

Pelican Beach boutique hotel evokes Old Florida. Page g7



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RITZ-CARLTON HOTELS & RESORTS

The epitome of oceanfront luxury, the Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale is the town’s only AAA five-diamond hotel.

ROCHELLE LASH  
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

You would think the sheer beauty of Fort Lauderdale’s sunny coast, with its palm trees and hibiscus flowers, sparkling waters and magnificent 40-kilometre stretch of Atlantic beach, would be enough. Not even close.

Greater Fort Lauderdale, incorporating 31 communities from Hallandale Beach in the south to Deerfield Beach in the north, pops with more than 500 hotels, 4,000 restaurants, 120 nightclubs, a wildlife sanctuary and the home ice of the NHL’s Florida Panthers.

The 100 marinas and 500 kilometres of inland waterways that harbour 50,000 sailing and power boats have inspired two nicknames for Fort Lauderdale: the Venice of America and the Yachting Capital of the World. And it’s cruise territory, par excellence. The world’s two largest ocean liners, both Royal

Caribbeans, are based at Port Everglades and about 40 grand ships take to the high seas every week between October and April.

The spring break college kids decamped years ago to Daytona and Panama City, and Fort Lauderdale has evolved into a stylish, classy destination, with great beachfront hotels, terrific boating experiences, power shopping at the Galleria, sport-fishing and fashionable dining.

Fort Lauderdale is at the top of its game. It is the No. 1 winter destination for Canadians, drawing nearly one million vacationers annually from north of the border. To me, the allure is the vibrant, all-inclusive society of young and old, golfers and surfers, gays and straights. Above all, Fort Lauderdale is unpretentious and lighthearted, with a party culture that rocks on, swinging from beach-chic to luxurious.

Here’s a peek at one of Florida’s legendary towns. You can do it posh. Or you can party. Either way, it must be done.



DREAMFOCUS PHOTOGRAPHY

A full-moon beach party at the S3 restaurant in the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort.

POSH RIDES

Beach towns make me want to rent a Corvette or a T-Bird, but why take to the roads when there is sparkling, blue water everywhere? Whatever your ride, from paddleboard to power boat, the banks of the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean are like Architectural Digest magazine come alive, with hundreds of lavish mansions of astounding size and opulence.

Still, nothing says luxe like a yacht. Caution: as Gilded Age tycoon J. Pierpont Morgan advised, if you have to ask the price, you can’t even afford the upkeep.

To buy into the opulent boating lifestyle, there is no better showroom than the annual Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show. The world’s largest, it displays \$3 billion in mega-yachts and accessories, and even a personal submarine. The best of the best, perhaps, a 50-metre pedigree lovely built in Europe, might cost \$50 million to \$75 million, plus that darned maintenance

bill of \$1 million a year, or more. Hashtag: Rich.

“But people who are not billionaires still can fulfil their yachting dreams,” said Arnoldo Ramirez, chairman of Water Fantasies, whose splendid boats dock at Pier 66 and Bahia Mar Marina. “We charter 24-to-30-metre luxury yachts at \$6,000-\$10,000 a day and we are lucky to be cruising magnificently clean waters.

“Between 10 and 12 people can have an exceptional, five-star experience with a gourmet chef and they connect with the sea, the sky and their family and friends.”

Perhaps I am a peasant at heart. I like the adorable, hop-on water taxis that tootle through the Intracoastal for \$20 or less, stopping at Lauderdale landmarks such as 15th St. Fisheries where specialties are conch fritters and fried gator, and Las Olas Boulevard, the trendy strip of beach boutiques and hip restaurants.

Please see BEACHES, Page G4



DOUG CASTANEDO/GREATER FORT LAUDERDALE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Fort Lauderdale encompasses a 40-kilometre stretch of Atlantic Ocean and sunny beach.



FOREST JOHNSON/FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW

The Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show is the world's largest, showcasing more than \$3 billion in yachts.

