

# Miami Herald

## HOTELS PUT THE 'STAY' IN STAYCATION

**L**ocals looking to splurge on a getaway near home this summer have some difficult questions to ponder when choosing among the region's newest hotels.

Should there be an ice skating rink and bowling alley downstairs? Does the restaurant need to be linked to a celebrity chef? Should the beach be a short walk or a quick shuttle ride away? Are yoga classes offered inside or on the roof — or both? Is there a food truck on site?

And — seriously — does the toilet need to be equipped with a remote control and mood lighting?

With these details and more, here's our guide to some of the most noteworthy new arrivals on the hospitality scene in Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe counties.



**WALK OF BEACH** Beachwalk Resort in Hollywood Beach opened in May with 452 rooms.

David Edward Nelson (the former mayor of the town) founded the hotel, which has several amenities including Woody Allen and Tom Cruise for the only Florida property to feature in the exclusive John F. Kennedy airport. There's also a high-end theater including original art throughout, business machines in the rooms, and a private beach and tennis courts. The hotel also has a spa, gym, 24-hour fitness center, and a private beach.

Beachwalk Resort in Hollywood Beach is a pretty strong place. During a recent visit, a hotel was offering a beach chair across the street from the hotel, and a parking spot on site on a sunny day. The neighborhood is a nice walk away and the hotel has arrangements for everything from Landrover

to a good spa, excellent service, excellent dining and guestroom. The grand opening was last summer.

**Shopping sprees** Lots of options are packed into a small space, including yoga classes in the spa or on the rooftop deck and a shopping off the lobby. Shuttle service is available to Miami International Airport. Casual attire. The hotel's location is great, but it's a little far from South Beach where guests have to take a cab to the beach.

**Best for** Couples or friends who want to explore the burgeoning Mid-Beach neighborhood — or don't mind a short drive to South Beach. Details: 1701 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, [www.beachwalk.com](http://www.beachwalk.com), 305-955-3400. Mid-August

### BROWARD

**Beachwalk Resort** What's new: The 452-room resort opened in May with 452 single bedrooms, individual rooms that can be joined to create 24 two-bedroom suites. Guests have a small restaurant, fitness center and pool on site, and an electric buggy shuttle to the airport and the International Waterway

**Beach Resort**

**What's new:** The entire Watson property is now opened to December on land formerly occupied by a water park. The location is in the historic airport area, where dining halls and bars have been replaced by upscale dining, bar lounges and outdoor restaurants. The location also is filled in, with Greek-style architecture and walk to local shops.

**Bragging rights:** The location near the beach from the beach is hard to beat for walking to from Key West nightlife, or walking out for a bike ride or a stroll trip in the morning. It's the best beach view hotel in the Keys in the last 20 years. Every room has a private balcony and are stocked with local products from Key West like collection of foods by local authors and locally distilled rum.

**Can't forget:** The heart of the Keys is not for everyone, particularly people who are uncomfortable with unconventional behavior or appearance. The bar across the street has live music every day as if you're walking a secluded tropical island. You may not be your place.

**Best for:** Guests who want a taste of the old hotel in the heart of the historic district.

**Details:** 201 William St., Key West. Reservations: [www.watsonkeywest.com](http://www.watsonkeywest.com) (305-292-8282). Rates start at \$229 a night, a "last minute luxury" special offers 2 percent off week-end and 20 percent off weekdays for bookings within a two-week window.

• **The Gates Hotel**  
**What's new:** A former chain hotel near the spot where U.S. 1 enters Key West has been transformed into a "boutique hotel." It's got 100 rooms now and another 145 on the way when they finish transforming a second building on the property.  
**Bragging rights:** Comfortably chic, it's the South Florida version of mid-century modern with a bleached-wood, classy-beach-house aesthetic. An

on-property food truck, the Blind Pig, serves tasty snacks for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There's on-site parking and bikes to take downtown, as well as daily bike tours of the island at sunrise and sunset. It's a long-ish walk but a short bike ride to Smathers Beach on the island's Atlantic coast.

**Caveat emptor:** Being at the "entrance" to the island means it's as far as you can get from the heart of Old Town and still be in Key West. And while many rooms have water views, that view is across busy five-lane North Roosevelt Boulevard — also known as U.S. 1.

**Best for:** Guests who want an up-to-date hotel with modern amenities but don't mind a drive or taxi ride back from downtown. A shuttle is planned once the rest of the resort is complete.

**Details:** 3824 North Roosevelt Blvd., Key West; [gateshotelkeywest.com](http://gateshotelkeywest.com); 305-320-0930. Rooms start at \$200 a night; Florida residents get 15 percent off.

• **Keys Beach Resort & Spa Club**  
**What's new:** A historic Middle Key resort has been re-made as a 22-room hotel. Club Deck hotel with a brand new marine and restaurant on Florida Key.  
**Bragging rights:** The original beach resort from Florida

Key is hard to beat. The new marine bar looking for boats up to 20 feet and onboard your boat and enjoy the most amazing. They'll even come on board for you at the dock. In the hotel, the lobby's historic Cuban coffee machines, games and other events. It's a great way to be caught off-guard after a late check-in or a long day on the water.

**Can't forget:** In the Watson location, if you're not in your own boat, you'll need your car to get around everywhere — and Watson has a great way to get out to the island and experience more options of Key West in Islamorada.

**Best for:** Families (it's pet-friendly) and those who want to be out on the water. A variety of water sports are available on property and a pair of rental powerboats will soon be added to the fleet.

**Details:** 206 Overseas Highway, Islamorada. [www.keysbeachresort.com](http://www.keysbeachresort.com); 305-862-2266. Rooms start at \$29 for weekdays and \$39 on weekends. Bookings of two or more nights between Sept. 1 and Nov. 2 are 20 percent off, excluding Oct. 29-31, a former Key Beach.

**What's new:** In the heart of Key West, this is a former chain hotel taken down to the studs and re-made as an upscale resort. It's got 80 rooms, including oceanfront suites. The new

look both the beach front on a four-acre site. The old restaurant, which was an outdoor restaurant, has been replaced with a new one (called for "renewal").

**Bragging rights:** The oceanfront location is the in Islamorada — really beach, palm trees, blue green ocean and the village of Key's lighthouses visible offshore, which makes the view a really great one. It's also the perfect location for bringing on the beach, and with the on-site bar and restaurant, there's no need to get on the highway for a few more.

**Can't forget:** In the Overseas area, almost any explanation involves getting on the highway (the hotel does offer a shuttle for the location, within three miles). Islamorada has recently been adding to its area of new restaurants and galleries — but it's not South Beach. It's more Key West.

**Best for:** People seeking the classic Islamorada beach experience with an updated look. A few places to relax after a day of fishing for fish on the water — it's being out on the beach while waiting for your favorite fisherman to arrive.

**Details:** 8000 Overseas Highway, Islamorada. [www.oceanfront.com](http://www.oceanfront.com); 305-868-0077. Rooms start at \$165 a night.