

Is Atlantic City cool again?

By **DOREE LEWAK**

Last Updated: 10:58 AM, August 2, 2012

It's a summer Sunday afternoon, and Adam, a preppy blond finance guy, is still wearing his loafers, jeans and untucked button-down shirt from the night before. It's the telltale sign of a good night — that, and the fact he hasn't gotten any sleep.

"I never expected AC to be anything like this," says the 26-year-old Greenwich Village resident, who partied the night away at HQ, a nightclub at Revel, the new 6.3-million-square-foot boardwalk mega-resort, which opened in Atlantic City over Memorial Day weekend. "As a first-timer, I didn't expect a Vegas-style experience."

After getting the VIP treatment in the hotel's "Cabanas" lounge, which lays on special favors for big spenders, his friend, Corey, 26, is already a Revel believer: "They gave us models, which is great," says the entrepreneur who also declined to give his last name. Of course, those models will cost you. Weekend access to the "Cabanas" starts at \$2,000 a day for a party of six.

The guys, in town for a bachelor party, are in a pretty good mood despite spending what any high roller would consider a small fortune the night before. "We dropped serious money — probably about \$40,000 among six guys," says Adam casually. "We wanted to blow it out — bottle service, cabanas, gambling."

Gambling in Atlantic City is certainly nothing new; for decades, the seaside town has been synonymous with retirees and their jugs of nickels hoping to strike it big at the Golden Nugget. Dilapidated hotels dotted the strip along the former crown jewel beach town, making it look like one big ashtray. But the tone of Atlantic City has slowly been changing, and with it, a concerted effort to make the Jersey Shore town appeal to a younger, hipper set — partiers who might otherwise be headed to Vegas or summer party spots like East Hampton.

"If you build it, they will come." That's what Revel CEO Kevin DeSanctis has been betting on as he tries to reinvent the city as the new go-to summer — and fall and winter — destination. And celebs have been making their way down the shore this season to the \$2.4 billion mega-resort, including Michelle Obama, Kim Kardashian, Kanye West, Jennifer Hudson and Megan Hilty. J.Lo, along with boyfriend Casper Smart, just decamped this Tuesday from a two-night stay in one of only two decadent sky suites — a palatial 3,800-square-foot loft-like space — where she enjoyed an in-room massage and played craps at a private table in the Ultra Lounge.

Still, gambling revenue is disappointing at the hotel. Revel ranks eighth out

of the 12 Atlantic City casinos for its gaming take, the AP reported.

DeSanctis says the resort benefits from its non-gambling pursuits and business is looking up.

“Atlantic City is definitely moving in the right direction over the past several years,” says DeSanctis.

Indeed, its renaissance has been a long time in the making. The tony Pier Shops at Caesars — a glorified shore-front mall with an hourly water show that opened in 2006 — includes blue-chip stores such as Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co. and Apple. The annual Food and Wine Festival that launched in 2009 has become a popular summer event that draws celeb chefs including Jersey’s own Cake Boss, Buddy Valastro. There’s also the off-the-strip Borgata, which entered the fray back in 2003 and aimed to lure NYC’s movers and shakers to its throbbing night life scene. The pricey Water Club at Borgata, which debuted in 2008, offers sexy adult-centered sun and fun with luxe amenities including its Sunroom Lounge with fireplace — no children allowed. 2008 also saw the opening of boutique Chelsea Hotel, which strived for a sophisticated and city-like feel at its star club, C5. Meanwhile, four years ago, Harrah’s hotel started a steamy Pool at After Dark nightclub that has been successful at drawing throngs of young creatures of the night.

With nearly 2,000 rooms, Revel boasts all the trimmings: HQ, the nightclub with a massive LED video wall, racy pool parties for the scantily clad, and a young and attractive staff. There’s also unique electronic gaming in the casino, Android tablets on every nightstand, digitized remote controls and push-button “do not disturb” signs.

“I used to think the Borgata was amazing, but Revel is a step up,” says Morgan Milner, a 31-year-old New Yorker who broke from regular weekends in the Hamptons this summer to check out the Atlantic City hype. Fashion industry lovebirds Hyunjoo So, 41, and her boyfriend, Jay Wyche, 35, of Fort Greene, are AC regulars who are back for their second stay at Revel.

“We’re big AC people,” Wyche says, “but this hotel is just gorgeous. It’s aesthetically so much nicer than the other hotels. They really pay attention to the details.”

Details like the ocean — some of the other hotels on the strip ignore their views, but Revel emphasizes them. This includes the area’s first oceanfront casino; all other gambling dens here are windowless.

To be sure, all this luxury comes at a steep price, with basic rooms starting at \$189 and topping out at \$45,000 for a swanky Beyoncé-worthy sky suite. (The singer headlined at Revel during its opening Memorial Day weekend, drawing big-name guests, including the first lady and her daughters, who also stayed at the hotel.)

There are 14 restaurants inside the hotel, ranging from American Cut, Iron

Chef Marc Forgione's steakhouse, to Amada, a Spanish-flavored tapas bar with live flamenco dancers.

"It's all geared towards higher end," says Melissa, a 40-year-old mom of two from Huntington, LI, who is joined by three well-heeled girlfriends for a birthday blowout weekend. So how much does she expect to shell out?

"Maybe about \$500 total — it adds up quickly between \$14 cocktails and \$20 burgers."

And while the old cliché of the Atlantic City gambler often includes a cigarette dangling from his lips, Revel is also the first smoke-free resort in AC. "I really like that it's not a smoking hotel," says 24-year-old model Tanya Ruban. "In every other hotel here, in Las Vegas, there's smoke everywhere — but here it's really nice."

And for guests who really want to breathe, there's Bask, the latest outpost of Exhale Spa, and a city unto itself at 32,000 square feet. After a night of partying at HQ, detoxing in the 71-degree salt grotto — one of only four in the country, and the spa's true highlight — is ideal.

For James Ball of Smithtown, LI, who, at 20, is just shy of partaking in the action in the casino and nightclub, Bask is his destination of choice. The St. John's University student — who booked a facial, eyebrow wax, massage and manicure — is having a grand time getting pampered during his three-day stay. "It's a lot nicer than the other hotels on the strip — and the customer service is so much better here," he says.

But can AC's silver bullet keep the party going during a brutal Jersey Shore winter?

Early signs aren't promising.

"My girl and I always say it's going to be hell here in winter. The walk up to the hotel is so windy now, that I don't want to imagine it," says Wyche. "But maybe we'll go back — only if we're comped."

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