## BEACHES Fine-dining options aplenty

CONTINUED FROM G1

### POSH DIGS

The Lauderdale Luxe Collection offers the Vacation-Like-a-VIP package, May 1-Sept. 30 with room upgrades, free valet parking and \$100 resort credits.

The Luxe Collection includes 11 posh palaces such as W Fort Lauderdale, the global hotel chain's largest cabana of cool; the Westin Beach Resort & Spa, another major oceanfront biggie; the family-friendly Lago Mar Resort and Club and the Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale, which is in a class by itself.

The Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale is the town's only AAA five-diamond resort and it's a beauty, with unlimited opportunities for livin' large. The Club Lounge, open to privileged guests of select rooms and suites, is the ultimate in belonging, with its impeccable personal concierges, all-day delicacies and open bar.

At the spa, the extravagant sapphire sea treatment will polish and cleanse your skin to jewel-like smoothness. Or have your massage in an outdoor cabana, soothed by the ocean breeze.

The Ritz-Carlton orchestrates culinary journeys by moonlight on Via Luna's oceanfront terrace or in the 5,000-bottle Wine Vault, where female patrons are offered faux fur stoles to ward off the chill and Champagne sabring is a parlour game.

### THE DINNER PARTY

With a trendier, tropical-chic vibe, S3 in the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort is Fort Lauderdale's hottest party scene. For the record, S3 stands for sun, surf and sand, as well as steak, seafood and sushi. I would add sexy, sultry and stunning. S3's oceanfront full-moon parties, patio firepits and live music attract crowds of beautiful people, deeply bronzed, dressed for success and madly posting selfies to Instagram.

With teams of chefs on the line



LIPS

From left, Nicolette, Diva and April at the nightclub Lips, where fabulous drag queens perform.

in the busy, open kitchen, S3 cooks up small and large plates of lamb chops, rib-eye steaks, shrimp toast and grilled octopus, and serves Asian delicacies such as hamachi sushi. It all goes best with creative, potent cocktails of tequila and vodka infused with lime, lemon grass and basil.

### THE RAINBOW PARTY

Fort Lauderdale's gay scene is one of the most dynamic in the U.S. with nearly 20 resorts, 150 LGBT-owned businesses and the United States' highest concentration of same-sex couples (2.8 per cent of a population of nearly 180,000), a slightly higher proportion than Seattle and San Francisco.

The "gay-bourhood" called Wilton Manors, exuberant and social, jumps with 24-hour merrymaking and cool hangouts such as Alibi or Rosie's Bar & Grill. And community spirit will burst with Stonewall Summer Pride, June 21-22, when streets will be closed for all-day entertainment and a kids' zone.

Straight-friendly Lips is a local institution famous for its fabulous

## IF YOU GO

Air Canada, Sunwing, WestJet and Air Transat fly non-stop from Montreal to Fort Lauderdale.

For all-Florida info: 888-735-2872, [www.visitflorida.com](http://www.visitflorida.com).

For venues mentioned, consult Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau: 800-356-1662 or 800-22-SUNNY/800-227-8669; for hotel reservations: 800-928-7583; [www.sunny.org](http://www.sunny.org). The region includes 31 communities such as Hallandale Beach, Deerfield Beach, Pompano Beach, Dania Beach and Hollywood.

The Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale: 954-465-2300, [www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/FortLauderdale](http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/FortLauderdale); 1 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Boul. Price: In January, deluxe rooms approx. \$549-\$619 U.S., per night, or \$799-\$919 for an oceanfront suite, all incl. evening turndown, swimming pool, beach club, fitness room, children's activities. Via Luna: lunch/dinner daily, Sunday Brunch. Extras: spa treatments, pool cabanas, valet parking and Club Lounge access.

The Florida Panthers will play the Canadiens in Montreal on Jan. 6 and again in Fort Lauderdale/Sunrise on March 29.



Please see Checking in on G7 Resort evokes Old Florida

drag divas doing fabulous send-ups of Cher, Barbra, Madonna and Adele.

