

36 Hours in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

By GERALDINE FABRIKANT

FORT LAUDERDALE continues to mature beyond its spring-break days, with posh resorts now rising along the beach. Meanwhile, Las Olas Boulevard, the lively commercial strip that links the beach to downtown, has welcomed an array of new boutiques and restaurants. Sure, a smattering of raucous bars still dot the beach, and the rowdy club goers of Himmarshee Village can be three deep in the middle of the week. But at the end of a sunny, water-logged day, the resort town now offers a sophisticated evening that doesn't involve neon bikinis and syrupy daiquiris.

Friday

5 P.M.

1) SEASIDE DUSK

There are a slew of beachfront spots where you can have a drink, *watch the* clouds roll over the ocean, soak up the sea air and catch the parade of sun-soaked tourists **and** residents **going home in suits and ties**. Two of the more welcoming places are Margarita Cantina Crab and Seafood House (201 Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard; 954-463-7209), where you can sip a chardonnay and listen to the steel band, and the 1120 Cafe (10x South Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard; 954-414-1024; h2ocafe.net) next door, if you prefer a bit more quiet.

7 P.M.

2) WATERFRONT WAHOO

Fort Lauderdale's dining scene is alive and well inland as well as on the water. The local hotshot Steve Hudson bought the Bimini Boatyard Bar and Grill. (1555 Southeast 17th Street; **954-525-7400**; biminiboatyard.com) in 2008 and spent \$1.2 million to snazz it up. It now evokes a New England-style boathouse, with its crisp blue and white decor, enormous cathedral ceiling, gleaming oak floors and portal-style windows. A new outdoor bar is on a marina, bringing in a nautical mix of young and old who dine on fresh seafood like woodgrilled wahoo (\$19) and yellowtail snapper (\$22).

9 P.M.

3) NICE AND COOL

For a cool nightcap, slide over to Blue Jean Blues (3320 Northeast 33rd Street; 954-306-6330; bluejeanblues.net), where you can sit at the bar and listen to live jazz and blues bands. The club has a tiny stage and a dance floor, should the mood strike. The music

can go from jazz to Caribbean depending on the evening.

Saturday

8 A.M.

4) DAWN PATROL

Take an early morning stroll along the wide, white beach. It is open to joggers, walkers and swimmers, and **is** surprisingly clean. For a leafier, more secluded adventure that is a favorite **with resident runners and** walkers, try the two-mile loop through the woods in the Hugh Taylor Birch State Park (954-468-2791; floridastateparks.org/hughtaylorbirch; fee, \$6 for a car with two passengers; \$2 for joggers). Its entrance is only steps from the beach at the intersection of AxA and Sunrise Highway. If you are not a jogger, take a drive through anyway.

10 A.M.

5) SUNNY NOSH

Finish off the jog at the beachside Ritz-Carlton (1 North Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard; 954-465-2300; ritzearlton.com/fortlauderdale). The company bought the former St. Regis and put its own stamp on the property. For a relaxed breakfast (served until 11 a.m.), either indoors or out, go to Via Luna, the hotel's restaurant, where you can choose from a \$28 buffet with omelets, smoked salmon, cereals and fruits.

1 P.M.

6) ECCENTRIC ESTATE

Bonnet House (900 North Birch Road; 954-563-5393; bonnethouse.org) was the vacation home of the artists and art patrons Frederic Bartlett and his wife, Evelyn, whose first husband was the grandson and namesake of the founder of Eli Lilly and Company. They created an eccentric, brightly painted retreat, now a museum -- more Caribbean mansion than Florida estate - near a swamp where alligators thrived. Window bars protected the house from the panthers that once roamed the estate, and the monkeys that still live there.

3:30 P.M.

7) CRUISING THE PIER

If you want to go a bit off the beaten track, drive up A1A to Commercial Boulevard and hang out on Anglin's Pier. There is a little shopping area for swim gear, and you can rent fishing poles for W. Or just sit and have a coffee. They close the area off from 7 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays for free musical entertainment.

