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TRAVEL

FLORIDA

5 reasons to escape to luxury in Bal Harbour this fall

Miami-area beach offers an unmatched level of sophistication.

By Mauri Elbel
Special to the
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From a private poolside cabana that eyeballs the turquoise waves crashing on to the deserted shores of Bal Harbour, Florida, I find my happy place.

My husband and I look up from our books as a cabana attendant announces his presence by setting an ice bucket filled with chilled prosecco and sparkling water next to the plushly pillowed beach nest we're curled up in together.

"Please let me know if you need anything at all," says Gabriel, a staffer at ONE Bal

Harbour Resort & Spa, which became the Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami in early October. He follows the beverage service with a colorful spread of tropical fruit, an al fresco lunch menu and instructions on how to operate the private Jacuzzi with the press of a button.

I could get used to this, I think to myself, fully appreciating these rare, almost surreal moments lost in cabana heaven.

This level of pampering is the antithesis of my normal routine balancing life with two little boys — hectic days will soon become busier after our third arrives in November. But in Bal Harbour, luxury is the way of life.

Sitting on the northern tip of bustling Miami Beach, Bal Harbour drips with extravagance from every corner of its

one-square-mile exclusive enclave inhabited by 3,200 residents. Widely considered Miami's most fashionable beach destination, luxury travelers from all over the world gravitate to this quiet stretch of sand just beyond bustling South Beach.

"Bal Harbour is unlike any other beach destination," says Carolyn Travis, executive director of Tourism for Bal Harbour Village. "There is no other place that offers this level of sophistication."

From Austin, it's a breeze to reach this slice of paradise — a direct 2.5-hour flight and a 30-minute scenic cab ride delivered us to Bal Harbour's shores in less time than it takes to get to our favorite Texas beach towns. But other than the sheer convenience of



Children play in the sand during a beautiful fall day in Bal Harbour.

CONTRIBUTED BY MAURI ELBEL

Bal Harbour continued on D12



Order a savory Maine lobster dish at St. Regis Bal Harbour's J&G Grill. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY MAURI ELBEL

Bal Harbour

continued from D10

getting here (equidistant from Miami International Airport and Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport), below are five more reasons to book at trip to Bal Harbour this fall, when the weather is perfect and the crowds are nonexistent.

Stay

We stayed at the Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami (www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/BalHarbourMiami), the 18-story glass signature designed tower sitting along a coveted 750-foot expanse of sugary Bal Harbour Beach where the Atlantic Ocean kisses the Intracoastal Waterway. Panoramic views of an endless sea, a 10,000-square-foot waterfront spa, a nearly \$4 million international art collection, two top-notch restaurants, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and a serene European-edged outdoor swimming pool fringed by private cabanas are a few of the amenities on offer. The hotel's 124 lavish, contemporary suites contain bathrooms that you'll never want to leave — think freestanding egg-shaped tubs positioned in front of 10-foot floor-to-ceiling windows with in-mirror televisions and showers built for two.

Across the street, Bal Harbour Quarzo (www.quarzomiamihotel.com) is a boutique hotel comprised of 30 units, with an additional 84 expected to debut by early 2015. From its bay front locale, spacious suites feature full kitchens, modern furniture and private balconies that overlook the zen-inspired meditation garden and pool lined with cabana pyramids that glow at dusk.

One visit and you'll know why Forbes Travel Guide voted the St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort (www.stregisbalharbour.com) as one of the world's finest five-star properties. The posh hotel wraps 243 guest rooms into three, all-glass towers situated on pristine Bal Harbour, offering guests everything from white-glove butler service and pet pampering to a 14,000-square-foot Remede Spa and day villas that rent for around \$500. Champagne sabering is a ritual at the resort each evening along with nightly live jazz performances that take place on the stage in front of the Wine Vault, which holds more than 4,000 bottles and 400 varietals.

If you want to get a glimpse of Miami Beach's yesteryears, book a stay at the Sea View Hotel

(seaview-hotel.com), Bal Harbour's most historical hotel that has attracted repeat families and well-known politicians since the late 1940s.

Shop

Fashion-conscious travelers can lose themselves perusing the Bal Harbour Shops, undeniably the epicenter of this chic beach town. The high-end retail mecca is considered to be among the most exclusive outdoor shopping destinations in the country, comparable to Fifth Avenue and Rodeo Drive — and when based on revenue per square foot it's considered the world's most successful. These 100 posh shops on Collins Avenue are candy for the eyes — browse the vibrant array of handbags on display at the storefronts of Gucci and Prada, walk through Salvatore Ferragamo's impressive two-story flagship store and try on a pair of Jimmy Choo's Vogue-worthy shoes. Bring, or better yet buy, an extra bag to fill with fashionable finds to take back with you.

Eat

I'd suggest fasting before vacationing in Bal Harbour because this tiny town doesn't fall short on flavor. At Makoto, celebrity restaurateur Stephen Starr's restaurant with the famed Chef Makoto in the kitchen, we devoured a colorful parade of inventive dishes including spicy tuna crispy rice topped with serrano chili, a watercress and chikuwa salad tossed in wasabi dressing and robata-style short ribs with truffle miso. At St. Regis Bal Harbour's J&G Grill, we savored gastro delights like black truffle pizza with fontina cheese and Maine lobster with garlic-buttered gnocchi, sautéed spinach, jalapeño, ginger and scallion before ending our feast with a warm and rich chocolate cake accompanied by cool vanilla bean ice cream. We started our mornings with al fresco savory-meets-sweet breakfasts at the Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami's Mister Collins — think farm fresh omelets bursting with bacon and brie and Belgian waffles smothered in raspberries and dark chocolate. Lunches at the hotel's Pool Bar & Grill featured deliciously light bites like the lump crab and guacamole stack.

The beach

Unlike the bustling beaches you'll find along much of Florida's coastline, Bal Harbour is a golden stretch of secluded serenity.

Because of the limited amount of public parking — and the fact that fall



Unlike the many bustling beaches you'll find along Florida's coastlines, Bal Harbour is a golden stretch of secluded serenity.



The cabana pyramids at Bal Harbour Quarzo provide the perfect poolside place to relax.



At the Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour Miami, you can spend an entire day relaxing in a private poolside cabana.

is low season in Bal Harbour — we found its newly expanded beach practically private. Three of Bal Harbour's hotels are oceanfront properties, allowing you to traipse directly from your suite onto the beach where lounge chairs with umbrellas make for a post-card-perfect place to spend the day. Work off rich meals while taking in the views afforded along Bal Harbour's \$3 million, one-mile, palm-shaded jogging and biking track and cool off in the waves just steps away.

The culture

An unexpected perk of booking a stay in any one of Bal Harbour's four hotels is the Museum Access card, part of Unscripted Bal Harbour, the destination's public art program conceptualized to provide a platform to South Florida artists and connect culture-seekers with Miami's dynamic art museums. Much to my architect husband's delight, we spent a day exploring the new Pérez Art Museum Miami, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Herzog & de Meuron in downtown Miami's Museum Park. Not only did we receive free entry, but cardholders also receive complimentary museum membership and have free admission to the area's three other leading visual arts museums: the Wolfsonian Museum, Bass Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art.



Explore the new Perez Art Museum Miami for free with your complimentary Museum Access Card.

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