

HOTEL INTEL

# ADULTS ONLY AT MIAMI BEACH ART DECO MAINSTAY



ROCHELLE LASH

The National Hotel Miami Beach, one of the finest art deco treasures along a famed Atlantic oceanfront strip, recently wrapped up renovations to its guest rooms and has adopted an adults-only policy.

This is Florida's Gold Coast, a vacation area that sparkles with celebrities and nightlife, swimming pools and brilliant sunlight. The first Miami Grand Prix zoomed through the Hard Rock Stadium last weekend, making Miami the only super-sports host city of the MLB, NFL, NBA, MLS, NASCAR and F1. Grand Prix fans and party people visited from throughout the U.S., Europe, the Middle East, Canada and South America, and the VIP roster included Tom Brady, James Corden, Ashton Kutcher, Michael Jordan, Serena Williams and David Beckham.

The National was ready for the spotlight, radiant after major updates to its elegant 1939 origins. It is famed for its architecture, remarkable objets d'art and outstanding Spanish-inspired gastronomy.

The National even improves on Florida's quintessential attractions: sun, surf and sand. One of its two swimming pools is the longest bathing beauty along Miami Beach, with guests serenaded by parrots and surrounded by a tropical habitat of lavish palms. The hotel also backs onto a particularly wide and beautiful stretch of Atlantic oceanfront, a South Beach paradise that has captivated visitors for more than 100 years. And running alongside the shore is the Miami Beach Boardwalk, a delight for strolling, cycling and people-watching.

**Age limit:** Perhaps the National's most significant change is that it has become an adults-only resort, open to guests 21 and up. I confess I didn't miss the shrieks of Marco Polo in the pool or spring break revelry at the bar. Should I feel guilty?



The National Hotel Miami Beach's attractions include two swimming pools. One of the pools is the longest bathing beauty along Miami Beach. PHOTOS: NATIONAL HOTEL MIAMI BEACH



The recently redesigned rooms and suites at the National Hotel Miami Beach maintain a vintage spirit with art deco accents.

"We do love children, but they often play by their own rules," said National general manager Yaser Mohamad, "and many grown-ups value peaceful swimming pools, hammocks swaying in the garden and a sophisticated drinks and dining scene."

But the National isn't without life. If there is a bachelorette or stag party, for example, one of the pools turns into the scene of a cocktail party.

**Food and beverage:** Executive chef and Barcelona native Sergio Chamizo brings Spanish authenticity to Mareva 1939, a lovely,

leafy restaurant that is often jazzed up with live music.

Signature dinner dishes are black paella with scallops and shrimp, Cantabrian anchovies, duck breast and braised short ribs. Not-to-be-missed delicacies include roasted bone marrow, octopus in potato cream, grilled chorizo and Iberian ham.

I only succumb to dessert if it's a rare treat, and Chamizo makes the splurge worthwhile with a feathery manchego cheese flan and also a caramelized brioche, richly laced with coconut ice cream and guava.

Sunday brunch is an unbeatable buffet featuring many of Mareva 1939's specialties, plus egg dishes, oysters, sushi, a carving table and, for \$35, unlimited passion fruit mimosas or bloody marys.

Guests can munch, lunch and drink at the poolside Aqua Bar, where best bets are the red snapper sandwich, Florida seafood ceviche and chilled salads with cashews and shrimp, fuelled by cocktails like the tequila-based Spicy Senorita.

**Art deco:** The National's lobby, Bar 1939 and Martini Room are visions of 20th-century antique style. The hotel's owner, Delphine Dray, hails from Paris, where her family amassed one of the world's largest art deco collections. They sold it for US\$75 million to buy the hospitality masterwork, notable for its silvery dome, symmetrical facade and exterior carved details. One of the stars of the historic South Beach area, it will be in the spotlight during the 46th annual Art Deco Weekend next January.

Exploring the interiors is a sensuous experience. At Bar 1939, I stroked luxurious suede club chairs and spiralling copper cobras, and toyed with slinky

IF YOU GO

NATIONAL HOTEL MIAMI BEACH

**305-532-2311, nationalhotel.com; 1677 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, Fla. Pets, US\$150 per stay. Accessible.**

**Price:** Historic Tower, city view, from US\$415 (ocean view available); Cabana poolside rooms from US\$505. Resort fee of US\$38. Includes two heated swimming pools, beach chairs/towels (umbrellas are extra), Nespresso, bottled water, digital newspaper, guest computers, fitness area, yoga classes (with reservation), cruiser bikes, daily housekeeping. Direct booking includes welcome drinks, beach umbrella, 1 p.m. checkout (on availability). App offers remote check-in, upgrade discounts. Extra: pool cabanas, massages. Valet parking, US\$40 per night.

