

A LOFT

HOT MIDTOWN LOCATION

TAMPA IS
SIZZLING

Tampa's newest hotel in a half-billion dollar entertainment and retail district

We knew we were going someplace new when my phone's GPS kept sending us in circles! Talk about cutting edge! We finally found the new Aloft hotel, just off Dale Mabry near I-275, in Tampa's new "Midtown" district.

This is Tampa's first mixed-use project of its kind—a \$500 million development on 20 acres that links downtown to the Westshore area.

This is a unique place—two hotels in one or "dual branded." Combined they feature 226 rooms with an exciting rooftop bar/restaurant. Aloft has a trademark look—a contemporary style that is anything but cluttered. People often mispronounce the hotel's name. It's actually "aloft," rather than "A-loft." The company is only 16 years old and already has over 200 hotels, including in downtown Sarasota on Palm Avenue.

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The midtown hotel is in an exciting location—close to everything: Raymond James Stadium, Amalie Arena, International Plaza, Westshore Plaza, University of Tampa, Tampa International Airport, Tampa Convention Center and Hyde Park Village.

After we unpacked, we got back in the car (valet parking only) and toured another trendy area called "Armature Works." That's a section of Tampa Heights that is built around a fully restored 1921 mixed-use building. Live music on the lawn, restaurants inside and people watching along the path along the Hillsborough River.

Back at the hotel, we were glad to decompress by the rooftop pool that offers 360-degree views of the Tampa and St. Petersburg skylines. The contemporary music at the pool matched the cool vibe and tropical and lush décor.

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A friend of ours who lives in Tampa and always wants to be on the cutting-edge of new things was more than happy to join us for dinner at the Sal Y Mar rooftop bar and restaurant.

Here's how the website aptly describes it: "Inspired by the Riviera Maya town of Tulum (Mexico), Sal Y Mar (which stands for 'Salt & Sea') has a casual yet sophisticated vibe that adds a unique flavor to the mix of dining offerings in Midtown, with a setting and menu rich in old-world influence."



We began with salads. Erin had the 'Harvest Salad,' which is mixed greens, apples, dried cranberries, candied walnuts, crumbled goat cheese with lemon ginger vinaigrette. (\$14.) I had the 'Stuffed Endive' which is a version of my new favorite 'wedge' salad: Blue cheese, smokey bacon, blistered tomatoes, parmesan croutons, crunch onions with roasted garlic herb cream dressing. (\$15.)

We also went in slightly different directions for our meal. She had the Chipotle Charred Chicken, grilled with smashed red potatoes and grilled asparagus. (\$29.) I had the Filet Mignon that was seared with cilantro, green onion, garlic butter, roasted sweet potato medallions and sauteed spicy kale. (\$42.)

We had coffee and dessert—Erin had the Flan De Naranja (Rich citrus custard and orange caramel drizzle (\$10) and I had the Truffle Duo (Dark chocolate cocoa with white chocolate strawberry (\$10).

We could not have been happier with each of our selections. Our waitress was helpful, professional and made us feel welcome. The restaurant is beautiful—and the outside bar filled up with a mix of hotel guests and Tampa Bay area residents flocking to this new fun place.

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We got back to the room earlier enough to watch a little Netflix on the big screen TV. The bed was comfortable, and the room has all the bells and whistles—including USB ports for cell phone charging on the bedside table.

We texted ahead for our car which was waiting for us outside the front door. It was easy to jump on the interstate and be back in Sarasota an hour later.

It was less than 24 hours in Tampa, but a great opportunity to sample the new "Midtown District" from the epicenter in this classy Aloft hotel.

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