



Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa

Deeply Rooted

From a humble start in the 1950s to three luxury properties, Evans Hotels has found success while staying true to family ideals and community connections.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

With stunning beaches and that laid-back lifestyle for which Southern California is known, it's no surprise that travelers flock to San Diego. And, since the 1950s, Evans Hotels has welcomed many of those visitors to its properties, becoming a major force in the local tourism industry. The family-run company's first two hotels, the Bahia Resort Hotel and the Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa,

opened in Mission Bay more than 50 years ago. Evans Hotels then added The Lodge at Torrey Pines, a AAA Five Diamond resort, to its growing list of accommodations in the early 2000s—further cementing the company's position in the community.

"I'd like to think that we are part of the fabric of San Diego and of Southern California in general," says Anne Evans, San Diego native and co-founder of Evans Hotels. The historic properties, their



Clockwise from top: The Lodge at Torrey Pines; a bay-view room and patio at Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa; the beach at Bahia Resort Hotel and one of the company's two stern-wheeler boats (in the distance)

expansion over the last few decades and a steady stream of guests all point to a successful enterprise with no signs of slowing anytime soon. The company announced in late 2015 that it would partner with SeaWorld to explore the opportunity of building a hotel at the theme park in Mission Bay. Even with these grand plans on the horizon, sometimes looking back on the journey from humble beginnings is the best part.

THE EARLY YEARS

In the mid-1940s, a Chamber of Commerce committee suggested developing Mission Bay as a recreational area to draw tourists and broaden the city's mostly military-based economy. "The city issued a formal request for proposal, inviting developers to apply to lease land to build a hotel," Evans says. Her late husband and co-founder, William Evans, decided to apply to construct 52 beach cabins, a restaurant, bar and swimming pool—with a telephone in every room.

Though he had previous experience running his father's walk-up apartment buildings and managing a fraternity house at the University of Southern California, the Bahia Resort Hotel was the first property Evans developed; it opened in 1953 after the Evanses were awarded the first long-term lease on Mission Bay, which was mainly marshland and mud flats at the time. "Not everyone could see what Mission Bay was going to be, but he could," Evans says. Eventually, crews would dredge 25 million cubic yards of sand and silt to create the land areas of Mission Bay Park. In those early days, as work on the hotels progressed, Evans shares that her husband went around to older neighborhoods offering to remove their pesky palm trees. Remove them he did—and the trees have grown with



the Bahia Resort Hotel ever since.

The Bahia was the Evanses' only hotel until the owners of the Braemar estate, a mansion belonging to the Scripps family, offered to lease land to Evans Hotels in 1958. The following year saw the opening of the Catamaran Hotel (the name later changed to the Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa)—an 82-room inn on the northwest corner of Mission Bay.

Because there were then two hotels, William Evans formulated another innovative idea: He wanted an alluring way to differentiate the properties, to transport guests from one hotel to the other and to increase event space for both properties. His solution was the purchase of a 45-foot ferry boat that





The Catamaran's Oceana Coastal Kitchen serves fresh seafood, like ceviche.

he renovated and turned into a Mississippi-style sternwheeler named the Bahia Belle.

EVOLUTION AND EXPANSION

Over time, both the Bahia Resort Hotel and the Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa have expanded. The resorts' most dramatic changes are evident in the number of rooms available at each. By 1968—15 years after it first opened—the Bahia Resort Hotel had gradually expanded to contain its current 314 rooms. Similarly, a tower with 160 rooms was added to the Catamaran resort that same year. Two decades later, the resort was renovated again, increasing in size to 311 guest rooms. And the Bahia Belle received an update in the 1980s to increase capacity.

Aside from adding rooms, Anne Evans says she and her company have had to keep up with changes in expected amenities as well. “The public’s expectations of what a hotel needs to be have changed a lot,” she says, mentioning that they included only telephones when the Bahia hotel first opened. Of course, flat-screen TVs, wireless internet access and more were later added to the rooms. To keep improving accommodations for guests, the company continually reinvests its revenue into the hotels.

Sustainability is also important to the company, according to Tony Castro, maintenance supervisor at the Bahia Resort Hotel. “We have become much greener

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—ANNE EVANS



The Lodge at Torrey Pines is next to Torrey Pines Golf Course, home of the U.S. Open in 2008.



Amenities have expanded over the years.

over the years and we continue to make large strides in this area,” he says. “We have made changes to our grounds and watering systems in an effort to do our part and conserve water due to California’s recent drought conditions.” The hotels also work to conserve energy and minimize waste. In fact, for its sustainability efforts, all three hotels have attained the highest level of participation in the California Green Lodging Program.

