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Finding Fort Lauderdale

Close the guidebooks and let a local lead the way.

By JESSICA CHESLER

FORT LAUDERDALE'S FAMOUS CANALS have earned it the moniker of "The Venice of America." Year-round, on any given morning, you can see the fortunate who get to live and visit here out on their paddleboards, jet skis, yachts, and whalers. Then there is the city's Spring Break alter ego – Fort Liquordale – which is built on a reputation of bikinis, bleach blond hair, buff bods, and a whole lot of partying, most likely due to the 1960 coming-of-age film, *Where the Boys Are*. When I moved here nearly seven years ago, it was the latter I had imagined. However, what I discovered was a city with a rich history, a strong connection to the water, and a growing arts and tech community. There probably hasn't been a better time to be in Fort Lauderdale. →



GOTTA HAVE IT

Before moving here, I didn't consider flip-flops to be an actual shoe. But when locals go out, they ponder whether they should wear their old flip-flops, good flip-flops, or fancy flip-flops. It doesn't matter if they have pink flamingos, dolphins, or palm trees. Get yourself a pair of flip-flops in Fort Lauderdale, and you'll be reminded of your time in the sun every time you slip them on.



How Not to Look Like a Tourist

Fort Lauderdale is one of the few places where you can sport a typical touristy look without sticking out like a sore thumb. Khakis, Polo shirts, baseball caps, and sandals are all welcome here. Although it does show up here and there, you won't find as much Miami flash. Fort Lauderdale is more relaxed. Fashion tends toward preppy, relaxed beach chic, or elegant resort wear. Just keep in mind that socks and sandals don't pair well together no matter where you are.

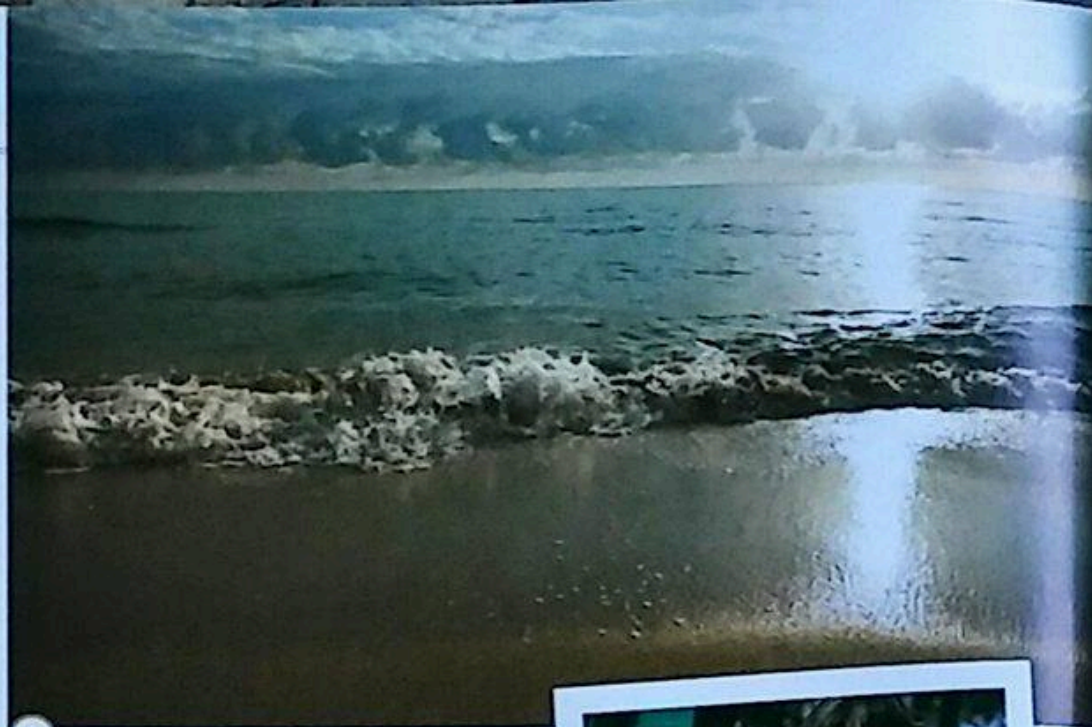
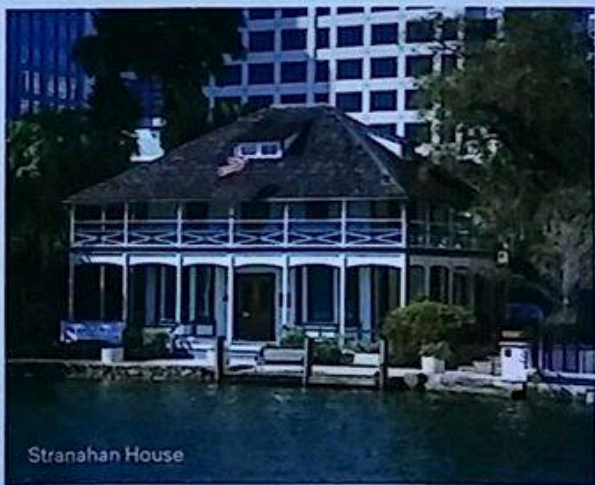


