

Haute topics:

At Your Leisure



Brand New

THE RITZ-CARLTON, GRAND CAYMAN is nearing completion for an extravagant late fall opening. The Caribbean property will be home to multi-million dollar private residences, as well as The Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Situated on 144 acres stretching sea-to-sea from the acclaimed Seven Mile Beach to North Sound, The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman and The Residences blend a lush Caribbean backdrop with classic British-Colonial architecture. The resort features 365 guest rooms and suites, the first La Prairie Spa in the Caribbean, five dining venues, including two by renowned chef Eric Ripert, a tennis center by Nick Bollettieri and a Greg Norman-designed nine hole golf course. For more information, please visit residences-cayman.com.—C.D.

Isle Take It!

ONLY 170 MILES EAST OF PALM BEACH, the newly-opened Abaco Club on Winding Bay is taking the luxury travel market by storm with more than two miles of powder sand beaches and a signature Scottish-style tropical links championship golf course.

The \$250 million, 520-acre golf and sporting retreat was developed by British entrepreneur Peter de Savary. An ambitious international developer, conservationist and 1983 British America's Cup challenger, de Savary has amassed a number of stellar resorts to his credit, including the St. James Clubs in Paris, Los Angeles, London, New York and Antigua and Scotland's jaw-dropping Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle.

His latest creation provides resident and non-resident members with a unique tropical destination that includes championship golf, renowned bone and deep-sea fishing, spa and fitness center, scuba-diving, snorkeling, horseback riding, tennis and a host of other popular leisure activities.

For those who want more than just a taste of this extraordinary destination, homesites (with breathtaking views of the ocean and golf course) are available starting at \$1.5 million. For membership/ownership details, call 888-303-2765 or visit www.theabacoclub.com.—J.D.



Haute Upgrade in Sunny Isles Beach

AN INTIMATE FRENCH SPA offers some of the best therapists in South Florida. The clean, contemporary, marble lined Bice Ristorante and 30-seat mahogany bar with a pair of flat screen TVs highlights an open, art filled lobby with a Mayan Sushi Bar. Upstairs, 210 guest suites with bathrooms large enough to live in, offer wraparound balconies facing the sea. The new Le Meridien hotel on Sunny Isles Beach near Aventura, is the first tony destination to open in the north beach area's history. Nestled among high-rise condos, aging motels and new resorts like Donald Trump's Sonesta Beach, Le Meridien offers well-traveled guests a peaceful yet hip boutique destination. The cool oasis, highlighted by a gushing waterfall entrance on a blue tile backdrop, is not pretentious, yet Le Meridien is all about style and sophistication with European flair.

One and two bedroom condo-style guest rooms, designed with aqua frosted glass table-tops and sliding doors, solid white Egyptian cotton linens on king-sized beds with royal blue backslashes, sandy beige floors, couches and chairs with sea blue pillows, and beige pinewood panels to keep out the annoying morning light. (This is Miami, and like resort towns in Europe, night life is minutes away!) Rooms are also fully



equipped Italian-themed kitchens featuring top-of-the line stainless steel GE appliances, thermal coffee makers, shapely Thomas white china, modern goblets and European designed flatware. DVD/CD players, LCD flat screen TVs, washers and dryers and high-speed wireless Internet access add the modern necessities to the low-keyed European style.

The condos are also for sale, so owners can buy and close, buy and use, or buy and rent nightly to hotel denizens. (Also available are four Penthouse suites with private rooftop terraces and whirlpools.) For those who really like a private beach, staying at Le Meridien makes more sense than bunking down on South Beach where the hotel rooms and buildings are snug, and the beaches are crowded with celebrities, photographers and gawkers.

Have a Belgian waffle with a mix of strawberries and blueberries, and a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice on the terrace overlooking the sea. Then swim in the sea or the pool, and relax in the tiled whirlpool bath while fixating on the waltzing waters of the long lean reflecting pool. And, a midday massage, Caviar Facial and run on the sand as the sun dips in late afternoon should make the day feel perfect.

A little French Riviera on Sunny Isles Beach is a good thing. Call 305-503-6000 or log on to miami.lemeridien.com. —L.M.