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Love Letter to Hotel Stary, Krakow

by [Dana Hazels Seith](#)



"Stary" in Polish slang means "old buddy." Very appropriate. Photo: KiwiCollection

Dear Hotel Stary,

We were introduced casually, a link from a friend whose wedding reception you were hosting. She was after your understated elegance. I think she liked that you were a magnificent private residence in 15th-century Poland.

You stood in the heart of Old Town, tucked just off the square, confident in a land of old and new. Once inside the Gothic structure, I knew I was in for something special. Tasteful modern touches, like Molton Brown bath products and heated floors, blended with the antique romanticism present in every exposed beam, Italian marble vanity, and thick plaster wall.

In the brief time I knew you, it was as if I didn't know myself. Stary, the fete, that night, was one for the books. I don't know what came over me (the red leather furniture? the black and white checkered floors? the polished woods?), as I'm usually so restrained! But in the end, you had me kicking off my high-priced heels and singing Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" with the rest of them.

I want to explore every nook and cranny, without the mock Euro-disco celebration of that night. I want to dip in the grotto pool, sip cocktails on your rooftop (it has the best views of the city), and play chess in the lobby while an attentive staff caters to my every whim. I need to know you beyond the debauchorous haze that brought us together. I want to see you again in the soft glow of daylight.

Until we meet again,
Dana

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FILED UNDER : [Love Letter](#), [Hotels We Love](#), [Poland](#), [Krakow](#)

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Dana Hazels Seith

Dana is an award-winning journalist, a former CNN producer, and a veteran DailyCandy Atlanta editor. She is the Atlanta Community Manager at MSN's Postbox, founder of [danapop.com](#), and a writer for various lifestyle publications. She travels for the perspective.

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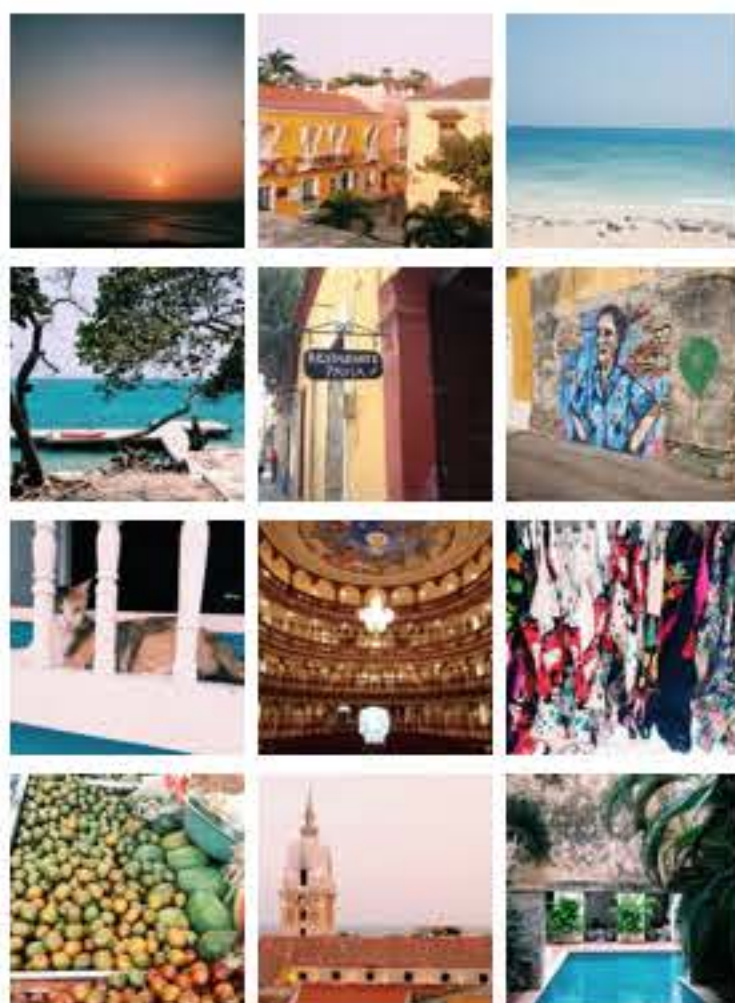
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It's official. #Sealions really are the cutest animals ever. [shar.es/TnGAz](#) [pic.twitter.com/MusUqTzJJ](#)



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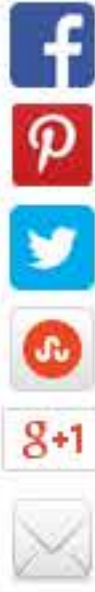


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No Cameras Allowed at the Strip Club Where Everybody Knows Your Name

by [Dana Hazels Seith](#)



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Images: Courtesy of Artem Nazarov / PC Press at Portfolio Center

There are few American institutions as democratically divey, raunchy, and nostalgia-inducing as [Clermont Lounge](#) in Atlanta, Georgia. The hallowed strip club has been operating out of the basement of the defunct Clermont Motor Hotel since the 1960s, and the strippers have (almost) been around that long, too. How's that for Americana? Real live girls, girls, girls, performing for everyday regulars and out-of-town-celebrities alike. Fathom contributor Dana Hazels Seith spent three years gathering anecdotes, interviews, and stories from inside the club, and the fruits of her labor have culminated with the gorgeous coffee table book [No Cameras: The Clermont Lounge](#). The author chatted with Fathom editorial director Jeralyn Gerba about the iconic destination. Some of her insights are shared below.