PHOTO OPPTS → One local Instagrammer @FtLauderdaleSun became insta-famous with his daily sunrise pics on Fort Lauderdale Beach. Take advantage of the natural beauty surrounding the city's shoreside location. You'll be hard-pressed to find a more classic, more epic vacation photo than one taken on the white sands in the quiet of dawn.



For the Jeopardy File → Fort Lauderdale is one of the last bastions of mid-century modern design. The city experienced a huge period of growth during the 1950s and '60s. From houses and condos to commercial buildings, you'll find architectural gems clustered and scattered throughout the city. As the buildings age, some are being restored to their former glory, but many of them are being torn down or replaced. Now would be the time to get a sense of Old Fort Lauderdale before time takes any further toll.



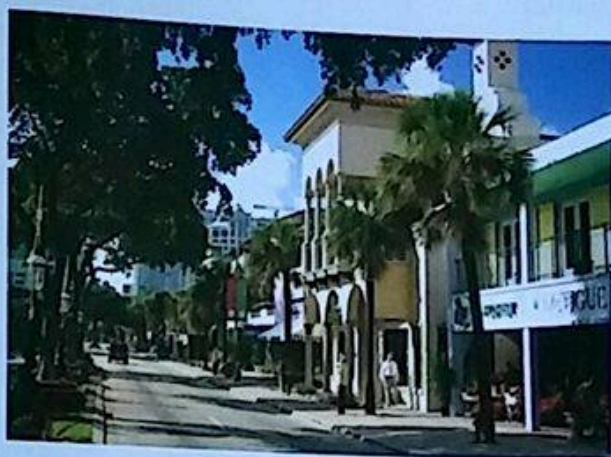
Stranahan House

THE BEST \$10 YOU'LL EVER SPEND

Spend an evening outside the famous Elbo Room or Dirty Blondes bars, and you'll likely run into Mickey Clean — the former punk rocker, trained artist, and permanent fixture on Fort Lauderdale Beach. He is usually riding around on his bicycle with a cigar box of crayons and rolled-up sheets of paper. For \$5 or \$10, Mickey Clean will draw your portrait, and you'll take home a one-of-a-kind piece of art for a bargain.

Eat Around the Town

Like any coastal city, Fort Lauderdale specializes in seafood. There are tried-and-true gastronomic landmarks such as the New England lobster at Kelly's Landing or the blackened dolphin sandwich at Southport Raw Bar. Other hidden gems are making their mark as well. The Fish and Chips at Foxy Brown are the best I've had yet, and I've considered it a personal mission to find the best version of this simple staple since arriving here. Hot & Soul will satisfy your craving for fusion comfort food, and Hardy Park Bistro serves unassuming, yet sophisticated New American cuisine in a quaint setting.



Tourist Tips *There are two major "Don'ts" for tourists here: 1.) Don't forget to put on sunscreen, even if it's cloudy. Trust me. 2.) Don't be afraid to wander off the touristy trail that is Las Olas Boulevard, which is home to some great shops and restaurants. It will also take you directly to the beach, but it's worth exploring further as well.*



ICEBREAKER → Salt Life is life to those who live, work, and play in the Venice of America. Fishing, boating, diving — basically anything outside or on the water — will start a conversation with anyone on the barstool or beach towel next you. Even the weather is elevated beyond idle chitchat because the winds, the rains, and the tides all determine how good the fishing and boating will be that day.

If It's Free, It's For Me

Visit between May and October, and you'll find yourself right in the middle of turtle season. The nests are marked to track and protect the unhatched sea turtles. Once it gets dark, go a little north or south of Fort Lauderdale Beach proper for a chance to see a nest breaking. Sign up for a guided sea turtle watch or take your chances on your own. If you're lucky enough to catch this miraculous event, remember not to pick them up and never use a flashlight or your camera as it might disorient the turtles during their race to the sea.



If art is more your thing, Flagler Arts and Technology Village (otherwise known as FATVillage) hosts an art walk on the last Saturday of every month. The warehouses, offices, and shops nestled between Andrews Avenue and Sistrunk Boulevard open their doors to become a public gallery and art space. Each month features different artists, live performances, and food trucks to get your grub on. For the tourist, it's an opportunity to experience a vibrant part of Fort Lauderdale that's undergoing a period of rebirth. For the art lover, it's a chance to check out the local art scene and find that souvenir that's a step above a postcard. ☉