

Sunny Fort Lauderdale represents the perfect escape away from our cold winter climate



PHOTO: VISIT FORT LAUDERDALE

The night Skyline of Fort Lauderdale.

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FYI

With the weather having been so freezing lately here in Canada, I was thrilled to make my escape for a winter getaway in the sunny state of Florida. For the first time, I had the opportunity to visit Fort Lauderdale, which was a real treat.

Fort Lauderdale is the largest municipality in Broward County, which encompasses 1,197 square miles, with 24 miles of Atlantic Ocean beach. It has a resident population of over 1.95 million people.

While previously known as a quiet beach community, Fort Lauderdale has been known as a hot spot for spring breakers ever since the December 1960 film *Where the Boys Are*, which was shot on location in the Fort Lauderdale area. Outside of spring break, however, Fort Lauderdale is now known worldwide as a year-round destination with plenty to do for all age groups.

For some family fun in the sun, you may wish to try out the local mini-golf experience. Pixar Putt is an 18-hole pop-up experience which will be open until March 26. The experience features iconic characters from many of Pixar's most beloved films, including *Toy Story*, *Inside Out*, *Finding Nemo*, *Coco*, and more. It is open seven days a week and includes after dark sessions for those 18 plus.

If shopping is something that you hope to do in Florida, look no further than Sawgrass Mills, the world's largest single-story discount mall. Further discount shopping can be accomplished at the Fort Lauderdale Swap Shop, which is the largest indoor/outdoor flea market down south. For a more traditional shopping experience, The Galleria at Fort Lauderdale is a more upscale shopping mall with stores including Macy's, Michael Kors, and much more.

Inclusivity

Visit Lauderdale, the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Greater Fort Lauderdale in South Florida, recently unveiled its new brand campaign, *Everyone Under the Sun*. The vibrant campaign reflects Greater Fort Lauderdale's welcoming and inclusive community. People from more than 170 countries speaking 147 languages call Greater Fort Lauderdale home. The brand campaign features plenty of surprising twists to not only highlight how different Greater Fort Lauderdale is from other destinations, but to also invite "everyone under the sun" to enjoy its one-of-a-kind offerings. The new campaign showcases accessible beaches, thrilling outdoor adventures, immersive nature encounters, shopping, in-pool meetings, dock and dine opportunities, pampering, romance, and memory-making experiences.

Where to stay

There are close to 600 lodging establishments, with more than 37,000 hotel rooms in the area, ranging from luxurious high-rises to smaller boutique hotels and motels. The diverse mix of Greater Fort Lauderdale accommodations encompasses oceanfront and inland properties, specialized spa resorts, as well as meeting and convention facilities.

During my trip, I chose to stay at the B Ocean Resort, which many people may remember as the former Sheraton Yankee Clipper. The B Brand caters to the following aspirations through its signature elements and programming: B Nourished as it relates to the mind, body and soul; B Adventurous by exploring the world and self-potential; and B Compassionate by actively caring for the community and the environment.

Along with a fresh, contemporary design and a desirable beachfront location, B Ocean Resort offers a unique experience allowing both travelers and staycationers to fully immerse themselves in the destination from the second they step foot through the door. The resort is conveniently located in the heart of the city, around 15 minutes from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Port Everglades, downtown Las Olas Boulevard and along the famed coastal highway A1A.

Originally built in 1956 as the Yankee Clipper, named after its ship-like structure, the hotel quickly became a popular place to visit for American favorites such as Marilyn Monroe, Joe DiMaggio, and many more. As one of the few beachfront hotels in the city along the Atlantic Ocean, the B Ocean Resort has incorporated some historic elements and has blended them to create a more modern, sleek, and stylish feel.

The B Ocean Resort offers 481 spacious guest rooms and suites, ranging in size from 300 sq. ft. to a lavish 1,700 sq. ft. — all of which are inspired by the property's serene oceanfront location. Guests can choose from room categories including the Chic Room, the Captivating Room, the Stunning Room, the B Enhanced Junior Suite, the Posh Suite, or the Master Suite. Along with the B Hotels & Resorts signature Blissful Bed, each room has sleek custom furnishings, a 55" HD LED interactive flat-screen television, bath amenities, a coffee maker, an in-room safe and mini fridge, as well as electrical power hubs equipped with convenient USB, USB-C, and international outlet plug-ins. We were very pleased with our accommodations.

