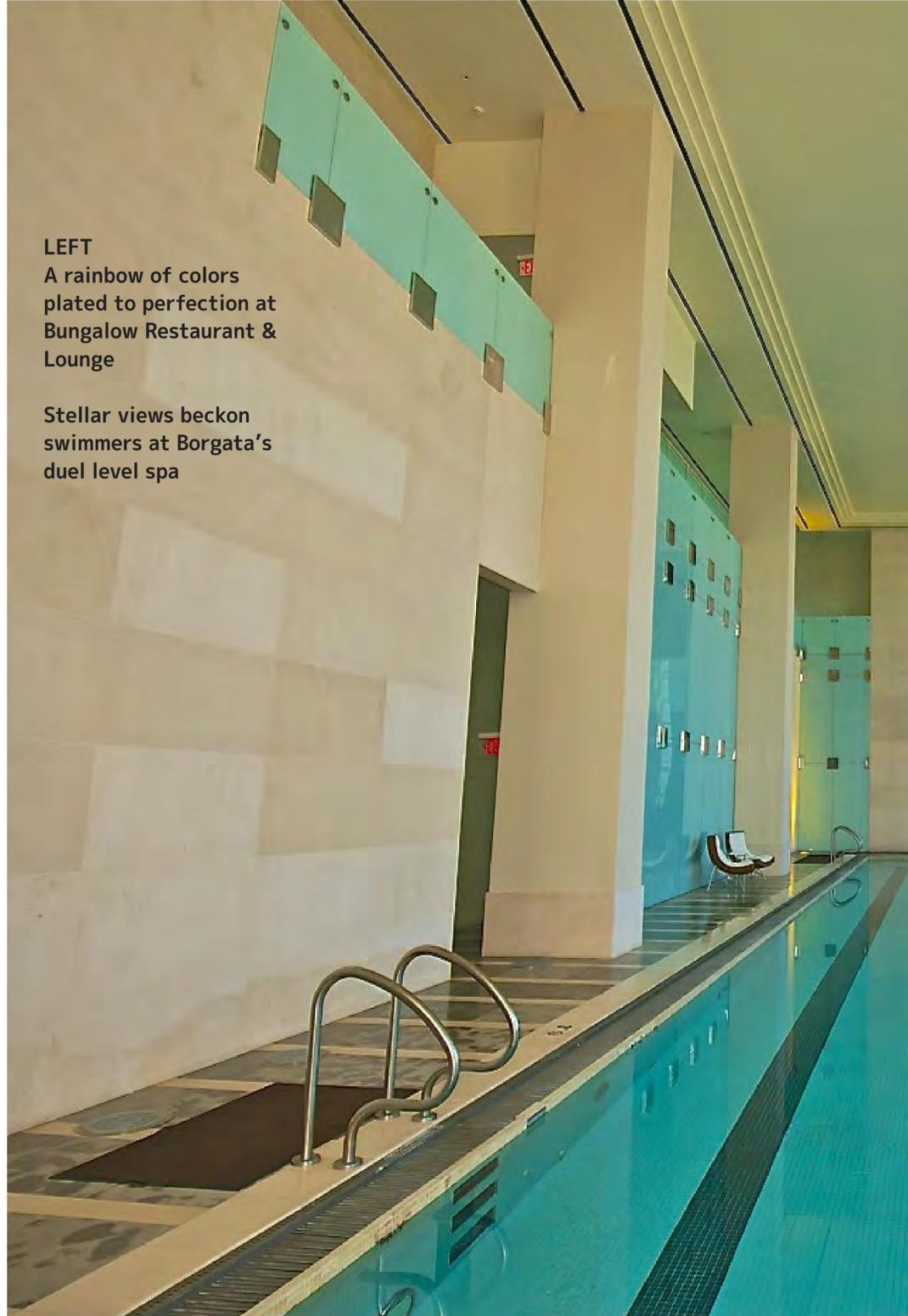
Waves break along a brilliant backdrop at the Atlantic City Seashore





LEFT
A rainbow of colors plated to perfection at Bungalow Restaurant & Lounge

Stellar views beckon swimmers at Borgata's dual level spa



Tasty treats warm your heart and soul at Borgata's Sunroom



Tempting creations come to life at Cuba Libre

The property recently completed a \$150 million renovation, taking on a fresh, modern look and it shows! Colorful ornaments dazzle guests as they enter the richly decorated and inviting lobby. Impressive upgrades include 727 handsomely remodeled rooms and suites, a 12,000 square foot salon and spa, 10 mouth-

watering restaurants, and a dozen bars, lounges and a hip nightclub.

