

# The Miami Herald

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## TRAVELWISE

# New hotels: earthy to ultra-luxe

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This year's crop of new and improved hotels in South Florida runs the spectrum from eco- and budget-friendly to extravagantly splurge-worthy. Chic boutiques, family-friendly chains and intimate hideaways all beckon to tourists — or locals seeking a quick backyard escape.

Most of the offerings have given new life to historic buildings, includ-

ing Hotel Breakwater, Dream South Beach, Surfcomber and Shelborne. Just three significant hotels were built brand new from the ground up: a Brickell-area Hampton Inn & Suites, Element Miami International Airport and St. Regis Bal Harbour.

The last two hotels are both part of global hospitality company Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

• TURN TO TRAVELWISE, 8J

## New hotels range from earthy to ultra-luxe



AL DIAZ/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**WHAT'S NEW:** Clockwise from above are the Hampton Inn near Brickell; hotelier Vikram Chatwal at his Dream South Beach; the Grand Hall of the St. Regis Bal Harbour; and the 209-suite Element near Miami International Airport.

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They couldn't be more different — Element's guest room floors are made of recycled tires; some floors at St. Regis are made of marble quarried in China for the resort. But the opening of both earlier this year show the continued appeal of the area, for hotel companies and visitors both.

"They're not betting on Miami," said Rolando Aedo, chief marketing officer for the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau. "They're investing in Miami because we're a good investment."

South Florida markets continue to thrive. Occupancy and rates were both up in March of this year compared to 2011. But while prices continue to inch up, there's no better time than summer to get the best deals.

## MIAMI-DADE

• **Dream South Beach**

**What's new:** Everything but historic details (including floors) inside the former Tudor Hotel and Palmer House. Not even the elegant elevators, done up in mother of pearl and black glass, escaped attention. While the hotel partially opened in summer of 2010, it wasn't finished until last July. The 108 rooms are highly designed, with Ann Sacks tile, custom furniture and touches such as gold glass-beaded wall coverings. Restaurateur Geoffrey Zakarian's Tudor House earns raves. Still

to come: A spa with two treatment rooms opens this month.

**Bragging rights:** The Sun House, a 900-square-foot suite with a lavish bedroom, living room, two 65-inch TVs and enormous bathroom, boasts an even larger outdoor deck on the roof (with easy access to the rooftop pool). Starting price: \$2,995 a night.

**Caveat emptor:** Privacy buffs beware. Bathroom areas are enclosed with glass, and while privacy doors with cutouts provide a screen, there's still potential to get an eyeful. While meticulously designed, the smallest rooms are tiny.

**Best for:** Couples, design aficionados.

**Details:** 1111 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-673-4747; [www.dreamsouthbeach.com](http://www.dreamsouthbeach.com).

**Rates and deals:** Summer weekdays start at \$199. A romance package including continental breakfast for two, champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries starts at \$249. Miami-Dade residents get 20 percent off; Florida residents get a 15 percent discount if they book by phone directly with the hotel.

• **Element Miami International Airport**

**What's new:** The entire 209-suite building, which opened in February. It's the tenth Element to open so far.

**Bragging rights:** Suites are roomy and built with the environment in mind: floors made of recycled tires, big

windows that let in natural light, wallpaper made of recycled material. Most rooms have a full kitchen with stove, refrigerator and dishwasher; others have a modified kitchenette with microwave, toaster, sink and mini-fridge. Wi-Fi, breakfast and a Monday through Thursday evening reception with food and drinks are complimentary; there's also a do-it-yourself gourmet coffee machine in the lobby. The hotel, set on a lake, offers a pool and barbecue area; the parking lot dedicates premium parking spots to fuel-efficient and low-emitting vehicles.

**Caveat emptor:** The hotel is very close to Miami International Airport — but not to some of the area's most popular tourist destinations. A free shuttle is provided to and from the airport and to restaurants or shopping in a 3-mile radius. Travelers will need a car or money for the cab if they want to hit South Beach.

**Best for:** Families; cruise passengers who need an overnight stay; anyone who doesn't mind sacrificing proximity to touristy areas in exchange for reasonable rates; eco-conscious travelers.

