



Denver International Airport's New Destination Hotel:

Story and photos by Christopher J. Davies

It is hard to believe that the Denver International Airport (DEN) opened twenty years ago! DIA, as it's locally known, is one of the nation's largest airports, spanning 53 square miles, which is larger than Disney World's massive theme park at only 43 square miles.

The downside to DIA has been its long distance from downtown Denver.

Beginning

in April, however, a new light rail train system will begin operation connecting the terminal's new transportation center with Union Station in Downtown Denver. The ride to downtown will come in at just under 37 minutes.

DIA has grown to become the 5th busiest airport in the U.S. and the 17th busiest airport

in the world! It currently operates six runways, including one that spans 16,000 feet in length, making it the longest commercial runway in North America. This runway was a lifesaver when Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his contingents flew home to Russia after the G8 summit, the jet weighted down with American-made goodies!

There is no doubt the Denver International Airport is a world-class airport.

Situated just two hours flying distance from the west coast and three hours flying distance from the east coast makes it centrally located for business and leisure travel.

Since opening DIA, the airport has had its sights set on expanding with an on-site hotel and direct rail service to downtown Denver. In November of 2015, that decades-old vision came to fruition with the opening of the new Westin Denver International Airport Hotel. This grand and modern hotel offers 519 guest rooms, 35 suites and a 37,500 square foot conference center. Just like Munich International Airport's on-site Hilton Hotel, the Westin DIA is just a minute's stroll from airline check-in counters and security.

"Today, we open an entirely new chapter in our international airport's history," said Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock. "With this stunning new hotel, conference center and open-air plaza, we are elevating Denver and the Rocky Mountain region to new heights. The hotel and commuter line set to open in April are the first steps toward leveraging DIA as an economic powerhouse that will create tens of thousands of new jobs and bring more business opportunity to Metro Denver."

The mayor continued, "Thank you to the strong leaders, visionaries and a tremendous community, for making today possible. I'm proud of the progress we've made and prouder still of the future we have forged together."



Back in August of 2015, I received an invitation to tour the Westin DIA while construction was in full swing. I was impressed with the layout and design, yet rooms were recently sheetrocked and the whole place was full of dust and construction scraps. Having built several new homes from scratch I knew things would be much better once construction was completed.

In early December 2015, just weeks after the official opening, Darcy and I had the pleasure of staying at the hotel for an evening and experiencing the restaurant and hotel amenities first hand.

We arrived by car and decided to valet park at the front of the hotel. While the cost for an overnight valet service is \$33, depending on the duration of your stay it could be well worth the difference compared to self-parking at the airport garage (\$3 per hour/\$72 per day).

Since the hotel is basically built into the side of the existing DIA terminal, the first floor is street level adjacent to the new transportation center. Escalators lead you to the second floor where the convention center lobby, ballrooms and meeting space. A second lengthy escalator transports people from the 2nd floor to the 6th floor where the hotel reception is located. The lobby is ultra modern, styled in The Jetson's era architecture. The hotel's restaurant, Grill & Vine, is located one floor below on the 5th floor. It can be accessed by an escalator or via elevator. The 5th floor also connects the hotel to an open-air plaza that leads to the airport passenger terminal. Two 150-foot canopies frame the plaza.

GRILL & VINE

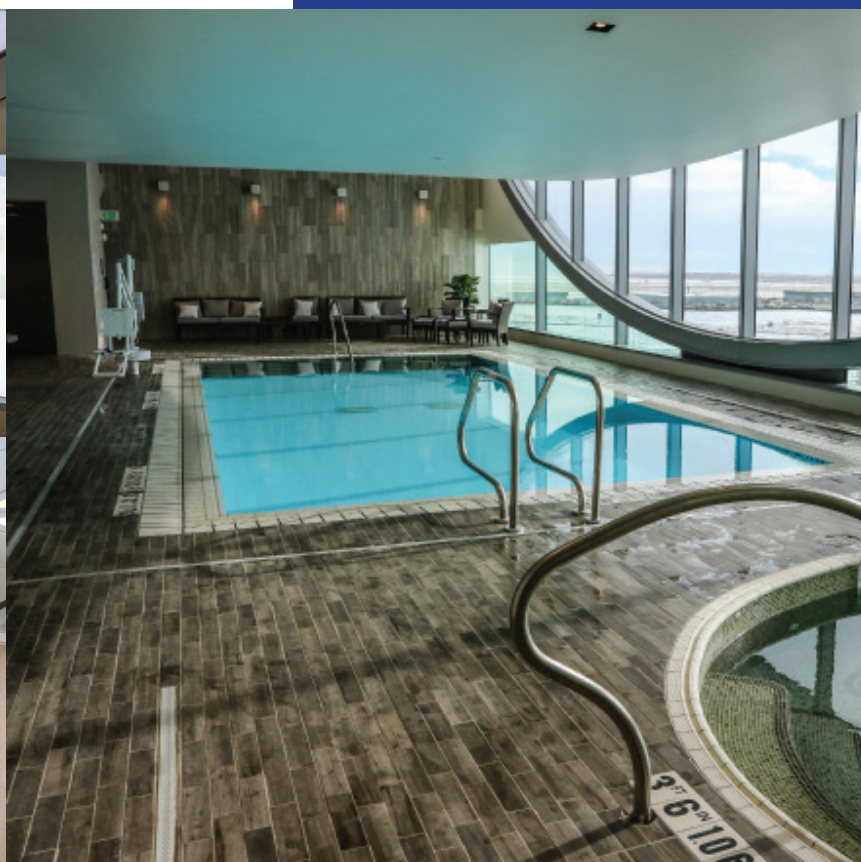
This is the third Grill and Vine restaurant by Westin (the first two at the San Francisco International Airport and Whistler Resort in British Columbia, respectively). Grill and Vine's concept was initiated by Westin, but further defined and brought to fruition by the Puccini Group of San Francisco, a comprehensive, integrated hospitality marketing and design firm. Its operations team facilitated the identity, guest experience, and operational model of Grill & Vine for the Denver market, including the creation of a more beer-driven menu to tie in with the local craft brewery scene. The Puccini Group was also integral to training the staff, and carefully sourced tabletop items to ensure the consistency of the guest experience throughout the restaurant.