**Food and drink:** Mareva 1939 restaurant (age 14 and up), mareva1939.com; breakfast, dinner daily, Sunday brunch noon to 4 p.m., from US\$70. Aqua Bar: lunch daily until 6 p.m. In-room dining daily.

**Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau:** 305-539-3000, miamiantbeaches.com.

beaded curtains. Gold leaf accents and chrome trim add a lustrous sheen.

The National closed for nearly a year to redo the 116 rooms and suites in the Historic Tower and 36 Cabana units. The new decor maintains the vintage spirit, with lacquered ebony furniture, terrazzo floors and curvy lamps with silken tassels.

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# A MODERN PILGRIMAGE

The 724-kilometre Camino de Santiago offers a chance for reflection and rejuvenation, **Rick Steves** writes.

For over a thousand years, the cathedral towering over the main square of Santiago de Compostela in the far northwest corner of Spain has been the ritualistic last stop for pilgrims who've hiked here from churches in Paris and all over Europe. And for a thousand years, pilgrims — standing before this towering cathedral — have been overcome with joy and jubilation.

Walking the Way of St. James has changed little over the centuries. The gear still includes a cloak, a floppy hat, a walking stick, a gourd (for drinking from wells), and a scallop shell (symbolizing where you're going).

In recent years, the route has enjoyed a huge renaissance of interest, attracting more than 300,000 pilgrims annually. These days, most take a month to walk the 724 kilometres from the French border town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. The walk itself is a kind of hut-hopping. At regular intervals along the route, humble government-subsidized hostels called albergues provide pilgrims a place to rest for the night (bunks are generally free, though a small donation is requested).

In the midst of the Camino, out on a dusty trail pilgrims have trod for a thousand years, I meet pilgrims of all types. Prepackaged groups have clean, matching T-shirts. Each hiker is issued

a mass-produced walking stick with a decorative gourd tied to the top and the requisite dangling scallop shell with a brightly painted cross of St. James.

Other pilgrims are part of humbler, ragtag church groups from distant Catholic lands. Resting on a bluff, I'm passed by an otherworldly group that has shuffled all the way from Lithuania to the rhythm of its raspy, amplified chant-leader. Along with their rucksacks, the group carries an old boom box, various statues, and a 10-foot-tall cross. With their intentionally monotonous chant, they trudge slowly out of sight and then out of earshot.

Later, I stop in a medieval village — like so many ghostly quiet villages that pilgrims pass all along the route. Its only "shop" is a vending machine cut into a stone wall. An old woman scrubs her laundry, bent over a convenient creekside spot as her ancestors have for centuries. She ignores a shepherd herding his gangly flock over a narrow bridge.

In this idyllic corner, pilgrims are eager to share their experiences. I met a bouncy flower child from Berlin — a 20-year-old woman hiking alone, singing to herself, and radiant with appreciation for this personal journey. She speaks to me as if she were a real saint come to Earth. Talking with her, I feel



The Camino de Santiago ends at this cathedral, which holds the tomb of St. James. For centuries, many believers have walked the route in search of healing or forgiveness. CAMERON HEWITT

I've entered a Botticelli painting (and don't want to leave).

An Englishman I meet is doing the trail in three successive years because he can't get enough time away from his 9-to-5 job to do it in one 30-day stretch. While he walks, he reflects on simplicity. Nearly everyone I meet is having a richly rewarding time. I keep thinking how a standard RV vacation — with its clever abundance of comforts — couldn't be more different than this chance to be away from the modern world with all that it entails.

Because the last overnight stop on the Camino is just two miles away from the city of Santiago, most pilgrims arrive at the cathedral late in the morning, in time for the midday mass.

Like a kid follows a parade, I follow the pilgrims as they approach the cathedral. I try to imagine the mindset of a medi-

eval pilgrim, so exhausted yet so triumphant. You've just walked from Paris — about a thousand miles — to reach this holy spot. Your goal: to request the help of St. James in recovering from an illness. Or maybe you've come to honour the wish of a dying relative ... or to be forgiven for your sins. Whatever the reason, you know the pope promised that any person who walked to Santiago in a holy year, confessed their sins, and took communion here would be forgiven.

After weeks of hiking, the spires of the cathedral come into view and jubilation quickens your tired pace. Finally, you stand upon that shell in the pavement to gaze up at the awe-inspiring cathedral. Stepping inside, you squint down the nave and see the statue of St. James that marks his tomb.

Kneeling at the silver tomb,

you pray and make your request. Then you climb the stairs behind the altar up to the saint's much-venerated statue — gilded and caked with precious gems. Embracing him from behind while gazing thankfully out over the cathedral, you have completed the Camino de Santiago.

Whether you hike the entire route or just the last stretch, it's an experience that will stay with you forever. And, if you need an excuse to be thankful, consider that — unlike your medieval counterpart — you don't need to hike back to Paris.

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