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CHECK IN/CHECK OUT

**BOSTON:
LIBERTY HOTEL**

THE BASICS

The completion of the Charles Street Jail in 1851 was a milestone of design, bringing the architect Gridley James Fox Bryant's stately, rough-hewn granite style to the edge of the Charles River. The jail closed in 1990 and has been transformed into a luxury hotel after a \$150 million restoration. The result preserved much of the original stone and brickwork while adding touches like Gothic-style chandeliers that tower over a lobby lounge. Many cell bars remain as well, cleverly backlit by ever-changing shades of lavender and chartreuse. And while most of the 298 rooms are stacked in a new tower, 18 are in the original jail, connected by catwalk-like terraces that guards once patrolled.

THE LOCATION

Situated at the northern edge of Beacon Hill, overlooking the Charles River, it's an easy walk to the Boston Common and the Back Bay neighborhood, and a stone's throw from a subway station (Charles Street/Massachusetts General Hospital on the Red Line).

THE ROOM

Though I booked a basic king in the jail, my room was not yet ready when I arrived at 3:40 p.m. (for a 3 p.m. check-in). After being told that housekeeping was running behind, I waited in the lobby until 4:30, when I was upgraded to a "Brehtaking Jail" — room No. 432, which was, to my delight, a larger, corner version of what I'd reserved. It was cozy yet airy, with exposed-brick walls and floor-to-ceiling windows that offered river and city views. The modern furnishings included an off-white divan, black lacquered desk and dresser and an earthy merino throw at the foot of the plush white bed. A 32-inch flat-panel TV sat above the mini-bar, and an elegant vase was filled with flowers. Instead of the typical "Do not disturb" card, the doorknob sign read: "Solitary." Cute.

THE BATHROOM

Spacious and well-equipped, including a large bathtub, glass-doored shower with excellent water pressure, plenty of towels, Molton Brown products, two luffas and a couple of silky, terry-cloth lined robes. A granite floor

matched the overall design.

RESTAURANTS

Scampo, the hotel's upscale Italian restaurant, is scheduled to open in March. But Clink, a cool and casual place with a lot of exposed brick and original cell bars, offered a delicious array of small plates, including artisanal cheeses served with grilled cranberry-pecan bread (\$10 to \$15). The same menu is also served at the atmospheric lobby bar, a clutch of red velvet banquettes and leather ottomans popular with post-work crowds in business attire. Later, the cocktail action moves to the Alibi bar, housed in the former drunk tank that now features real, blown-up mug shots of celebrities like Mick Jagger (who was spotted at Clink in September) and Lindsay Lohan.



JODI HILTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Liberty is in the old Charles Street Jail.

AMENITIES

The gym is small, and there's no spa. But the hotel offers Wi-Fi (\$10.99 a day), local car service in rush hour at no extra charge and, starting sometime in 2008, remote airport baggage check-in screened by the Transportation Security Administration.

ROOM SERVICE

Breakfast, ordered at 10 a.m., arrived within a half hour, as promised. My huge, tasty Cheddar and asparagus frittata (\$20) came with delicious potatoes and copious toast triangles.

THE BOTTOM LINE

It's a well-done theme hotel that plays its schtick to perfection, making you feel like one privileged inmate. Doubles start at \$319. Liberty Hotel, 215 Charles Street, Boston; (617) 224-4000; www.libertyhotel.com.

BETH GREENFIELD