

RADISSON BLU A HIP TAKE ON DOWNTOWN CHICAGO LIFE

Located in Aqua Tower, world's tallest skyscraper designed by a woman



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

The Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel is a new star in the architecturally rich Chicago skyline.

Those are powerful words in a city of buildings created by some of the best — Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Henri Sullivan, Frank Gehry, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Daniel Burnham, who built the Chicago World's Fair with the first Ferris wheel, and was one of the lead characters in the novel, *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson.

The new Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago has impressive credentials, too. It is located on the first 18 floors of the 81-storey Aqua Tower, which is the world's tallest skyscraper designed by a woman, Chicago architect Jeanne Gang. And it shows.

In a city that has spawned some of the United States' tallest phallic monoliths, the curvy white Aqua Tower is distinctively feminine, said to be inspired by rolling sand dunes or perhaps the waves on Lake Michigan. It was named Skyscraper of the Year by the international building guru Emporis, and Gang was honoured by the American Institute of Architects.

UPSCALE SPINOFF BRAND

Radisson Blu is an upscale brand of Radisson, a spinoff that emphasizes service and dazzling contemporary interiors.

Several features make the Radisson Blu Aqua Chicago a standout. It is a great buy and family-friendly. And, for a downtown hotel, the Blu boasts excep-

tional fitness installations, many outdoors. Its sprawling open-air terrace features a year-round jogging track, and in warm weather, a lap pool and a children's pool.

Partly because there are residents in condos and apartments on the upper floors, the Radisson Blu Aqua has home-away-from-home facilities such as barbecues, cabanas and a firepit for family cookouts or after-dark mingling.

I was so enthralled with the outdoor scene that I totally missed an important tech aspect of the hotel. The guest room TVs have menus for requesting room service, wake-up calls and housekeeping, and even better, a cellphone app is available for the same functions, so you can make those arrangements from outside the premises.

DARLING OF DESIGN

Designers decked out the lobby with flashy materials. The reception area is glamorous, with mirrored front desks and a sapphire LED light. The lobby lounge is warmed by a long, lean, 18-metre gas fireplace, deep cossetting wing chairs, a wall of reclaimed brick and another of shimmering gold-plated discs.

The guest rooms and suites, 334 in all, are all about light and minimalist furniture, with a fresh palette of soothing blues and dark chocolate against crisp white. More than half have balconies and many have both a glass shower and a soaking tub. As a bonus, there is a choice of carpeted or wooden floors.

DINING, DRINKING

The Radisson Blu Aqua also has updated traditional hotel dining. The scene here is trendy and casual. The Filini Bar & Restaurant is a stunning space with a glass wall of wine, an open kitchen and a patio. There is a



The Radisson Blu Chicago is in the distinctive Aqua Tower, which has won architectural awards for its wavy concrete exterior. **RADISSON BLU CHICAGO**

nightlife feel, with long communal tables for parties and silvery leather banquettes for romance.

Executive chef Carolina Diaz was in the kitchen when I visited and she sent out a delectable Italian feast for the table to share — charcuterie such as sopresatta and bresaola, a cheese plate with Gorgonzola and burrata with figs; a rich and dreamy pasta with prosciutto, mascarpone and truffle oil; an impressive branzino (a whole fish) roasted with citrus and fennel; and comfort desserts that no one could pass up — panna cotta and gelato.

AROUND CHICAGO

The Radisson Blu Aqua is near stop No. 9, Michigan Avenue, of the Chicago Trolley & Double Decker Co., so I hopped on a bright red bus and tootled around town. We rode by the

vast and beautiful lakefront, with its truly magnificent and historic sites such as The Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium and the Adler Planetarium. The hotel has a retail therapy package with discounts, so I bee-lined for the Shops at North Bridge, an indoor mall on Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile which is home to Nordstrom, Sephora and Swatch.

I had always thought of Chicago as a big-business city and an incomparably rich cultural centre. It is both, but it also has so many outdoor recreation options that you can plan a visit built entirely around fresh air and exercise. Kids especially love the Navy Pier amusement park and beaches on Lake Michigan, the 32-kilometre Lakefront Trail for cycling, the lively Chicago Riverfront walking promenade and Millennium Park with its giant sculptures, free concerts and skating in winter.

I saved the most intense art experience for my last day. The prestigious Art Institute of Chicago, home of the largest collection of Impressionist works outside of France, recently was named Trip Advisor's No. 1 museum in the world.

The Art Institute is an immersion in art history, home to treasures from ancient Etruscan art to modern-day Picassos and beyond. A terrific photography exhibit is *The City Lost and Found: Capturing New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, 1960–1980*, which runs until Jan. 11.

Rochelle@rochellelash.com
twitter.com/rochellelash

IF YOU GO

Air Canada flies non-stop to Chicago from Montreal and Toronto. Porter flies from Montreal to Chicago with a change at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. Prices start at \$208 one-way, at certain times.

Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago: 800-333-3333, 312-565-5258, radissonblu.com/aquahotel-chicago; 221 N. Columbus Drive. Pet-friendly. Children 17 and under stay for free.