ATLANTA, Georgia – If you talk to the right people, you'll find out about the Clermont Lounge as soon as you get down to Atlanta. It's a crazy, awesome dive bar that never changes. Same wallpaper since 1965, same wood paneling. And it happens to have strippers. It's a crazy place that has not been touched. The average age for dancers is around 53. There are 21-year-old girls here, but everyone knows Blondie, who is in her 60s. The Clermont is legend and lore.

You usually end up at the Clermont when you've already made a lot of bad decisions in an evening. When you are in a questionable or wild state of mind. That's what made capturing the place in photos and prose so difficult. This was a project that I am happy I was naive enough to sign up for. Had I known the scope and meatiness of the assignment – the toughest of my career – it would have been very intimidating.

The Clermont opened in 1965 and has been through several owners. The current ones, Tracey Brown and Kathi Martin, were willed the club in 2000 by their former boss, Mac, when they were bartending and managing the place. Mack was a shrewd business owner and saw it through several incarnations (burlesque club, strip bar, dive). There was a heyday, of course, with a real diversity of clientele and hot strippers dancing on the horseshoe bar in the 1980s. Then they just stayed there.



Taking a page from the large-format coffee table book.

Lots of bands got their start on a makeshift stage at the Clermont. The place is referenced in a lot of songs and music videos. Musicians gave it a kitschy caché, and then well-known people, like Anthony Bourdain and Margaret Cho, popularized it further. There are a lot of celebrity sightings.

It's big and crowded and filled with Georgia Tech frat boys, but there is a true regular crowd. They like the dancers as people and friends. They genuinely care about the girls. When the women are not on stage or feeding the jukebox quarters for their songs, they are often sitting at the bar, chatting with regulars.

It's a subculture-within-a-subculture kind of thing. A lot of people come by themselves to the bar. As early as 11 a.m. The commonality is that all of these people – blue collar workers and hipsters and professionals and bartenders off their shifts – create an oddball crowd. The dancers are real characters, too. Blondie crushes beer cans with her boobs. Porscha dresses up like Little Bo Peep. Cassy lights her nipples on fire. Barbie is beautiful and young and covered in tattoos. It's like that Hunter Thompson quote, "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro."



The neighborhood, Poncey-Highland, is a teenie, forgotten neighborhood between Inman Park and the Virginia Highlands. It has, at times, been a nice area and a seedy area. The section of town is one of the only areas untouched by gentrification. A lot is happening now. There's the adaptive reuse project [Ponce City Market](#). And the condemned hotel above the Clermont Lounge finally got bought by a boutique hotel group. A high-end steak joint is soon to come.

What will that mean for the iconic spot? The lasting appeal of the Clermont is that it never changes. And while the Clermont is unique to Atlanta, it represents something universal to so many people. You can remain just as you always were and still attract a crowd.

[See excerpts from No Cameras: The Clermont Lounge.](#)

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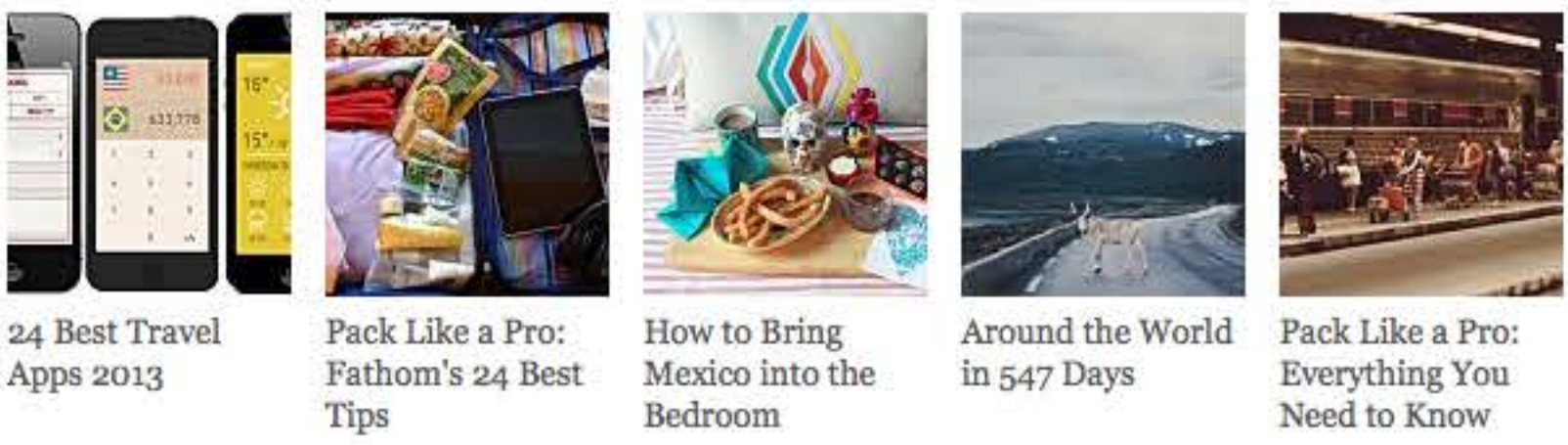
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