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The Mighty Peninsula

Chicago's venerable hotel creates memories galore. by Milla Sukonik

It is rare to find a grand hotel that offers fully immersive cocooning experiences, beckoning you to stay longer. The moment we entered the Peninsula Hotel in Chicago's grand dragon sculpture flanked doors, memories began forming.

I loved taking afternoon tea near the sun-drenched windows of the lobby restaurant; the aqua Pilates class in the enormous pool with amazing floor-to-skyline views; our gold-hued room with top-tier amenities like a bedside panel that let me choose sultry ambiance lighting, not to mention the super-indulgent handmade Hästens mattress I slept on. When I first visited Chicago over 20 years ago, the fine-

dining scene consisted of predictably large portions. The envelope has been pushed way off the table. The Windy City's gorgeous architecture is a backdrop for exciting homegrown restaurateurs like Paul Kahan, Grant Achutz, Rick Bayless, and Charlie Trotter.

Among culinary shrines is the Pen's Avenues. Helmed by former Alinea sous chef Curtis Duffy, Avenues lures serious foodies to its whimsical, well-planned courses. Witness dollops of caviar on Meyer Lemon gelée. Sommelier Michael Muser proffers spot-on pairing suggestions for you.

The Pen, known for its attention to details, noticed my sleeveless dining companion shivering and immediately offered a divine cashmere wrap. Restaurants around the world, take note.

chicago.peninsula.com

Where Bourbon Flows

WHEN PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN STAYED IN LOUISVILLE, HE REQUESTED A BOTTLE OF MAKER'S MARK TO BE LEFT ON HIS PILLOW.

The president showed great taste.

On Maker's Mark tours in Loretto, flowing water splashes against limestone that's used to make the bourbon and past giant wooden vats storing

mashbill. There's a connection to the bootleggers of yesterday.

If bourbon, which Congress declared "America's native spirit" in 1964, isn't enough to draw you to the Bluegrass State, Kentucky's rich horse history just might. It attracts world-renowned events like 2010 U.S.-based Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, where the best demonstrate unprecedented athletic ability for some 500,000 spectators. There's also the famous Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, the first leg of the Triple Crown, and Lexington's Keeneland Park, where you can watch thoroughbreds basking in the morning sunlight and their massive muscles pulsating, during workouts.

More than just fried chicken, Kentucky dining offers local fare in prestigious mansions. In Louisville, Corbett's Restaurant, inside the former Von Allmen mansion, proves that grits

deserve to be on fine menus, while Lexington's The Mansion at Griffin Gate lets you taste food in 1800s settings.

If you've never been here, you're missing out. Kentucky offers a king's pleasures at a commoner's price. And the bourbon, well, flows like water.

Kentucky offers royal pleasures at down-to-earth prices by Fred Minnick

