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CHICAGO

Radisson Blu Aqua Chicago

UPSHOT

An upscale version of Radisson stakes its claim in the United States, with rooms starting at \$200.

BASICS

The name Radisson, part of the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, calls to mind decent but not spectacular accommodations around the country, but the company's Blu brand means luxury. There are more than 200 Radisson Blu hotels worldwide, and this Chicago outpost, which opened in November, is the first in the United States. The 334-room hotel occupies the bottom 18 floors of the Aqua Tower apartment building, designed by the Chicago architect Jeanne Gang. Strength and airiness somehow converge in this 81-story Lakeshore East structure whose curving balconies give it the appearance of rippling in the wind.

LOCATION

A short walk from the Magnificent Mile, Millennium Park and other popular destinations, the hotel is in a prime spot — where the Chicago River meets Lake Michigan. My room, No. 725, had big windows facing the lake, where the Ferris wheel on Navy Pier beckoned.

THE ROOM

My partner and I lucked out, getting a corner room with a large wraparound balcony. The entryway to the room was cramped — I almost whacked my head on the closet, which jutted out from the hallway wall a few feet inside the door — but once I got past it there was plenty to like. A small desk area was to the right of the entrance and a hallway led to the bathroom and main room on the left, making it feel like a mini-suite. The light-colored hardwood floors contrasted nicely with deep blue curtains and crisp white sheets. Small tables on each side of the bed allowed enough space for laptops importing free Wi-Fi. The generous balcony looked nice, but there was no outdoor furniture, and thanks to typical conditions in the Windy City, it was more an aesthetic feature than a practical one.

THE BATHROOM

A deep soaking tub and separate stand-alone shower easily fit in the spacious bathroom, stocked with

Anne Semonin toiletries. Sea-green walls in the tub area engendered a meditative mood.

ROOM SERVICE

In an effort to be eco-friendly, the hotel skipped the big binder of hotel information and in-room menus, instead listing all that information on a television channel. We ordered a continental breakfast (\$19) and a "traditional" (\$16.50), which included scrambled eggs, bacon and hash brown potatoes. We were told the food would arrive within 45 minutes but about 20 minutes later we were already eating. The continental — a huge spread of bread, pastries, fruit, yogurt, granola, cheese, cold cuts, coffee and juice — was delicious, and would have been enough for two.



BRETT DOUGLAS

Luxury rules at the Radisson Blue Aqua.

AMENITIES

The amenities at the Blu are lavish. There's an 8,000-square-foot fitness center with machines, free weights, even a half basketball court. There's also a game room with pool and card tables, a sauna, a steam room, an indoor pool, a lobby bar, the Filini restaurant and more. But the pièce de résistance is the 80,000-square-foot partly covered outdoor space on the rooftop of a three-story section of the building that extends from the main tower. The roof contains another pool, a hot tub, cabanas, fire pits, a running track and lots of open space.

BOTTOM LINE

I had a few quibbles, but overall this gorgeous hotel offers a warm atmosphere, roomy accommodations and great amenities in an optimal location.

Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago, 221 North Columbus Drive; (312) 565-5258; radissonblu.com/aquahotel-chicago. STEVEN McELROY

Travel

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