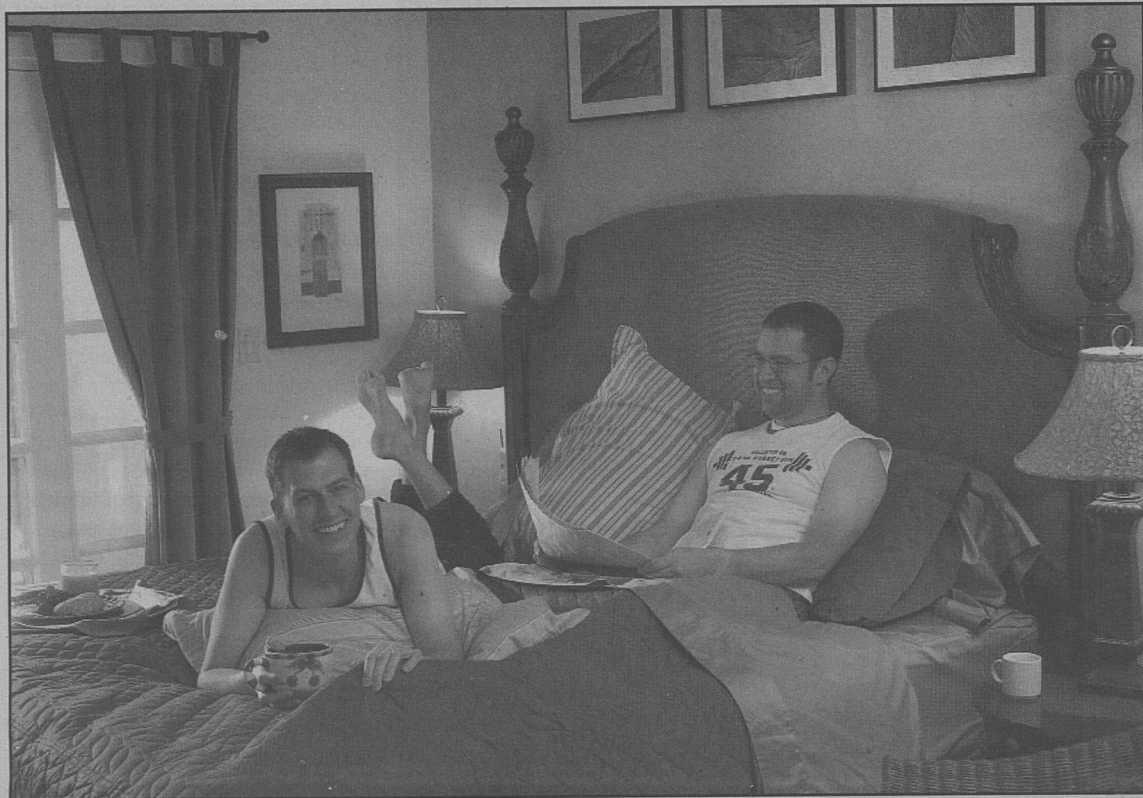


# arts & leisure



## A Resort to Howl About

Merle Exit Reports from Tucson's Coyote Moon Resort

**Editor's Note:** Travel writer Merle Exit offered to share with OITM readers her impressions of a new gay and lesbian resort in Tucson, Arizona. Coyote Moon opened in November 2004 with a significant number of staff wooed away from the nearby world-class resort Miraval. Save your pennies, friends: the least expensive room runs \$1600-plus per person, double-occupancy for a four-night package through mid-May, including three spa treatments, all meals, and transportation to and from the airport.

Star gazing at the sky above Tucson, Arizona, I caught meteor showers framing a first-quarter moon whose clarity made it appear as if there were a lunar eclipse. The stillness of the desert and views of surrounding cacti evolved into the sounds of distant coyote and nearby pig-like

javalinas blindly hoarding purposefully-placed vegetation in front of the welcome area of the 30-acre Coyote Moon Resort.

I recall the more-than-gay-friendly skies of American Airlines transporting me to a much less than crowded airport and being met by Todd Martin's dad, Mark. It was Todd who awakened partner Joe Studer's mind, body and spirit and helped him decide to transform a former guest ranch, nestled at the base of Sombrero Peak, into the first holistic resort and spa geared to an older and more financially stable gay and lesbian community.

