

When you approach the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate from the Tampa Bay area, the 16-story resort stands out like a beacon in the distance. It dwarfs all buildings around it. When you drive into the complex under the stately wrought-iron arches, you know you've arrived someplace special.

Golf, Food and Spa!

Who ever built this place was thinking ahead. When you walk in the main entrance, your eyes are inevitably drawn to the big back glass wall that reveals—in order, a fountain, a pool, a large hot tub and then the golf course, all perfectly elevated one after the next.

Erin and I were fortunate enough to be given a 16th story room overlooking the fountain/pool/tub/golf course on a balcony where we were able to sit and soak in the view high above Orlando. There are 720 rooms, suites and villas.

One of our favorite things to do upon first arriving at a new facility is to get a little exercise and explore the grounds. We went for a power walk around the resort's 45-golf holes, 15 acres of recreation and pools, and a conference center. This was no short walk! (Golfers will also want to know this facility includes the David Leadbetter Golf Academy World. We happened to meet him while we were there. He actually has a house in Manatee County!)

Afterwards we relaxed by the "formal pool." This is one of my favorite features of the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate. So often, relaxing vacations are "altered"—shall we say—by young families innocently having loud fun in the pool. That's why it's incredibly shrewd to have two separate pools—one for relaxation and one to play Marco Polo. Well done! (Speaking of families, the resort offers free shuttle service to Orlando area theme parks.)

We enjoyed a drink on our balcony while admiring the sunset, and then went down to "David's Club" on the far end of the lobby. They call it a high-end sports bar. Quite a dichotomy: Beautiful leather chairs, couches and restaurant seating—while surrounded by TV sets, each showing different sports channels. I loved this restaurant. Plush, comfortable—and our table had a nice view of that well-planned back yard as well.

We had stone crab claws for an appetizer with a mustard-tinged dipping sauce. We had four claws for \$60 (They are part of the on-going "Ingredient of the Month" campaign, featuring one locally-based product each month.), followed by an





iceberg wedge salad with blue cheese dressing. For dinner we each had the 8 oz. center cut filet mignon and baked potato (\$42). We also ordered truffled wild mushrooms and roasted vegetables. We punctuated this wonderful dinner with coffee and a scoop of ice cream with chocolate sauce. Wow!

Dinner complete, we went to the bar for a nightcap and mingled with some other hotel guests. David's Club is one of several restaurants at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, each with it's own niche.

Before going to sleep, we hung a request sign on our doorknob and later awakened to a fresh pot of coffee at the exact time we checked on the card. Great service!

While Erin caught up with a relative who happens to live nearby, I slipped downstairs to a European-style spa. The Mokara Spa is exactly what you want: friendly staff, gentle music, and soft bathrobes & new slippers. I had a 25-year veteran massage therapist named Debbie who could have doubled for the blonde-haired blue-eyed actress Anna Farris. Debbie was wonderful. Great touch, service and people skills.(\$144 including tip.)

I caught up with Erin at a poolside snack bar where I was glad to find they had gluten-free bread. (Allergy, not being trendy!) We had a nice lunch before we returned to the 16th floor to begin packing and heading back home.

The weekend flew by, and we were less than 100 miles from Sarasota. Orlando is not as far as it seems—especially when you stay at a place as convenient as this. RAY COLLINS

1-800-The-Omni • www.OmniOrlandoResort.com

