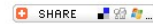


Weekend Away: Bal Harbour

- Christine Gray



Looking for a beach getaway with the WOW factor? High rise and high style, ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa in the exclusive enclave of Bal Harbour, Florida delivers the ultimate "room with a view".

The best way to experience Miami is from a high-rise, so my husband and I choose the ultra-luxe **ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa** for an indulgent weekend away. The resort impresses from the moment we step into its serene, elegant lobby and get our first look at the impressive collection of contemporary art installed throughout the property.

We are escorted to our suite via a semi-private elevator that opens to just two rooms per floor – a one-bedroom Executive Suite and a Studio. The two can be combined to make a private two-bedroom suite that is perfect for families. Our suite stretches the full width of the building with 10-foot floor-to-ceiling windows and balconies off both the north facing living room and the south facing bedroom and bath. Views of the shimmering waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay confirm that the hotel is aptly named – it is truly a ONE-of-a-kind getaway in Miami Beach.



We settle in to our 14th floor suite and I find myself going from one balcony to the other to take in the amazing panoramas. From the living room we look out on an expanse of green that stretches to the towers of the Trump International Beach Resort in Sunny Isles. From the bedroom balcony I can see the beautiful mansions of Bal Harbour with marina and golf course and then beyond to the downtown Miami skyline.



North-facing view from living room balcony, Suite #1414

A surprising aspect of the resort is that even though the 18-floor property appears to be a large building, it is actually a sophisticated, intimate retreat with just 62 Suites, 61 Studios and one 2,800 square-foot Penthouse Suite. The hotel originally opened as The Regent Bal Harbour in 2008, but it changed hands in 2009 becoming independently owned by local real estate entrepreneur Jorge Arevalo and his business partner, Tom Sullivan, and is now a member of the prestigious Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

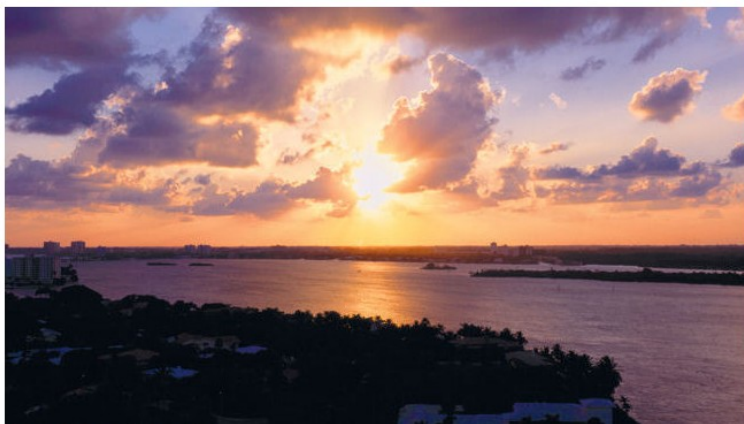


Suite Livingroom

ONE Bar Harbour Resort & Spa is famous for its gorgeous bathrooms, all with freestanding bathtubs and glass showers overlooking the fabulous views. There is even a TV embedded in the vanity mirror to keep me entertained while taking a bubble bath.



Our suite is so luxurious that we decide to stay in for the rest of the afternoon and evening. The suite is equipped with a full kitchen and stocked bar so we pour ourselves a glass of wine and watch as the sun sets off our bedroom balcony.



Sunset view over Biscayne Bay

The next morning we wake early (just after 6:00am) and are drawn to the living room balcony. Not accustomed to being on the East Coast, I gasp when I see the sun starting to peak out of the ocean. The sunrise over the Atlantic is startlingly beautiful. We are finally ready to emerge from our suite to take a morning walk along the beach.

Our semi-private elevator descends to the beach, one level below the lobby. On this level we pass the 10,000-square-foot waterfront Spa, and state-of-the-art ocean view fitness center before exiting to the outdoor pool and beach. In Miami, there are no private beaches or obstructions, so we are able to walk endlessly, getting our toes wet in the warm ocean water as the gentle waves lap on shore. There is also a two-mile long paved, beach-jogging path.



Sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean

On our return, we decide to have breakfast outside on the hotel's waterfront patio. The menu offers a range of choices from healthy to decadent. We order fresh-squeezed Florida grapefruit juice and indulge in the Grand Marrier French Toast. There is also an extensive buffet on offer with everything from fresh fruit, cereals and pastries to meats, cheeses and individually prepared omelets. We take our time this morning relaxing and reading.



The hotel is ideally situated close to Miami's most upscale shopping and dining experience -- the **Bal Harbour Shops**. Mid-morning we head to the lobby to take the hotel's complimentary car to the shops, just a couple of minutes away. The five blocks can be easily walked for those so inclined.



Bal Harbour Shops

In a league of its own, the world-famous Bal Harbour Shops sets the standard for the luxury retail industry. Designed to welcome in the tropics, the open-air mall includes shaded walkways with ceiling fans, fountains and palms. Shoppers stroll past a collection of shops that represent the 'creme de la creme' of the international retail universe from A to Z -- Audemars Piguet, Bulgari, Chanel, De Beers, Escada, Fendi...Valentino, Yves Saint Laurent, Ermenegildo Zegna, and many more, anchored by Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. If you find the sight overwhelming (I did), the hotel can provide a personal shopper.

After a couple of hours of shopping, we stop in for lunch at Bal Harbour Shops' Parisian bistro, **La Goulue**. Situated side-by-side with the Italian eatery **Carpaccio**, these restaurants' al fresco patios are part of the Miami A-list people-watching scene. The valet parking lot is full of Ferraris, Bentleys, Porsches and the like. Stunning fashion models dressed to impress sashay past tables during lunch.



Spa relaxation/mani-pedi room

We return to the hotel for an afternoon of spa treatments. I choose the 50-minute Signature Massage, followed by a 25-minute Pure Oxygen Facial. I'm very pleased and wish I had opted for the longer versions (80 minutes and 50 minutes, respectively). In addition to a massage, my husband agrees to try the Gentleman's Rejuvenation Facial and gives it the two thumbs up!

Later, we decide to stay at the hotel for dinner and stop first at the ocean view bar for cocktails before heading to the hotel's signature restaurant, Mister Collins. It has just undergone an exciting revamp with an official grand opening on June 16th. The new dining room is elegant, shimmering in white and silver. It is the only oceanfront restaurant in Miami Beach and so promises to be 'the' place to go when it officially opens. We decide to make a meal of appetizers and salad and order the House-made Guacamole with yucca chips, Ahi Tuna Tartare, and the True Classic Farmer's salad. All turn out to be great choices -- light and tasty.

The hotel is within a 20-minute proximity to the undying nightlife of South Beach, but we are here to relax, so we make it an early evening.



On Saturday, we reserve a cabana for the day with its own private hot tub in a garden setting beside the pool. Staff attends to our every need from magazines and cool towels, to refreshing beverages, lunch and dessert. There are only three cabanas with individual hot tubs, so reserve yours early, prior to your arrival.

ONE Bal Harbour introduced an exclusive members-only beach club in June 2010 with charter members that include Serena Williams, Stephen Dorff, Harry Morton, and Helio Catronoves, among others. Guests enjoy access to a secluded beachfront area furnished with chairs and umbrellas, and staffed with beach attendants for food, beverage and water sports service. The hotel also offers a poolside garden café. On our way back to the elevators we pass a guest with her adorable pet Westie in tow and learn that the hotel also welcomes pets with exclusive amenities and services.



Weekend party on the sand bar

This afternoon we return to our suite and discover another amazing sight from our balcony. On weekend afternoons, over a hundred boats gather on a sandbar in the bay because the water is so shallow that people can wade from boat to boat in waist-deep water.

On the island behind the sandbar is **Oleta River Park**, Florida's largest urban park. It offers a variety of recreational opportunities from biking trails to kayaking. Along the Oleta River, at the north end of the park, a large stand of beautiful mangrove forest preserves are filled with native South Florida plants and wildlife. Canoeists and kayakers can paddle the river to explore this amazing natural area. Swimming from a 1,200-foot sandy beach and saltwater fishing are also popular activities. Visitors can rent kayaks, canoes, and bicycles.

