

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

How This Florida Destination Became the 'Hamptons of the South'

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If you were to identify a Floridian destination based on its clichés, Palm Beach would be an easy guess. The seaside enclave has had a distinct vibe for generations: people are still wearing Pucci and Panama hats, sipping on Arnold Palmers, and filling their days with leisurely activities like tennis, swimming, shopping, and golf. Beyond the beach, you'll find glossy gardens, Spanish colonial architecture, and vibrant, tropical interiors – scenes that have been immortalized in Slim Aarons' photography.

This joie de vivre, cocktail-hour-at-any-hour vibe has prevailed in Palm Beach for more than a century. But with the COVID-19-spurred influx of New Yorkers and a wave of new developments, the formerly quiet holiday town is livelier than ever, blooming into what the community (and several other publications of note) is calling the 'Hamptons of the South.'

"Since 2020, there has been a dramatic increase in luxury brands moving into the Palm Beach market," says Joanna Gong from Sotheby's Luxury & Lifestyle Division. Those brands read like a map of Madison Avenue: Hermès, Cartier, Saint Laurent, Oscar de la Renta, Chanel. "With newer developments like The Royal Poinciana Plaza, a curated pocket of real estate has been made available on the traditionally tight island and has subsequently attracted some of the world's largest names in art and luxury."

Glimmers of the Northeast have also emerged on the local dining scene, with the arrival of Sant Ambroeus, La Goulue, Almond, and Le Bilboquet — a fixture of Upper East Side nightlife and the buzziest bistro in the Hamptons. And then there's the chic White Elephant Hotel and its lively restaurant Lola 41, both with origins in Nantucket (another popular escape for well-heeled Manhattanites).

Hotels, restaurants, and retail have always had the ability to revitalize an area (just look at SoHo in the 1990s). But in Palm Beach, these flashy openings have coincided with a surge in migration. In 2021 alone, *The Palm Beach Post* reported that 547,000 people exchanged out-of-state driver's licenses for ones with Florida addresses, most of whom were from New York. Interestingly, 14% were from overseas, which is a trend that Phillipe Delgrange of Le Bilboquet Group expects to see more of.

"I think that in the next two years, we will see even more people moving down to Palm Beach and West Palm, including a lot of Europeans," he says. "We are just at the beginning — I know so many people that are preparing to move in the next year or two. I think in the next two years there will be a major European component." Seasonal residents are also on the rise; many wealthy New Yorkers are opting to spend summers in the Hamptons, winters in Palm Beach, and the months between seasons in Manhattan.

For those who view Palm Beach as more of a seasonal destination, like its Long Island equivalent, better accommodation options are in the works: The Colony Hotel is closing for a full renovation this summer, The Breakers recently unveiled new suites and is investing \$25 million into modernization this year alone, and there are 17 new hotel projects throughout the region, slated for completion by 2025.

This swift influx could seem daunting for locals, but they seem to be viewing it with optimism. Nobody's trying to turn it into South Beach or change its refined character (any attempts simply would not fly, for obvious reasons). Palm Beach is undergoing the sort of evolution that the Hamptons has seen before: new money and younger generations inspiring more modernity and more to do. That, and the steady flow of New Yorkers seeking easy escapes that are low-key but high-end.

Aerin Lauder, the beauty magnate who has been holidaying there since her childhood, explains how she loves the mix of the old and the new. "Palm Beach has a way of welcoming newness, while keeping its sense of tradition and elegance alive," she says. That newness has come in five-star form, with the *crème de la crème* of food and fashion setting up shop.

Delgrange echoes Lauder's sentiment, pointing out that "Palm Beach represents the civility of the old world with the kinetic energy of the new." Civility is indeed an appealing characteristic in these times. Combine that with low taxes (a draw for the financial titans that have relocated their operations), and the quality of life that comes with safe streets and beachside living, and it's easy to see why people are following the party south.

One thing is certain: Palm Beach is more vibrant now than ever before, and it appears that things are just getting started. Inclined to join the crowd? Here the very best hotels and restaurants to add to your itinerary.

White Elephant Palm Beach is the sister property of Nantucket's most revered hotel, and unlike many of the historic accommodations in Palm Beach, the style is sleek and modern, featuring Scandinavian interiors and a MoMa-worthy collection of contemporary art. It's brought a youthful vibe to Palm Beach and is a haven for millennials, who gravitate to its lively alfresco restaurant, Lola 41. There are 32 rooms in total, including 19 suites, all containing private balconies. The central position is ideal for exploring; it's right across from the Royal Poinciana Plaza, within walking distance of Worth Avenue, and just two blocks from the beach, where the staff can arrange chairs and parasols. But if you'd prefer to stay on-site, the hotel has a pool that is framed with sun loungers. And just around the corner is the island's most iconic ice-cream parlor, Sprinkles.

Sant Ambroeus

Palm Beach marks Sant Ambroeus' first location outside of New York and the Hamptons, and it is a beautiful location indeed. The fashionable Italian restaurant is situated at the entrance of The Royal Poinciana Plaza, where pink umbrellas and bistro tables surround lush gardens and a fountain. Inside, you'll find classic art deco décor that's become a hallmark of Sant Ambroeus. There's a cabinet of cakes, cookies, and croissants to go, along with a coffee bar and a gorgeous gelato cart. There is something for everyone on the menu, whether it's decadent desserts or lighter fare, and it's just as good for breakfast as it is for a late-night dinner and cocktails.