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INN AT 500 CAPITOL: A Playful, Luxurious Home Base in Boise

by Tracy Ellen Beard



Inn at 500
©*Inn at 500*

Inn at 500 Capitol sits in the heart of downtown, within walking distance of restaurants, museums, public art, and the city's Basque Block. The 110-room boutique hotel is polished and upscale but never stuffy. Instead, the hotel's playful decor connects guests to Boise and the city's local events before they head out the door.

That personality is most obvious in the hotel's 57 themed rooms, which range from the Egyptian Theatre and Idaho wine to the Spirit of Boise Balloon Classic and other local culture. Other themed rooms venture beyond Idaho and draw inspiration from Paris, Rome, and animals. The concept could easily become gimmicky, but it does not. Wandering the halls is part of the fun as the interior decoration is eclectic, colorful, and interesting.

There always seems to be something new around the next corner.

One of my favorites was an etched-looking red illustration of the Boise skyline that greeted guests as they exited the 6th-floor elevator.

Luxury Without the Fuss

My room was spacious, comfortable, and accented in shades of lavender and purple, but the plush, inviting bed quickly became my favorite feature. After a day of walking around Boise and conducting interviews, sinking into it at the end of the day was heavenly.

Then there was the shower. The massive open shower included a handheld wand, rain shower, and three side jets. I have a love-hate relationship with enormous open showers. They look fabulous, but sometimes I spend half my shower freezing while standing outside the hot-water stream. Here, the additional jets surrounded me with warmth on all sides.

Accommodations at the Inn range from standard king and double queen rooms to deluxe and premier corner kings, studio and one-bedroom suites, spa suites, and penthouses. Some rooms include balconies, separate sitting and dining areas, and jetted tubs. The spa suites offer one of the hotel's more dramatic surprises: water pours from ceiling fixtures into the tub. The effect can be startling, so staff now warn guests about it at check-in.

One of my favorite amenities was much less dramatic but equally clever. Two-way cupboards, called butler pantries, let staff deliver room service, water, towels, or other requested items from the hallway. Guests open the cupboard from inside the room and retrieve everything without answering the door.



Inn at 500 art room
©David Fish



Inn at 500 penthousebath that fills from the ceiling
©David Fish



Winter Frost Steak
©Tracy Ellen Beard

After a long day, or first thing in the morning when I am still in my pajamas, that little bit of privacy feels luxurious.

The hotel also offers generous guestroom storage, a 24-hour fitness center, complimentary cruiser bikes, and luxury shuttle service. Pet-friendly rooms make traveling with four-legged family members easier, and the service throughout my stay was quick and friendly.

Steak, Potatoes, and a Chef Who Came Home

Hemlock, the boutique steakhouse inside Inn at 500 Capitol, is a must-try if you are staying at the hotel. Executive Chef Kiel Ard grew up in Meridian, Idaho, and began his restaurant career washing dishes at about 15. At 19, determined to learn more, he packed his belongings and headed to California.

A four-star resort job in Borrego Springs became what Ard considers his culinary school. He learned to make stocks and sauces from scratch before eventually moving to Colorado, where he spent most of his career. Years later, he returned to Idaho to join Boise's evolving culinary scene.

I liked Ard immediately. He was fun, entertaining, and clearly passionate about food. More importantly, that creativity showed in every dish we ate. Our server recommended the carpaccio, admitting that she had never been a fan until Hemlock's version changed her mind. One bite and I understood why—the delicate beef nearly melted in my mouth. The Creekstone filet mignon came dressed with black garlic aioli, crispy shallots, balsamic reduction, shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano, cured egg yolk, and locally grown micro arugula. The black garlic aioli's earthiness and the salty Parmesan paired beautifully with the delicate raw beef.

The steak dinner followed. We ordered the Winter Frost and Snake River Farms skirt steaks. The Winter Frost offered excellent marbling and texture, while the Idaho-raised Snake River Farms skirt steak was tender, deeply flavorful, and paired beautifully with Hemlock's chimichurri sauce. Ard considers these two steaks among his favorites on the current menu.

