



The swanky Conrad stands out for its nautical design. PHOTOS: CONRAD FORT LAUDERDALE BEACH

HOTEL INTEL

CONRAD FORT LAUDERDALE IS A NEW-AGE HILTON

From beach yoga at sunrise to CBD oil massages, it's not your grandfather's hotel



ROCHELLE LASH

Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach, a Hilton affiliate, marries one of the world's best-known hotel companies with an iconic vacation town known for the good life, Florida-style.

Hilton, arguably the first international hotel brand, fostered overseas travel during the 1950s and 1960s and evolved into a benchmark for executive comfort and a safe haven of American hospitality, whether you were in Peoria or Paris.

Fast-forward to 2022. Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach, architecturally big and bold, is not your grandfather's Hilton. It offers beach yoga at sunrise; tacos and falafel at the Spinnaker pool bar; boogie-boarding for juniors; sushi and sake at Takato and massages with CBD oil (a cannabis derivative) at the Conrad Spa. The resort recently added travel essentials for infants, including Pack 'n Play cribs, sound machines, baby monitors and bath products.

Nautical inspiration: The swanky Conrad stands out for its nautical design, which recalls a grand ocean liner. It has a distinctive curved facade that faces the Atlantic shore and large port-hole-style windows in every suite. It's modern grandeur with open spaces, wide corridors and a spacious lobby with curved accents.

The design show-stopper is the

sixth-floor Sky Deck, with an oval pool, a sun terrace, a garden area and Spinnaker and an outdoor bar and grill, all overlooking Fort Lauderdale's busy beach and oceanfront promenade.

A leader in Fort Lauderdale's surge to upscale living in the 2000s, Conrad Fort Lauderdale is surrounded by marine life. Across the street from the Atlantic Ocean, it is about one kilometre from the town's Intracoastal Waterway, which links hundreds of kilometres of canals, making Fort Lauderdale one of North America's great yachting centres. Port Everglades, three kilometres south of the Conrad, is the third largest cruise ship port in the world. Gigantic oceangoing vessels pass slowly in the distance, almost mystical entities, visible from the resort.

The suites: Conrad (owned by the Heafey Group of Gatineau) is an all-suite resort hotel, built with luxury in mind. Suites come in several configurations and they all have balconies, generously sized bedrooms and living spaces, and fancy galley kitchens with Sub-Zero and Wolf appliances and Lavazza coffee machines. There is lots of room because the dining space for each suite is on the private balcony, protected from the elements and serenaded by the constant swoosh of the ocean. The bathrooms are supersized, too, with double vanities, soaking tubs, glass showers, fine fixtures by Waterworks and Kohler and toiletries such as Shanghai Tang or a men's line called The Refinery.

Dining (hours vary): Takato has seduced Fort Lauderdale with an exciting fusion of Japanese and

IF YOU GO

Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach: 954-414-5100, conradfortlauderdale.com or 888-728-3029, hilton.com; 551 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd. Hilton Honors program valid at 18 brands including Waldorf Astoria, LXR, Hilton Garden Inn, Hilton Homewood Suites, Canopy and Curio Collection. Accessible rooms available.

Price: Prices fluctuate. Weekends and holidays are higher. All units have kitchens. Junior suites and studios from US\$650 with a two-night stay and Hilton Honours membership; one-bedroom suites from \$680. Poolside duplexes, two- and three-bedroom and penthouse suites also available. Extra: resort fee, \$40 per day. Includes bathrobes, business and fitness centres, bottled water, beach setups, sunrise yoga, bicycles, 20-per-cent off at Conrad spa. Valet parking, \$46 overnight; \$10 for dining or spa visits.

Fort Lauderdale tourism: 954-765-4466, visitlauderdale.com or sunny.org; Florida: 888-735-2872, visitflorida.com.

Korean cuisine and the oceanfront terrace is packed for lunch, dinner and happy hour. The spotlight is on sushi, plus shrimp tempura, spicy chicken, Wagyu steaks or rib-kimchee tacos, complemented by vegan wines, sake and cocktails.

Atlas, the hotel's lounge, serves après-sun suppers of roast chicken, charred octopus, burgers and flatbread. Atlas's bartenders do wild mixes of top-shelf tequila, mescal, gin and vodka; a glass of Veuve Clicquot champagne is a relatively affordable US\$22.

