

DELRAY SANDS RESORT IS A HIDDEN TREASURE



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

All the guests I met at the charming Delray Sands Resort in South Florida begged me not to write about this hidden treasure.

But the Delray Sands is a getaway with relatively moderate rates, standing-room-only at its new Latitudes Ocean Grille and the Atlantic right outside. So, here goes.

Delray Sands is one of the few hotels in Highland Beach, an upscale residential community in Palm Beach County, lying between hip Delray Beach and opulent Boca Raton. Mansions to the south, condos to the north. We're happily in the middle at this petite, laid-back and understated hotel, a total departure from its fancier Gold Coast neighbours.

Delray Sands is a highly successful 2015 reincarnation of a vintage Holiday Inn. What was preserved from the old days are the guest-friendly, low-rise structure, the kidney-esque swimming pool and the glorious Atlantic beachfront setting.

"We've always had lots of repeat guests, even before the renovations," said general manager Ric Clark. "We're directly on the beach, and not across the street. That makes a big difference."

I met both regulars and first-timers, including interior designer Manon Marinier and engineer Guy Doucet, who left their home in St-Anne-des-Lacs to spend 11 days at the Delray Sands. They draw for them is the hotel's relaxing pace, paired with the upbeat fun in the town of Delray Beach, a few kilometres north.

The Makeover: Everything was overhauled within the past year, including landscaping, interior corridor carpets, the fresh blue and white pool and beach loungers, and the striking Latitudes.

The 110 rooms and suites have been updated with Florida-inspired decor — a palette of ocean blues and sunny yellows against dark wood furniture, with sand-hued stucco walls and white trim.

Conveniences include mini-refrigerators, pod coffee



Delray Sands Resort is a newly renovated boutique property in Highland Beach, Fla., between Boca Raton and Delray Beach. PHOTOS: DELRAY SANDS RESORT



Latitudes Ocean Grille is a hit for its oceanfront setting, generous portions and fresh ingredients.

machines and 42-inch TVs in almost every room. Some rooms have private patios at the pool level; some suites have French doors separating living rooms and bedrooms. Almost all rooms have ocean views, full or partial.

Food & Drink: Latitudes Ocean Grille, the hotel's new wow feature, is a hit for its oceanfront setting, generous portions and fresh ingredients.

You can choose your spot, depending on your mood: the

Alfresco Ocean Terrace, steps from the sand and sea; the Chef's Seafood Bar, the hub of social action; the outdoor Wave Pool Bar, which also has a firepit lounge; private dining spaces; or the newly remodelled Latitudes dining room, which has ocean views and stylish aquamarine and navy decor brightened by sparkly lights and a wall of glass bubbles, all to suggest an underwater world.

The raw bar is a tempting dis-

play of stone crab claws, oysters, king crab, Gulf shrimp and tuna tartare. The lunch menu includes lobster bisque, cheese and lobster rolls and burgers. For dinner, there are starters of crab cakes, mussels, scallops with prosciutto and calamari, plus main courses of halibut, snapper, grouper, beef tenderloin and shellfish stew.

Perky poolside servers clad in black shorts and white tees start at 11 a.m. delivering mocktails and cocktails such as cilantro-ginger coolers and blueberry mojitos, plus salads, mahi sandwiches and Hebrew National hotdogs. Social Hour, weekdays only, features half-price small plates, as well as draft beer, liquor and wine.

And Sunday brunch — don't miss this feast — is a buffet of baked goods, salads, Latitudes' signature seafood bar, a carving station and unlimited California bubbly and mimosas.

Palm Beach Scene: Delray Sands is within a few kilometres of Palm Beach's major attractions.

The prestigious Kravis Center for the Performing Arts will present — and this amazing lineup is January only — Paul Anka, Yo-Yo Ma, Jackie Mason, Romeo

IF YOU GO

Highland Beach, Fla., is 48 kilometres north of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and 38 km south of Palm Beach International Airport.

Delray Sands Resort: 866-790-2198, 561-278-6241, delraysandsresort.com; 2809 S. Ocean Blvd., Highland Beach (Palm Beach County), Fla.

Price: Most rooms have balconies or terraces. Winter season: rooms, Sun.-Thurs. US\$279-\$459 per night, suites, \$569-\$999; On Fri.-Sat. rooms, \$299-\$499 weekdays and suites, \$589-\$999. Holiday rates are higher. May-November, rates start at about \$149. Resort fee of \$25 includes beach setups, swimming pool, hot tub, toddlers' pool, local phone calls, morning newspaper (Mon.-Fri.), Wi-Fi, fitness room, evening turndown (on request). CAA/AAA discount applies.

Latitudes Ocean Grille: 561-278-2008, latitudesdelray.com. Breakfast, lunch, dinner daily. Social Hour: Mon.-Fri., 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. Champagne Brunch: 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Sundays, \$49.95. Children's menu.

Tourism info: Discover The Palm Beaches: 800-833-5733, 561-233-3000, palmbeachfl.com; Visit Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com; VisitDelRayBeach.org, DowntownDelRayBeach.com.

and Juliet by the State Ballet Theatre of Russia, and Michael Feinstein conducting the Kravis Center Pops Orchestra (kravis.org). Henry Kravis, the son of the centre's namesake, Raymond F. Kravis, is married to Marie-Josée, who is from Ottawa and lived in Montreal.

Palm Beach is synonymous with golf, but there is more than the links on the sporting front. Canadian superstar Milos Raonic will compete at the Delray Beach Open, a World Tour event, Feb. 12-21 (yellowtennisball.com). And every autumn, the Delray Beach Tennis Center presents the Chris Evert/Raymond James Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic (delraytennis.com).

The Boynton Harbor Marina is a hub for jet-skis and boat rentals (catchboynton.com). Paddleboarders head for the Drop-In Surf Shop in Delray Beach (the saltfly.com) or Delray Beach Water Sports (delraybeachwatersports.com).

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