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Plunge Beach Hotel: Lauderdale by the Sea's Hidden Gem

A hidden gem with a coral reef just 100 yards offshore, this hotel is a laid-back retreat for beach lovers searching for fun. It's just like being on a tropical island in the Caribbean.

By **Sandra Schulman (Art & Entertainment Senior Writer)** x 07/17/2019

View of the Lobby at Plunge Beach Hotel

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There's a hidden gem in Lauderdale by the Sea, an offbeat beach front locale just north of Fort Lauderdale. While US 1 is dotted with kitschy old motels, the eclectic Plunge Beach Hotel is an off-the-grid modern getaway right on the beach. With 163 guest rooms and spacious one- or two-bedroom suites, there are lots of choices in a variety of settings that range from one-story beach bungalows to a 5-story building.

The town of Lauderdale by the Sea offers a walkable-friendly retro vibe, with one-story row of boutiques, casual seafood and Mexican restaurants, and community events. The Block Party at Anglin's Square and Pier on Friday nights is like Key West, but a lot more chill. Another key attraction is a coral reef just 100 yards offshore, making it a popular spot for scuba divers.

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My recent weekend stay at one of their ocean-front room was like being on a tropical island in the Caribbean, as my room's spacious terrace literally opened out right onto a small grassy garden area with bright green lizards scurrying about, then beyond that, white sands leading to the ocean. A bright striped beach ball awaited on my big comfy platform bed, while the bathroom had a cool wooden slab counter, huge shower and high end herbal bath products. Modern amenities of Bluetooth capabilities, a 50-inch LED HD television, a large in-room safe, and a mini-fridge added to the comfort.

Plunge Beach Hotel view to the ocean from a room.

Heading to the beach, it was thrill to see so many roped-off turtle nests, a sure sign of a healthy ocean. The little hatchlings should be scampering out of their sandy nests soon. Kite surfers, paddle boarders and kids on boogie boards reveled in the quiet surf. A group was snorkeling further out, checking out the coral reef and fish. The seaweed that plagued the beaches here last summer seems to have stayed away this time.

A real little paradise feel.

Plunge Beach Hotel provides lounge chairs, umbrellas, cheery pink and blue beach towels to make that 84-degree dip in the calm ocean a delight.

View of the beach at Plunge Beach Hotel

And for lunch, the backflip Beach Bar sits right on the sand, the only toes-in-the-sand beach bar in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. Hmm, what to choose from – Garlic Shrimp Tacos, Yucca Fries & Queso, Grilled Romaine Salad with avocado and toasted pepitas, or maybe the signature Backburger with Colby Jack cheese, bacon, avocado and chimichurri mayo.

But for my first meal at Plunge I opted for the tacos, served with chips, and a frozen Pina Colada with orange slices and a cherry on top because when on the beach that's what you order.

The pool scene is idyllic too.

There are two pools to choose from, a large angular shaped pool just behind the Backflip Bar and then a smaller, quieter pool nestled in the bungalows. The scene at the large pool is lively with music wafting in from the bar, and lots of sunny and shady places to lounge. I took a leisurely swim, then plopped onto my chair, cracked open a new book and dove into another world for a while.

Later in the afternoon after a dog nap —forgot to mention the hotel is dog-friendly and I had brought my 5-month old little Greyhound with me— I took little Hallie with me over to the main lobby building across the street to check out the scene where big video screens roll with tropical images.

The front desk is just inside with a large bar to the left. Table top games of foosball and table hockey await in the back; live music was provided by a swinging blonde singer. A lively birthday party was going on at the bar as the hotel is a prime spot for special gatherings.

Two eateries are located in the lobby, Octopus Gastro Pub for lunch and dinner offering a casual vibe with elevated seafood island-style.

I tried their crab fritters with charred corn and bacon and also the lime-coconut coco mussels. I also tried their namesake octopus, served with white beans, and the server suggested the blackened mahi, done to perfection with sautéed spinach and fingerling potatoes.

Savory food from the Bean & Barnacle at Plunge Beach Hotel

In the back of the lobby by the sunny windows that face A1A, is Bean & Barnacle, the onsite coffee shop and market, to pick up fresh-brewed coffee, sweet pastries like my fave chocolate croissant or a breakfast sandwich with egg, cheese and bacon to munch on the terrace or take to the beach for a sunrise picnic. It's also good for snacks, gelato, smoothies and juices.

Outside the main doors of Plunge Beach Hotel are cruiser bikes, great for heading off on an adventure down to Anglin's Pier to see the sweet kitschy charm of Lauderdale by the Sea.

As hidden gems go, this one's a real find.