We were in Idaho, so we had to try the potatoes. Hemlock's "thousand-layer" duck-fat potatoes begin with thinly sliced Idaho Yukon potatoes, and each layer is brushed with duck fat.



Duckfat potato
©Tracy Ellen Beard



Beef Carpacio
©Tracy Ellen Beard

Then they slowly bake the potatoes, cool them, cut them into blocks, and fry them until the exterior becomes crisp. The stack is scrumptious, but I suspect that there were fewer than a "thousand layers."

The Yukon potatoes were tasty, but we had to try the colossal tableside baked potato. It was ridiculous—in the best possible way. There were only two of us, but I swear the thing could have fed eight people. There was an indulgent array of topping options. We chose lobster butter, two cheese sauces, bacon lardons, and shredded cheddar piled on top. Then came the show: a blowtorch melted and crusted the cheese into a bubbling golden layer, topped with tallow-fried potato chips.

We finished the evening with a Baked Idaho, Hemlock's playful interpretation of a Baked Alaska. Huckleberry cake is crowned with potato ice cream and surrounded by torched meringue. The meringue was particularly decadent but not overly sweet.

Boise Beyond the Hotel

As comfortable as Inn at 500 Capitol is, its downtown location makes leaving the hotel easy—and Boise has plenty worth exploring. Artwork pops up throughout downtown, but Freak Alley Gallery deserves a bit more time. Murals transform the alley walls into an outdoor gallery, adding another layer to Boise's unexpectedly creative personality.

Next, the Basque Block. Boise's Basque community was one of my favorite discoveries. I spent hours learning about the people who immigrated here and the traditions their descendants continue to preserve. We stopped at Ansots restaurant for a Basque lunch, visited the Basque Museum and Cultural Center, and checked out The Basque Market, which carries numerous products from Basque Country.

Boise is an incredible place to try Idaho wine.



Tableside Potato
©Tracy Ellen Beard



Inn at 500 downtown Boise
©David Fish

We visited Cinder Wines and Telaya Wine Co., both easily accessible from downtown, then we traveled farther into the Snake River Valley, where the wine story continues at Ste. Chapelle and Devil's Bedstead.

Back downtown, we saved an evening for 8th Street, where restaurants and patios create an energetic gathering place. At Red Feather Lounge, we devoured steamed clams with chorizo and garlic in a broth so flavorful I would have happily eaten it as soup.

I am still determined to try and recreate it at home.

The Inn at 500 Capitol and Boise, in general, both offer wonderful surprises, and that is what I loved most about this trip.

Whether it was the themed rooms, the tableside potato at the restaurant, or the artwork just outside the hotel, these special touches make me want to return to the Inn at 500 Capitol—and Boise.



