

by: Sarah Henderson in [Developments](#), [Spotlight](#) No Comments



#DTJax skyline now home to Hilton

There's a new name on the top of a Southbank structure – an exciting shift in hotel presence Downtown. Last month, the Crowne Plaza was officially turned over as a DoubleTree by Hilton hotel. After about a year of renovations, the DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront is ready to not only serve out-of-town guests but also business meetings, events and staycationers. Kerry Boatwright, marketing manager for the DoubleTree, recently gave DVT a tour of the newly remodeled hotel and shared some neat fun facts.



DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront

What are some fun facts about the hotel? Any notable personalities who've stayed there or other trivia to share?

We've hosted quite the range of celebrities over the years, from presidents to foreign dignitaries. During Jacksonville's Super Bowl in 2005, we hosted more celebrities at one time than we ever have before, as we were the entertainment headquarters. We hosted Kelly Clarkson, Outkast, Kanye West, The Black Eyed Peas, among several others.

Most notably, we were known as Elvis Presley's second home during his reign as the king. He stayed at the hotel during each of his tour stops in Jacksonville, and it's rumored he would rent out our presidential suite for weeks at a time to seek solitude – so much so that the hotel renovated the suite after his passing and named it in his honor as The Elvis Presley Suite. It was complete with shag carpet and had gold records adorning the walls. However, the suite has been renovated several times since then and is known simply as Suite 1010 today.

The hotel sits on land that was once Dixieland Park, billed as "The Coney Island of the South," in the early 1900s. Dixieland featured amusement rides and its famous ostrich races. The park stretched from Treaty Oak to the river during its heyday but closed during the Great Depression in the 1930s.



The lobby and its chandelier

What's been the coolest part about the Crowne Plaza to DoubleTree transformation?

Seeing guests and locals react to the transformation has been the coolest part of the conversion to DoubleTree. We've experienced a complete transformation inside the hotel, making it nearly unrecognizable. Those of us who work here have seen things move along and progress, but if you haven't stepped foot in the building since renovations started, it really is a "wow" moment.

It's also been quite cool to see our final look come together. We really wanted to capture the metropolitan surroundings of Downtown Jacksonville and blend it with our coastal surroundings – from the river to the beach. You can find elements of all of this in local photography, the driftwood-planked floors and the mid-century modern furnishings that reflect the history of the building itself.

We also wanted to highlight the building's unique mid-century modern architecture by restoring the original look of the soaring two-story columns in the hotel lobby and by retaining the original chandelier in the lobby atrium.

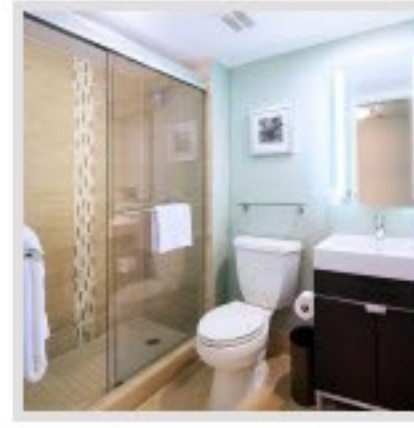
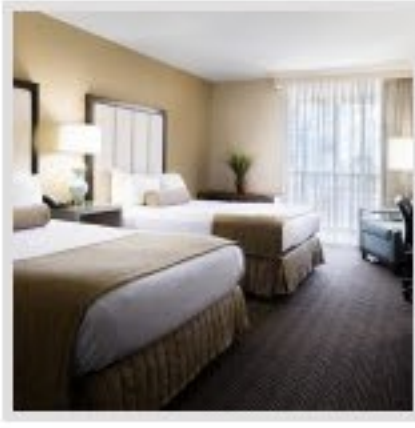
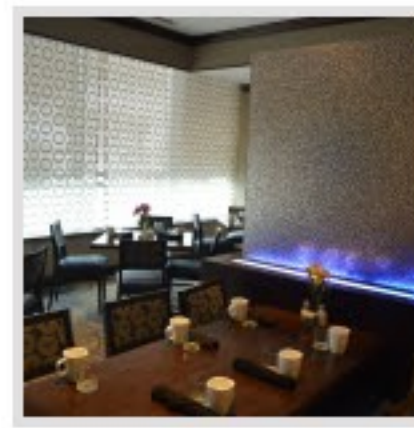
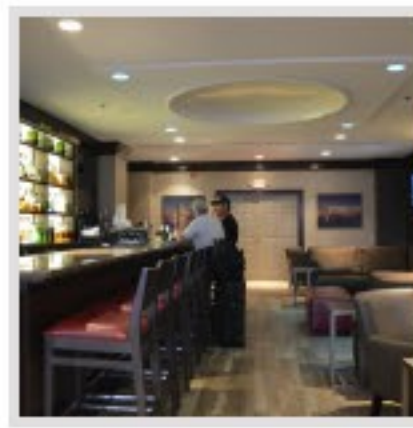
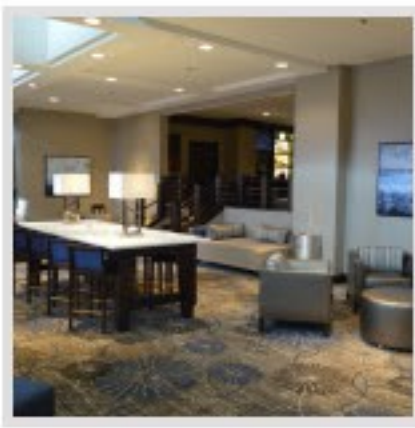
Do you offer any staycation packages and/or discounts for locals?

