

NJ's Revel casino breaks rules opening to ocean

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Posted: 3:04pm on Mar 19, 2012; Modified: 4:39pm on Mar 19, 2012



ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Think of a casino and chances are, what comes to mind is a dark, low-ceilinged warehouse of slot machines and card tables, bathed in cigarette smoke.

Revel, the casino-resort opening April 2 in Atlantic City, breaks all the old casino rules. The smoke-free resort embraces the ocean rather than turning its back on it, the way many of its competitors do.

It makes more use of sunlight and sweeping views of the beach and ocean than the other eight Boardwalk casinos, which were designed to keep gamblers fixated on, well, gambling. Thoughts of wandering outside to smell the salt air were left to those whose money was gone.

But at Revel, you can see the ocean from a good part of the casino floor, a no-no in other places. And Revel lets guests go right to their rooms without crossing the casino floor.

“We’re looking for people to look at this as a resort first,” said Kevin DeSanctis, Revel’s CEO and a veteran casino executive in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, having worked for Donald Trump, Steve Wynn, as well as running Penn National Gaming. “If you’re thinking of a two or three-day getaway in the northeast without getting on a plane, this is the place I want you to think of first.”

Gambling is only part of the \$2.4 billion resort; it also has a luxurious spa, 14 restaurants, 10 pools, and a theater with 5,050 seats that will host Beyoncé on Memorial Day weekend.

Located at the extreme northern end of the Boardwalk, next to the Showboat Casino Hotel, Revel is Atlantic City’s 12th casino, and the first to open since its main rival, the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, debuted in 2003. With its angular slanted roof and its giant white light-up ball atop the 47-story structure - the second-tallest in New Jersey at 710 feet - Revel is already an iconic presence in the nation’s second-largest gambling market.

Its sleek reflective glass bathes the beach in shards of brilliant light, and even the contours of its foundations were designed to appear as if they had been sculpted by waves.

Walking through the Boardwalk-level main entrance, visitors enter an airy atrium dominated by two massive escalators that carry them through the open space to the casino level. On the way, they pass an artwork called “Arrivals” that consists of 19,700 shiny gold circles suspended on 650 steel cables that catch the sunlight and dazzle the unsuspecting.

Spreading out atop a bright red carpet, the casino has 2,400 slot machines and 160 table games, arrayed in an oval pattern; there are few, if any, corners in the public spaces of Revel. The lighting of the casino and public spaces is constantly changing, programmed to vary with the time of day and day of the week, said Valerie Pageau, Revel’s artistic director with the Montreal firm Sceno Plus.

“You come in here in the morning, and we don’t want you to feel like

it’s midnight,” she said. “We’ll go with yellows, bright, light colors. At happy hour, we’ll use oranges and reds. Around midnight, it’s dark colors.”

It’s all designed to prevent guests from having the same experience over and over again, said Michael Prifti, of Philadelphia-based BLTA, one of Revel’s main architects, and part of a team of 65 separate design firms that had a hand in creating the resort.

“No other place on the Boardwalk lets so much light in,” he said. “The public spaces are all focused on the ocean. They frame your view.”

Revel will have 1,898 hotel rooms, each of which has a 46-inch flat screen LCD TV and a walk-in shower in which “several” people can fit comfortably, DeSanctis said, and fully stocked mini-bars. These rooms will rent for just under \$400 on weekend nights. A step up is an ocean Suite, which goes for about \$550 on the weekend; there are 160 of them.

The next tier of suites includes separate living areas and bedrooms, renting for \$600 to \$800 on the weekend. The two presidential suites on the 44th floor are for the highest of high-rollers, but even then, DeSanctis says, the idea is to rent them rather than hand them out for free. If you have to ask, you probably can’t afford it.

A year-round indoor-outdoor pool will be heated (in the 80s) and offer a swim-through door to the outside, even in the dead of winter. For less adventurous souls, there are outdoor fire pits and tons of couches, seats and other comfy places to just plop down, read a book, sip a drink or just vegetate for a while.

Revel’s restaurants include three from Jose Garces, a former “Iron Chef” TV show winner, including Amada, a tapas bar; Village Whiskey, and Distrito Cantina, a margarita bar and Mexican street food eatery shaped like a taco truck. Marc Forgione offers the American Cut steakhouse, Robert Wiedmaier has Mussel Bar, a gastro-pub inspired by an old-world Belgian roadhouse (ceiling-suspended motorcycle included), and Alain Allegretti offers Azure, a fine-dining French and Italian-inspired restaurant.

Other eateries include Lugo, a brasserie, three restaurants by Michel Richard: Central Michael Richard, a modern bistro; O Bistro and Wine Bar; and the tentatively titled Breakfast Room, a seated a la carte and grab-and-go spot.

For pampering purposes, Revel offers a 31,000 square-foot, 32-room spa to be renamed later, but which currently goes by the name Mind-BodySpa by Exhale. It offers hydrating facials, therapeutic massages and body-slimming services. The spa has men’s and women’s-only sides, with a co-ed common bath house area. There, guests will find a salt grotto, a room made entirely out of Himalayan salt bricks.

Uncommon touches include CoreFusion and yoga classes, a fully equipped gym offering SurfSET classes, a kind of aerobic surfing-based indoor workout, and features like “barre-to-bar,” where a ballet-based fitness class flows seamlessly into happy hour.

Revel is also home to Ivan Kane’s Royal Jelly burlesque club, blending live rock’n’roll with a modern take on traditional burlesque. Even the casino floor gets a little naughty; the “DigiPit” has electronic gambling tables set around a cross-shaped illuminated runaway with stripper poles at each end; dancers can drop down from the ceiling to further distract you from splitting those aces or realizing it’s not a great idea to take a hit on 18.

Revel will open at sunrise on April 2 with a champagne toast for a two-month “preview” period, with a full-blown grand opening over Memorial Day weekend. Reservations can be made at (855) 348-0500 or online at www.revelresorts.com