

TIKI

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Celebrating the "ISLAND" Lifestyle



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The Tiki Bar at Solomons Island



The Tiki Bar is located right on the Patuxent River in Southern Maryland.



The grounds of the bar are enhanced by a life-sized Bosko Moai.

Story and Photos by Raland Camara

How often do you get to go to an authentic Tiki Bar? I'm talking about an open air bar, with plenty of Tiki décor, a panoramic waterfront view, and a knock your socks off Mai Tai? Well, have I got a place for you! It's the world famous Tiki Bar at Solomons Island located right on the Patuxent River in Southern Maryland.

The Tiki Bar at Solomons Island (later referred to as the Tiki Bar) is a 90 seat open air bar. Just walking through the Tiki Bar, you'll immediately notice that it features plenty of carvings by Bosko. In fact, there are over 100 Bosko carvings on the walls and throughout the Tiki Bar. The open air atmosphere, Bosko art, sea shells, and various nautical themed elements really provide an authenticity to the Tiki Bar. You'll hear island music, steel drums, Jimmy Buffet, Bob Marley, and various 80's and 90's rock and roll.

The World Famous Mai-Tai

Much of the Tiki Bar's popularity comes from their famous Mai Tai. The Mai-Tai at the Tiki Bar is not your ordinary mai tai. It has a very unique taste that's all its own. On my trip to the Tiki Bar, we consumed several of these, all in name of science of course, trying to unlock the secret of its unique taste. Kelly Bingham, the bar manager for the last 9 years, said that it's been "a guarded secret recipe" for the last 26 years. My colleague, Dave Smith, a self professed mai tai connoisseur, said, "There is some special ingredient that makes this mai tai taste different than a typical mai tai. It's very good, not overly sweet, with a light tangy taste. It's very refreshing and perfect for a hot sunny day." Perhaps the best description came from Ali O'Driscoll, a bartender at the Tiki Bar, who said, "It's a special Rum punch made with lots of love and alcohol".



SOLOMONS ISLAND TIKI BAR

Running the Board

One of the traditions at the Tiki Bar is known as "Running the Board". On a large carved and painted board above the bar are the names of eight of the Tiki Bar's most popular house drinks. They are: the famous Mai Tai (the popular rum punch house drink), the Kokomo (a Mai-Tai with Coconut Rum and Vanilla Liqueur), the Blue Tiki (a Tiki Version of the Blue Hawaii with blue Curacao, banana liqueur, pineapple juice, and a dash of lemon juice), the Orange Crush (a nostalgic orange flavored drink with orange vodka, triple sec, vodka, orange, sprite, and a shake), the Tiki Sicle (a refreshing cream drink with orange and almond flavors), Bloody Mary (a Tiki version with a special crab seasoning), Cajun Margarita (Marinated with Fresh Jalapeno Peppers), and Tiki Tea. To "Run the Board" one needs to have all eight drinks listed on the board during the course of the day. Board membership gains you bragging rights with your fellow patrons. Even if you don't "Run the Board", you owe it to yourself to try at least a couple. While the Mai Tai is a "must have", I would also recommend the Orange Crush and Tiki Sicle as exceptional as well.

Tiki Joe and the Staff

The manager of the Tiki Bar is Joe Kurley, a.k.a. "Tiki Joe". Joe is a big teddy bear kind of guy that looks like he could have been a linebacker on a pro football team in his past, but is actually an ex-elementary school teacher. Tiki Joe is the heart and soul of the Tiki Bar and his ardent affection for it is quite evident. He is a real friendly guy with a smile and a greeting for everyone. It's common to see Tiki Joe chatting with some of the locals or welcoming back some newly made "old friends" to the Tiki Bar. "From the first night, I just knew that that I wanted to be at the Tiki Bar. I just loved it. I loved the people. I just love doing what I do", says Tiki Joe. The genuine friendship of the clients and staff are one of the things that also make the Tiki Bar a unique experi-



The majority of Tiki decoration was hand crafted by legendary carver Bosko Hrnjak.

ence. Tiki Joe attributes a big part of this to the support of the owners Pat Donovan and Terry Clarke and the great staff that is there. According to Tiki Joe, a key element to the Tiki Bar is getting the right ambience. The outdoor open air feel of the bar with its panoramic waterfront view and beach sand in Tiki Village add to the "Bahamas like" feel of the bar. Part of the character is also in the things that you won't see. "You'll never see a neon beer sign at the Tiki Bar, but you will see plenty of Bosko, sea shells, and nautical themed items" said Tiki Joe.