At special times throughout the year, we offer a Florida Resident Package that includes breakfast for two adults and two kids, premium Wi-Fi and 5% off standard rates. We also offer a Celebration Package that has been really popular with locals. It includes champagne upon arrival, breakfast for two adults and late check-out.

Can you tell me about the hotel's St. John's Provision Co. and the hotel lounges?

We'll always be home to Jacksonville's Ruth's Chris Steak House, but locals don't always know that we offer a hotel restaurant for all-day dining as well. Our new concept is St. John's Provision Co. Provision – meaning to provide food and beverage for a journey, is exactly at the core of what we do at St. John's Provision Co. We wanted to provide travelers food and beverage for their journey but food and beverage that has a taste of Jacksonville and local influence. You'll find that we serve up a lot of Southern and coastal cuisine with menu items like fried-green tomatoes, Mayport shrimp and cheddar grits, chicken and waffles with apple slaw and blueberry barbecue sauce, a lump crab cake sandwich, and our signature mac-n-cheese-stuffed fried chicken with kale slaw and bacon jam. For breakfast, we serve made from scratch organic muffins, Greek yogurt parfaits with housemade granola, and Southern staples like biscuits and sausage gravy. And in our room service menu, we highlight all of our locally influenced items on a "Local Dish" page.

Our bar, The Lounge at St. Johns, has been completely relocated from its original spot in the lobby and offers a more intimate environment with several couches, televisions and local brews from Bold City. And the Riverview Lounge at Ruth's Chris serves up one of the finest happy hours in town with great poolside and river views.



What are typically guests' favorite amenities of the hotel?

Guests are loving the ability to stay connected. With our renovation, we enhanced our Internet speeds, added four additional power outlets in all guest rooms, added convenient charging stations in our lobby, and added power outlets to each booth in St. John's Provision Co. We even added a connectivity zone in the lobby that has a communal table with USB charging station, outlets and two complimentary computers. Guests also have the ability to print remotely from anywhere in the hotel.

We also doubled the size of our fitness center and added all new Precor fitness equipment. Our guests have been raving about it since it opened.

Guests also love our riverfront, walk-out balconies. And we're a favorite for July Fourth and the light parade because of it.

Our dining options have been a hit, too – with room service, two restaurants and two lounges. And of course, our signature DoubleTree chocolate chip cookies are all the rage.



Skyline views on the pool deck

What's the story behind those cookies? Is that a Hilton tradition, and if so, do you know how it began?

There's something special about a warm, yummy chocolate chip cookie. And it seems to transcend all cultures. We think of it as a "warm welcome," which is why we give one to every guest as they check in.

DoubleTree started the "cookie welcome" in the early 1980s when most hotels reserved treats like these for VIPs. DoubleTree started handing them out to everyone because we think every guest is a VIP. The Christie Cookie Company has been the keeper of the secret cookie recipe. Every DoubleTree hotel follows this recipe and exact baking instructions to the letter to ensure you get the same delicious experience no matter which DoubleTree you visit. Cookies are baked fresh every day throughout the day at every hotel all over the world, from Canada to China. That's why they taste so good! Each cookie is approximately two full ounces of delicious-ness and is filled with an average of 20 chocolate chips – that's more than 950,000 pounds of chocolate chips every year!

How do you think having such a recognizable hotel brand now Downtown will affect Downtown for the better?

Having a major Downtown hotel supported by the Hilton brand is a huge win for Jacksonville as a whole. Hilton is an industry leader that raises the bar high and sets the standard in both product offerings and service – creating a stellar reputation that travelers they can rely on. And for us, the DoubleTree by Hilton brand was the right fit. The brand is upscale, fresh, innovative, and does it all while remaining approachable. We're excited about what our completely overhauled and contemporary product will be able to offer Downtown.

For more information on the DoubleTree by Hilton Jacksonville Riverfront, visit doubletreejax.com or call 904-398-8800. You can also follow the hotel on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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