

OUR
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WHAT'S NEW IN
MIAMI

MIKA
IN THE VIP LOUNGE

HOT NEW **PARIS**
RESTAURANTS

WORLD EATS
BUENOS AIRES

PASSPORT STYLE
SHADES OF SUMM

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what's new in...

MIAMI

by Jimmy Im

When it comes to reinventing itself, no city in Florida makes a bigger splash than Miami. The South Florida hot spot is constantly filled with headlining waves of temptations that pander to a diverse social spectrum. In fact, Miami saw a record 38.3 million travelers go through **Miami International Airport** in 2011. On the oceanfront, Port Miami saw four million passengers in 2011, marking the fourth year in a row the port topped the four million mark for cruise traffic. Travelers are steadily coming in droves, appreciating this sunny oasis that regularly dishes out new activities, attractions, and great eats. And it's not just tourists who are excited. Miami was voted #1 on the list of **The Happiest Cities to Work by Metro NY** last year. Talk about city envy!

Passengers who have eternally groaned at the lack of airport transportation to the city will be pleased with the opening of **Miami International Airport Metrorail Station's** Orange Line service, which enhances the number of stops and adds seamless connections to Tri-Rail, which runs to West Palm Beach. The Orange Line opened for service on July 28, 2012 and cost half a billion dollars. Visitors can now get from Miami International Airport to several parts of Miami, though there's still no direct service to popular areas like South Beach or Wynwood Arts District. Still, this is great news for locals and for those who are considering moving here (remember, happiest city to work!).

Miami is known to flaunt some of the most recognized events in North America, whether it's Scope Art Fair, Art Basel, Winter Music Conference, South Beach Food & Wine Festival, Miami Pride, and the Winter Party Festival, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary this past March. Many new annual events are quickly becoming just as notable, including **Miami Spa Month**. Celebrating its sixth year this July, the event will host largely discounted rates (think \$99 for a treatment rather than \$199) with 38 participating spas. Many of these spas are legendary for total pampering, like Ritz-Carlton



Photo: Alan Daniel

Spa, South Beach, and Elle Spa at Eden Roc Renaissance, which opened in 2011.

The most exciting hotel on the spa circuit is **Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa** (6801 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-514-7474. www.canyonranch.com. Rooms from \$425) in Miami Beach. The spa is certainly not limited to Miami Spa Month as it is popular year-round and known to pamper the affluent traveler who wants to restore health and wellness. The 150 all-suite, oceanfront destination spa resort is set on 750 feet of beach, with a strong focus on overall well-being. There are four freshwater pools, health-conscious gourmet dining, and its famous 70,000-square-foot Wellness Spa, the largest in Florida. Guests have access to unlimited classes in the gym or on the beach (Beach Boot Camp, Beach Yoga, etc.). Check into the resort's new **Aquavana Experience**, a luxurious way to heal or rejuvenate in aqua thermal therapy with various pools and treatments, a scented steam room, Finnish sauna, experiential showers, foot spa, herbal laconium, hydro spa, igloo, and heated loungers.

In the past year, Collins Avenue has been all the rage when it comes to new hotels, and a number of luxury properties have opened doors along this famous street. The

SLS Hotel South Beach (1701 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-674-1701. www.slsouthbeach.com. Rooms from \$315) has been the buzz

about town since it opened last fall. The Philippe Starck-designed, 140-guest room boutique took over the last historic art deco building of its kind on Collins Avenue, so it gave the designer the opportunity to infuse his design technique with trademark Miami architecture, while rock star Lenny Kravitz designed the penthouse suite. SLS is operated by the SBE Group who is known for turning out fun gay nights at the iconic The Abbey in Los Angeles. There are three restaurants here: The Bazaar by José Andrés, Katsuya by Starck, and Hyde Beach. The Bazaar gives diners an experiential culinary experience, heavy on molecular gastronomy while Katsuya is fine Japanese and Hyde Beach fills you with comfort food. SLS South Beach has certainly caused a scene with the jet-set variety that you can find chilling by the pool.

Perhaps the complete opposite of SLS South Beach is **Gale South Beach** (1690 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-673-0199. www.gale-hotel.com. Rooms from \$200). It's another new hotel (opened December 2012) inside an historic building that received a \$35 million restoration and, unlike the bling-ified SLS, it's



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more understated with a retro feel. They never compromised the tropical art deco, which is integrated with contemporary elements that play off a modern-Italian vibe. It's definitely a charmer. There are only 87 guest rooms, a true boutique, and guests can expect a quieter South Beach-glam experience. The 5,000-square-foot pool deck has killer views and takes bragging rights on getting a full day's worth of sun thanks to its location. The signature **Dolce** restaurant offers a modern take on Italian classics, like wood-roasted pizza and homemade pasta. While you're there, make sure to enjoy a classy cocktail at the Regent Cocktail Club, where every cocktail has a story.

Just a few blocks away, **The James Royal Palm** (1545 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-604-5700, www.jameshotels.com). Rooms from \$300) took over the historic, oceanfront Royal Palms Hotel, tricking it out with its James aesthetics (sister properties are in New York and Chicago). Visitors can expect stylish spaces with a muted color palette that embodies the South Beach lifestyle, locally sourced mini bar, and custom artwork. The majority of all 393 rooms offer step-out balconies and large windows with views of the Atlantic Ocean, Miami cityscape, or Biscayne Bay. There's a full-service spa, two swimming pools, plunge pool and cabanas, complimentary Wi-Fi, 24-hour gym, room service, and Business Networking Lounge. It makes an ideal stay for both business and leisure visitors. The hotel also keeps your little ones in mind. Not only is there Lil' James, a program and play space for children, but it's also pet-friendly.

