



Atlantic City an easy getaway

By Eddie Applefeld

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Looking for an easy getaway? From our area getting to Atlantic City is not a big deal. Once you cross the Delaware Memorial Bridge you can either go to Route 40 or stay on the Jersey Turnpike to Exit 3. Both ways take about two hours and 45 minutes.

My guess is many of you have been to Atlantic City at least once in the past 10 years. So for this article I will be looking at a little bit of the history of the town and a little about modern day. For much of my historical data, I referred to Wikipedia for help.

As of about a year ago the population stood at close to 36,000. Atlantic City became a city in 1854. It is located on 8.1 mile Absecon Island. Its total area is only 17.4 square miles.

The first boardwalk was built in 1870 along a portion of the beach to help hotel owners keep sand out of their lobbies. Because this proved to be so popular, the boardwalk was expanded and modified several times in the following years. The length of the boardwalk, before a 1944 hurricane, was about seven miles.

As Atlantic City's population grew, two new railroads provided service. In addition, huge hotels and guest houses sprung up all over town, including the Marlborough-Blenheim, Haddon Hall, Brighton, Chelsea, Ambassador, Chalfonte, and Ritz Carlton.

You can't think about Atlantic City without thinking of its piers. I can recall days of my youth spending many hours playing at some of these piers.

Of course during those days I didn't realize how important they were in the history of the town. The first pier, Ocean Pier, opened in 1882. The infamous Steel Pier opened in 1898. It was billed as "the showplace of the nation," It is now located across from the Taj Mahal and is in a rather sorry state as an amusement pier.

I guess many people when recalling those halcyon days will think about the Steel Pier and all the great acts that appeared there. How about Sinatra for starters. Now let's add The Beatles, Martin and Lewis and I could go on with a list of who's who in show business.

I visited for many summers in a row back in the 60s. It wasn't unusual at all to see men dressed in ties at night while walking the 'boards' and for women to be in their finest.

One didn't necessarily need amusement, walking up and down the boardwalk was enough. If you really wanted to be special you'd take a ride on one of those rolling cars. I still remember my very first ride on one of those cars. I thought I was so cool.

These times did not last. By the late 1960s many of those great hotels were closed or demolished. It is sad indeed to think about all those wonderful "grand dames" of the Boardwalk long gone. Today's hotel/casinos are big, but they lack the style and elegance of the great old hotels.

In an effort to revitalize the town, voters approved gambling in 1974. Resorts opened as the first casino and hotel in 1978. It was owned by Merv Griffin. I was in the media even back then and recall going and seeing Merv and his show business friends. I even got the opportunity to roll a pair of giant dice to win an overnight stay. Singer Steve Lawrence handed me the dice.

Other casinos soon followed. Today there are 11 hotel casinos. The newest hotel to open, and some say the most successful, was The Borgata, in 2003.

Train service to Atlantic City is also available. I recall taking the train from Baltimore's Penn Station once. There was one stop in Philadelphia. This is a good way to get there, but you can't walk to any of the casinos once in town, too far. So you will have to arrange transportation. Taxis are available.

AirTran and Spirit airlines serve the airport nine miles outside of town in Egg Harbor Township.

Many bus companies offer service to various casinos. With the rebates available, this might be your best bet.

Shopping has become big business here. All of a sudden there are several choices. One is "The Walk," an outdoor shopping center built by Baltimore's David Cordish. Another is The Quarter at the Tropicana, an Old Havana themed indoor shopping experience. And the third is the Pier Shops at Caesars, located on a pier opposite Caesars Hotel.

During my last visit I stayed at The Chelsea, Chelsea Avenue and Pacific. There are 20 floors with 332 rooms. On the 5th floor is Chelsea Prime, an upscale supper club. There is no gambling in this hotel, it is nice and actually quite reasonable. A standard weekday rate is \$99.

Connected to the hotel is Teplitsky's, a popular restaurant at one time. It was destroyed by a fire in 1966. It re-opened in October of 2008. I enjoyed looking at the gallery of old photos. I do remember this restaurant during my younger days in Atlantic City. For many of my parents friends it was a must stop.

Finally, if you want a more upscale dining experience while here let me recommend Morton's in Caesar's. It has your classic steakhouse look. The menu is presented to you, complete with food samples, at your table.

Desserts are made to order. Reservations are highly recommended almost any night, especially weekends. Here's a tip: don't go in wearing shorts and a T-shirt.

In short, Atlantic City today has most anything adults might require on a vacation, including a clean and fairly large beach and some top name entertainment.