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Lying your way through dinner and dessert

Beachfront hotel in Oregon is a literary masterpiece – and you can't beat the views

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Newport, Ore. – "I have been featured in *Playboy*, spent hours in the dungeon of a dominatrix and met my husband while posing naked in New Zealand."



AMANDA BALTAZAR PHOTO

Grab a good book, pull up a chair and take it easy at the Sylvia Beach Hotel on the Oregon coast. (Nov. 8, 2008)

There was a tinkle of silverware as the other diners at the Sylvia Beach Hotel put down their knives and forks and stared at me, mouths agape.

I was playing Two Truths and a Lie, the obligatory game at this oceanside hotel in Newport, Ore.

The brainchild of the hotel's eccentric owner, Goody Cable, this game has been played every night at dinner for the past 21 years. Cable cooked up the idea as a way to break the ice at her family-style meals. So the game wasn't a surprise when we sat down to dinner.

What was a surprise was the food: four courses of a quality you'd expect in a restaurant with at least as many stars. The fare is as local as possible, with goat cheese made a few kilometres away, produce from employees' gardens and fish caught in the ocean just metres from the restaurant.

The Sylvia Beach Hotel is in Newport, Ore., 160 kilometres southwest of Portland. Rooms range from \$70 to \$193 (U.S.) See

Follow links for information on [Nye Beach](#), [Oregon Coast Aquarium](#), [Oregon Coast Tourism](#), and [Hatfield Marine Science Center](#).

Before we could get started on either the meal or the game, our server Carole (also known as "Mom") welcomed us to the restaurant, Tables of Content, and its delightful double entendre, and explained the house rules for our evening – such as "no kicking under the table" and "no laughing when your partner lies."

The first course, salmon mousse, was interspersed with guessing whether Gloria had not been introduced to the king of Thailand; had not danced for him; or had not received sweets from his wife, the queen.

As we rolled into the salad course, Tom tried to convince us he was a soothsayer. By the main course, we'd stopped lying to just shut up and enjoy the food. (Main course offerings include wild mushroom vol-au-vent, local halibut with a caper-lemon sauce, lamb with a mint vinaigrette and Cuban chicken. And that's the truth.)

By the time dessert – chocolate cake with a marionberry sauce – appeared, everyone believed that my husband had been the junior chess champion in Arizona when he was 15.

Our bedroom for the night was another story completely, which is fitting for the Sylvia Beach Hotel. Cable designed the hotel as an ode to her true love: literature. Each of the 22 rooms is designed after an author or literary work. We'd been allocated the Edgar Allan Poe room, replete with a pendulum axe swinging above the bed – directly over our throats, I realized as I looked up – a taxidermied raven, angled as if in one swoop he could take out our eyes (preferably after the axe had fallen), and a door leading to nothing but a brick wall.

Other rooms were just as elaborately adorned. The Dr. Seuss room was filled with drawings of *The Cat in the Hat*; Jane Austen's was a picture of floral tranquility with paintings of the author and her characters; Agatha Christie's was full of clues; Herman Melville's featured the requisite whale motifs. (I was really hoping that I would peer into the mirror in the Oscar Wilde room and find myself looking 20 years younger, but alas, all I found were books and photos of the author throughout his life.)

But the real star of the hotel is Sylvia Beach herself. An unrecognized bookstore owner in Paris in the 1920s and '30s, Beach published James Joyce's *Ulysses* when everyone else rejected it. She finally got her long-overdue renown when Goody Cable designed the hotel in her honour.

"It's perfect since we're located on a beach," says Cable.

Literature is the central theme of the Sylvia Beach, so it's fitting that more fiction is featured at the dinner table – and everywhere else. Books are squeezed onto shelves, tables, nooks and crannies throughout the hotel. And reading rooms on the third floor and in the attic have armchairs tucked between pillars of books, with views of Pacific Ocean waves pounding onto the sands of Nye Beach below.

Should you want to halt reading and explore the area, Nye Beach is a small part of Newport, about halfway down the Oregon coast. This tiny area has a number of independent retailers – a couple of bookshops, gift and clothing boutiques and

even a lingerie shop.

In Newport proper, there's the excellent Oregon Coast Aquarium with indoor and outdoor exhibits of everything from sea lions to jellyfish. (sea lions, seals and sea otters), and indoors there's everything from transparent jellyfish to creatures with names you can't pronounce.

A few steps further is the more detailed Hatfield Marine Science Center, which explains the why's and wherefore's of marine life, and two lighthouses just a short drive away.

But if you're going to stay at the Sylvia Beach, come with fiction in mind. You'll want to spend some time just turning pages and listening to the melody of crashing waves, as well as thinking up elaborate stories with which to beguile your dinner companions.

Oh, and for the record: I met my husband while touring a brewery—fully clothed.

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