Boise artwork
©Tracy Ellen Beard



Freak Alley
©Tracy Ellen Beard



Baked Idaho
©Tracy Ellen Beard

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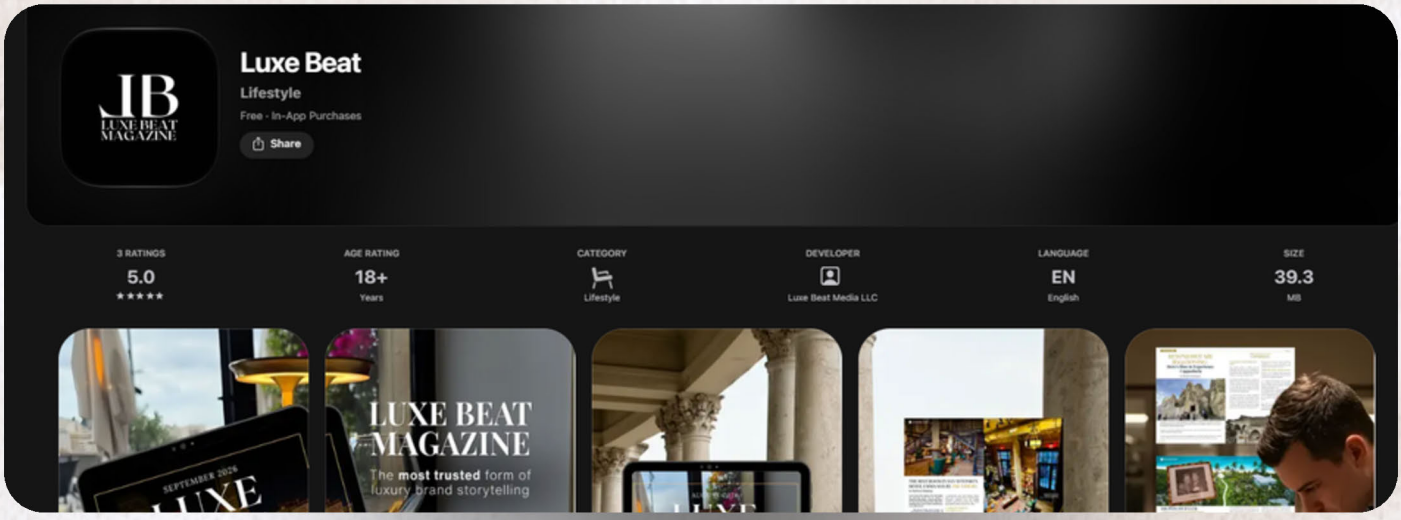
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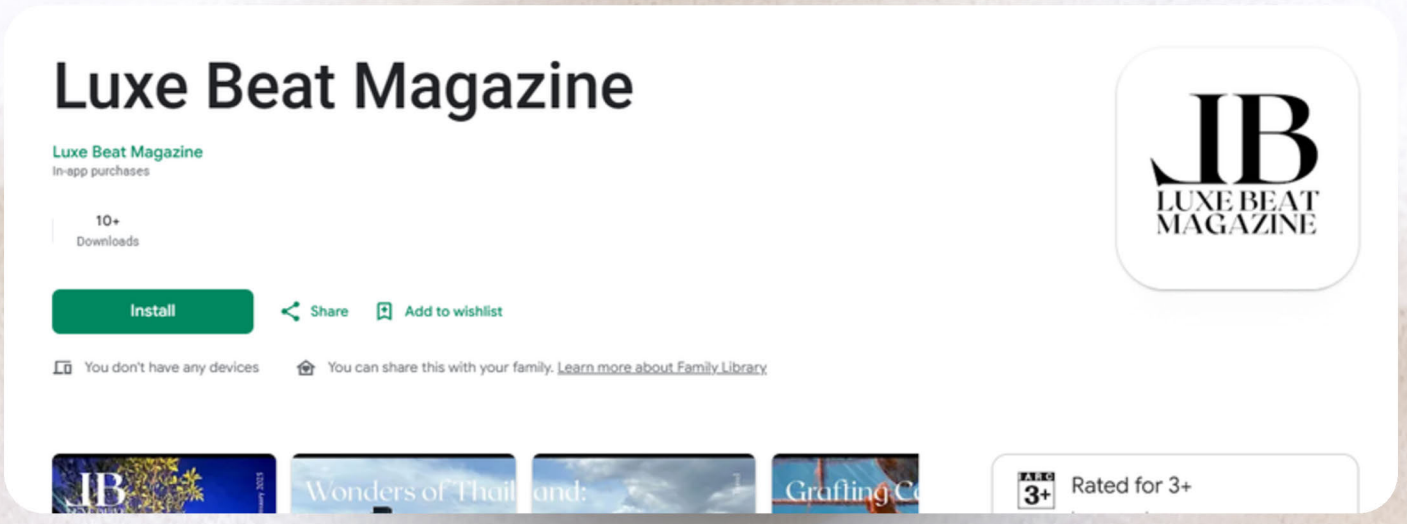


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