

# FANTASTIC Fort Lauderdale



Florida  
SPECIAL



*Helen Foster* dives into 'America's Venice' and enjoys the sandy beaches and buzzing food scene

**I'M RECLINING ON** the deck of the dazzling white Spirit Of Lauderdale catamaran, anchored off a seemingly endless stretch of sand. Below me is the turquoise sea, to my right is a cold beer, to my left, a turtle frolics in the waves. I've sunned, I've snorkelled... I am in my happy place: Fort Lauderdale. When in Florida, we Brits don't tend to 'do' Fort Lauderdale - instead heading to Miami, the Keys or Orlando. But with a laid-back feel, miles of beaches, streets you can actually walk down and a buzzing food scene, I'd rather come here. Here are my top 10 must dos:

## 1 SUNDOWNERS AND SNACKS AT SHOOTERS.

More than 300 miles of idyllic waterways wind their way around Fort Lauderdale - it's known as America's Venice - so there are lots of waterfront bars and restaurants. Shooters wins for me for its slouchy sofas that shout 'come relax with a cocktail', and watching people pull up in their yachts never gets old. Don't leave without eating; I recommend the ahi tuna salad followed by the beef short rib tacos. Or, try the southern-fried chicken with bacon-cheese waffles. ([shooterswaterfront.com](http://shooterswaterfront.com))

## 2 BARGAINS GALORE AT SAWGRASS MILLS.

Outlet malls offer big brand names at discounted prices and Sawgrass Mills is the largest in the US with over 350 stores. I flirted with half-price Prada, toyed with a reduced-to-£90 Michael Kors bag - but ended up walking out of Hobbs-alike Ann Taylor with two dresses and a skirt for £80. Sign up at the visitors' information stand for a coupon book offering even more discounts. ([www.simon.com/mall/sawgrass-mills](http://www.simon.com/mall/sawgrass-mills))



Main picture: Fort Lauderdale has more than 300 miles of waterways. Clockwise from top left: Helen enjoys a trip on a gondola; the beautiful view from Shooters restaurant; Fort Lauderdale beach

**3 LAS OLAS BOULEVARD.** You could spend a week on this lively, tree-lined street and not munch your way through all the bars, cafés and restaurants. Top stops include **Pan'e Dolci** (number 613) for their cakes and fresh bread, the cute courtyard at **Vinos Wine Bar** (number 922) and **Louie Bossi Ristorante Bar Pizzeria** (*louiebossi.com*). Book early for spots on its front patio or romantic walled garden; I loved the topped bruschettas.



**4 GO ALLIGATOR SPOTTING.** I'm not sure what was more exciting – whizzing inches above the Everglades on an airboat or the thrill of seeing the snout of a gator just a few feet away. You'll also spot turtles, jumping fish and birds. Once on dry land, intrepid types can pick up some gator tail bites from the on-site food truck (it tastes like chicken), or even hold a baby gator. (*evergladestours.com*)



of waterways lined with multi-million dollar yachts and incredible houses – and the captain knows who most of them belong to. You can take alcoholic drinks on board, so buy some fizz and pretend you're one of them. (*gondolaswest.com*)

**Beach Kitchen And Cocktails** is full of beautiful people enjoying the view. The lobster roll from the brunch menu is the business. (*sbe.com*)



**5 TRY THE HOKKAIDO SCALLOPS AT KURO.**

I admit I wasn't expecting much from a meal in a casino but Japanese restaurant **Kuro** at the **Seminole Hard Rock Hotel And Casino** blew me away. Start with one of their cocktails based on the five tastes (I had salty Roku, which included shochu, Prosecco, soy and coriander) then pick a selection of shared dishes from the huge menu. I loved the Hokkaido scallop sashimi that exploded with citrus flavour, the Wagyu tacos, the pork belly tonkatsu and the Chilean seabass miso that melts in your mouth. (*seminolehardrockhollywood.com*)

**7 HAVE A SEA-VIEW MASSAGE.** On the 11th floor at the **Pelican Grand Beach Resort** is **Pure Spa**; the treatment rooms have incredible views and my massage was excellent. Relax in the Bond-style hanging egg chairs and private sun terrace after your treatment, or head to the veranda and chill on a rocking chair overlooking the beach. (*spa.pelicanbeach.com*)

**9 KAYAK THROUGH THE MANGROVES.** Spot birds, fish and, if you're extremely lucky, the manatees that sometimes swim in this unique ecosystem. Fun fact: where I paddled was called **Whiskey Creek** as smugglers used to hide their booze in the waters during prohibition. Don't panic if you're a beginner, I can tell you from personal experience that the guides are exceptionally patient, even when you go around in circles. Tours from \$35 (£27) each. (*whiskeycreekhideout.com*)



From top left: outside Louie Bossi Ristorante Bar Pizzeria; delicious Hokkaido scallop sashimi at Kuro; the beautiful view from the Pelican Beach Grand Resort; spot alligators in the Everglades; the outdoor eating area at Hyde Beach Kitchen And Cocktails; Helen enjoys an ice cream at Kilwins

**8 TRY A LOBSTER ROLL AT HYDE.** Each beachside town in Fort Lauderdale has its own personality. **Hallandale Beach** is described as hip and up-and-coming – and **Hyde**

**10 EAT TREATS AT KILWINS.** When I asked some locals where the best ice cream was to be found they all sent me to Kilwins. It's been around since 1947 and my scoop of chocolate caramel cashew didn't disappoint – but my must-buy was the chocolate-covered Nutter Butters. Vanilla biscuits filled with peanut butter and dipped half in milk chocolate, half in dark. Simply delicious. (*kilwins.com/filauderdalelasolas*)



**6 SIP CHAMPAGNE ON A GONDOLA.** Float past beautiful mansions while the sun sets on a cruise with **Gondalas West**. Our tiny boat weaved in and out

**MORE ON THE TOUR**

Helen stayed at the Pelican Beach Grand Resort. It's all whitewashed shutters, pale wooden floors, ceiling fans and plump cushions. **Rooms start from \$239 (£182) per night, based on two sharing (pelicanbeach.com).** Norwegian flies to Fort Lauderdale airport from London Gatwick from £159 each way (*norwegian.com*). For more info on the region, visit [sunny.org](http://sunny.org). ♦