

St. Augustine... a little town with a big history

Art can be defined as that which visually pleases the eye and enriches the spirit or conversely, torments the viewer into a soul searching inquiry. Or, it can extend beyond the physical representation to the abstract art of ideas, as in the art of hospitality that is extended with sincere warmth and good fellowship; or the artful presentation of a meal that teases the eye and fulfills its promise to your palate; or better yet, the art of fear, when shadowy images and moving objects purport to be supernatural manifestations. Regardless of your personal definition of art there is small town on the northeast coast of Florida that is not only the oldest in the country, 443 years to be exact, but also the home to one of the earliest organized artist communities in the nation. St. Augustine is a picture perfect, charming, historic, cultural and haunted city; in other words, something for everyone.

We stayed at the

historic Casa Monica Hotel located in the center of the old town and within walking distance of all the attractions. Built by Franklin W. Smith in 1888 and contemporary to Flagler's Ponce de Leon Hotel - but no match for its opulence - Smith's hotel was sold to Flagler within months after it was completed. Flagler renamed it Hotel Cordova and under his tutelage it thrived until the depression of 1929. Hotelier Richard C. Kessler of Orlando bought the building in 1997 and after extensive and costly rejuvenation the themed Spanish-Moorish style building reopened as the Casa Monica Hotel in December of 1999. (www.casamonica.com)

The Casa Monica justly deserves its AAA Four Diamond Hotel rating as much for the quality of its staff as for the unique nature of its design and luxuriousness of its appointments. Every inquiry was greeted with a smile and a chance encounter with a staff member was just an excuse to exchange a pleasantry. At every level of service from the newly appointed General Manager Tom Cherniavsky, to the bell hop that rushed to open the courtyard door



leading to the Arabian Nights roof-top pool, there was a universal desire to be of assistance. A review of Casa Monica's top-notch restaurant "95 Cordova" can be found in the Restaurants segment of this issue.

My recent trip to St. Augustine was to explore its historical roots and continuing tradition as an artist's community. St. Augustine fulfilled its promise as an art destination regardless of how you define art.