

Modern oceanfront oasis evokes Old Florida

Boutique-inspired Pelican Beach Resort offers visitors the best of both worlds

Pelican Grand Beach Resort is a timeless treasure and a deluxe oceanfront oasis on the edge of the busy, buzzy city of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

It's a boutique-inspired babe with 156 rooms, but it also has superior resort features, such as a shop, an outdoor pool, a beach club, fine dining at Ocean2000 and creative cocktails at O2K, a pool-side lounge (both spaces use trendy typography).

I visited during the week and thought it was a sophisticated, chic, grown-up getaway, but on weekends and holidays, it's a family playground. Kids love the beach, of course, but also the Emporium, an in-house ice cream parlour, and Fort Lauderdale's only "lazy river," which winds around the swimming pool.

Plus, the place is so picturesque that it holds 150 weddings a year.

Pelican Grand's top attribute is its location directly on the beach, rare for a four-star hotel in this Atlantic community, where many establishments are situated a hop across Ocean Blvd. from the sea. I was also enchanted by the décor, an eclectic collection of seaside styles. And Pelican Grand surely has the prettiest veranda in town, a long oceanfront stretch of comfortable white wicker tables and chairs for drinks or dining.

The hotel is thoroughly modern, built eight years ago from scratch, but it has the patina and charm of Old Florida. The original owners had wanted a sand castle on the beach with a retro look, and they equipped it with the best of today's fittings and conveniences, as well as hurricane-proof and soundproof walls. It's warm, friendly and an imaginative departure from the modern template of minimalist décor. Recent updates include new pool furniture, new bedding and carpets and the opening of Ocean2000.

Pelican Grand's exterior is sunny yellow to reflect Fort Lauderdale's inviting subtropical climes, and it's trimmed with cupolas and tiny black and white awnings.



ROCHELLE LASH
CHECKING IN

The lobby is a stylish reception area and living room, classically decorated in the corals and aquas of the sea. In the sunroom, dark antique rattan chairs and large potted palms suggest Hemingway's Key West. A mahogany turn-of-the-20th century antique credenza adds a colonial Caribbean air. The look is all very Florida outdoorsy, with sliding doors opening onto the veranda, which is steps from the beach, and the upstairs corridors designed to be open-air, so you always feel the sea breeze.

"It's not the boxy look, and we're not trying to be ultrahip," said general manager Robert Keesler. "Pelican Grand is contemporary and refreshing, but it's also a lighthearted throwback to another time — and it's an original."

The guest rooms recall weathered seaside cottages: a cream palette with bead-board trim, brass-stemmed lamps, new sand-coloured carpets and one wall painted to look like vintage barnwood in pastel colours of the sea and sky. The beds are covered in luxurious white duvets, trimmed in palest turquoise satin. And so important, most rooms and suites have private oceanfront verandas. The suites add a separate living room, and at certain low-season periods, they're available for \$50 more per night.

Ocean2000 and the O2K Lounge are where Pelican Grand goes modern, or rather 1920s art deco. Both spaces have glamorous, recently updated looks, with white leather furniture and lots of windows for views.

The very happening O2K lounge does tapas, lobster, pork taquitos and capellini, plus wildly exotic cocktails such as the Pelican Brief of pomegranate and VeVe liquor (so vibrant that it's spelled with not one, but two, uppercase Vs), blended from Brazilian acai berries; and



The Pelican Grand Beach Resort in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., has an enviable Atlantic oceanfront setting.

the O2K margarita, shaken with premium Partida tequila and agave nectar.

With its swanky décor, divine beachfront veranda and Latin-accented cuisine, Ocean2000 is a pleasure at any time of day. Breakfast might be Florida orange juice and Gulf shrimp hash. Lunch features shrimp sliders, Cuban pulled pork, fish tacos and yucca fries, plus classic burgers and clubs. Brunch goes all-out with a buffet of meat, fish, cheeses, cakes and all-you can sip mimosas and bloody Marys. Dinner has choices like crab cakes, halibut à la plancha and steak with chipotle. And, no discussion, one simply must follow up with Key lime pie, from

the Florida Keys.

The Evening Under the Moon dinners at Ocean2000 are special experiences set for full-moon nights, starting with Jan. 16 and Feb. 14. With oceanfront seating on the sweeping veranda, guests will be seduced by the moonlit sea, a sky full of stars and the rhythmic sound of the Atlantic waves. Adding mystique, Pelican Grand supplies telescopes for stargazing and has invited Bea Kobran, Florida's top astrologer, to give personalized readings and perhaps reveal what your future holds. Here's hoping that you're destined for a few more days and nights at this delightful Florida find.

■ IF YOU GO

Pelican Grand Beach Resort is 14 kilometres from Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport via U.S. Highway 1 North to Sunrise Blvd. E.

Pelican Grand Beach Resort: 800-525-6232, 954-568-9431, www.pelicanbeach.com; 2000 N. Ocean Blvd., Fort Lauderdale.

Price: Rates fluctuate; approximately \$199-\$350 U.S. per night. An additional \$15 per night resort fee includes Wi-Fi and use of beach chairs, towels and umbrellas, swimming pool and fitness room. At certain times, if you stay three nights, a fourth night is free. The Escape Winter Package includes \$28 valet parking, the \$15 resort and adds a \$100 resort credit. Packages are available with meals, Champagne and paddle-boarding. Cruise clients have free transportation to (but not from) Port Everglades or Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

Dining: Ocean2000 serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily and Sunday brunch; The Emporium (boutique, ice cream and coffee shop), daily, 7 a.m.-11 p.m. O2K Lounge: lunch, dinner, small plates and cocktails.



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