**Details:** 3525 NW 25th St., Miami, 305-636-1600, [www.elementmiamiairport.com](http://www.elementmiamiairport.com).

**Rates and deals:** Starting around \$109 on weekends and \$129 on weekdays during summer; Florida residents save up to 20 percent off best available rates.



# The Miami Herald

• **Hampton Inn & Suites  
Miami Brickell/  
Downtown**

**What's new:** The entire 15-story property, just two blocks from Mary Brickell Village and a half block from the Metromover.

**Bragging rights:** Open since September, the 221-room hotel has already climbed to the No. 1 spot on TripAdvisor.com's list of 129 Miami hotels. Art is abundant, from the video installation in the lobby to the South Florida scenes wall-papered at guest-floor elevator landings. A unique feature for a Hampton Inn, the spacious bar extends to the pool area.

**Caveat emptor:** While competitive with other downtown hotels, the property fetches high rates.

**Best for:** Families on vacation, cruise passengers, business travelers.

**Details:** 50 SW 12th St., Miami, 305-377-9400, [www.hamptoninnmiamibrickell.com](http://www.hamptoninnmiamibrickell.com).

**Rates and deals:** Starting at \$159 in summer; Florida residents get 12 percent off the best available rate and 50 percent off the cost of parking through the end of the year.

• **Hotel Breakwater**

**What's new:** Just about everything at the historic 100-room hotel, made up of two old Art Deco buildings, has been rebuilt. Rooms are simple and chic, with pops of navy and lime. Vintage-feeling (but modern) black and white photography

throughout the property tells the story of a glamorous couple traveling to the hotel and enjoying their stay. The property opened last June, but some of the biggest additions — such as the pool and restaurants — weren't in place until earlier this year.

**Bragging rights:** A 40-foot-long see-through plunge pool is elevated between the two buildings, giving passersby on Ocean Drive a peek under the water. The hotel offers free Wi-Fi, bikes, and short-term iPad use — rare perks for South Beach. Rooftop lounges offer fantastic views of the ocean.

**Caveat emptor:** There are two restaurants on property, which can make the hotel's entrance feel busy. A quiet public area will eventually be turned into a business center and espresso café, so check at booking whether any work will be going on during your stay.

**Best for:** Anyone who wants to be in the middle of Ocean Drive action — with an old-school glamour vibe.

**Details:** 940 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach, 305-532-2362, [www.breakwatersouthbeach.com](http://www.breakwatersouthbeach.com).

**Rates and deals:** Starting at \$254 in summer; book directly and get continental breakfast for two, a 20 percent restaurant discount, a free upgrade, free glass of champagne when you arrive and VIP club passes.

• **Impala Hotel**

**What's new:** The 17

guest rooms were recently renovated, keeping only the travertine limestone floors, bathroom sinks, tubs, walk-in showers and wood-and-wrought-iron closets. Dating back to 1920, the building also houses Spiga, an Italian restaurant.

**Bragging rights:** Two bold pieces in the intimate lobby: a wall mural of the Byzantine Empress Theodora designed by fashion designer Christian Lacroix, and a sun mosaic on the floor originally meant for the mansion of Gianni Versace.

**Caveat emptor:** The hotel feels more like a quiet Mediterranean getaway than South Beach spot — not a negative, depending on what you're looking for. But if you want Art Deco and neon, or a chain sensibility, this isn't the place.

**Best for:** Couples, travelers seeking a respite amid the hustle.

**Details:** 1228 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-673-2021, [www.impala-miami.com](http://www.impala-miami.com).

**Rates and deals:** A mid-June weekend starts at \$197.50 a night; Florida residents get 10 percent off with an upgrade, if available, through Sept. 30.

• **Shelborne South Beach**

**What's new:** The 280-room condo hotel's public areas have been completely restored and updated, from the classic porte-cochere out front to the beach-casual taco shack out back. In the middle: a new boutique, su-

shi bar, lounge, ballroom, restaurant, outdoor patio and sun deck.

**Bragging rights:** For all the upgrades, hotel owners left the charming original diving board alone — a wise move. The white lobby wows with crystal chandeliers and a “bubble desk” made up of acrylic spheres.

**Caveat emptor:** Of the 200 or so rooms that will be renovated, only 50 have been done so far. Another 25 will follow over the summer. When booking, make sure you know what you’re getting.