The business also remains a family-run endeavor: When William Evans passed away in 1984, Anne took on more responsibilities within the company. With the help of their children, she commissioned a custom-built, 100-foot sternwheeler called the William D. Evans. Launched in 1986, the 400-passenger boat was crafted in the same antebellum style as the Bahia Belle. Both

sternwheelers continue to cycle back and forth between the Bahia and the Catamaran today, used not only as a shuttle but also for private events and chartered cruises.

In 1995, Evans Hotels purchased The Lodge at Torrey Pines in La Jolla, renovating and reconstructing a large portion to create a brand-new luxury resort with 169 guest rooms. It reopened in 2002 with a prestigious AAA Five Diamond rating and sits alongside the Torrey Pines Golf Course, near picturesque Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve.

As Evans Hotels has grown, members of the Evans family and other staff members have worked side-by-side with the local community. From political activities and presidential visitors to partnerships with health organizations and supporting community events, they have integrated themselves into Mission Bay Park, greater San Diego and beyond.

“I am immensely proud of what we do and of the relationship we have developed with our staff members and with the public,” Evans says, explaining that her company has brought a stable workforce to Mission Bay and continued to thrive in a service-oriented industry.

Castro, an 18-year employee at the Bahia, adds that while the hotels have grown over the years, one thing hasn’t changed with time. “That is our commitment to creating the best possible experience for each of our guests,” he says. “And, as an employee of Evans Hotels, I have become a part of that commitment.” Castro notes that small businesses have come and gone on Mission Bay, but that, overall, the area has remained consistent. “Belmont Park has changed a bit and so has SeaWorld, but they continue to draw many people to this area as do the beach and bay areas themselves,” he says. “We remain a very popular place to bring the family.”

THREE DISTINCT DESTINATIONS

Each hotel has its own personality, atmosphere and style. The founding Bahia Resort Hotel is situated on a 14-acre peninsula with guest rooms featuring views of the bay or hotel gardens. The light colors and expansive windows add to the seaside

vibe, creating a breezy, relaxing environment conducive to winding down. Beachside cabanas are available, and the resort also offers professional tennis lessons, access to nearby water sports, movies by the pool and cookouts on the beach during summer—not to mention seasonal cruises on the Bahia Belle.

The Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa is a different environment altogether, with a tropical Polynesian design. The hotel’s theme is implemented in everything from the decor to on-site events. The grounds are filled with lush gardens—tropical plants, waterfalls, koi ponds and talking parrots. Tiki torches and handcrafted Balinese totem poles further add to the ambience. The hotel hosts events like summer sunset luaus complete with hula dancers and roasted pigs as well as yoga classes, poolside Polynesian dance lessons, seasonal movies on the bay and cocktail cruises. The Polynesian theme carries over to The Catamaran Spa with South Pacific and Asian-inspired massages and other treatments. And Oceana Coastal Kitchen offers bayfront dining and California cuisine made with seasonal, local ingredients.

The newest property in the company’s portfolio, The Lodge at Torrey Pines, sits adjacent to the Torrey Pines Golf Course, which hosted the U.S. Open in 2008 and will again in 2021. As expected, the iconic course draws golfers from around the world looking to play on the same challenging greens as the pros. The Lodge was built in the California craftsman style, providing a resort that’s upscale while still blending well with its environment. The Spa at Torrey Pines offers relaxing treatments inspired by the ocean and adjacent Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve. And dining options include A.R. Valentien, the Lodge’s signature restaurant, as well as The Grill, which recently underwent a \$2.5 million renovation and features an outdoor grill, rotisseries and oven.

While each resort has its own appeal and audience, they have one important thing in common according to Evans. “Our hotels have been resources for families and all manner of people seeking rest and relaxation,” she says. “So many people have formed wonderful memories.” ■

FUN FACTS

Learn about the little-known details of Evans Hotels’ properties.

BAHIA BELLE

This paddle-wheel boat has been shuttling guests between the Bahia Resort Hotel and Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa since the 1960s. Built in 1942, the boat previously ferried personnel between San Diego’s Embarcadero and Navy ships in port. William Evans transformed the boat—originally named the Juanita—into the sternwheeler.



CATAMARAN RESORT HOTEL AND SPA

The hotel’s unique flora and fauna amplify its

Polynesian theme,

and the hotel also houses a special bird room. Currently home to

eight parrots and nearly 30 ducks, bird handlers work on-site to train the birds, which are showcased in special presentations during spring and summer.

THE LODGE AT TORREY PINES

An acclaimed, farm-to-table restaurant within The Lodge, A.R. Valentien is named for an early 1900s San Diego artist who created impressionist paintings, pottery and botanical illustrations. In addition to fresh cuisine and a view overlooking the golf course, diners enjoy a collection of art by the restaurant’s iconic namesake.

