

Atrium at Gaylord National Resort &amp; Convention Center



# THE BUSINESS OF SERVICE

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center proves itself in its first year

Blanc Concept suite



BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

When something goes wrong, how it's made right tells you a lot about a place. After checking into my room at Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in Maryland, which opened April 25, and which I visited in July, the first thing I noticed was the bed. It was lovely, really, with crisp sheets sporting a white-on-white block pattern set off by a navy blue and gold

**TRAVEL** coverlet across the foot of the bed. It looked so cozy I couldn't wait until it was time to climb in. But upon closer inspection I noticed some squiggly lines of ink scrawled on the top sheet between the two pillows. It appeared as if someone had crawled into bed, then doodled on it. I picked up the phone and pressed the button marked Housekeeping. On the second ring, a guy with a warm voice answered, "Hello, Mrs. Philbrick." Slightly freaked out that he knew my name without my having introduced myself, I explained the situation. "I apologize, Mrs. Philbrick. We'll send someone up to change the linens immediately." No fuss, no arguments. And when I returned from lunch an hour later, the bed was outfitted with spotless sheets.

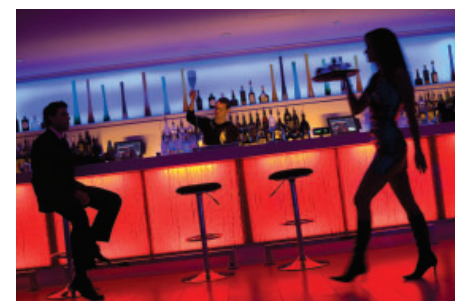
Providing great service is clearly the goal of the folks at Gaylord National, which is operated by the same company as the award-winning Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville, Tenn. From the moment my foot hit the pavement exiting the taxi until I closed the door of my guest room, a Gaylord employee was my constant companion. Not a fan of situations that force small talk—after covering the weather, just what are we supposed to talk about?—I initially felt that having an escort took service to excess. But as we covered the grounds from the front door to the registration desk to the elevator and finally to my room, I began to realize just how huge this hotel is. Without a guide, I might've easily gotten lost. The largest combined hotel and convention center on the East Coast, Gaylord National sits on 41 acres, and boasts 2,000 guest rooms (including 110 suites) and 470,000 square feet of function space. Despite its size, once familiar with its layout I found navigating the property a breeze.

Most convention-goers are likely to visit Gaylord National at some point. "Our goal is to go after convention business," says Tina Sampson, vice president of sales and marketing. "That's our specialty. Eighty to 85 percent of our business is conventions." Indeed, before the resort and convention center opened, Gaylord National booked 1 million convention room nights—including 800,000 for folks who had never before been to the capital city. Sampson explains that the Washington, D.C. location is ideal: "A lot of people can get here in a short amount of time."

Though Gaylord National is geared primarily to convention guests, "the space is

also designed to appeal to leisure guests," says Amie Gorrell, director of public relations. Specials are designed to help attract leisure guests by offering lower prices and package deals on weekends and holiday seasons, when convention attendance is typically low. Seasonal programs also become big draws. Describing the six-story tall glass tree that will debut in the 18-story atrium this winter holiday season, Gorrell promises, "It will be a spectacle to behold!"

No matter the season, Gaylord National is a destination in its own right. It offers breathtaking views and several indoor surprises like two-story replicas of a Colonial-era mercantile shop and a Federalist-style farmhouse, a water fountain that shoots water into the air synchronized to music every night, lush gardens and roving entertainers. Some offerings—including retail shops, a 20,000-square-foot spa, four restaurants and a nightclub—might be expected at any resort. But all these offerings are so well executed that Gaylord National finds itself in the awkward position of having to limit local crowds to ensure there's sufficient availability for resort guests without alienating local support. It's a delicate balance that a top-service provider can pull off. **SP**



## IF YOU GO

### GETTING THERE

Fly into Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), located in Arlington, Va., for the most convenient access to National Harbor—it's about a 15-minute taxi ride.

### WHAT TO DO

Explore the shops, restaurants and museums of the new National Harbor community on the same shore where Gaylord National is located. Or take the water taxi from Gaylord National across the Potomac to Old Town Alexandria, Mount Vernon, or Georgetown. The water taxi runs daily every 30 minutes from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. For details, contact the Potomac Riverboat Company at 703-684-0580 or [www.potomacriverboatco.com](http://www.potomacriverboatco.com).

### MORE INFORMATION

#### ■ Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center

201 Waterfront St.  
National Harbor, MD 20745  
301-965-2000  
[www.gaylordnational.com](http://www.gaylordnational.com)

Nightly rates range from \$299 for a standard guest room and \$1,100 for a suite

#### ■ National Harbor

1-877-NATL-HBR  
[www.nationalharbor.com](http://www.nationalharbor.com)