

## The Diplomat Beach Resort Launches in South Florida



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The newly-unveiled Diplomat Beach Resort, situated in the residential area of Hollywood, Florida, just minutes away from the busier scene of Miami, went through a \$100 million renovation over the past five years.

Owned by Thayer Lodging Group, Brookfield Hotel Properties, and managed and operated by Hilton (it is part of the brand's Curio portfolio), the 1,000-room hotel has a beautiful breeziness to it, weaving outdoor elements like sand, wood, moss, and even stately faux palm trees in the stately three-tiered enclosed atrium (even if you peer closely, you would not discover that these elaborate palms are freeze-dried).

The entire "outdoors meets indoors" theme plays out in the details: the Hotel Bar located at the far end of the lobby with its skyscraper of bottles and a breezy, sexy James-Bond vibe, brings people together; its bartenders serve guests outdoors and indoors. Designed by Leo Daly, the bar has fish scale-themed tiles on its exteriors, and a lovely marble slab where drinks are served on passport-stamped coasters.

Willie Shine, a bit of a legend in the bartending scene, unabashedly creates cocktails that are odes to global libation classics in hotels (his Vieux Carre is an ode to the Carousel Bar at New Orleans' Monteleone); his Nacional Cocktail is adapted from the Hotel Nacional in Havana). He knows his glassware: three shelves of clear Tiki glasses, vintage martini glasses and wine glasses are displayed at the bar; all his drinks are served by the book, in chilled glasses.

"We could have taken the easy way out and appointed just one designer for the place," says Shai Zelering, Managing Director of Thayer Lodging Group. "Instead we chose different designers for each of the restaurants, to give them each a distinct look and feel."

The Diplomat Prime, designed by Thom Long of Idea Collective, has a playful design to it, with a dramatic 18-foot black and white mural featuring two bathing beauties setting the tone for the dining experience (who wants to eat steak with a straight face?). Sommelier Dale Losasso curated a 385-bottle wine list and that itself merits a second look. Rich marbles and woods and a bright leather combined with a retro velvet makes you feel as though Don Draper from Mad Men would fit in well here.

Geoffrey Zakarian's Point Royal is a relaxed yet glamorous dining space, designed by Gachot with a decidedly Cuba-meets-Miami flair. The natural American white oak millwork and flooring mixed with large palms and tropical plants give a feeling that one is lost in some sort of elegant jungle, where guests dine on dishes like grilled cauliflower with spicy mole sauce and drink copious amounts of Colombian coffee. The details make the place: the bar, clad in American Imperial Danby stone, glitters jewel-like in the center of the room; the Private Dining Room is lined with tropical leaf wallpaper, and even the bathrooms have a playful flamingo wallpaper.

Next door is the casual Zakarian eatery, Counter Point, which serves fluffy macaroons, lemon scones and thick paninis. Another lobby eatery called Canteen, with its imposing 14-foot doors of teak and resin, acts as a place to grab and go.

For those seeking a bit of fun in terms of dining, there's Monkital with dishes made by Michael Schulson; he serves small shared plates in the Japanese style of Izakaya. Dark mahogany banquettes are juxtaposed next to playful glass lanterns that hang from wooden beams in the main dining room; the best part about Monkital is the Karaoke Bar at the back, which has private booths that resemble recording studios.

With 1,000 rooms, it's hard not to feel as though you're at the Fontainebleu. But in many aspects, the Diplomat is the anti-Fontainebleu, without the crowded vibe and a truly family friendly atmosphere (a generous, sinuous lagoon is dotted with happy kids; there are plenty of cabanas, a water slide, as well as a beachfront that will be extended in the next year).

The rooms, which either face the Atlantic (sunrise-facing), or downtown Hollywood, are generously sized with enigmatic and aquatic-themed artwork. The spa, with its spacious lounge with a sunlit terrace, is a lovely place to heal after a hard day in the sun.

The best part about the hotel just might be how much color and options there are.

Four elegantly-styled color-coded Trina Turk cabanas, with a festoon of patterned pillows and ice bucket, are situated on the Mezzanine level, near the infinity pool and Hotel Bar. There's a \$1,500 package to rent these plush digs, which comes with your own personal butler.

Now, that's style.

*Room rates start from \$212.*

*By Charu Suri*