

Shop 'Till You Drop at the Memphis Pyramid

Then go upstairs to the hotel at the massive Bass Pro Shops in Memphis

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Big Cypress Lodge

When I was growing up in New Hampshire, one of my parents' favorite ways to spend an evening was to listen to recordings of a couple of salty storytellers known as Bert & I. Their stories were quintessentially New England tales—told in a down East Maine accent that makes Cajun seem like the King's English—that were equal parts absurdist humor and clever paeans to rural life.

One of the more famous (and memorable to me) tales was “Harry Sleeps at L.L. Bean’s,” about the night one of the quirky characters slept at the famous outdoor retailer’s store in Freeport, Maine. This was long before the movie *Night at the Museum* and its sequels, and the idea that someone could spend a night indoors among the tents and fishing poles and jackets at L.L. Bean was somehow ridiculously funny and incredibly alluring to me.

I was reminded of that story from my youth recently when I set foot inside the iconic Memphis Pyramid. It's not quite Graceland or Beale Street, but the Pyramid is a Memphis landmark. Located on the banks of the Mississippi, the 321-foot, glass and steel Pyramid is impossible for drivers to miss when they're arriving or leaving the city via Interstate 40. After it was first opened in 1991, the massive structure served as the home court for both the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies and the University of Memphis men's basketball team. Both moved to the more centrally located FedEx Forum in 2004. For years, Memphis puzzled over new uses for the Pyramid, with proposals ranging from a casino to an indoor theme park to a branch of the Smithsonian Institution.

Eventually, the city gave the nod of approval for the Pyramid to become a massive Bass Pro Shops—officially known as [Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid](#)—which opened this past April. In so many different ways, this is unlike any other Bass Pro Shops, or any other retail store. Its sheer size is overwhelming. At 535,000 square feet, there's ample room for every conceivable piece of clothing and equipment an outdoor enthusiast might want, from a flotilla of fishing boats to tents and backpacks, hunting rifles, archery equipment, cook stoves and on and on. In fact, the store boasts what it says is the largest assortment of waterfowl hunting equipment ever assembled.

But visitors to this reboot of the Pyramid will have lots more than potential purchases jockeying for their attention. Though Bass Pro Shops is focused on prepping people to spend time outdoors, their store in the Pyramid opts to bring the outdoors inside. The racks of clothing and fishing poles are set amid a cypress swamp environment, complete with ponds and alligator pools. Arrayed around the store are 10 aquariums that are home to over 1,800 fish that live in 600,000 gallons of water. The store is so teeming with nature that it requires a staff of naturalists to properly manage its manmade ecosystem.

But what makes this latest iteration of the Pyramid so unique—and the reason it so quickly brought back memories of Bert & I and L.L. Bean—is because a hotel called the Big Cypress Lodge dominates the building's second and third floors. And unlike Harry, who had to find a place to rest among the camping equipment, this Bass Pro Shops very much wants you to spend the night. In fact, the hotel has 103 upscale rooms to choose from, each of which has the look and feel of being in a lodge in the middle of the wilderness. Among the options: Duck Cabins decorated with artwork from the conservation group Ducks Unlimited. There are also tree houses, fly-fishing lodges and the Governor's Suite, which is roomy enough for eight guests.

The interior of the lodge is so rustic and convincing that it can be jarring to sit on the deck attached to many of the rooms and look out not on mountains or a lake, but on merchandise and shoppers. But somehow, perhaps because of the unexpected contrasts and the sheer size and ambition of the whole Pyramid complex, it all works.

If nothing else, the lodge and the Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid is a monument to shopping. Which means that the holiday season is a good time to visit. The lodge is offering aptly named Shop 'Til You Drop holiday packages through Christmas Day, and from November 14 to December 24 Santa's Wonderland will arrive at the Pyramid, with a range of free games, activities and craft making for the kids.

If you go, be sure to bring along your gift list. You'd be hard pressed not to find something for everyone.