The two restaurants at The James, **Catch Miami** and **Florida Cookery**, have been wooing locals and visitors alike since opening. *Top Chef*-winner Hung Huynh helms the globally influenced seafood at Restaurant Catch. The 4,000-square-foot hot spot spans two floors, inside and outside, and has 190 seats, but it's seemingly always brimming to full capacity. I am a huge fan of Florida Cookery. The chef, Kris Wessel, is a South Florida native who cooks up authentic regional cuisine that combines Latin American, Caribbean, and South American flavors. The dishes skew "exotic" (oxtail and alligator), but you can still order familiar (and tasty) dishes like lime-grilled chicken and conch chowder. I always feel at home here and look forward to bringing friends when they're in town.

Speaking of home style cooking, my favorite restaurant is **The Dutch** at **W South Beach** (2201 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-938-3111, www.thedutchmiami.com). It's the Miami outpost of Andrew Carmellini's The Dutch in NYC, which brought him international fame. The American restaurant serves seasonal comfort foods but with the added value of Andrew's magic touch. He whips up dishes that are "Florida" inspired, like the Jamaican jerk chicken and Florida mahi.

Heavy-pocket visitors splurge with W's new **VIP Suites**. They come complete with a dedicated W Insider VIP Concierge, airport transportation from MIA in a private car, guaranteed admission to WALL nightclub, and a farewell gift, among other goodies.

For those looking for gay establishments, bars like Twist and Score have long reigned as the queens of nightlife, but gay bar **Mova Lounge** (1625 Michigan Ave. Tel: 305-534-8181, www.movalounge.com) plans on giving the two clubs a run for their pink dollar when it moves to its new location on Brickell at the end of May. Guests can expect a bigger (and swankier) space with the same chic crowd. Meanwhile, the new **Eros Lounge** (8201 Biscayne Blvd. Tel: 305-754-3444, www.erosloungeiami.com) opened to a gay beat earlier this year. This gay video bar features multiple 60-inch plasma TVs, live DJs, and even yummy bar food. It's proved to be as popular for its karaoke and its drag nights.

According to premiere nightlife promoter Edison Farrow of **Sobe Social Club** (www.sobesocialclub.com), there are plans for more gay bars to come throughout the year, though no solid plans have been announced. Farrow is known to throw special events throughout South Beach, and has been a promoter for 13 years now. He's also on the board of directors of Miami Beach Gay Pride. "There is a fun, care-free attitude in Miami that makes life here so special," he says.

If you haven't heard, Atlanta's famed **Swinging Richards** (17450 Biscayne Blvd. Tel: 954-357-2532, www.swingingrichards.com) made its way to Miami in the fall of 2011. It's the Southeast's only gay-managed and gay-operated male strip club with fully nude strip shows. Needless to say, plenty of hot bodies will keep your eyes (and wallet) busy all night. It's free on Mondays (\$5 to \$10 every other night) with VIP rooms and a VIP Lounge. Have a swinging good time, and save us a seat.

If you're really looking for eye candy, head to **1111 Parking Lot** on Lincoln Road. No, it's not a cruising spot but a combined parking garage, penthouse, and tropical garden by architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron. It's so swanked up, people are known to book business meetings and weddings here. Could this be the world's sexiest, most attractive parking lot in the world? Only in Miami!

Miami is truly my great escape in Florida, not only for the reason it's the epicenter of culture, but clearly the city keeps me busy. In fact, a solid reason for my return that I have yet to mention is the revitalization of **The Raleigh** (1775 Collins Ave. Tel: 305-534-6300, www.raleighhotel.com, Rooms from \$318). The iconic hotel was purchased by David Edelstein in partnership with SBE's Sam Nazarian, which will make it the most talked about Miami hotel takeover in years. In fact, Michael Schwartz, the James Beard-award winning chef of **Michael's Genuine Food & Drink** (130 NE 40th. Tel: 305-573-5550, www.michaelsgenuine.com), has already opened a new restaurant at the hotel called Restaurant Michael Schwartz, his first restaurant outside the Design District.

Just around the corner on a quiet residential block is the **Pestana South Beach Art Deco Hotel** (1817 James Ave. Tel: 305-341-2401, www.pestana.com). Rooms from \$179). This beautiful boutique hotel provides 97 rooms and suites in four classic art deco buildings. The newest hotel to call South Beach home also offers two luxury two-bedroom apartments, as well as the retro Mermaid Café and the Pool Bar set on a 1940s-inspired patio with an outdoor pool. If you want to experience what it's like to live the good life in Miami Beach, without the crowds, you'll love it here. The staff is as warm and welcoming as the tropical weather, and alfresco drinks are a great way to relax before a night out on the town. Whether traveling as a couple or a family, this is a great option for people who like to spend time together in a casual yet sophisticated setting.

Also, late this summer, the new **1 Hotel & Residences South Beach** will be sure to make waves when it opens in the former space of the Gansevoort. The 417-room hotel operated by Starwood Hotels will be an exciting addition to the Miami Beach hospitality scene. Considering the affordable real estate in Miami these days, it looks like I might just never leave. ■