

RELAXATION POURS FORTH AT MARGARITAVILLE



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Jimmy Buffett's new Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is the embodiment of cocktail culture, with tiki hut bars and a tropical beach party vibe.

But Margaritaville also has an unexpectedly polished side: it's a fine hotel with fetching beach-chic decor, good food, a cracker-jack staff and a sublime spa.

It's full service, boasting a ballroom, a boutique and a business centre. Exceptionally, it spans two glorious waterfronts, stretching from a beach club on the Atlantic Ocean to a lively dockside pub on the Intracoastal Waterway.

Margaritaville represents a philosophy as much as a vacation destination, so to get in the spirit, I went full immersion ahead of time.

Barefoot and bikini-clad at home in Montreal, I browsed margaritaville.com for palm-frond palazzo pants and premium tequila. I listened to Buffett tunes on Radio Margaritaville on Sirius XM, and I streamed Margaritaville TV to watch videos of breezy, sunny paradises.

I was prepped.

The real thing: In living colour, the Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is high-spirited and entertaining. It is a sparkling \$200-million indoor-outdoor hospitality complex that is the new wow factor of the Hollywood Beach Broadwalk, a retro oceanfront promenade of souvenir shops and ice cream parlours.

"It's exciting. ... The hotel is vibrant and dynamic," said Margaritaville general manager Cate Farmer. "It adds a new dimension and there is so much to do."

The lobby is a buzzy scene and a half, with people moving and mingling to upbeat music by Buffett, the Beach Boys and Bob Marley.

The 349 rooms and suites have been almost sold out since the resort opened six months ago, with guests flocking to Hollywood's latest sensations, such as:

- The surf-simulating FlowRider Double, as well as youngsters' activities, such as the Parakeet Kids' Club.
- The sophisticated JWB Prime Steak and Seafood Restaurant,



The Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort is part of Jimmy Buffett's colourful hospitality empire.
PHOTOS: EILEEN ESCARDA/MARGARITAVILLE HOLLYWOOD BEACH RESORT



The Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort has 349 rooms with deluxe coastal decor.

where big steaks and big wines rule.

- Live entertainment at several venues, including the LandShark Bar and Grill, which serves buckets of beer and 10 kinds of margaritas, along with crispy shrimp, burgers and key lime pie.

Deluxe decor: The spacious lobby has the look of a tropical island cottage, with whitewashed walls as backdrops to parrot murals, vintage surfboards and rustic pottery.

Amid fountains and potted palms, visitors chill on casual furniture made of rattan covered in linen and denim. Look up: hundreds of crystal margarita glasses dangle from a chandelier.

"We call it 'coastal luxe,'" said

private balcony is high up and yields a sweeping view of either the Atlantic or the Intracoastal.

An oasis of calm: The biggest surprise about Margaritaville is that it has options for a tranquil getaway.

The luxurious St. Somewhere Spa is a soothing sanctuary with 11 treatment rooms, plus Vichy showers, a mani-pedi salon with OPI products and an inner sanctum of steam and whirlpool baths.

Special après-sun services include the Coconut Body Bliss exfoliation, the Vitamin C Facial and the Aloe Quench hydrating treatment.

If you like your swimming pools peaceful, the spacious 11th-floor deck is a blessing, and reserved for guests aged 21 and over. You can bronze on circular sun beds and dip in the large, rectangular pool. The License to Chill Bar serves poolside lunches, washed down with Champagne or punchy drinks like Last Mango in Paris.

The neighbourhood: Margaritaville is already a community leader, having worked with the city to refurbish the Hollywood Bandshell for live performances.

And Margaritaville invites the public to taste its delights. On the Broadwalk, it operates Floridays Airstream Café, a food truck that dishes up fancy hotdogs and rum creamsicles. The oceanside

IF YOU GO

Margaritaville is 10 kilometres south of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and 12 kilometres south of Port Everglades, the second-largest cruise port in the world (after Miami).

Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort: 954-874-4444, margaritavillehollywoodbeachresort.com; 1111 N. Ocean Drive, Hollywood, Fla.

Price: Rates fluctuate daily and prices are approximate. Rooms start at US\$199 until Nov. 30. Resort fee of \$15 a day covers beach-cruiser bikes, live entertainment, two beach chairs/umbrella, three swimming pools, Wi-Fi, fitness centre, in-room coffee, local calls.

Extra: valet parking, \$35; self-parking, \$30; pool cabanas from \$100; FlowRider Double, \$25-\$45; Parakeet Kids' Club from \$50 for a half-day; fitness/yoga, \$12 at 8 a.m., Thurs.-Sun.; paddle boarding/kayaking from approximately \$35; access to St. Somewhere Spa baths: 954-874-4430, starting at \$25.

Hollywood information: 954-924-2980, visithollywoodfla.org; Fort Lauderdale: 800-22-SUN-NY/800-227-8669; sunny.org; Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com.

Lone Palm Beach Bar supplies beachcombers with fish tacos and frozen daiquiris.

Five O'Clock Somewhere, the hotel bar and grill on the Intracoastal Waterway, is a new stop for the Fort Lauderdale Water Taxi, as well as a launch site for paddle boarding and kayaking. This might be the best vantage point in town for sunsets and sangria.

Conclusion: With all the hoopla, I was worried Margaritaville would be too frenetic. But it's thoroughly enjoyable — even luxurious.

And after this, every other hotel will seem like ... well, just a hotel.

rochelle@rochellelash.com
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