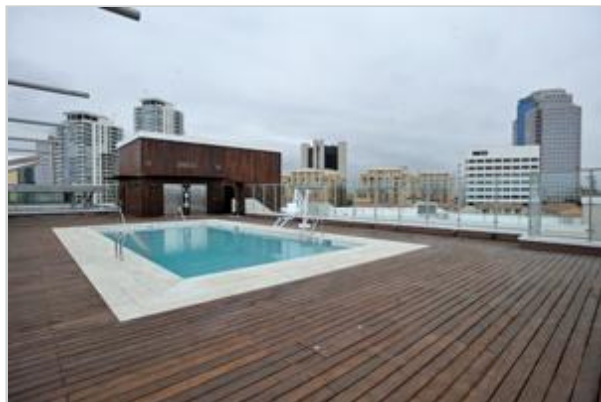


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Avia Aims Higher

By Andrew Shortall Staff Writer

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The Avia hotel's rooftop pool terrace provides a view of the Pike at Rainbow Harbor, the Aquarium of the Pacific and the Queen Mary. (Jeff Gritchen Staff Photographer)

LONG BEACH - Avia is a word that suggests a lot of different interpretations and pronunciations. Some find hints of foreign languages, such as French or Latin, or relate it to concepts like aviation, life or vitality.

If fact, it's something unique.

"It is a new word that (LodgeWorks LP) evolved over the last year and a half," said Ken Dickson, general manager of Avia, the new hotel coming to Long Beach. "We really just created it."

No matter how it is interpreted, Avia operators hope everyone who stays with them learns what AVIA's hotel approach stands for.

Avia is a collection of boutique hotels from LodgeWorks, a hotel development and management company. AVIA will have four hotels at the end of 2009, including those in Savannah, Ga., Napa Valley and the Woodlands, Texas.

The fourth installment is Avia Long Beach, the new hotel coming to the Pike at Rainbow Harbor at 285 Bay St. The eight-story hotel, more than 90percent complete, is expected to open the third week of July.

Originally, the opening of a Sierra Suites hotel - not an upscale boutique hotel like Avia - was slated for this site in 2005.

LodgeWorks decided an upscale hotel was more suited for the location after conversations with city officials and a look at the growth in the convention and tourism business in the area.

LodgeWorks is still planning to bringing a Hotel Sierra (formerly Sierra Suites Hotel) to Long Beach, right across the way from Avia Long Beach.

Hotel Sierra would be a five-story building with 125 suites and rooms, and is expected

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to open in December 2010, but for now Dickson is focused on Avia's opening.

"We have got something that is going to stand right out there and bring attention to Long Beach," Dickson said.

Avia looks to welcome each guest with "the gracious-host concept," Dickson said. That means welcoming people on a level found only in boutique hotels, an approach that is more like entertaining at home, he explained.

Examples of the gracious-host concept include same-day dry-cleaning and laundry service, in-room massages and spa services upon request, as well as complimentary evening tastings of one of the Avia chef's favorite starters.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau, said Long Beach is taking another step to presenting a more complete option for lodging with the opening of the Avia.

"Long Beach is maturing and offering different types of lodging and in turn is becoming an urban waterfront playground," Goodling said.

Dickson said the Avia wants to set up every guest to make a special and authentic discovery in the vast playground that is Long Beach.

The hotel is within walking distance of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, the Aquarium of the Pacific and everything Pine Avenue has to offer.

In case guests need any help making a discovery, Avia offers an exclusive "tastemakers" service, ensuring each guest has a local's perspective to learning more about Long Beach. The tastemakers are local professionals who provide guests with a local's insight into things to do in the city, from hot spots around Long Beach to a simple dinner.

After exploring Long Beach, guests can see what else the Avia has to offer. The hotel boasts the fascinating, occasionally quirky designs of Colum McCartan.

McCartan is a designer who made a name for himself after completing the interior design of a number of hotels, including New York's Parker Meridien Hotel in 2002. From the guest rooms, to the lobby, to the dining hall or the suites, McCartan's unique designs are spread throughout the hotel and waiting to be discovered.

Avia utilizes a number of al fresco spaces with folding nano doors in the club room and the courtyard to make the most of the Long Beach environment, which Dickson said is one of the hotel's greatest assets.

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Avia also uses a mixture of natural colors within the hotel itself, with wood and soothing colors, such as green and blue across the wall, which are reminiscent of the colors of the ocean.

The hotel will also incorporate what Dickson said is "museum quality art, that is an integral part of the hotel design," including an artistic rendition of a tree.

Then there is what Dickson and Goodling refer to as the signature of Avia, the rooftop pool terrace. The panoramic view from the terrace looks out on the Pike at Rainbow Harbor, the Aquarium of the Pacific, the Queen Mary and the ocean beyond.

Avia offers 138 rooms and suites with complimentary wired and wireless Internet. The hotel also includes meeting places with a gallery, club room, courtyard and dining room.

The price range to stay at Avia starts between \$175, \$250 or \$300 a night, depending on the season, convention periods or day of the week. Dickson said Avia will follow the patterns of existing hotels, staying competitive early and later gravitating to the high side of the market once they have been established.

"Avia is the first new boutique hotel built from the ground up in Long Beach,"

Goodling said. "It attracts a new, younger traveler who is interested in the design and service that define a boutique hotel."

Dickson said the Avia is looking to accommodate a wide range of guests from conventioners and corporate customers to leisure travelers. The expected average stay is two to three nights.

Dickson hopes each guest who stays at Avia will leave having learned more about Long Beach.

"Avia in every location we build one is going to be all about that community," Dickson said. "Avia Long Beach is indeed all about Long Beach."

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