

The Many Sides of Atlantic City

By [Andrea Doyle](#)

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Atlantic City is experiencing a renaissance.

As a history buff, Atlantic City's storied past has always fascinated me. Founded in 1854, tourists would stroll the world's first boardwalk built as a way to prevent sand from being trekked into the lobbies of its elegant hotels. This is the birthplace of the Miss America Pageant and the inspiration for the world's best-selling board game: Monopoly.

In 1898, the Steel Pier opened in Atlantic City. One of its most famous attractions was the World-Famous Diving Horse where a horse and rider would plunge from a 40-ft.-tower into a 12-ft.-deep pool of water. Although the last time a horse took a dive on the Steel Pier was in 1978, today the Steel Pier still delights.

Whirling lights, whizzing rides, and the sweet aroma of cotton candy and funnel cakes intermingle with the scent of freshly popped popcorn. Claw machines, Skee-ball are all here to enjoy as is the Steel Pier's newest attraction—a 227-ft. observation wheel with 40 temperature-controlled gondolas that seat up to six people each. The ride lasts 15 minutes, and its 14,500 lights that change color and illuminate this section of the Boardwalk, including the **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City**, injecting high energy and pulsating beats into this historic seaside destination.



Hard Rock Hotel & Casino has energized Atlantic City.

The moment you step into the lobby, you know you are not in a typical hotel. Taking center stage is Elvis Presley's 1963 Rolls Royce, which according to Adam Zengel (how's this for a title?), vibe manager of the Atlantic City property, is the dazzling centerpiece the lobby was built around. "This is one of our most popular pieces of memorabilia here and was also the focus of a documentary about Elvis called, 'The King,'" says Zengel, who led us on a tour past the outfit Bruce Springsteen wore on the "Born to Run" album cover, and ensembles donned by Lady Gaga, Whitney Houston, and Cher, and guitars of all styles and colors. John Lennon's handwritten lyrics to the song "Imagine" are also on display, as is a motorcycle owned by the late E Street Band saxophonist Clarence Clemons. Zengel's favorite piece in the collection? A girl's blue-and-yellow cheerleading outfit worn by Kurt Cobain for a *Rolling Stone* photoshoot shortly before his death.



Elvis

Presley's 1963 Rolls Royce serves as the centerpiece of Hard Rock's lobby.

Not only does Zengel oversee the property's impressive collection of memorabilia, but he is also responsible for curating close to 40 playlists for different areas in the resort as well as booking acts for its theaters, stages, and outdoor beach bar. The property features live music, 365 days a year.

He also runs "The Sound of Your Stay," a complimentary program that consists of expertly curated music playlists to "amplify" your stay, or a Fender guitar, headphones and an amplifier that will be delivered to your guestroom to help you rock out.

The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino has transformed the former Trump Taj Mahal into this music memorabilia repository, in addition to a thriving 2,000-room hotel, casino, spa, dining mecca, and meetings venue after a \$500 million renovation.

Fitting with the theme, even the Rock Spa and Salon is a place to "retune." Touted as the world's first fully immersive music-centric spa menu, with 35 treatment rooms on two levels in this 50,000-sq.-ft. sanctuary, it features amplified vibrations, pressures, and patterns as the foundation of its treatments. The *Rhythm and Motion* massage includes bass vibrations that ripple along with the table with treble beats coming from above to send pulses racing through the body.

Tennessee Avenue Transformed

Dilapidated buildings, junkies, and boarding houses once proliferated on Tennessee Avenue. Not anymore. Today's offerings include MADE Atlantic City, a chocolate and wine bar; Iron Room that offers coffee and breakfast along with lunch, charcuterie, cheese, wine and progressive plates; The Leadership Studio, a yoga and community studio; Rhythm & Spirits, a live music hall; and Tennessee Avenue Beer Hall, featuring more than 100 craft beers on tap, and an outdoor patio with lawn games and picnic tables. Developer Mark Callazzo has ignited the Tennessee Avenue renaissance after purchasing property here between Pacific Avenue and the Boardwalk.



Tennessee Avenue Beer Hall transforms a once blighted area of town.

These new businesses have joined together with the 120-year-old Steel Pier, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, Ocean Casino Resort, Resorts Casino & Hotel, and Showboat Atlantic City to form a partnership called, North Beach.

“It was pretty scary here last summer,” admits Deb Pellegrino who owns MADE with her husband, Mark. She is a former executive pastry chef for **Caesars Entertainment** in Atlantic City, and he is a former sous chef for Carmine’s. “Not anymore,” she says. “The vision is to make this a destination like Beale Street or Bourbon Street.”



Sip cocktails and watch chocolate be created at MADE.

Guests sip cocktails as they watch the pair make chocolate from actual cacao beans. Chocolate-making classes welcome groups of up to 25 to don aprons and hairnets and get involved in this tasty process. And the chocolate is superb, admits Rachel Ray, including MADE on her “5 Things Rachel Ray is Loving Right Now” list.

Another must-see is the Little Water Distillery, a family-owned and -operated craft distillery set in a former Prohibition-era warehouse. Not only does it produce small-batch rum and other artisan spirits, but it also offers fascinating tours and tastings.

Strolling the Atlantic City boardwalk has always been a highlight; hitting the boards early morning, as the sun dances along the water’s edge, promises delight. There is no better way to start your day than with an early morning yoga class, and Hard Rock can arrange that right on the beach. The gentle lapping of the waves and the cry of the seagull adds a layer of tranquility to your practice.



Hard Rock Beach Bar is picturesque with the Observation Wheel in the distance.

Although this may not fall within the health focus of my three-day jaunt to Atlantic City, I couldn't leave without purchasing a box of saltwater taffy, assuring myself that it is here this sugary treat was invented, so of course I had to indulge!

Click [here](#) for more information on Hard Rock Atlantic City, and [here](#) for additional Atlantic City insight.