Let it Ride

Candy apple red, burnt orange and sun-splashed yellow twist and twirl against the hot June sky as screams of unabashed glee fade into oblivion. Kids of all ages come here, to the

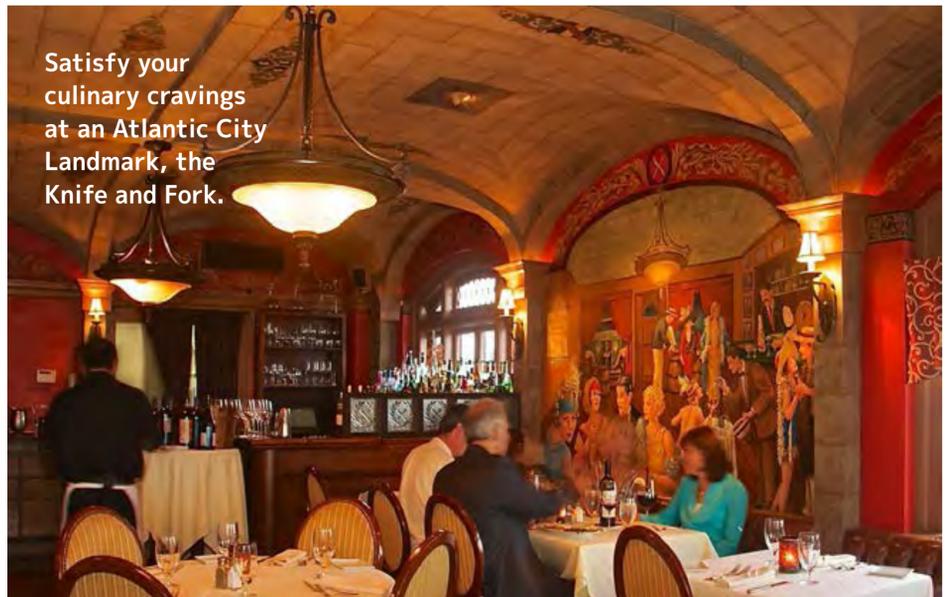
Steel Pier to relive a time when life was carefree and the only stress one had was deciding between cotton candy or corn dog. This Atlantic City landmark, which first opened to the public in 1898, spans 1,000-feet across the deep blue ocean and was once considered the greatest entertainment venue in the United

States. Today, it's home to adrenaline-infused, high-octane rides like the slingshot, Rock N Roll, and a private helicopter tour that takes you across the city's magnificent skyline.

One of the most memorable ways to embrace your inner child is to step



High rollers delight in Borgata's VIP suite



Satisfy your culinary cravings at an Atlantic City Landmark, the Knife and Fork.



Restore your physique with a Thai Massage at Borgata's spa

back in time and stroll down one of the most famous stretches of real estate in the area: The Atlantic City Boardwalk. Each year, millions of feet, bikes, and those famous "rolling chairs" have come across these properly placed planks. In fact, the rolling chairs, first introduced to the Boardwalk in the 1876, still take visitors on a reminiscent ride down this significant stretch of history. The first permanent Boardwalk was built in 1870 as a way to keep sand off of hotel carpets. Today, the Boardwalk is more than four miles in length and 60 feet across at its widest points. The present structure, which sits upon concrete and steel pilings, is constructed out of thousands of two-by-fours. And due to increasing foot traffic, it's necessary to replace the boards every 12 years.

Winning Hand

No visit to Atlantic City is complete without seeing where the Miss America Pageant got its start. Each year, the nationally televised competition unfolds in what was once called Historic Boardwalk Hall. Located just steps from Caesar's

Hotel, this revered venue was home to acts like The Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Luciano Pavarotti, the Rolling Stones and Louis Armstrong. Today, thanks to a three-year, \$90 million renovation this historic venue is beautifully updated into a modern special events arena capable of seating up to 14,770 people and now hosts acts like Lady Gaga, Elton John, Bruce Springsteen, and Paul McCartney. The hall's façade also doubles as the magnificent backdrop for a luminous, 3-D light and sound show held each and every night.

A crowd of tourists huddles along the Boardwalk as night falls. Their big dilemma requires a team meeting. At hand, a major decision to be made. Live music? Upscale dining? Sipping champagne on the sand at Bungalow Beach? Dancing? Taking in a comedy act? Or casinos? Thanks to Atlantic City's decision to roll the dice instead of rolling over, they can now do them all – in one night. A seaside town that was down on its luck took the ultimate gamble by placing a big wager on elegance, sophistication, and luxury. And it paid off. To try your luck, visit www.doac.com.