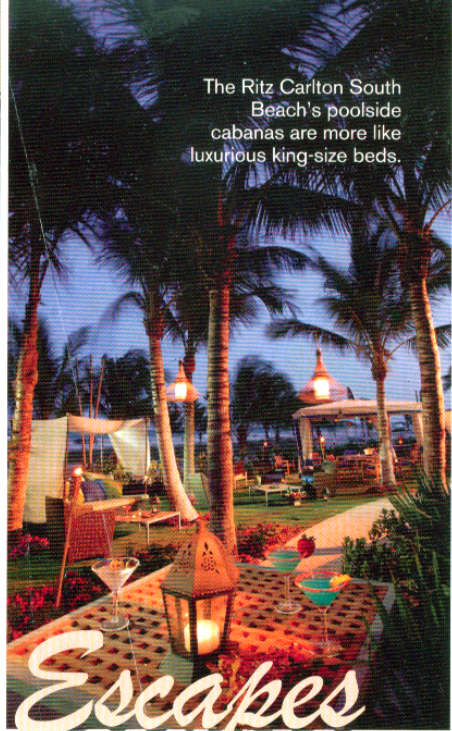




EXECUTIVE TRAVEL



The Ritz-Carlton South Beach's poolside cabanas are more like luxurious king-size beds.

Weekend Escapes

Need to detach from the pressures of the workweek? If you can only carve out a few days for relaxation and rejuvenation, here are two easy-to-reach goodies.

BY BARBARA PERKINS

SoBe It — An Art Deco inspired high-rise marries South Beach hip with the signature service of the Ritz.

You would be crazy not to treat yourself to a poolside cabana at The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach hotel — although it might be more accurate to call it a king-sized canopy bed.

Propped-up by half a dozen pillows, and hidden behind the veil of a gauze curtain, that is exactly where we wiled away a recent sunny Saturday afternoon.

Located at the east end of Lincoln Road, the sparkling white former DiLido hotel opened just one year ago. It retains the bones of its original Morris Lapidus design, from its black terrazzo floors and grand staircase down to the hubcap-like sculptures that dot the cherrywood lobby wall.

The property, which sits directly on the beach, upholds the Ritz-Carlton's standards of excellence — providing exclusivity and exceptional service without being overbearing.

On our visit, the expansive pool area with its infinite view of the ocean was teeming with staff. Here we were inundated with plush towels, complements of the pool concierge, while roving tanning butlers dispensed lotions from their arsenal.

You could spend an entire weekend here just floating around on the cushy blue rafts in the pool, although umbrellas, cabanas and lounge chairs are also available on the beach for hotel guests. We were too busy sipping the hotel's signature piña colodas to ever get there. But we did enjoy the oceanfront DiLido Beach Club restaurant. Just steps from the sand, this casual spot for sandwiches, salads and fresh seafood is also a primo spot for people watching. Keep in mind, though, that if you do leave the pool area, be sure to return at sunset to watch the hotel's synchronized swimmers perform a glorious water ballet.

The 11-story hotel, nestled amidst its towering neighbors, offers handsome accommodations. Each of the 376 guest rooms, replete with comfy featherbeds, features views of the ocean and an oversized marble bath with separate showers and tubs.

Worth a splurge, too, are any of the 64

rooms on the private club level. Accessed by a special elevator keycard, the view-to-kill clubroom provides just the right antidote to room service or the minibar. Here, five times each day, the highly efficient concierge staff make their "presentations" — each one an abundant spread of food: from fresh fruit, pastries and afternoon tea to cordials and chocolates at night. Another option is the hotel's Americana restaurant, which serves classic favorites while pulling double duty as a supper club with live jazz on weekend nights.

Finally, an absolute must is a La Maison de Beauté Carita spa treatment. At 16,000 square feet, this outpost of the Paris-based oasis is a gem, with its floor-to-ceiling waterfall and 14 treatment rooms. In April, *Mobil Travel Guide* awarded the spa four stars — making it one of only 47 four-star spas in the US, and the only one on South Beach.

From the spa's epic lineup that includes body massages, algae baths, seaweed wraps, and facials, we indulged in a heaven-sent, 80-minute foot treatment. Relaxation does not get any better than this.