

TERMINAL BLISS: FORT LAUDERDALE

A laudable seaside lifestyle and the world's second-largest cruise

port are just two reasons why Fort Lauderdale expects the number of travelers passing through its airport to double by 2020. Happily, this inviting and modern facility—with Florida written all over it—is up to the task. | **By Denise Reynolds**

ARRIVE AT THE FORT Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport (FLL) and you won't have to wait a New York minute to experience the sights and sounds that spell Florida. Flickering plasma screens above the baggage carousel display video from nearby coral reefs. Magnificent shots of wildlife from the Everglades add their welcome. What's that sound? Calypso music announcing the



arrival of your baggage at the new billion-dollar terminal complex, home to the only U.S. airport where passenger traffic has continued to grow every year since the turn of the millennium.

Once an abandoned nine-hole golf course, the land that FLL sits on was purchased in 1929 for \$1,200. During WWII, the original airport, consisting of two shell-rock runways, was acquired by the Navy and used to train torpedo bomber crews. Former President George H. Bush was stationed here at age 19, one of the Navy's youngest pilots.

Today, FLL's reputation as the "easy come, easy go" airport is well-deserved. Departing passengers park their cars in one of the covered garages and cross a skywalk to their terminals, where they are no more than a five-minute walk from their gates. Arriving passengers claim their bags in the same concourse, just a short stroll from their arrival gates. Cruise passengers can be sipping their first shipboard cocktail within an hour of landing at FLL. The connection between FLL and Port Everglades—the world's second-largest cruise port—is a key reason the airport expects to double its annual traffic to 30 million passengers by 2020.

That's Entertainment / These days, we're spending more time waiting in airports than ever before, due to increased security measures. It's a good thing, ►

Expansive terminals feature vibrant works of art and branches of downtown dining spots.

then, that FLL holds our interest with everything from aquariums stocked with indigenous fish to an art collection valued at nearly \$7 million. Terminal 1 is home to six aquariums that mirror local ecosystems, including a mangrove swamp and a coral reef setting. Above, a wavelike series of high-tech monitors showcases South Florida attractions with stunning video footage undulating along the succession of screens.

Artwork runs the gamut from traditional media of bronze, oils, and tapestry to contemporary pieces fashioned from glass, fiber optics, and neon. Terrazzo is Caroline Braaksmá's medium of choice for artistic flooring in Terminal 1. Here, you'll view snakes, lobsters, and a giant gator tail, while a symphony of Everglades sounds and towering palms surround you.

Even the parking garages get into the act: Jody Pinto's million-dollar fiberglass light cylinders take their colors from the Florida landscape and cleverly correspond to the color coding of FLL's terminals. Get a bird's-eye view of the cruise ships and the city's skyline from the Hibiscus Garage. Just ride the yellow cylinder elevator to the top.

Back inside, pick up current movie releases on DVD from Inmotion Pictures (www.inmotionpictures.com) in Terminal 2; return them at a time and airport of your choosing. Passengers in other terminals can phone the kiosk at 954-359-0118 and have movies—and a DVD player, if desired—delivered to their gates.

Going Shopping / In Terminal 3 you can shop vicariously, admiring window displays in a re-creation of storefront façades along famed Las Olas and Hollywood boulevards, beneath picture-perfect clouds floating in the tromp l'oeil blue sky. Golfing enthusiasts will appreciate the PGA Tour Shop in Terminal 3; load up on gear on your way to any of 53 area golf courses. Making a lasting impression on your local hostess is as easy as Terminals 1, 2, 3, in which you'll find a profusion of colorful fresh flowers available from the carts of Everlasting Bouquet Co.

Scattered among the terminals are gift shops where you can pick up a Florida Marlins baseball cap, Seminole Indian jewelry, or a bag of piña colada licorice to tide you over until you get your hands on the real thing. Duty-free shopping is on the upper level of Terminal 4.

Dining / Airport food offerings are themed by terminal, representing attractions that draw snowbirds here every winter. In Terminal 1, there's a replica of the white seawall that lines the beachfront promenade, along with Cruzan Islands, which serves up tropical libations with food from Cheeburger Cheeburger and Pizzeria UNO. Spinaci's Fine Food, founded by one of the city's most beloved Italian restaurateurs, is here, too.



Once outside, a 10-minute bus ride takes you to Tri-Rail trains bound for Miami.

Fort Lauderdale has more miles of navigable waterways than Venice, and in a nod to her sister city, Italian specialties can be found in Terminal 2 at Gran Forno, an offshoot of the award-winning Las Olas bakery.

Terminal 4's Boat House Dockside Bar boasts nautical maps of the Florida Straits, and a replica of an 882-pound blue marlin presides over the polished wood bar.

United's operations are in Terminal 3, which offers Chili's ToGo and a full-service Chili's Too, with a view of the runway comings and goings along a wall of windows, ideal for plane-spotters.

For seafood on the beach, head to the elegant 3030 Ocean (\$10 by cab, www.3030ocean.com) overlooking the Atlantic. Across the street, steaks are sizzling at Shula's on the Beach (www.donshula.com), serving patrons three meals a day on an outdoor patio or within memento-lined walls paying tribute to Shula's 1972 "Perfect Season" team.

Getting Down to Business / Each terminal has a business center supplying stamps, a mail drop, travel insurance, and phone cards. A staffed center is located on the upper level of Terminal 2 providing photocopies, faxes, traveler's checks, currency exchange, and Western Union services. FedEx and ATMs are located in the centers at Terminals 1 and 3.

Wireless Internet service is available in all gates and ticketing areas. Currently, connections are free and accessible to anyone with a wireless card.

Getting Grounded / At ground transportation areas outside each terminal's baggage claim, you'll find transportation options to please every pocketbook. Shared rides to beach hotels run \$8, a metered taxi is around \$10, and a private car costs \$30. Individual rental car shuttles also pick up here. Within the year, rental car services will move to a new consolidated facility, fed by a single fleet of

shuttle vehicles. Keep the Tri-Rail trains in mind. It's a 10-minute bus ride to the airport train station for comfortable service south to Miami (and its airport) and north to Palm Beach County. Tickets cost \$2–\$5.50 for the hourly departures (www.tri-rail.com).

Getting Gone / If you have a few hours, sample some South Florida attractions, all a short cab ride away. Fishing enthusiasts will find plenty to brag about at the IGFA Fishing Hall of Fame & Museum (www.igfa.org) adjacent to the 160,000-square-foot Bass Pro Shop (www.basspro.com). Stroll Las Olas Boulevard, sip cappuccino at a sidewalk café, or shop chic boutiques and galleries.

Work out at Pier 66's fitness center (\$20 day rate includes spa facilities), drool over megayachts docked at the marina, or take a spin at the revolving Pier Top lounge, which offers a panoramic view of the city's beaches, waterways, and cruise ships, along with drinks and live music in the evenings (www.pier66.com). Or take a water taxi from the dock and view palatial estates along Millionaire's Row (\$5, www.watertaxi.com).

Indulge in a beachfront massage at Marriott's Harbor Beach Resort & Spa (\$250, www.marriottharborbeach.com). Day room rates start around \$99. Or discover the \$800 million Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa on Hollywood Beach (www.diplomatresort.com).

Special Attention / A meditation room is tucked away in the upper level of Terminal 3, beside the escalators.

Details, Details, Details / FLL Tel: 954-359-1200 or www.fll.net **The Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau** Tel: 954-765-4466 or www.sunny.org /END/ **Denise Reynolds** is a Fort Lauderdale-based travel writer who specializes in food and wine, luxury travel, and spas. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it.