

Checking In: Fresh Florida hotel is dressed all in white

Fort Lauderdale's B Ocean has it all

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 29, 2013 9:52 AM



B Ocean's interiors are just as focused on white as its exterior.

Photograph by: B Ocean Fort Lauderdale

Design-wise, I love white.

Nothing is fresher and more immaculate. Plus, white manages to stimulate and soothe at the same time. All of which means I fell hard for the B Ocean Fort Lauderdale, a striking landmark at the pivotal beachfront corner of Sunrise and Ocean Blvds.

B Ocean is a stunner for more than its pure white exterior. Its curved building is so cleverly planned that all of its 240 rooms and suites face the Atlantic, which is a valuable vacation feature. You can gaze out at the whitecaps, marvel at the tides and plan your time under Florida's brilliant sun. The B Ocean is such a looker that it has won the city of Fort Lauderdale's Community Appearance Award for outstanding urban design. What affects visitors even more are its relatively accessible rates, including one deal that invites you to visit for \$1 on your birthday (as long as you stay at least one more night).

"We're more moderately priced than the other major AAA Four Diamond hotels that are beachfront,"

said B Ocean's general manager, Eduardo Fernandez. I was thrilled to discover that he grew up in St-Léonard and had worked at Le Centre Sheraton, our city's second-largest hotel. He moved on to bigger challenges: New York's Sheraton hotels and then the prestigious Sheraton Bal Harbour in Miami.

"Fort Lauderdale definitely has a more mellow climate than Montreal, and it's more laid back here," said Fernandez, "but our location is so dynamic — facing the beach and three blocks from the Galleria Mall and the Intracoastal Waterway."

B Ocean's interiors are just as focused on white as its exterior. The lobby's wall of sculpted waves is white, but it is back-lit to glow with the changing colours of the sea, sky and sun. The patio and pool are situated off the lobby, surrounded by white lounge chairs and tulle-draped cabanas.

The bedrooms are so pristine that I felt like I was their first and only guest. The furniture is lacquered white and trimmed with white leather. The lamps are columns of frosted white glass. It's all a gallery-style backdrop to the great panoramic windows and the views of the Atlantic beach and ocean. The corner rooms have extra edge — green views, because the hotel faces the Hugh Taylor Birch State Park on one side and the Bonnet House Museum & Gardens, a splendid conservation area, on the other side.

B Ocean Fort Lauderdale is the flagship of a new brand that is taking South Florida by storm with variations on its signature theme. The b2 miami downtown — which uses lowercase letters to signify that it is a baby sister — is a boutique hotel that opened in 2013 overlooking Biscayne Bay and the Port of Miami, so it's great for business travellers, design-district fans and cruise clients. The first B Resort will open early in 2014 at Walt Disney World in Orlando, with family-friendly gourmet grill cooking and a full spa.

The B-brand marketers have let loose with rampant puns playing on the verb "to be," suggesting a customized experience for each visitor. Lindsay Dufresne, the Fort Lauderdale hotel's B Experience manager, stays in touch with guests via Facebook, dealing with requests small and large, from gluten-free birthday cupcakes to deep-sea fishing. Guests are invited to B Nourished at the hotel's B'stro on the Beach and B in Touch with free Wi-Fi, loaner iPads and business services. B Ocean has one spa suite where you can B Indulged with a whirlpool bath and massages. And the latest is B Social, a manager-guest cocktail at 5 p.m. every day, featuring free wine and cheese.

B Ocean's culinary scene is winning. B'stro on the Beach is the place for all-day dining, with appealing lemon-ricotta pancakes for breakfast, and lunches and dinners of niçoise salads, burgers and shrimp pasta.

With former Montrealer Fernandez at the hotel's helm and Daniel Meys from France as food and beverage manager, it's all good. Options abound, including a pool bar and a new lobby bar where cocktail hour is a good buy with \$7 B-blueberry martinis and \$7 bites, such as truffle fries, empanadas or fish tacos with cilantro-lime crème fraîche.

B Ocean has an Asian accent, too. SAIA Sushi and Asian Grill is the hotel's star culinary attraction, and it uses capital letters to say so. Oceanfront and sleek, SAIA has an open kitchen, a sushi bar and Zen-style tables and chairs in white and dark leather.

Chef Subin Chankesorn hails from Thailand, so many dishes have heat and extraordinary lightness. His tamari scallops with minced crab are wrapped with gossamer strips of tuna. The miso filet, marinated for 24 hours, is seared on a Japanese-style grill. Top-selling dishes include the fire-dragon shrimp sushi and Thai curry lobster. The tangy Ruby Foo vodka-basil fusion and the Tequila Thyme complement the zingy food, and SAIA finishes with wildly creative dessert drinks, such as the white chocolate crème brûlée martini or the all-Florida key lime pie martini.

The writer was a guest of the hotel. The hotel did not approve the story.

IF YOU GO

Air Canada, Sunwing, WestJet and Air Transat fly non-stop from Montreal to Fort Lauderdale.

B Hotels & Resorts: 888-662-4683, bhotelsandresorts.com

B Ocean Fort Lauderdale: direct, 954-564-1000; reservations at 888-662-4683, boceanfortlauderdale.com; 999 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd./Ocean Blvd./Route A1A, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Price: Rates fluctuate. Rooms and suites in three categories, all oceanview, start at \$209/\$259/\$419 U.S. per night, including Wi-Fi, heated swimming pool, beach towels and fitness room. Extras: valet parking, beach chairs (\$12) and umbrellas (\$20), massages. The B-Wed Forever package features late checkout, Champagne and gifts. If you stay on your birthday, your second night is \$1. Certain blackout dates apply to special offers.

Dining: SAIA Sushi and Asian Grill, 954-302-5252, saiasushi.com; dinner nightly.

Greater Fort Lauderdale Tourism: 800-928-7583, sunny.org

Visit Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com

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The B Ocean Fort Lauderdale's curved design works to the advantage of guests in all 240 rooms.

Photograph by: B Ocean Fort Lauderdale