Beyond the guestrooms, the B Ocean Resort features a spacious lobby and several

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meeting spaces. Guests may choose to relax at either of the hotel's two outdoor swimming pools, one of which is a fairly large infinity pool conveniently located right on the beach. The private beach offers every guest two free beach-loungers and towels per room, with the option to also rent umbrellas when the weather permits. Beach-side service is provided, with food and drinks from the beachside restaurant The Salty Siren being delivered right to your seat.

The hotel also includes a 24-hour state-of-the-art B Active Fitness Center, two B Indulged Spa Suites, and over 14,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor meeting space that has expanded onto the second floor. The second floor Point Room offers floor-to-ceiling windows with an attached spacious outdoor beachfront terrace – it is an ideal venue for high end corporate and social events. B Ocean's private beach, pool decks, and first-level ballroom are also available for large group events, meetings or weddings.

The hotel has five restaurants on site. The Salty Siren, as mentioned, is the hotel's poolside restaurant. Otherwise, the hotel offers seafood and Mediterranean cuisine at the Naked Crab, drinks and brunch with mermaid shows and burlesque shows at the Wreck Bar, more drinks and cocktails at the Florida Bar in the lobby, and the grab and go Clipper Express, which includes offerings such as bagels, croissants, muffins, juice, coffee, and chips. Come by in the evening for grab and go sushi as well!

For complete details on the Mermaid shows go to <https://www.boceanresort.com/mermaids-at-the-wreck-bar/>

We interviewed Leydis Castillo, the director of shows and one of the mermaids, and she laughed how the young children believe the mermaids are the real thing.

Boucher Brothers on The Beach

We were thrilled to discover that The B Hotel & Resort partners with the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management in order to pamper guests while at the beach. I have had the pleasure of experiencing their fantastic work before during previous stays at hotels in the Hollywood and St. Petersburg areas.

Boucher Brothers is a hospitality management company that specializes in a variety of outlets including pool, beach, food and beverage, water sports and team building activities. They are a forward-thinking and proficient hospitality company expanding across North America. The company currently owns a portfolio of over 100 hotels and condominium properties, 45 blocks of public beach throughout Florida's east and west coasts, 50 blocks of public beach in Virginia Beach, and four beaches around Lake Michigan in Chicago. They also do corporate team building and team events.

The Boucher Brothers know that when you come to the beach, you want to relax and feel pampered – their courteous and friendly staff does just that. The Boucher Brothers team provided excellent service during my stay. Upon your arrival at the beach, they will set you up with your free beach chairs, as well as an umbrella if you wish. Further, you have the option to rent the more luxurious sun loungers, with comfortable cushioning and unobstructed views of the ocean. Servers from the hotel restaurant, The Salty Siren, come right to your seat to take your order, further enhancing your relaxation.

In terms of beach sports, the Boucher



The Coral Reef Mermaids from the B Ocean come ashore.

Brothers have collaborated with BouYah Watersports. If you wish, you can arrange for jet skis, kayaks, banana boat rides, or paddle boards. The closest BouYah Watersports location to the B Ocean is at the Marriott Harbor Beach, which is a six-minute walk from the hotel. Guests can reserve their adventure directly online at <https://bouyahwatersports.com/marriott-harbor-beach>.

Dining out

There are more than 4,000 wining and dining establishments and 132 nightclubs in Broward County. The culinary scene is filled with rising star chefs, exciting restaurants, breweries and pubs, coffee houses and scenic dock-and-dine eateries, along with many great hotel restaurants.

I have a few places to highlight from my stay.

The Naked Crab Seafood Kitchen + Cocktail Bar: Let's start off with the Naked Crab Seafood Kitchen + Cocktail Bar, which was conveniently located right in our hotel lobby at the B Ocean Hotel and Resort. It was a most convenient place to dine after checking in right at dinnertime. The Naked Crab embodies authentic, local dining on Fort Lauderdale Beach. Executive Chef David Morales conceptualizes slightly different menus every season and blends together fresh ingredients and spices in order to create contemporary Mediterranean dishes influenced by the flavors of Europe, North and South America. The menu is sourced locally using fresh seafood and produce from local farms.

