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Bed Check: Relax, or don't, at The Hotel ML

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Entering the ML Prime Lounge in the [Hotel ML](#), I felt as anonymous as the short man in the gray suit texting away on his iGadget. I was just another guest on another day passing through Mount Laurel, N.J., on business or for pleasure. Yet unbeknownst to me, I'd been noticed. And in an unprecedented show of personal service, I was being serenaded.

“When you walked in, I thought, ‘She looks comfy, like she’s a singer-songwriter or a dancer,’ ” Dyanne Hunter, a local musician and mom, told me during a break from her Wednesday night gig in the hotel lounge. “I try to read people as they come in and play what I think they’ll like.”

For an Ohio business traveler and longtime Hunter fan, she sang “[Southern Cross](#),” by Crosby, Stills and Nash. “This one’s for you, Ed,” she called out to a grinning man at the bar. For a small boy with ants in his pants, she belted out “[I’m a Believer](#)” from “Shrek” and the tongue-twisting “[Proper Cup of Coffee](#).” He wiggled to the beat. For me, she performed the Dar Williams tune “[The Babysitter’s Here](#).” Rather than psychoanalyze her song selection — in that set, she also covered music by Edie Brickell, the Cranberries and Jimmy Buffet — I sank deeper into my plumped-up chair and embraced my coziness.

Only half the hotel, about 12 miles from Philadelphia, lends itself to such deep relaxation: the den-like cocktail lounge; the spacious outdoor pool orbited by chaise longues; and the guestrooms flecked with the deep reds and golds of autumn. The other half is much more hyper.



In The News

Accessible by a long hallway on the second floor, [CoCo Key Water Resort](#) features a jumble of slides and tube rides, plus a giant bucket that drops 300 gallons of liquid on unsuspecting heads. In the adults-only Palm Grotto Spa, a husband and wife drifted into the outdoor portion of the hot tub, momentarily escaping childish squeals and screams.

When the attraction started to shut down in the early evening, I moved to the video room adjacent to the water park. I was too late to play any of the Chuck E. Cheese-style games, but made it in time to watch a gaggle of kids collect their windfall of plastic key chains, cheap sunglasses and other Made in China trinkets. I reminded myself to check under the bed for any lurking SpongeBob SquarePants-es.

The property, once a Marriott, became an independent boutique hotel in March. A catchy new name followed — like J.C. Penny becoming JCP — as did a seasonal buffet that you can't not hear about: Signs promoting the feast greet guests at check-in and en route to the lounge and restaurant. (For summer, the eatfest was seafood and prime rib; for fall, expect harvest ingredients.)

After exploring the two personalities of Hotel ML (I clocked more time in the tranquil spaces than in the others), I retreated to my double-bed bubble. Accustomed to the anodyne rooms of hotel chains, I was struck — in a good way — by the decor: boudoir-red walls covered in black graffiti-style scrawl and lamps coated in a cracked-eggshell pattern. The room felt very edgy-snug, like a Lou Reed song performed by a mother of four.