Alexander Homs, Puccini Group's Director of Restaurant Operations states, "Puccini Group enjoyed the opportunity to participate in adapting a restaurant concept and creating a strong foundation that will enable the outlet to provide guests with a fantastic food and beverage experience within an airport hotel setting. We hope that we've helped provide a welcome respite and a delightful meal or drink for the Denver traveler."

Grill & Vine's dining room and bar overlook the plaza. The Westin and DIA plan to rent space in the plaza beginning this summer for private and public events. The space would be ideal for live concerts and farmers markets promoting Colorado-grown products.

The Westin DIA's Executive Chef is Scott Snodell, a longtime Denver resident who has worked with the Starwood Hotel Chain since 2000. While the Puccini Group developed a good percentage of the menu, Chef Snodell added some locally-sourced ingredients like sausage from Continental Sausage (supplier to Biker Jim's) and Colorado Avalanche Cheese. Chef Snodell also oversees the hotel's convention business, where menu selection is much broader.





"The restaurant has already exceeded initial projections five-fold," explained Chef Snodell. Some of the restaurant's signature dishes include Lamb Suso Pappardelle, Ribeye, Tuna Tartare Ceviche, and Roasted Red and Yellow Beets. The bar is stocked with a number of original concocted bitters for use in signature cocktail recipes. Some Patron faves include a Moscow Mule (with Breckenridge Vodka) and the Copper Mine Shaff (with Stranahan's Whiskey). The wine list is clever and diversified with a great percentage of bottles reasonably priced from \$40 to \$68. We loved the Domaine Drouhin 2013 Pinot Noir from Oregon's Willamette Valley (\$40) paired with the Lamb Sugo Pappardelle. The bar offers more than 25 wines by the glass, utilizing a professional nitrogen wine preservation system that ensures that every glass of wine is served fresh and at the proper serving temperature.

The Rooms

The Westin DIA Rooms are very modern and well appointed. We were elated to stay in a Junior Suite with King Bed (\$434). Our 732-square foot room was a corner room with massive wall to ceiling windows on two sides looking down at the transportation center and the parking garage. In the distance, we could see majestic mountain views from Pikes Peak to Longs Peak. The room was decorated in calming earth tones. Westin signature amenities included a king-sized Heavenly® Bed and spacious bathroom with walk in glass walled shower. A massive 60-inch LCD TV provided

sports bar sized entertainment. The room was furnished with comfortable chairs that made it ideal for watching our favorite TV channel. The floor to ceiling curtains can be controlled electronically from your bed stand.

In the evening after 10 p.m. there were no flights landing or taking off at the airport. Flights resumed at 6 a.m. the following morning. I watched a number of flights take off, but surprisingly, our room was extremely quiet due to excellent soundproofing.

Other Nice Amenities

The Indoor Heated Pool and Hot Tub provide soothing relaxation for even the most seasoned road warrior. The pool also has floor to ceiling panoramic windows with a stunning view of the transportation center and Flatirons.

The workout room is located adjacent to the pool. It has its own stunning view over

the white peaked passenger terminal, and is stocked with the most modern exercise equipment and comforts.

Summary

The Westin Denver International Airport Hotel is a world-class, state-of-the-art hotel.

It took more than twenty years to develop, but is clearly well worth the wait! With average published rates at \$275, it is obviously aimed at the business traveler, but on weekends locals can find substantial discounts. Combined with the soon-to-commence rail service, this could make for an affordable romantic getaway. Service during our stay was stellar. Some negative online reviews reflect bumps in the road that are common with any newly opened hotel of this size. Darcy and I look forward to returning soon!