

CHECKING IN

The Palms brings glamour, history to Miami Beach



ROCHELLE LASH

The Palms Hotel & Spa is a classic oceanfront resort with all the appeal that has made Miami Beach a coveted destination for 100 years.

The Palms has a hint of glamour, history and attractive, full-service facilities: 251 renovated rooms and suites, The Palms Spa, the organic-inspired Essensia Restaurant and Lounge, a swimming pool surrounded by tropical trees, and a fully equipped beachfront with turquoise sun-brellas waving in the Atlantic breeze.

The hotel is at the heart of the dynamic new Mid-Beach scene, the stretch of Collins Avenue between 20th and 44th Streets that is a hub for chic hotels, many opening in 2015, rebuilt from Art Deco or Mid-Century originals.

A boardwalk runs along the sandy shore on the sea side of the hotel, and it's a pleasant, laid-back contrast to the fashionable frenzy out front, which is buzzy with valet and the action of the main drag.

The Palms has maintained a lot of its 1930s design and ambience. The elevator doors are striking etched-glass mirrors and the lobby looks like a colonial-era Bahamian lounge, with vintage rattan ceiling fans circling slowly over plush club chairs, perfectly faded Oriental rugs and indoor flora and fountains.

The hotel has menus and free accommodations for kids, but I like its sophisticated side: massages in outdoor cabanas; farm-to-table cuisine and perky cocktails at Essensia; and a savvy concierge who can ace tickets to Art Basel (Dec. 3 to 6, 2015) or the South Beach Wine & Food Festival (Feb. 25 to 28, 2016).

What sets this hotel apart is that it is independently owned, by the Krause family, many of whom work at the hotel. They keep it relevant, constantly upgrading. The rooms are smart and contemporary in colours of chocolate and vanilla.

The hotel also reflects a rare oneness with nature. I toured the organic garden, nibbling on herbs, hot peppers, edible flowers, kale and arugula and



The Palms Hotel & Spa in Miami Beach is a classic, deluxe resort facing the Atlantic Ocean with a beachfront, a swimming pool, fine cuisine and lush gardens. PHOTOS: THE PALMS HOTEL & SPA



The Palms Hotel & Spa's pool and lawn are surrounded by a jungle of tropical plants, including palm, papaya and lime trees.

heirloom tomatoes. And later, I feasted on all of those fresh fixings in herb-infused cocktails and locally sourced dinner dishes. There is greenery all around. The pool and lawn are cosseted by a tiny jungle of tropical plants, trellises of vivid flowers and as many as 50 varieties of palms, plus papaya and lime trees. Two live parrots survey the scene from their own hutch.

The Palms also is known for its Inspired by Nature program of eco-operating systems and its award-winning Green Team that

orchestrates such events as beach cleanups. Essensia's slow-food menus focus on ingredients from the hotel's own harvest as well as Florida farms and meat producers — and the chef lists sources like Tina's Pride and Swank Farms.

Special dishes include scallops with mâche and grapefruit, snapper ceviche with papaya and sweet chili, grilled octopus with chorizo oil, lamb sausage, grilled fish, grass-fed beef, plus veggie-centric treats like kale pesto, curried couscous and wild mushroom risotto.

Breakfast features a choice of a buffet with fruit, home-baked croissants and an omelette station, or à la carte treats like French toast bread pudding, crab frittatas, steak and eggs and lemon-poppysseed quinoa pancakes.

Both Essensia Restaurant and Lounge serve outdoors, on pretty, shady terraces with rattan furniture and leafy palms. The lounge also does craft beer, organic wines and cocktails with fresh fruit — melon margaritas and the vodka peach-tini — as well as garden herbs.

The poolside Tiki Bar pops with drinks like the Miami Passion and Spicy Planter's Punch, and light lunches of mahi sandwiches and kale Caesars. A gentle rhythm of Latin music adds to the fun. I couldn't decide whether to samba in the pool or snooze in my chaise longue, so I headed out to bake on the beach.

The nature theme continues at The Palms Spa, which uses Aveda plant-based products. If you indulge in a treatment, you can use the spa's steam room and the intimate indoor-outdoor relaxation lounge, which is soothed by a gurgling wall of water. To primp for a night out in South Beach, you can stop by the beauty salon.

The Aqua-Salt Glow is one of

IF YOU GO

The Palms Hotel & Spa: 800-550-0505, 305-534-0505; thepalmshotel.com; 3025 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, Fla.

Price: rooms start at about \$179 US for city view (until about Oct. 1); junior suites at \$299; suites at \$597. After Oct. 1, starting rates are \$243, \$404 and \$807. Resort fee of \$22.95 includes local and toll-free calls, heated swimming pool, Wi-Fi, newspapers, fitness centre, beach setups, digital newsstand. Garden tours on request. Extra: valet parking, \$37; Tiki cabanas with TVs, \$125. Advance purchases get 10 per cent discounts. Fourth night free at certain times (usually June 1 to Sept. 30). Preferred Hotel Group loyalty program applies (iPrefer). Packages for spa, weddings, meetings, romantic getaways. The eco-deal Do Good, Feel Good starts at \$859 US for four nights, two people, incl. breakfast, \$50 spa credit p.p., paddle-board lesson and a beach cleanup.

Essensia (essensiarestaurant.com): breakfast, lunch, dinner daily and Sunday brunch (gluten free, vegetarian, vegan and kids menus available); Tiki Bar: from 10 a.m., daily. Happy Hour: Mon. to Thurs. 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Miami Beach: 305-539-3000, miamiandthebeaches.com. Visit Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com.

the sea-worth treatments and the Chakralexology is one of the 30-minute services that are relatively good value at \$70 to \$90. The half-day journeys, incorporating massage, body scrubs and facials cost \$150 to \$385, and among favourites are the Jet Lag Revival and the Afternoon Delight.

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