Sweet Opening at Salt

This past week, I traveled to Australia with several members of my family to attend the opening of our newest property, Outrigger on the Beach at Salt. The celebration was a beautiful affair that blended the cultures of Hawaii and Australia in a way perhaps never seen before.

The property at Salt is located on the beachfront in the northeastern corner of the state of New South Wales in Tweed Shire. The Gold Coast airport serves that area and is just a 15-minute drive away. It is a busy, unique transportation center shared by northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. The state border cuts right across the main runway.

When I first saw the Salt site two years ago, it was isolated and could be reached only by a lonely, narrow, asphalt-and-gravel road with many potholes. The sandy soil was overgrown with weeds, and the area had become a dumping ground for junked cars and trash. The ocean was hidden from view by the foliage and a sand berm that had built up over the centuries, just beyond the upper reach of the waves rolling in from the Pacific. It was hard to believe that that neglected acreage could be turned into a site for first-class hotels and homes, but I told developer Brian Ray that if he could achieve that, I would return for the opening party.

Many locals were skeptical too. Did they want the area developed? How would it change the community? Several told me there were vocal debates on the pros and cons. Finally the Tweed Shire Council agreed that the pros were compelling, noting that Tweed residents needed job opportunities nearby. Many were commuting up to an hour or more to the north to find employment in the resort centers of southern Queensland, such as Surfers Paradise, where the Outrigger Sun City is located.

A little more than 24 months after my visit, the beautiful Outrigger on the Beach at Salt is now open for business. There are three wings, with over 300 tastefully furnished and decorated condominium apartments (called “strata title” in Australia). With the site having been elevated by moving hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of fill, guests almost anywhere on property can now look out over the seafront berm to get a great view of the ocean and the many seagulls that seem to effortlessly glide the air currents all day.

Nearby, a second hotel is being built, and homes are sprouting up in the residential part of the project. A lifeguard station is on site, and some of Australia’s legendary surf lifeguards keep a close eye on the beaches, waves, and currents. Other amenities will soon include a five-star spa and a variety of restaurants and shops.

As envisioned, the members of our hotel’s operating staff are almost all local residents. For many, their job with Outrigger is their first local work opportunity. Others have seen their commute times cut by more than half. They are all friendly, quietly efficient, and focused on doing the right thing, at the right time, in the best Outrigger tradition.

The opening ceremonies were originally planned for outdoors, but a series of storms passing through dictated a last-minute move into the lobby. Honored guests and a large contingent of local and national media representatives were impressed as Ka’ipo Ho and Marsha Kapu brought blessings and waters from Hawaii, which they presented to members of the local Aboriginal community. The latter responded by mixing the Hawaii waters with that from regional rivers, symbolizing the blending of the cultures, and performing traditional dances that pointed out the close ties of the Aboriginals with nature and the environment. It was a “chicken-skin” evening for sure.
I was honored to be given a beautifully handcrafted didgeridoo, the Aboriginal musical instrument, by Ken Dickson, a highly skilled craftsman and local cultural advisor. The instrument will be on display in the lobby for all to enjoy during the coming years of Outrigger's management of the property.

Congratulations to General Manager Gerd Beurich, Rooms Division Manager Rajesh Shetty, and all of our ‘ohana at the Outrigger on the Beach at Salt for a wonderful, impressive opening party. Through your work, dedication, and attention to detail, you have created a beautiful addition to our Australia portfolio. Thank you for that and for all the hospitality extended to my family and me during our stay with you. I wish you all the very best for the coming years.