At the Spinnaker Pool Grill, the seafood salad, the chipotle beef taco and the burger are best-sellers, along with a banana split drink made with rum and chocolate. If the kids are hankering for sandwiches, pizza and brownies.

What to do: GO H2O is Conrad's day camp for kids and teens, with water and land activities such as snorkelling, marine treasure hunts, tie-dye or jewelry crafts or beach soccer (ages 4 to 17, all-day, including lunch; funkyfishoceancamp.com, \$89 p.p.)

Guests also gather at the beach for sunrise yoga sessions or cruise along Fort Lauderdale's oceanfront promenade with the resort's fleet of new bicycles.

The Conrad Spa is a top draw. The Ocean Enchantment treatment combines care for face and body with orange blossom essence.

The Sea Spa Escape uses seaweed-based products to exfoliate and massage and the Hydrafacial is an intense rejuvenator based on exclusive serums.



Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach is architecturally big and bold.

Beachcombing through time never gets tiresome

London's history floats in on the tides, with treasures discovered on the Thames

RICK STEVES

I've spent more time in London than in any other European city. Its people, its traditions and its history keep drawing me back.

In England, history means museums, churches and castles. But my favourite ways to learn history don't always require entry through a turnstile. Strolling with a good local guide is like beachcombing. I pick up obscure shards of a neighbourhood's distant past, unlocking unexpected stories. On a bright, brisk January morning, I join David Tucker, who runs a tour company called London Walks. Walking through London with him epitomizes the metaphor of urban beachcombing ... followed by literal beachcombing, as well.

From London Bridge, Tucker points downriver past the Tower of London and says, "During the Second World War, Nazi bombers used the Thames as a guide on their nightly raids. When moonlit, they called it a 'silver ribbon of tin foil.' It led from the English Channel right to our mighty dockyards. Even with all the city lights carefully blacked out, those bombers easily found their targets. Neighbourhoods on both banks of the river went up in flames. After the war, the business district on the North Bank was rebuilt, but the South Bank ... it was long neglected."

Turning his back to St. Paul's Cathedral, Tucker points to a vast complex of new buildings showing off the restored, trendy South Bank, and continues, "Only recently has the bombed-out South Bank been properly rebuilt. There's a real buzz in London about our South Bank."

Then, saying, "The tide is low only for a couple hours a day ... and this is perfect," he surprises me by climbing down the embankment's slippery-with-seaweed steps to a pebbly beach. Exploring the pebbly beach takes you away from the urban bustle and into a calm and peaceful environment.

Most don't realize the Thames is a tidal river. With each tide going out and coming back, the Thames replenishes beaches

like these with historic wonders. In Victorian times (and even before), scavengers would "mud-lark," as this muddy treasure hunt was called, for anything they could sell. Today, mudlarking is a pastime for beachcombers who see the Thames as an ever-changing archeological site, with little treasures dating as far back as ancient Roman times awaiting discovery.

It's low tide, and the beach is literally littered with history. Picking up a chunky piece of 500-year-old roof tile worn oval by the centuries, Tucker explains that these red clay tiles were heavy, requiring large timbers for support. In the 16th century, when large timbers were required for shipbuilding, lighter slate tiles became the preferred roofing material. Over time, the heavy, red-clay tiles migrated from the rooftops to the riverbank ... and into the pockets of beachcombers like us.

Like kids on a scavenger hunt, we study the pebbles. Tucker picks up a chalky white tube. It's the fragile stem of an 18th-century clay pipe. Back then, tobacco was sold with disposable one-use pipes, so used pipes were routinely tossed into the river.

Climbing back to street level, Tucker continues our walk as if our beachcombing were just a warm-up, and we prowl through the fascinating relics of the South Bank neighbourhood that survived both German bombs and urban renewal. Scaling steep stairs into the attic of St. Thomas's Church, we visit the Operating Theatre Museum, a crude surgical theatre where amputations were performed in the early 1800s, as medical students watched and learned.

A typical day in London can be spent at the Tower of London or Westminster Abbey. But it can also be spent sifting through the tides of history.

This article was adapted from Rick's new book, For the Love of Europe. Rick Steves (ricksteves.com) writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows and organizes European tours. You can email Rick at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.



Beachcombing on the banks of the River Thames near London's Waterloo Bridge is an eye-opening and mesmerizing journey through history, a history that keeps bringing travel writer Rick Steves back. RICK STEVES