7 P.M.

8) CRABS AND PIZZA

One of the trendier new restaurants is Truluck's by the Galleria Mall (2584A East Sunrise Boulevard; 954-396-5656; trulucks.com). An elegant room with dark woods and red leather

upholstery, the year-old restaurant adds a bit of glamour to the popular mall and has a busy bar where a piano player entertains all evening. It has a surf-and-turf menu, but is perhaps best known for stone crabs. Dinner for two, about \$75 to \$100. For lighter fare, try D'Angelo (4215 North Federal Highway, Oakland Park; 954-561-7300; pizzadangelo.com). Opened in March, the modern Tuscan-style restaurant attracts a fashion-aware young crowd with its meatball tapas (\$10) and Napoletana pizzas (\$11).

9 P.M.

9) MALL PARTY

It may not be spring break, but you would never know, looking at the huge crowds at the Blue Martini by the Galleria Mall (2432 East Sunrise Boulevard; 954-653-2583; bluemmartinilounge.com). But the patrons are decidedly more upscale. By 8 p.m. when the band is playing, the bar is packed with young professionals and snow birds, schmoozing and dancing. A newer spot is SoLita Las Olas (1032 East Las Olas; 954-357-2616; solitalasolas.com), which opened this year and has a lively bar. Fort Lauderdale also has a booming gay night-life scene, including the ever-popular Georgia's Alibi (2266 Wilton Drive; 954-565-2526; georgiesalibi.com).

Sunday

11 a.m.

10) SOUTHERN COMFORT

The Pelican Grand Beach Resort (2000 North Ocean Boulevard; 954-568-9431; pelicanbeach.com) offers a Sunday brunch from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The plantation-style restaurant overlooks the beach, with a big veranda with white wicker tables and rocking chairs that catch the sea breezes. The Sunday prix fixe menu (\$33.95) includes eggs Benedict, rice pilaf, bloody marys and mimosas.

12:30 P.M.

11) SUPER SWIMMERS

Water enthusiasts should stop in at the International Swimming Hall of Fame (One Hall of Fame Drive; 954-462-6536; ishof.org). Did you know that both Leonardo da Vinci and Benjamin Franklin experimented with swim fins? Or that Polynesian swimmers used palm leaves tied to their feet? That and other swimming trivia are lovingly displayed at the sleek white building on the Intracoastal.

2 P.M.

12) LAS OLAS STROLL

In an era when shopping in new cities can remind you of every mall back home with the same stores lining the streets, Fort Lauderdale has kept its streak of independence: nothing fancy but fun. East Las Olas Boulevard has a rash of one-off stores like Kumbaya (No. 1012; 954-768-9004), which carries colorful T-shirts (\$20) and equally colorful straw bags (from \$20). Seldom Seen Gallery (No. 817; 954-527-7878; seldomseengallery.com) has a riot of

wall clocks (from \$35) as well as brightly painted walking sticks (\$20). If you want to take edible gifts home or you can't resist them yourself, drop in at Kilwin's Ice Cream, Chocolates and Fudge Shop (No. 809; 954-523-8338; kilwins.com). Its motto is "Life is uncertain. Eat dessert first." Ponder that with a bag of caramel corn (\$4.75), as you explore the rest of the shops.

IF YOU GO

Opened in 2004, the **Pelican Grand Beach Resort** (2000 North Ocean Boulevard; 954-568-9431; pelicanbeach.com) is situated north of the main strip, directly on the beach. The Southern plantation-style hotel has 156 rooms, from \$169.

The **Ritz Carlton Hotel** (i North Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard; 954-465-2300; ritzcarlton.com/fortlauderdale) opened in 2008 in the former St. Regis hotel. It has a sleek pool on the seventh floor overlooking the water, a full-service spa and a wine room with more than 5,000 bottles. The 192 spacious and elegant rooms start at-\$269.

W Fort Lauderdale (401 North Fort Lauderdale Beach Boulevard; 954-414-8200; whotels.com/flauderdale) is a sleekly modern hotel that opened last year along the beach with 517 rooms. It has a Bliss Spa and two pools, one with a D.J. who plays from noon to 6 p.m. on weekends. Rooms from \$289.