Price: The hotel's website has a best-rate guarantee. Rooms, some with balconies, \$219-\$350 U.S., depending on the season; suites cost more. Business Class rooms have lounge access with breakfast, evening cocktails. Rates include Wi-Fi, daily newspaper, pools and fitness facilities. Packages feature spa treatments, shopping discounts, romantic add-ons (Champagne, chocolates, turndown gift) and Chicago attractions.

Filini Bar & Restaurant: 312-477-0234, www.filinchicago.com; daily breakfast, lunch, dinner and 24-hour room service; seasonal patio.

Chicago info: choosechicago.com, bikechicago.com; Architectural River Cruise: 312-922-3432, architecture.org/rivercruise; Chicago Trolley & Double-Decker Tours: 773-648-5000, chicagotrolley.com.

The curvy white Aqua Tower is distinctively feminine, said to be inspired by rolling sand dunes or perhaps the waves on Lake Michigan.

WHERE TO STAY

TO ADVERTISE
PLEASE CALL
514-987-2279



VERMONT



QUALITY INN

2572 Shelburne Rd, Shelburne
855-547-2524

Special Rate for 2 night hotel stay for \$149.99 USD or 1 night for \$79.99 plus Tax. Park & Fly rate which includes 1 night stay with round trip transportation to BTV airport and up to 21 days parking for \$139.00 plus Tax. Rates based on double occupancy. Additional charge \$10/person/night. Pet charge \$20/pet/night. These rates also include Full Hot Breakfast, Indoor Heated Pool, Hot Tub, Sauna, Fitness center, Free wireless Internet and a Business center. Directions: I-89, Exit-13. Rates based on availability. Not valid on busy weekends. This promotion is available till 4/30/2015. Call **802-985-8037** or Toll Free: **855-547-2524** for reservation.



TRAVELODGE

1016 Shelburne Road, South Burlington
1-802-862-6421

Close to downtown Burlington shopping malls and outlets. Enjoy a Free Full Hot Breakfast, High speed wireless internet and pets welcome. Special rates for 2 nights \$129.00 USD or 1 night for \$69.99 USD Plus Tax. Additional \$10 USD per person/night. Pet Charge \$10/pet/night. Rates based on availability and not valid on busy weekends. Call **802-862-6421** for reservations



SMART SUITES

www.smartsuitesburlington.com
1700 Shelburne Rd., So. Burlington, Vt.
Toll free 877-862-6800

Come and enjoy our hospitality in either a studio efficiency at US \$92.95 or a more spacious one bedroom suite at US \$102.95/night, including a deluxe continental breakfast and free WiFi. Mention the Gazette special. Not valid with other discounts and subject to availability. Effective 05/02/14. Take Exit 13 off I-89, left on rt. 7 for 1.5 miles, same entrance as Holiday Inn Express.



VERMONT



GREEN MOUNTAIN SUITES HOTEL

www.greenmountainsuites.com
401 Dorset Street, South Burlington, Vermont
Toll-free reservations 866-337-1616

Experience all the Charm of a Boutique Vermont Country Inn. Escape to beautiful Burlington, Vermont starting at \$129/night weekdays. Luxurious One-Bedroom Suite Includes Vermont-style Hot Breakfast served each morning. Includes Fireside Reception with Beer, Wine and Food (M-Th.), Heated Indoor Pool/Jacuzzi & Exercise facility. Walking distance to University Mall and close to Lake Champlain and the Church Street Marketplace. Promotional rate may not be available during select periods. Contact us for more info. Promotional rate may not be available during select periods. Contact hotel for more information.



NEW HAMPSHIRE



STONEHURST MANOR

www.StonehurstManor.com
White Mountains, North Conway
© 603-421-6146

Beauty & comfort surround you at our historic "country elegant" boutique hotel. Panoramic mountain views, fireplaced Library Lounge, 20 guestrooms (8 w/frlpcs) & renowned dining. LOTS of North Conway tax-free holiday shopping nearby. Fr. \$78ppdo(US) includes Breakfast, Dinner (from our full menu) and XC Skiing/SnoShoeing from the door. Call NOW for Fabulous Holiday Getaways!



NEW YORK



RIVERSIDE TOWER HOTEL

www.riversidetowerhotel.com
New York City, New York
Toll free 800-724-3136

Singles USD \$134. Doubles USD \$139. Suites USD \$149.-\$169. Lincoln Center area. Hudson River views, 18 floors, kitchenette, 5 minutes to midtown. Safe, quiet luxury area. Riverside Drive & 80th Street.



AMERICA'S BEST VALUE INN

www.plattsburghbestvalueinn.com
19 Booth Drive, Plattsburgh, New York
© 518-563-0222 Toll free 1-800-358-2137

In wonderful Plattsburgh. Only \$120 for 2 nights. Canadian cash. Up to 2 people, additional pers. add \$10 more per night. Free continental breakfast. Located conveniently off exit 37 on I-87. Some holidays, wknds & spec. events do not apply. Up to 70% occ. daily. Based on availability.