

CHECKING IN

# RESORT CRAFTS VACATIONS WITH A LOT OF CLASS



ROCHELLE LASH

Posh and polished. Those were my first thoughts as I stepped into the lobby of the Naples Bay Resort in the pretty city of Naples, on Florida's Gulf of Mexico. It was instantly clear that this picturesque resort has that intangible quality: class.

Why talk about Naples Bay Resort during summer? For one thing, Canadians have a 30-per-cent discount before Oct. 31.

**The resort:** The Italianate lobby is a sweep of marble mosaics with sunny colours of terra cotta and saffron, vases of orchids and bronze-coloured wrought-iron trim. Large glass doors open on to sunny days and yachts bobbing in their slips at the marina.

It's personal, too. Chef concierge — yes, the hotel uses the French "chef" — Marilyn Soffer greeted me with ideas for Day One, à la Naples Bay: paddle boarding, a body-glow massage at The Spa and dinner at the resort's super-chic new restaurant, 1500 SOUTH. René Vandekatsey at the front desk suggested an afternoon at The Club's pools. And general manager John Reilly proposed a sunset cruise on Naples Bay aboard one of the hotel's fleet of watercraft.

Naples Bay Resort is two blocks from the folksy tourist village of Tin City, and the in-house shuttle ferries guests one to two kilometres to the shopping and dining districts of Fifth Avenue South and Third Street South, as well as to a beautiful stretch of Gulf Coast beach. (This part of the Gulf is pristine, free of bacteria, and checked regularly by the Florida Department of Health in Collier County.)

**Two sections:** Naples Bay Resort is built in two sections and both families and couples can customize their vacations at either the Naples Bay Hotel-Marina or The Club, which is a condo commu-

IF YOU GO

**Naples Bay Resort:** 866-605-1199, 239-530-1199, [naplesbayresort.com](http://naplesbayresort.com); 1500 Fifth Ave. S.

**Price:** Canadians have a 30-per-cent discount with a three-night minimum stay, if you stay before Oct. 31, not valid on U.S. holidays. One-bedroom suites with marina views start at approximately \$269 U.S. in Aug.-Sept. for two people, or about \$189 U.S. for Canadians. Hotel rooms, two-bedroom suites and condos also available. Resort fee, \$35 per day, includes beach setups, Wi-Fi, valet or self-parking, town/beach shuttle, four pools, hot tubs, local and 800- calls, daily newspaper, fitness centre, Har-Tru tennis courts, nature path. Extra: bicycles, paddle-boarding, kayaking, boat rentals, fishing gear, spa services, rollaway beds. Naples Bay partners with Golf Club of the Everglades, Fiddler's Creek Golf Course, Twin Eagles Golf Club and TPC Treviso Bay.

**Restaurant 1500 SOUTH:** 239-530-5105; cocktails and dinner from 5 p.m., Tues.-Sat.

**Paradise Coast Tourism:** (Naples, Marco Island, Everglades): 800-688-3600/ 800-2ESCAPE, [ParadiseCoast.com](http://ParadiseCoast.com).

nity. They're one block apart, linked by a nature trail through a landscaped park of banyan trees and hibiscus flowers. Both resort areas have distinctive characters and services, so guests at one can use the swimming pools and restaurants at the other, and if you don't feel like walking, the shuttle awaits.

The hotel section of Naples Bay



1500 SOUTH's chic new dining room is one of the hottest tables in town. NAPLES BAY RESORT

is a low-rise, Tuscan-inspired village of 87 luxurious accommodations — king hotel rooms and one- and two-bedroom suites with handsome, classic decor and balconies overlooking waterways and Naples Bay. The suites have full kitchens.

This private, intimate enclave is built around a 97-slip marina, as well as the chic new 1500 SOUTH dining spot and a swimming pool. A little promenade is home to a few well-chosen shops: the Ship's Store, a sunglass boutique and a beauty salon. That's pretty much all you need for morning-till-evening amusement.

But a short stroll down the road, The Club boosts the leisure factor sharply upward.

Here, the accommodations are larger, two- or three-bedroom condos, ideal havens for long-terms stays. They have six-night minimums and no housekeeping, but many guests, including several families from Montreal and Toronto, book into Naples Bay for months.

And why not? The courtyard of the condo complex is a lively hub of leisure with a full-service spa, four swimming pools (one for adults, one lap pool, one lazy river and one for kids), tennis courts and a fitness centre with Pilates and aerobic studios.

Servers trot around the swimming pools taking orders for food from the Blue Water Café. A summer menu offers shrimp salads, Tamiami tacos or Almost Famous burgers, perked up with vodka cocktails like the Good Morning Mary or the Gulf Breeze. The fun factor peaks at Happy Hour.

**Fabulous food:** The big dining-out news at Naples Bay is the opening of 1500 SOUTH, a super-chic restaurant with striking interiors of white leather and black ebony, plus patio dining facing the marina and a buzzy bar scene.

Art Smith, one of Bravo TV's favourite Top Chefs and the winner of two James Beard awards, is at the helm of 1500 SOUTH. Smith was Oprah Winfrey's

private chef and is part of the global U.S. Diplomatic Culinary Corps. Equally impressive, chef de cuisine Dagan Stocks is fresh from Jean-Georges Vongerichten's J & G Grill at the St. Regis Bal Harbour.

Here in Naples, the stylish 1500 SOUTH dishes up such Italian-American goodies as home-cured prosciutto, burrata cheese with hazelnuts, oxtail pasta, spicy porchetta and N.Y. strip steak. Florida seafood choices include red snapper and grouper, and Smith also showcases his native U.S. comfort food, such as fried green tomatoes and southern-fried chicken.

A morning of golf or boating requires a nourishing breakfast and a refreshing lunch. The Naples Bay Resort's new Catalina Café has a waterfront patio and a menu of smoothies and fresh juices, lox and bagels, pastries, egg dishes, club sandwiches, salads, plus creative fair-trade coffee drinks like the tiramisu latte.

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