

TRAVEL

Casino sampler, E3
 Motown sampler, E4
 A bathhouse unlike any other in Switzerland, E3

FLORIDA



A couple bikes past the showy yachts parked within one of Fort Lauderdale's many canals.

PHOTOS: COURTESY, FORT LAUDERDALE CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Fort Lauderdale full of possibilities

One-time spring break hot spot has diversified its vacation offerings

BY KIM SCHNEIDER
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FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA. — At few other spots in southern Florida is there a more classic beach boardwalk than here in the center of Las Olas Boulevard. Even the art of cruising has made a comeback as four lanes of traffic, notable for the impressive sports cars, move slowly enough to make a statement between the rows of palm trees.

But the sleek cars are just part of the show for beach bag-laden vacationers waiting to cross to the boulevard — literally translated, “the waves” — and its wide sugar-sand beach. Live rock and jazz tunes waft from the long stretch of open-air cafes and bars, and locals on rollerblades zip along the tree-lined boardwalk. Some tote surfboards, while others stroll with ice cream cones in hand.

The scene is full of the “anything can happen” sense of possibil-

ity depicted in the Connie Francis and George Hamilton flick “Where the Boys Are.” The 1960 beach film launched the area as the collegiate spring break hot spot, and at the trend’s peak, about 380,000 young revelers flocked here over a six-week period, according to the Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau.

But that was then.

Today, luxury hotels have squeezed out low-end properties that marketed to the spring break crowd; even the site where the wet T-shirt contest originated has been replaced by the high-end St. Regis Hotel.

At certain times of the year, you’ll still find T-shirts proclaiming the strip as “Spring Break Headquarters,” and drink specials abound at open-air bars overlooking the ocean. But those doing the ordering today are as likely to be young retirees, conventioners or parents with kids in tow as members

of the hard-bodied college crowd. And conversations are more likely to focus on a snorkeling adventure or Everglades ecotour than the previous night’s drinking binge. For when you tire of the beach, if that’s even possible, day trip adventure options abound.

A gondola ride

One of the best ways to see the city, locals will tell you, is by water taxi. For \$13 for the day (or \$48 for a full family pass), you can hop on and off of your transportation for lunch or sightseeing, but can otherwise spend the day traversing the city’s 300-plus miles of navigable canals. City planners studied Venice to create a city filled with waterfront property, meaning your ride takes you past multimillion-dollar mansions, showy yachts and ancient mangroves. For added romantic flair, book the gondola ride

SEE FLORIDA, E2



Fort Lauderdale’s extensive canal system was modeled after Venice’s, making the new gondola rides a natural idea.