Turning the other direction, I am once again mesmerized by the idyllic fine sand and turquoise water of Miami Beach.



ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa beach view from Suite #1414

We ask the Concierge, Carlos, a member of the prestigious **Les Clefs D'Or**, for dinner suggestions nearby and we decide on Makoto, named for its talented chef, Makoto Okuwa, who worked with Iron Chef master Morimoto in New York and Washington, DC. Everything is outstanding from shared plates of salads, noodles, roboto grill, and sushi, to the frozen dessert of peach and green tea mochi balls. Makoto also offers a curated list of impressive sakes and we learn that low-quality sake is heated to mask the flavor of impurities, whereas premium sake should be served chilled and enjoyed much like a fine white wine.

This weekend has been all about the views, so what could be more amazing than returning to our suite tonight and seeing the moon over Miami? We can't wait to return and add a **seaplane** or **helicopter tour** to our itinerary, so we can discover even more of Miami from the air.



Moon over Miami

GETTING THERE / ARRIVE IN STYLE

The hotel can arrange transfers via Worldwide Transportation - A Chauffeur Driven Company
www.worldwidetransportation.com

The ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa is conveniently located within walking distance of the famous Bal Harbour Shops, 15 minutes from South Beach and Aventura Mall, 25 minutes from the Port of Miami, and 30 minutes from both the Miami and Fort Lauderdale airports and Fort Lauderdale's Port Everglades.

WHERE TO STAY

ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa
10295 Collins Avenue
Bal Harbour, FL 33154
Tel: (305) 455-5400
Website: www.oneluxuryhotels.com

WHERE TO DINE

Miami's dining scene offers everything from luxurious, five-star restaurants serving fine cuisine to casual lunch counters in Little Havana serving authentic Cuban sandwiches.

At the hotel: Mister Collins, Miami Beach's only oceanfront restaurant.

Locally, in Bal Harbour: Makoto (Japanese), La Goulue (French) and Carpaccio (Italian) at the Bal Harbour Shops.

In Miami's Design District: **Michael's Genuine Food & Drink**, one of Miami's most popular restaurants, serving incredible freshly-caught fish, seafood and other dishes prepared from locally sourced ingredients.

WHERE TO SHOP

Bal Harbour Shops - This exquisite collection of designer boutiques and restaurants in a subtropical garden setting is a favorite playground for socialites, fashionistas and celebrities. 9700 Collins Ave, Bal Harbour.

MUST DO

At ONE Bal Harbour Resort & Spa, guests are attended to with 24-hour Concierge service, personal shoppers, and multi-lingual staff that can help accommodate requests that range from evening-out attire to private jet and yacht charters:

Art Deco Tours www.mdpl.org

Miami Skyline Seaplane Tour www.miamitours.us

Helicopter Tour TourHelicopter.com

Yacht Charters www.theadvantaged.com

MUST SEE

Art and design are everywhere in Miami from galleries and museums, to entire districts featuring art, architecture and design.

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens - Completed in 1916 as a winter retreat for agricultural industrialist, James Deering. It is a European-inspired estate featuring 34 rooms with art and antiques spanning 2,000 years, creating the effect of a house lived in for centuries. The 10 acres of formal gardens along Biscayne Bay are embellished with fountains, sculptures and balustrades. Vizcaya is a National Historic Landmark.

Museum of Contemporary Art www.mocanomi.org

MIAMI'S BEST NIGHTLIFE

We didn't indulge in the nightlife, but here are some great suggestions from ONE Bal Harbour's concierge, Carlos, who can assist you with reservations:

LIV - Miami's hot nightclub, LIV at Fontainebleau Miami Beach offers a high energy, DJ-driven atmosphere, with the Miami nightclub scene's sexiest dancers.

Mokai - Popular velvet rope club where celebrities like Lindsay Lohan, Pharrel Williams, Adrian Grenier and Enrique Iglesias join the party crowd.

The legendary Fontainebleau Miami Beach is the resort the Rat Pack frequented and where James Bond and Goldfinger played a game of gin rummy in a scene. After an extensive renovation, the iconic playground is back and more alluring than ever.