To sample some items on the menu, I tried the crab cake as an appetizer, as well as the scallop risotto and the particularly tasty branzino. This was capped off with some tiramisu for dessert, which was also delicious.

Open for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a weekend seafood brunch, locals and guests can relish in a seafood tower to share with the table or take advantage of the dry-aged prime steak. For breakfast, guests can enjoy a full menu of traditional staples and specialties, including lump crab benedict and crab avocado toast.

Matchbox Restaurant: We also experienced Matchbox Restaurant, part of an American chain first opened in 2003. Match-

box currently has 15 locations, including Washington, Maryland, Virginia, and of course Florida. Matchbox is part of Thompson Hospitality, one of the largest retail food service management companies in the USA.

The Matchbox in Las Olas, Fort Lauderdale, opened in early 2022. It is located in a particularly trendy area which features dining and entertaining on the New River, with lovely water views.

Since its debut, Matchbox has become known for brick oven pizzas, mini burgers, fresh salads, and chef-inspired entrées, like Miso salmon and chimichurri steak frites. Diners can enjoy elevated American-bistro fare crafted from high quality ingredients. I particularly enjoyed their delicious cocktails, including the strawberry rose margarita and the peach lemon drop, as well as the spinach and artichoke dip, the aforementioned Miso salmon (a menu highlight!), as well as the chicken pesto pizza.

Warren Thompson, President and Chairman of Thompson Hospitality, started the company in 1992. It is built on values gained from 30-years of client, customer and community relationships. Veterans in the hospitality industry, the company currently owns and operates over three dozen restaurants. Other company-owned restaurants in the area include Big Buns and Willie T's Seafood Shack.

The restaurant offers several handicap accessible tables and a lowered bar area, as well as compliant restrooms. In order to enter, as you come out of the parking area, the sidewalk/courtyard has a ramp.

Matchbox is located at 221 SW 1st Avenue. You can call 954-751-5959 for a reservation. Visit <https://www.matchboxrestaurants.com>.

The Lobster Bar and Sea Grille: When seeking out places to eat in Florida, one would be amiss to forget about the fantastic local seafood scene. I had the privilege of enjoying a meal at the Lobster Bar Sea Grille while in Fort Lauderdale. The restaurant, located at 454 East Los Olas, offers an extensive selection of seafood, including, as mentioned in its name, a large array of lobster dishes.

The dining room features soft white her-

ringbone subway tiled walls and arched ceilings. Warm custom lighting creates an intimate and inviting ambience. Clusters of sofas are located near the bar for cocktails before or after dinner, making it the perfect place to meet friends or business associates. Adjacent to the lounge is a fully covered outdoor patio with cushioned furniture, ideal for cocktails and light dining. Walls can be brought down in this outdoor space as well on a windy day to preserve client comfort.

During my meal, I had the opportunity to taste some oysters, the restaurant's famed lobster morsels (lightly fried lobster with Greek honey-mustard aioli), Dover sole served with brown butter and a side dish of quinoa mixed with kale, the decadent Whole Lobster & Black Winter Truffle risotto dish, as well as some profiteroles to end the meal on a sweet note. Everything was delicious!

General Manager George Mollas notes how the restaurant presents freshly caught, both locally and internationally, whole fish. "Our seafood is as fresh as fresh can be; 48 hours from the water to the table," he said. "The atmosphere of the Lobster Bar Sea Grille is a very swanky, upscale and sexy environment"

Mollas says that his team's goal "is to exceed our guests' expectations. We go the limit for our guests. Whatever they need we can deliver. As guests leave the restaurant, they let me know how much they enjoy the food we prepare for them and the wonderful atmosphere. In particular they love our attention to detail."

The restaurant is fully code compliant with regards to handicapped accessibility. It seats about 175 indoors and 50 outdoors, and also features two private rooms (one seating up to 60 and one seating up to 80).

The Lobster Bar Sea Grille is part of the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group, which also owns eight other restaurant brands. You can purchase the Ultimate Dining Gift Card, which never expires and can be reloaded.

For reservations call 954-772-2675. The restaurant is open for lunch weekdays and dinner seven nights a week.

For more details about Fort Lauderdale go to <https://www.visitlauderdale.com> for more details. ■



The Boucher Brothers turn a day on the beach into paradise.

PHOTO: B OCEAN RESORT

PHOTO: BOUCHER BROTHERS

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