

# Lost City Found

## Event Planner Raises the Gods in Atlantis

By Gary Abeyta

Somewhere at the bottom of the Caribbean, a sunken treasure chest is half buried in the sand. The lid opens slowly, allowing earth, sea, wind and fire to escape. The four elements come together to resuscitate Bahamian characters, including Poseidon himself, who then leads a godly procession delighting adults and children.

Another evening in Atlantis begins.

That's right, Atlantis. Never mind all those theories that the city, with all its riches, sunk to the bottom of the ocean floor. No one even knows where, as this city has been placed somewhere in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Spain or in the Caribbean.

The fact is Atlantis is alive and thriving in the Bahamas.

Located on Paradise Island, this hotel/casino provides visitors a mythological ride with its "Mystic Powers of Atlantis," where the sights and sounds are as important as the food and drink.

But first, we need to know a little about the Islands of the Bahamas to understand why Atlantis has been found here — after centuries of being considered "the lost city."

The archipelago that comprises the nearly 700 islands of the Bahamas stretches more than 650 miles from the eastern coast of Florida to the southeastern tip of Cuba. It is among these dots in the Caribbean where Christopher Columbus landed in 1492 and met the Lucayan



Indians, who had settled the region during the ninth century.

Returning to Spain with a wealth of riches, Columbus' journey encouraged others to follow, and soon conquistadors wiped out the Lucayans through disease, enslavement and hardship.

In 1647, English settlers began arriving. The Islands of Bahamas were governed by Great Britain until the Revolutionary War. Spain took advantage of a distracted England and claimed the islands as its own. Great Britain, however, regained control in 1783, and the Bahamas remained a British colony until only 30 years ago, when it declared its independence.

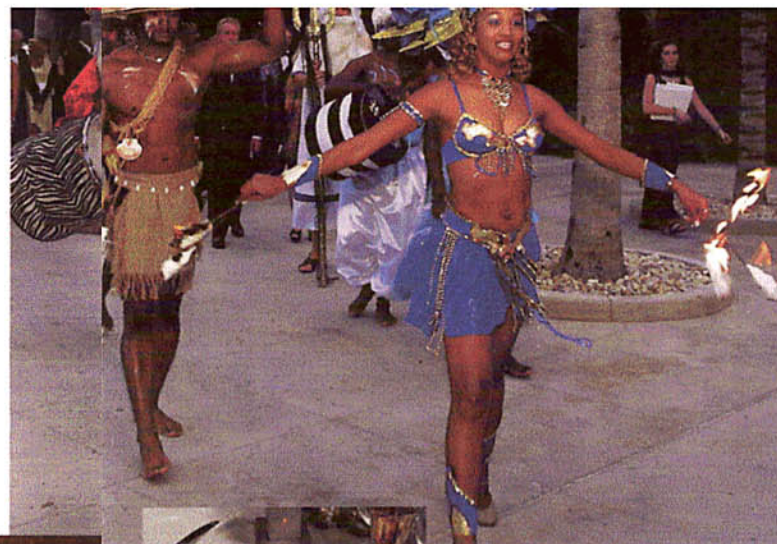
With its subtropical and tropical climate — ensuring a fairly even temperature between 68 to 86 degrees — the

islands are a pleasant year-round tourist destination. The ocean water temperature ranges from 73 degrees in February to 82 degrees in August.

Yes, the Bahamas truly offer a hop, skip and jump paradise between Florida and Cuba. No wonder Atlantis was found here, and its founders know a thing or two about event planning.

Borrowing liberally from themed casinos in Las Vegas, Atlantis recognized that to pull off the epitome of parties, social events and business meetings, a team approach was needed. So it reached out to some of the best in the business, including Harith Productions Ltd., which brought in Floral by Design by Sean and BBJ Linens to create and design Mystic Powers of Atlantis.

The president of Philadelphia-based Harith Productions Harith Wickrema is an



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described as: "Royalty of duck confit and foie gras terrine blessed by Zeus with rays of Ra ripened baby lettuce echoed by fig and pumpkin dressing."

The second course, "Temple of the Sea," was explained as: "Speared with Poseidon's trident, harvest from the ocean depths, seafood pepper pot stewed in a whole coconut with hints of lemongrass."

This meal was downright delicious, and interesting, because the service coincides with the appearances and coming to life of the various gods who ruled Atlantis, the ocean, fire, wind and earth.

The third course was "Nectar of the Gods" — no, not your favorite liqueur or wine — which is defined as: "Mayan Temple, majestically withstanding the winds, regally offers the sensual fruit nectar of black current sprinkled with rose petals."

By now, we guests really were ready to dig into the fourth course, "Apollo's Eclipse of the Sun," which includes: "Sage laced beef tenderloin and Bahamian grouper with lobster claw crowning saffron mashed potato, sun-drenched vegetables from Atlas' garden, infused in herb butter with ancient classic, pommery mustard and Café Ole sauces."

Finally, we were served "Temple of the Moon." Here, "the Goddess of the Moon, Selene, rises from the ocean with white chocolate and mango timbale perched on Caribbean fruits sparked with golden papaya dressing and rimmed in a sweet coffee flavored reduction."

While this meal was for a small group, the next night, 700 guests were served. But the same attention to detail and mystical charm of a fantasy world was created for the larger group.

Menus are designed around specific themes, but the one constant is that all

food is prepared based on island flavors — coconuts, pineapple, mangoes, avocados and loads of fish such as snapper and mahi-mahi — whether service is from a buffet or for a banquet. All the cooks have been trained properly in island cooking methods.

Because of its location and temperatures, outside events give guests ample advantage to celebrate the sun and the surf. But it also can be pounded suddenly with a thunderstorm. This climactic reality forces Atlantis' staff to work as quickly as a grounds crew at a baseball stadium.

A good example of this occurred during our visit. A planned outside event was interrupted when a major storm began. As quickly as humanly possible, all food was moved to the different restaurants and cafés within Atlantis, and guests were invited to follow the food.

While the Atlantis staff plans most of the themed experiences for on-premise events, it will accept off-premise occasions as well, such as weddings. But these kinds of events do present major logistical and timeliness challenges, because often everything needed for an off-premise event — including some guests — have to be flown in.

Because themed events are Atlantis' main course, it has several already planned and repeats them. The most popular request is a jungle theme — of which it has two scenarios.

The most difficult event it tackled was a Renaissance theme, which required moving from Atlantis to the Ocean Club, another venue, where guests were greeted by costumed characters including King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

All in all, if the natural draw of the Caribbean or the Bahamas is not strong enough to entice you, perhaps the mystic powers of Atlantis will, and you too will be enchanted by the gods, who smile at the hotel's catering, event planning and food service staffs. c|m