The Grill Sergeant BBQ

The real surprise of my visit to the Tiki Bar was the Tiki Bar restaurant located in Tiki Village right next to the Tiki Bar. It's called "The Grill Sergeant BBQ" named after the U.S. criminal investigator by day and Grill Sergeant by night, Mike Theesen. You only have to talk to Mike for a minute to realize that he has a passion for barbeque and it shows in everything he makes. Mike is student



More Bosko art.



Tiki Bar at Solomons Island manager "Tiki Joe" Kurlley.

of the art of barbeque and takes his food seriously by always pursuing the ultimate in barbeque. Mike describes his barbeque as "Maryland Southern Style". His "secret recipe" for his dry rub barbeque is absolutely fabulous. The dry rub is both hot and sweet. It's just hot enough to give the flavor a little kick. I would personally recommend the baby back smoked ribs. The meat just falls off the bone. I also loved the minced and sliced pork sandwich. You should also try the secret dry rub sprinkled on the some of the fries. I'm sure you'll love it. In fact, it's some of the best barbeque that I've ever had. To fully experience the Tiki Bar, you should definitely enjoy some barbeque from the Grill Sergeant and a world famous Mai-Tai. Trust me on this one, you'll be glad that you did!

The Clientele

All kinds of people come to the Tiki Bar from all over the world. People have come from: Australia, Great Britain, Germany, the eastern seaboard and southern California. Tish Disabella, a bartender at the Tiki Bar said, "On a typical Saturday afternoon, you'll get boaters, contractors, girls with their girlfriends, guys after work, and Prince Frederick locals. On Friday and Saturday nights, you get a little bit younger crowd and groups of friends. It's not uncommon to have bachelor and bachelorette parties as well. It's really a great combination of people." The dress is very casual with shorts and flip-flops being the norm.

Special events: Opening and Closing Celebrations

Two of the big events that have given the Tiki Bar much of its festive reputation are the Opening and Closing weekend celebrations. The Opening is the third Friday in April. It's not uncommon to have over 25 thousand people show up from Friday through Sunday, with 12 thousand people on Saturday alone. As Tiki Joe puts it, "Opening is a celebration that spring is coming. Solomons Island has four seasons, so spring has a special meaning that better weather is coming. The Tiki Bar closes for the winter time. Opening is something that people look forward to with eager anticipation. People enjoy getting out. The people have been looking forward to this all winter. The girls get out their new summer outfits. Also, people are looking forward to seeing their friends that they haven't seen in a while." Opening also has a Marti Gras feel to it. It is a real celebration. The festivities also include a procession with the Tiki King" arriving on his float pontoon across the water with his Tiki Fan maidens dropping rose petals at his feet. This year's Tiki King is Gordon Spalding and his fan maidens are Diane Rowe and Sarah Hassen. The procession is all in good fun and really helps kick off the festive nature of the Opening celebration.

The Closing celebration this year is a Halloween Bash with Saturday October 19th being the Halloween Costume Party. There is a costume contest, band, prizes and great food. The



The "Grill Sergeant" Mike Theesen creates some of the best BBQ anywhere.

costumes are not traditional but very creative. Some of the past costumes have included Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton in jail suits and a person dressed up as a Mammogram machine. A big part of this celebration also includes a donation to a worthy cause. Each year during the Closing Halloween celebration, the Tiki Bar gives to a charitable cause. Past causes have included the Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Humane Society. Tiki Joe sincerely expressed, "We consider ourselves to be very blessed. We like to give back to the community."

A Place to Enjoy a Good Drink and Good Friends

The warm friendly atmosphere of the Tiki Bar is one of its most endearing characteristics. Per Tiki Joe, "The Tiki Bar was built on a fundamental of being friendly. We don't turn up the music because the Tiki Bar is a place for people to meet and talk. It's not really a music bar. It's a bar where everyone seems to be old friends. One of the keys to our success is that we greet everyone with a handshake and when they leave with a smile".

Raland Camara is a software engineer from La Costa, CA. He lives with his wife Kelly and son CJ. Some of his passions include travel, photography, Tiki, sports, spending time with his family and a good mai tai.



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