

## FRIENDSHIP CAPITAL

ALBANY, NEW YORK

By Sheree Bykofsky and Joyce Kaplan

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Joyce and I became best friends while JFK was saving the nation from the Cuban Missile Crisis, not that Joyce and I were much aware of it; we were busy playing pickup sticks and Monopoly and scheming to make best friends of our Moms who were nearly 20 years apart in age. It's a good thing our plan worked, too, because just a few years later when paper dresses were all the rage and Twiggy was an international icon, our Moms moved us far apart from each other. But through the distance and over time, our best friendships stuck—including our Moms'—and Joyce and I are closer than ever, best friends—sisters for life.

Today Joyce lives in Ithaca, NY, and I have moved myself and my business to the Jersey Shore. We wanted to meet at a place where we could shop, relax, eat great food, be pampered and laugh our heads off. You may be surprised how possible all that is in Albany, New York.

For one thing, the Hampton Inn and Suites offers an exemplary girlfriends' getaway package. From Monday through Thursday the third floor is a female only floor, accessible only with a special elevator key. Step off the elevator and find a healthy array of snacks and beverages available for the taking 24/7.

In your comfortable, newly renovated room, you'll find a delightful and abundant assortment of spa amenities. As part of the girls' getaway package, each guest is invited to enjoy a half-hour in the hotel's relaxation room, which has a sauna, steam room, tanning bed, and practically-human massage chair.

But a tanning bed can go just so far. What's a girls' getaway without a spa treatment? We found paradise at the full-service day spa Jean Paul, located at the Stuyvesant Shopping Plaza, where we were kneaded for an hour into two happy and intoxicated raggedy-Ann dolls.

We stumbled out of the spa into the Plaza relaxed enough to head to our hotel for afternoon naps, but what's a girls' getaway without shopping? At first glance the Stuyvesant Plaza doesn't look like much more than a nice strip mall, but upon closer investigation we found several shops and eateries that turned out to be hidden treasures. Joyce and I particularly enjoyed playing What Not to Wear in Chico's, where we filled up two shopping bags with items we should wear. We also found a fabulous assortment of our favorite jewelry designer Hollyashi at the Silver Parrot. Other excellent stores in the mall were White House/Black Market, and Talbots as well as several independently owned gift, book, food and clothing shops. Before we headed over to the nearby Colonie

Center which is home to Macy's, Sears, Boscov's, L.L. Bean and the usual players in between, at Stuyvesant Plaza we enjoyed a terrific lunch at Bountiful Bread, where the breads, pastries, muffins, sandwiches, and salads are truly delectable.

In fact, Albany really knows how to serve up a great sandwich—yee ha!! (Joyce and I are hysterical as we write this). Our lunch the prior day at Debbie's Kitchen in the Center Square neighborhood really set the bar high for our food expectations in Albany. The unusual mishmash of ingredients on bread at Debbie's Kitchen may give the average patron pause, but go ahead and order one of the daily sandwich specials which may sound like Turkey with cranberry mayo, horseradish, beets, apple, red onion and cheddar. Whatever it is, you won't be disappointed. The way Debbie puts those ingredients together will send your palate to ecstasy. Debbie's itself can be described as a small "hole in the wall," but it's worth a three hour drive for the sandwiches. And Debbie's proximity across the street from Washington Park makes it the perfect place to grab a meal for an outdoor picnic on a sunny day.

What's a girls' getaway without some sight-seeing?

Albany Trolley Tours runs a series of trolley and duck tours in and about the historic city. Joyce and I pretended to be Lucy and Ethel on the fabulously fun and interesting Chocolate Trolley tour which took us to several chocolate and candy shops around the city. We learned how to make delicious chocolates while wearing attractive hairnets, plastic gloves and aprons.

And what's a girls' getaway without excellent dinners?

There's no shortage of fine dining in Albany. The Hampton Inn itself boasts a world-renowned chef Yono who has created two extensive menus, one at DP's which is casually elegant and the extremely elegant Yono's which features fine Indonesian cuisine. Everything we ordered at DP (which included selections from Yono's) was as good as food gets. Joyce and I both enjoyed the culinary aspect of our girls' getaway even though Joyce is a die-hard vegetarian (a picky one, she'll admit), and I've eaten from the full spectrum of the finest cuisines around the world (Joyce won't let me say "as my waistline attests" because she's my best friend!).

A few blocks away, one evening we enjoyed a meal at the old world restaurant Jack's Oyster House. Naturally, Joyce didn't select the house special Steak Diane, but the chef did accommodate her very nicely by preparing a special rigatoni vegetable dish.

Finally, what's a girls' getaway without a fun show? Lucky for us, across the street from the Hampton Inn at the Capital Repertory Theatre, Menopause the Musical was playing. Along with a jam packed audience of 98% women over 40, we did laugh our heads off while enjoying the Broadway-caliber performances in a truly wonderful small theater.

All in all, we had even more fun than when we used to make activity books for each other filled with specially designed games, puzzles, and mazes and when they were all filled in and used up, we sold them to a very sweet elderly neighbor for 50 cents. We reminisced

and laughed and planned and shopped and ate, and we capitalized in everyway on the many attributes of Albany which, when it comes to girls' getaways, gets a Capital A.

IF YOU GO:

Albany County Convention & Visitors Bureau  
518 434 1217  
[www.albany.org](http://www.albany.org)

Hampton Inn & Suites, Albany Downtown  
25 Chapel St., Albany  
518 432 7000  
[www.hamptonsuitesalbany.com](http://www.hamptonsuitesalbany.com)

Capital Repertory Theatre  
111 N. Pearl St., Albany  
518 462 4531  
[www.capitalrep.org](http://www.capitalrep.org)

Albany Trolley Tours  
Visitors' Center, Downtown Albany  
A division of the Albany Aqua Ducks, Inc.  
518 462 3825  
[www.albanyaquaducks.com](http://www.albanyaquaducks.com)

Stuyvesant Plaza  
Western Avenue, Albany  
518 482 8986  
[www.stuyvesantplaza.com](http://www.stuyvesantplaza.com)

Jean Paul Spa de Beaute  
518 482 2121  
[www.jeanpaulspa.com](http://www.jeanpaulspa.com)

Bountiful Bread  
518 438 3540  
[www.bountifulbreadalbany.com](http://www.bountifulbreadalbany.com)

Colonie Center  
Wolf Road & Central Avenue  
Northway Exit 2E, Albany  
518 459 9020  
[www.shopcoloniecenter.com](http://www.shopcoloniecenter.com)

Debbie's Kitchen  
456 Madison Avenue  
Albany  
518 463 3829

Jack's Oyster House  
42 State Street, Albany  
518 465 8854  
[www.jacksoysterhouse.com](http://www.jacksoysterhouse.com)