

Swanky beach resort focuses on wellness, food and activities

Diplomat to rebrand as Curio, a Hilton property, and launch \$100M makeover



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The Diplomat Resort & Spa, an Atlantic oceanfront landmark of Hollywood, Fla., has seen it all and done it all, and done it well.

The swanky beach getaway opened in the fabulous '50s and has been a leader in the hotel arts of good food, professional service and top-drawer activities. It has splendid views of the Atlantic Ocean, the Intracoastal Waterway and the night lights of Fort Lauderdale and Miami. In 2014, The Diplomat's focus is wellness, starting with plush pampering at its dazzling new spa. In 2015, it will launch a \$100-million makeover to other sections of the hotel.

The immediate news is that this memorable property has been sold and, as of Oct. 30, will rebrand from a Westin affiliation to Curio — a Collection by Hilton. A different company bought the Diplomat's famous golf and tennis clubs, but the properties will continue to work closely together.

A WORLD OF ACTION

After many dramatic ups and downs, The Diplomat was demolished and rebuilt in 2002. Today, it is a whopping complex with 998 guest rooms and suites, two swimming pools, a large beachfront, several restaurants, a kids' club, a private marina and a major convention centre.

Several dining areas feature sushi, poolside salads, spa cuisine and kid-friendly fare. Hollywood Prime serves fine wines and upscale Americana — shrimp cocktail, aged steaks, rack of lamb, butter-poached lobster and cheddar-mashed potatoes. Gourmets with deep pockets go international, indulging in Kobe beef, Osetra caviar and Cristal Champagne.

Montrealers Norton and Mary

Segal tipped me off to the Diplomat.

"It's all about the lobby," said Norton, a prominent lawyer. "It's a cosmos of people-watching, with great restaurants and palm trees under a huge atrium."

True, the lobby is a scene. A world-beat of guests from Canada, the U.S., South America and Europe criss-cross the huge marble floor, through towering indoor palm trees and around tropical-style rattan furniture. You'll see kids with water wings going to the pool, beachcombers in flowered cover-ups, business people in suits, bellmen ferrying luggage, airline crews in uniform — and maybe a movie star.

I can't help but name-drop. The Diplomat has been host to a gold roster of 20th-century American idols. Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Judy Garland and her daughter Liza Minnelli all sang here. Standup comedy stars Joan Rivers and Woody Allen got 'em laughing. Orchestra maestro Lawrence Welk broadcast from here, keeping his TV audience enthralled with Champagne corks popping and ballroom dancing. The Diplomat was a glamorous Florida resort where



The Florida resort's dazzling Spa Duet Room has an ocean view.



The landmark Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Fla., has an Atlantic oceanfront, a new spa, swimming pools, a marina, dining options and nearly 1,000 rooms. **PHOTOS: DIPLOMAT RESORT & SPA**

women wore gowns, jewels and furs and dapper men sported dinner jackets and patent shoes.

Still, the hotel's history wasn't all roses. In the 1980s, a Saudi Arabian sheik tried to walk out on his \$1.4-million tab, but the hotel caught up with him.

The Diplomat is still hot; it recently has welcomed U.S. President Barack Obama and celebrity A-listers like Jerry Seinfeld, Billy Crystal, Christina Aguilera and Cameron Diaz.

SPA AND SPORTS

The Diplomat's spa, opened in 2013, is a knockout. It's a luxurious sanctuary of shimmering glass overlooking the ocean with 10 treatment rooms and a salt-

steam bath. Massages are tailored for moms-to-be, athletes with sore muscles and couples with romance on their minds.

The beauty department includes a mani-pedi salon and custom treatments for men, women and children. For pure bliss, I'd go for the Illumination facial with rejuvenating anti-oxidants and follow with a body scrub and skin-nourishing wrap.

There is a comprehensive fitness room, open 24 hours a day, but I love the outdoor exercise possibilities. There are jogging maps available and sunrise yoga is held on the beach on Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays. A simple stroll can double as a sightseeing tour. The charming, oceanfront Hollywood Boardwalk is three kilometres away, with the surfside appeal of beach shops, snack bars and ice cream parlours.

WAYS TO SAVE

The Diplomat is deluxe, but it has a big enough heart to have price-conscious options. It does not charge a resort fee, as do many Florida hotels, which often amounts to an extra \$20-\$30 per room. There also is a deal for a fourth night free, with Wi-Fi.

For a budget bite, I bought a healthy \$7 lunch-to-go at ingredients (some assembly required), a cute café in the lobby. (The lower case reflects the eatery's modest prices and size.)

The Spa Soothing Experience starts at \$299 US per night and includes lodging, breakfast, a gift, a \$59 credit and a late checkout. Internet is free in the lobby. And so is the people-watching.

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IF YOU GO

The hotel is 18 km south of Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport; 33 km north of Miami International Airport; and 13 km south of Port Everglades, the second-largest cruise-ship port in the world, after Miami.

The Diplomat Resort & Spa: 954-602-6000, www.diplomatresort.com; 3555 S. Ocean Drive, Hollywood, Fla. As of Oct. 30, members of Hilton HHonors Program will get benefits.

Price: The website has a best-rate guarantee. Rooms start at approximately \$249 US for two, including two pools, a whirlpool, 24-hour fitness centre, Wi-Fi in the lobby. Prices will be higher Dec. 20 to May 24. Extra: beach chairs, kids' club, water sports (sea kayak, paddleboard, Jet Ski), parking, \$20 (self) or \$25 (valet), spa treatments (954-602-8400). Children under 18 stay for free. Family packages include children's meals, kids' club and 50 per cent off a second room. Cruise guests' rates start at \$199 U.S., including continental breakfast, self-parking. Club Level rooms include Wi-Fi and rooftop lounge with breakfast and cocktail-hour refreshments. Hollywood information; 954-924-2980, www.visithollywoodfl.org; Fort Lauderdale: 800-356-1662 or 800-22-SUN-NY/800-227-8669; www.sunny.org. Florida info: 888-735-2872, www.visitflorida.com.

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