

## GIFT IDEA: TRAVEL



Photos courtesy of Leigh Cort

# Manhattan Tower: An oasis of mid-century hospitality

## Travel Specials

View the holiday lights along the waterways of Fort Lauderdale. Manhattan Tower is currently offering two complimentary tickets to the water taxi to guests staying three nights or more – a \$52 value. Hop on and hop off from the Manhattan Tower dock. This promotion is available through Jan. 15, 2017; use promotional code PVRMT701 when booking.

## By Leigh Cort

Special to the Recorder

It's a blue-and-white morning from the verandah overlooking Florida's Intracoastal Waterway. A warm breeze and gentle sunrise pull me from my plush blanket to step outside and inhale a soothing beginning to my day at Manhattan Tower – considered by many to be the best-kept secret vacation spot in bustling Fort Lauderdale. Shhh...it's a jeweled hideaway that's only been here since the early 1950s!

Although Fort Lauderdale has been tagged the "Venice of America" – with nearly every street, home and neighborhood positioned on coveted waterways – somehow you have to find your own hush-hush place to enjoy a moment of tranquility and call it home. It's not always found inside a 40-story hotel or resort, where you're just a number on the door with a pocket of plastic keys.

Only two blocks from Fort Lauderdale's 23-mile beach that is dotted with chic properties adorning the shore and skyline, I discovered Manhattan Tower and was transported back to a timeless and colorful past. Designed by the innovative and famed mid-century architect Charles McKirahan, the story as a corporate retreat began with its pedigree: It was a masterpiece of design for General Motors executives.

No bellmen needed here. It was convenient to pull up to the classic front door and enter a tropical courtyard, pool and gardens. I was swept into a vintage vibe everywhere I looked



– from the streetside pool to the Intracoastal waterfront patio. Eclectically stylish and extremely interesting, the patio swept the hotel's entire property with umbrella tables, chaise lounges, bronze sculptured animals, pots of flora, an awning-covered barbecue area and an open vista of flamboyant yachts cruising by.

Meeting owners Russel Dion and Joseph Caffey in the hotel's library explained the tasteful furnishings and antiques. They owned an antique gallery for 30 years on Las Olas Boulevard, allowing them to collect a wide variety of unusual treasures that now fill the hotel and gardens. Guests find this a constant source of wonder and amusement – riches with a "story" gathered from international travels mixed with newer acquisitions and fascinating art. They have created a setting that is quiet, low-key and elegant – only a few blocks from Fort Lauderdale's hub of activity.

Imagine 13 studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments from which to

choose! Russel and Joseph reside on the third floor, while guests often take up residence for weeks at a time on the first and second floor. Their focus is to provide a level of service and comfort in each apartment that includes a thoughtfully provisioned kitchen for more lengthy visits. My linens were plush, the bathroom vanities and accoutrements carefully arranged, and all of the suites spacious!

At Manhattan Tower, there is sociability unlike staying in a large hotel, especially when the water taxi stopped at our dock to take us up and down the Intracoastal to fine and fun dining, shopping, beaches, museums and sightseeing. Unquestionably the best way to see this beautiful city is along the water; their tours are a magical combination of tours plus transportation. Within minutes of my call, a water taxi captain also became our guide and historian. It's hard to believe that for \$26 per person we could cruise for the entire day and night (senior rates are lower). Your water taxi ticket is

also a passport to excellent savings at many boutiques, attractions and restaurants. Suggestion: Begin with a three-hour round-trip route to become familiarized with the many stops and let the crew offer advice on places to disembark that will make your vacation personalized.

By late afternoon each day I felt compelled to return to Manhattan Tower's loggia – a covered terrace connecting the courtyard with the waterfront – with the most handsome little bar. It's a lovely place to meet other guests, enjoy a cocktail and decide on the night's restaurant or club.

With hundreds of dining options minutes from our hotel...and many recognized for culinary excellence and integrity, I was a bit overwhelmed with the vast genres but I enjoyed the nightly "hunt." Reviews and themes included: waterfront, rooftops, five-star hotels, celebrated chefs, 24/7 bistros, pubs, sustainability, rustic fish camps, beautiful people, special-occasion and bring your Platinum AmEx!

As the days passed quickly by, I couldn't help remembering the sight of our resplendent first view of the glittering water. I wished we were staying for another fortnight so that I could get to know Fort Lauderdale more deeply. I dreamed of a window to gaze out of, a comfy sofa to sit in – I felt the romance here for a reason. I had to plan my return visit... There is a hidden story to tell which will unfold as I listen to the Gordon Jenkins musical masterpiece "Manhattan Tower."