I checked in, viewed the lay of the land and was handed my itinerary for the next four days. As I unpacked in my Spanish casita-style adobe and lava-stone guest room, I drank one of the many bottles of water provided and thought how much I was looking forward to

relaxing and rejuvenating while hoping that the menu would not specialize in tofu turkey, bean loaf and carob pudding.

But, alas, due to the predominance of vegetarian guests, the Cooking Class, run by head chef Kelly Kimpton, a Miraval transfer, focused on Butternut Squash ravioli in a wild mushroom sauce. For the next two days the song, "It Was Flatuation" ran through my mind. Do not fear, two days later I was finally blessed with a breakfast of steak and eggs and a pheasant dinner.

Joe Studer and I had a chance to chat about the resort. For the past ten years his Bostonian lifestyle was one of living in a mansion, going to dinner parties and theatre, and trips to both P-Town and Palm Springs. As we walked among the peacefulness of the cacti, drinking a bottle of water, I understood

why he gave it up – and then requested a few bandages for the toe that just got pricked.

Lynn White, another Miraval transfer, now Coyote Moon's Spa Manager, removed the thorn and treated me with an 80-minute scrub and rebalancing Seaweed Wrap using Seaweed Mud, a blend of three types of seaweed. A customized body cream made with goat milk followed. A few days later, after drinking a bottle of water, I indulged in one of her Vitality Facials. Still, I believe I may owe her my life for that thorn bit.

Early morn had me venturing on a hot air balloon excursion, despite my fear of heights (a.k.a "height-drophobia"). Thunderbird Adventures takes off from Coyote Moon's premises. It was an enthralling experience drifting above red rocks, mountains, and a cotton field. Boo boo time, as the basket immediately toppled over upon landing. As I grabbed for safety and pitied the women I fell on, my poor nail ripped, but hung, from my middle finger. I, of course, had to show everyone.

A manicurist was unavailable upon my return. However, James McIlrath, Coyote's Spa Director and former Spa Director of Miraval ... perhaps a pattern here ... performed the necessary surgery and gave me a body-conditioning massage using Swedish strokes, shiatsu stretches, reflexology, Reikei and cranial-sacral techniques. I drank a bottle of water and thought how both my finger and I were grateful.

The mild temperatures beckoned me to stroll the grounds. I said to myself, "Self, you can go for a swim in the outdoor pool, play tennis, engage in a game of sand volleyball, or take a dip in the Jacuzzi." Then I remembered that I don't know how to swim, don't really like being in the water and since everyone was off doing their own thing, tennis and volleyball were out of the question, not to mention that

I've never handled a tennis racket or played volleyball since being in Lucille Kyvallos' gym class.

Lunch was a spiritual experience as I sat amongst a water fountain and citrus trees located just outside of the Clubhouse. Actually, it gave me an excuse to pick my own grapefruit and orange.

After drinking a bottle of water, I decided to feed and pet the horses over at the Corral, where a movie scene set was the backdrop of Coyote Moon's Old West Town. There was the thought of horseback riding. Although they offer this option these horses are not part of the plan. Then I remembered that my fear of heights extended to being on top of a horse.

An absolutely delectable dinner was followed with a lecture on Tarot and Past Lives. Was I a camel in a past life? Would it be in the cards for me to entertain at Coyote Moon? At first I thought that Todd was going to play "Tea For One," but the few guests and staff all showed for my audition. Being a Gemini, I performed a scene from the *Wizard of Oz* with all of the characters and did my rendition of "I Left My Heart In San Francisco."

I breathed the night air as it turned from clear to odorous. There was a javalina a few feet away, snorting songs of pumpkins, squash and brussel sprouts. Since it did not present a pork chop in exchange, I gave it nothing.

The morning before my departure I went to the area known as the Ramada, a partially enclosed space with tables, chairs, couches, barbecue and band stand that abuts the Waterfalls Patio. As I sat, drinking a bottle of water, I contemplated how much more unstressed I was feeling, the freedom of being amongst my peers in a luxurious facility, and the wish to return to a supportive and loving staff. ▼

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