



Sonesta Siestas

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the west coast of Florida. For most of the past 30 years, I've lived and worked everywhere from urban Tampa to beautiful Sarasota to growing Ft. Myers to classic Naples. My experiences on the east coast of Florida have been short and fleeting. Not overly warm and fuzzy. All that was about to change in one weekend.

My "assignment" was to stay in two sister-hotels—Ft. Lauderdale and Coconut Grove.

SONESTA FORT LAUDERDALE BEACH

After driving for three hours from Sarasota, I was ready to get out of the car. The GPS said to keep going straight on Sunrise Boulevard. I told Erin, "If we keep going straight, we're going to wind up in the Atlantic Ocean. This place must be awfully close to the water!" It is!

The Sonesta Fort Lauderdale is exactly where you'd want your hotel to be. The building is shaped so all the rooms have a view of the ocean across route A1A.

We stayed on the 10th floor in a "junior suite" which they promised didn't mean

it had low ceilings. We had a corner room with a beautiful unobstructed view of the ocean out both windows.

The hotel used to be a Holiday Inn, but the folks from Sonesta clearly know how to make a place feel more upscale. The bathrooms are clean and modern. The showers don't have curtains or doors, but a glass mini-wall that goes about half-way. Very sleek.

After we checked in, we got back in our car and headed to the Sarasota equivalent of Palm Avenue. Here it's called Las Olas Boulevard. We walked around until we found a perfect spot for lunch.

"Louie Bossi's Ristorante" is my new favorite restaurant in Ft. Lauderdale. Yes, it's the only place I know, but I can't imagine liking any place more. Wide open, spacious, wood floors, beautiful bar area and tables out front or in the courtyard. I had a chicken Caesar salad and Erin had kale Caesar with chicken and a poached egg.

We headed back to the hotel where it was time to use our free drink coupons

given out at check-in. The bar is at the far end of the lobby, overlooking the pool. There is also a restaurant at the other end of the lobby as well.

Important to note Sonesta Fort Lauderdale Beach offers a Florida resident discount that can be as high as 30%. TripAdvisor has given it the "Certificate of Excellence" and an average of four out of five stars. AAA has given it the Four Diamond Award.

The hotel's top floor is dedicated to meetings, conferences and parties. I usually don't write about this sort of information, but the floor to ceiling windows and the unbelievable panoramic views of the ocean and the rest of Ft. Lauderdale deserve a comment. This would be a great place to plan anything from an important meeting to a fun party.

After a restful night—and that priceless ability to open the curtains and see the Atlantic Ocean a hundred yards away—it was already time to pack up and head an hour south to our next destination.

SONESTA COCONUT GROVE MIAMI

"Where are you now?" my brother in Buffalo asked on the phone.

"We're actually south of Miami in a place called Coconut Grove," I told him.

He didn't think there was anything south of Miami besides Cuba, but Coconut Grove is a lush little enclave four miles south of downtown Miami that can't be overlooked.

We stayed on the 15th floor in a smaller room than the previous night but with a full kitchen and a view of "The Grove." There is a large complex outside our balcony that reminds me of the former Quay in Sarasota. It's full of shops

and restaurants, but the real beauty of Coconut Grove is beyond that big complex.

After browsing around some eclectic stores we stumbled upon an active outdoor restaurant that appears to take up about a quarter of the block called "GreenStreet Cafe." Plenty of indoor and outdoor seating, and a large and friendly staff ready to accommodate. You won't find anyplace better in The Grove... and the food and service were top-notch. Erin had pasta with clam sauce and I had pasta with shrimp, followed by coffee and an ice cream sundae.

Needing to burn off some calories from that tasty lunch, we walked across the street to rent a couple bikes also on Main Highway. ("Highway" is a bad name for it, because cute little Main is anything but a highway. It's a classic little village, with shoppers, diners and residents going about their lives.)

Rey Buroz owns "RB Cycles" in Coconut Grove and has two other locations as well in Doral and Miami. He set us up with a couple basic bikes with thick tires and comfortable seats. They have road bikes, mountain bikes,

triathlon bikes and all the gear and accessories you could want. Rey has been doing this for 17 years, and clearly knows customer service.

He was kind to point us toward a bike path where we were able to see more of the area, as well as parks and the waterfront.

After a nap, we showered and dressed for dinner in the Sonesta Coconut Grove restaurant that overlooks the harbor, the bay and the ocean. What a view! Perfect name for the place, "Panorama Restaurant and Sky Lounge." This resort really took advantage of its location by putting the hotel and the pool on the 8th floor.

Not only is it a beautiful setting, it's also been voted one of the best restaurants in Miami! They specialize in Peruvian food. Erin had churrasco steak with sweet plantains and I had filet with shrimp and risotto.

We checked out in the morning and began our drive back to Sarasota. A three and a half hour drive, yet a world away. Great memories of our extended siestas at the Sonestas in Fort Lauderdale and Coconut Grove. – *Ray Collins*



SOMETHING NEW ON NAPLES' FIFTH AVENUE SOUTH

WE LOVE DISCOVERING new places, and during our drive back from Miami to Sarasota we wanted to stop for lunch around the halfway point in Naples.

I thought I knew all the places on trendy Fifth Avenue South, but I was pleasantly surprised to find a new casual restaurant that was absolutely overdue for this district that would remind you of Palm Avenue in Sarasota.

There's a new place called "Shea's Lansdown Street" in the 700 block of Fifth Avenue. It's a Boston-themed neighborhood bar that opened in the Spring of 2016. Very nice and friendly atmosphere. (It's a sister-pub the Maurer family opened to accompany another popular place that's been in nearby Bonita Springs for nearly ten years.)

We found it only because I was trying to find a place to root against the Buffalo Bills, and when I punched up "sports bar" and "Naples" on my phone, I was glad to find this place.

Craft and import beer, private parties, outdoor patio dining and plenty of fun. Great atmosphere, good food and reasonable prices. Perfect combination.

We will be back!

