

Near Brickell, a new hotel option for not-so-big spenders

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Al Diaz / Miami Herald Staff

After a decade that saw the opening of several luxury hotels in downtown Miami, there's a new, cheaper kid on the block: Hampton Inn.

Developer and owner Bernard Wolfson hopes the 221-room hotel, scheduled for a soft opening Tuesday, will attract budget-minded business travelers who value proximity to downtown's action — but want to avoid luxury rates.

Average rates at the new hotel, located just south of Mary Brickell Village at 50 SW 12th St., are expected to hover around \$160 depending on the season.

“We just know that there's a need for a moderately priced hotel,” said Wolfson, president of Hospitality Operations.

Over the past couple of years, the area saw the opening of the Epic Hotel, part of the chic Kimpton brand; the Viceroy Miami in the ICON Brickell development; Tempo Miami in a condo near the AmericanAirlines Arena; the JW Marriott Marquis and the luxury boutique Hotel Beaux Arts within the Marquis.

“We have the greatest concentration of four-star hotels in Miami-Dade County,” said Alyce

Robertson, executive director of Miami's Downtown Development Authority. “But having something affordable for businesspeople this close in ... gives a greater range of prices so people can have access to the downtown business community.”

With a sixth-floor pool, lounge, fuchsia-accented rooms, wall murals featuring Miami scenes in some public areas and several original pieces of art, the hotel avoids cookie-cutter chain sensibilities.

“It's a very edgy hotel,” Wolfson said. “We're trying to be Brickell, but we're going to have the

services and costs of a Hampton Inn.”

The Brickell Hampton, which cost about \$37 million to develop, will be Wolfson’s sixth hotel in South Florida and fifth Hampton Inn. His other Hampton Inns are in Coconut Grove, the area around Miami International Airport, Pembroke Pines and Fort Lauderdale.

Situated in a 15-floor building, the downtown hotel is larger than the typical 115-room Hampton and includes 210 parking spaces. The Brickell area location already has leased part of the ground floor to an art gallery and is in talks with restaurants to fill additional space. With an eye on the environment, the hotel has registered for LEED certification with the U.S. Green Building Council and includes a cistern to harvest rainwater as well as charging stations for electric vehicles.

The new location signifies the brand’s move into city centers, a trend that has taken off nationwide in recent years.

“The hotel that used to be a suburban brand over the last 7 to 8 years has really taken off in more urban environments,” said Phil Cordell, global head of Hilton Worldwides’s focused service brands, which include Hampton Inn. He said the brand is in Manhattan, Boston, Chicago and New Orleans. “The Miami hotel is the latest in our kind of urban trend.”

The chain will bring nearly a dozen trade reporters to the hotel next month, Cordell said, to show it off as an example.

While those Inns in a city’s core might be priced higher than exit-ramp roadside locations, Cordell said the properties are still a comparative bargain.

“The value equation is still there,” he said. “It’s not as much about a low price as it is value for the price.”

Wolfson said he expects the hotel to be priced between \$100-\$200 less than nearby hotels, though the boutique Hotel Urbano near the entrance to Key Biscayne — itself once a Hampton Inn — is an exception.

That 65-room hotel has rooms available for \$93 on Tuesday. Wolfson said he considers that property a complement to the Hampton more than a competitor.

Nor was he worried about an Aloft hotel scheduled to open in the Brickell area next July. Part of Starwood, the brand advertises “style at a steal.”

“We’ll get more than our share of the business,” Wolfson said.

General manager Eduardo Chapoval said the hotel expects to do heavy business with corporate guests on weekdays and turn to leisure and cruise passengers on weekends. Blast emails have already gone out to travel agents and members of Hilton’s rewards program, and Chapoval said the phone had been ringing steadily for the past couple of weeks.

Miami-Dade hotel consultant Scott Brush, who prepared a study for the project, said the hotel’s location, proximity to public transportation, construction cost and pricing appeal makes it a good bet.

Said Brush: "It's as close to a slam dunk as anything I've seen."

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