**Best for:** Anyone who wants a lot of options in one beachfront location.

**Details:** 1801 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-531-1271, [www.shelborne.com](http://www.shelborne.com).

**Rates and deals:** A recent check showed standard rooms for a mid-June weekend starting at \$175 a night; an updated premiere room starting at \$299. Summer deals have not been announced.

#### • St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort & Residences

**What’s new:** The entire complex, which includes two residential towers and a 243-room hotel on the site of the former Sheraton Bal Harbour, opened in January.

**Bragging rights:** Where to begin? With the ocean views and balconies in each giant room? The butler service? Or the gorgeous pieces of art spread around the Yabu Pushelberg-designed interiors? Or maybe the Jean-Georges Vongerichten restaurant, J & G Grill, or the

14,000 square-foot Remède Spa. Not to mention the pools, cabanas and gorgeous beach out back. Travel + Leisure recently included the resort in its “It List” of the world’s 50 best new hotels.

**Caveat emptor:** Not for the budget-minded. At all.

**Best for:** Couples, families, weddings, shoppers who crave proximity to Bal Harbour Shops, business travelers with generous expense accounts.

**Details:** 9703 Collins Avenue, Bal Harbour, 305-993-3300, [www.stregisbalharbour.com](http://www.stregisbalharbour.com).

**Rates and deals:** Summer rates start around \$459 a night. Through Oct. 1, get the fourth night free plus a \$100 resort credit and poolside royal cabana. The “Awaken and Indulge” package, starting at \$549 a night, includes a \$100 spa credit and daily breakfast for two at the Atlantico restaurant; it is also good through Oct. 1.

#### • Surfcomber Miami, South Beach, a Kimpton Hotel

**What’s new:** The hotel’s interior, from the “sheetrock in,” got a full renovation, said general manager Sean McKeen. Formerly a DoubleTree, the 1948 Art Deco hotel with 186 rooms is now part of the boutique Kimpton portfolio. Its new design was unveiled last December. The lobby area feels like a curated attic, with sculptures of reclaimed wood from the Everglades, see-through chests containing knick-knacks and a jumble of materials that coexist

beautifully. Rooms are painted in pale lavender with art in the form of wall-mounted, burlap-covered surfboards.

**Bragging rights:** A 24-hour fitness center, Kimpton amenities (such as pet-welcoming policy and hosted wine hour from 5-6 p.m. daily). On-site restaurant Lantao serves Southeast Asian street fare. Life-size farm animals made of fiberglass resin serve as whimsical design touches inside and out.

**Caveat emptor:** Rooms are small for the price.

**Best for:** Families, thanks to children’s activities including ice cream break and table tennis tournaments that will launch over the summer; couples or solo leisure travelers; Kimpton loyalists.

**Details:** 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-532-7715, [www.surfcomber.com](http://www.surfcomber.com).

**Rates and deals:** For a mid-June weekend, rates start at \$271. Florida residents get either free daily parking or breakfast through Sept. 30. “Stay and Save” lets you save 20 percent on two nights, 25 percent on three nights and 30 percent on four nights, also through Sept. 30.

#### • Room Mate Waldorf Towers

**What’s new:** The entire interior of the 1937 building was renovated into a 44-room LEED-certified hotel. Open since last September, the sherbet-hued hotel is part of Spain-based Room Mate Hotels. Each of the col-

lection’s properties has a human name, like Waldorf here (described by the hotel as “sportsman, extrovert, affable, conceited”), Grace in New York City and Carlos in Buenos Aires, and aims to make visitors feel like they’re visiting friends. Unaffiliated with the Waldorf Astoria brand.

**Bragging rights:** Prime Ocean Drive location, cheeky marketing. A lobby window bears this message: “Do you want to sleep with me?” A robe in the room, available to buy for \$19.99, suggests: “Touch me, love me, take me with you.” Wi-Fi is free.

**Caveat emptor:** There’s no fitness center or pool, but the ocean is just across the street. Since that street is Ocean Drive, it can be noisy.

**Best for:** Young adults with a sense of humor.

**Details:** 860 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach, 786-439-1600, [www.room-matehotels.com](http://www.room-matehotels.com), look for the Waldorf link.

**Rates:** Starting at \$139 on summer weekdays, \$169 weekends.