The writer was a guest of the Ritz-Carlton Fort Lauderdale. The hotel did not review the story.

## Auto museum a hidden gem

Miami gallery features 1,200 cars, bicycles, Vespas, and even James Bond memorabilia

SUZETTE LABOY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## IF YOU GO

**NORTH MIAMI, FLA.** — The classic cars lined up against an empty, vintage gas station along a busy street in North Miami attract visitors to a much larger space right behind it.

More than 1,000 cars are on display at the 23,000-square-metre Miami Auto Museum at The Dezer Collection that includes American classics, military and electric cars, bicycles and more. The museum is so large that if every passenger on three 747 airplanes were given just one item from the museum, they could all bike, drive or pedal out, said curator Myles Kornblatt.

There are eight galleries spread throughout two large buildings in a part of Miami not known to showcase collectibles, much less \$25 million to \$30 million U.S. worth of one-of-a-kind vehicles.

"We are a bit of a hidden gem," Kornblatt said.

Jorge Ivan Vergara Salazar, who came from Colombia to Miami on a family vacation, recently visited the museum and said he was surprised to find so many rare cars under one roof.

"Everything that you see in television, like James Bond and Indiana Jones, those are all marvellous things," Salazar, 49, said in Spanish while touring the museum.

Real estate developer Michael Dezer, 72, started his massive collection as a teenager and has one of the largest Vespa scooter collections in the world.

"I knew it was original before I showed up," said AJ Palmgren, a self-proclaimed Knight Rider historian who travelled from Des Moines, Iowa, to Florida for a family vacation. He made sure to stop at the museum on this trip.

"It's very familiar. I've studied all of the remaining surviving original cars," he said while standing next to KITT, the black Pontiac Trans Am that was featured in the popular 1980s television series.

Miami Auto Museum at The Dezer Collection (<http://www.dezer-collection.com/>). Open Monday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The museum is located off Biscayne Blvd. in North Miami, about 11 kilometres south of Aventura, Fla., and 20 kilometres northeast of Miami Beach.

Admission is \$25 U.S. for adults and \$10 for children under 12 to see one of the buildings or \$40/\$10 to see the entire collection. Children younger than five are free. The museum offers special rates for groups, and Florida residents are also given a discount.

Among the most popular galleries at the museum is the Hollywood Cars of the Stars exhibit, which showcases cars, submarines, airplanes and more that were featured in movies, including the BMW motorcycle from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, and the Mitsubishi Eclipse from the Fast and the Furious film in 2001, which was the first car the late Paul Walker drove in the film series.

The Batboat used in the Batman television series that aired during the 1960s was signed by the builder, George Barris, and the Batmobile (also a Barris creation) is also on display.

The museum also houses the largest collection of everything James Bond, including the Aston Martin sports car he drove in 1964's Goldfinger and a massive glass enclosure filled with rows of books, toy cars and figurines.

Some of the items in the museum are replicas, including the Cadillac from Ghostbusters. But a majority of the cars at the museum are originals.

"The replicas are sort of like a great side dish because we have so many originals," Kornblatt said.



LYNNE SLADKY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vehicles and an airplane from James Bond films are on display in the James Bond gallery at the Dezer Collection Museum in Miami.

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### N.H. SKI AREAS OFFERING FREE SKI, SNOWBOARD

**NORTH WOODSTOCK, N.H.** — Ski NH and its 33 member resorts are offering a week of free learn-to-ski and snowboard packages as part of a national outreach program. From Jan. 11-17, the mountains are offering a limited number of packages that include a free lesson, rentals and lift ticket. Participants should visit [www.SkiNH.com](http://www.SkiNH.com) to register and download a Learn to Ski or Ride Free coupon. Then, they'll contact a participating ski area to reserve a specific day. It's part of national Learn to Ski & Snowboard Month, a program featuring special offers to make it easier and more affordable for people to learn to ski, snowboard, cross country ski or snowshoe.

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