

DREAMSCAPES

TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

Winter/Spring 2024

THE WELLNESS AND ISLANDS EDITION

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OTTAWA GETAWAYS

MICHELIN STARS ON THE SUNSHINE STATE

MUST-EAT RESTAURANTS IN MIAMI AND ORLANDO

BY JIM BAMBOULIS

The sweet smell of Cuban coffee, with its ambrosia-like notes, reverberates inside Miami's Versailles Bakery and Café, further amplifying my anticipation for a taste. I slowly close my eyes, take a deep breath and savour a long sip, ensuring I make the most of this delicious experience that never disappoints, and immediately puts me in a state of caffeinated Zen.

Largely overlooked, even dismissed for years, Michelin finally came knocking on Florida's door, releasing the inaugural edition of the Michelin Guide Miami, Orlando and Tampa, back in 2022. To date, the prestigious restaurant guide has validated 144 restaurants across the Sunshine State creating a food scene to be savoured. Naturally, my taste buds convinced me to pay a visit, and experience the delicious flavours for myself.

CUBAN CLASSICS WITH A FRENCH TWIST AT VERSAILLES

The self-proclaimed "World's Most Famous Cuban Restaurant," Versailles has represented the heart of Miami since 1971, especially for Cubans who regard it as a gathering place. Celebrities and dignitaries have passed through this iconic Michelin-recommended, family-owned Little Havana hub. While the landmark eatery is adorned with French-inspired chandeliers, murals and mirrors, Versailles is Cuban through and through. I sink my teeth into a flaky empanada, paired with a Cuban coffee that has me bouncing off the walls all day. While already satiated, the sweet tooth beckons. I catch the irresistible scent of caramel cheesecake and coconut flan, devouring each without hesitation.

A CITYWIDE MELTING POT OF FLAVOURS

In Miami's Coconut Grove, acclaimed Michelin-starred executive chef and owner Michael Beltran helms Ariete, a restaurant that fuses Cuban, French and Floridian flavours, but also reflects and celebrates his exiled Cuban grandparents'





LONDON GASTROPUB WITH SOUTHERN TWISTS

Part gastropub, part brewery and part beer garden, the Bib Gourmand-awarded Ravenous Pig in Winter Park is the first of three establishments from James Beard Foundation semi-finalists and husband-and-wife duo, James and Julie Petrakis. Nothing says traditional gastropub with a southern flair quite like a pub burger, truffle fries, and a craft pint with a side order of baked cheese grits and mushroom/gruyere beignets.

passion to unite people through food. Intrigued, I bite into the moist, Florida-orange-shaped *foie gras* surrounded by cocoa nibs, and watch in awe, salivating as 14-day dry aged *canard a la presse* is prepared seamlessly tableside.

In Miami Beach, I take a short elevator ride to the sensory overload that is the stunning Michelin-recommended Mila restaurant. Inspired by their travels, owners Greg and Marine Galy looked to interior designer Olya Volkova to bring their rooftop eatery to life, evident through wood-carved artwork and lush foliage at every turn. Michelin-starred chef Michaël Michaelidis features a divine, “MediterrAsian-inspired” menu that is served Japanese izakaya style. While the robata-grilled lamb kofte takes me nostalgically back to my Greek roots, the madai sashimi with jalapeno dressing and tuna tartare with avocado miso put me in a contented, even eudaimonic state.

Further north, the infamous Surf Club Restaurant is led by acclaimed Chef Thomas Keller, holder of seven Michelin stars. Intimate and private, this vintage Art Deco hangout inspires me to channel my inner celebrity, and blissfully enjoy continental classics including French onion dip with kettle chips, jumbo crab cake with spicy mayo, and the ribeye steak. For dessert, a whisky tumbler of 12-year-old Glenfiddich, of course.

ORLANDO'S LATIN-INFUSED FLAVOURS

For decades, Orlando has been considered by some as the “Theme Park Capital of the World,” and while that’s still the case, the city is increasingly inspiring visitors to take a deeper look, beyond its expected thrills. That’s especially true when it comes to Orlando’s evolving, diverse and delicious food scene. After all, its close proximity to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts makes it a natural foodie destination, and in turn, has beckoned internationally-inspired top chefs to elevate Orlando to Michelin star status.

Away from Orlando’s theme parks, I discover the Lake Nona neighbourhood. The trendy community is home to public artwork, parks and hiking trails, including a weekly artisan and farmers’ market. It’s also my dining stop. I head to the Michelin-recommended BACÁN, the signature restaurant of the new Lake Nona Wave Hotel. The colourful vibrant space is complemented with a contemporary menu of tropical influences from Central and South America. My Old Fashioned, infused with Coconut Cartel Rum from Guatemala and xocolatl mole bitters inspired from Mexico, whets my appetite. I anxiously bite into butter-smooth scallops *a la plancha* with smoked roe, and lobster and burrata tostadas with passion fruit and toasted pepitas. Ignoring my full stomach, I opt for the succulent skirt steak with nutty, tangy tomato-based romesco sauce. For dessert, a chocolate sphere is melted over a rich chocolate brownie tableside, and I unabashedly devour the whole thing.

On another occasion, I’m across town, atop the luxurious Four Seasons Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort as whizzing rollercoasters and Epcot’s iconic geodesic sphere are heard and seen in the distance. Malyna Si of Capa, Central Florida’s only female chef, leads a Michelin-starred restaurant at this posh property. Romantic, spacious yet



PHOTOS: ARIETE HOSPITALITY GROUP | VISIT ORLANDO | MILA | JIM BAMBOULIS | THE SURF CLUB RESTAURANT/DEBORAH JONES



FOODIES REJOICE ON CALLE OCHO

Time your arrival right and beat the lineup at Sanguich De Miami, a narrow Bib Gourmand outpost in Little Havana, known for its Cuban sandwich featuring pork butt marinated for a week in garlic and spices, then pressed and grilled. For a more immersive Calle Ocho gastronomic experience, take the 2.5-hour Little Havana Food and Cultural Tour to delve deeper into the soul of the community, and savour its delicious flavours.

cosy, Chef Si complements the mood with her exquisite Spanish-inspired menu, including the heavenly paella Valenciana with Calasparra rice, green and fava beans, marinated chicken and rabbit with a pinch of saffron. I pause and head to the terrace to view Disney World's nightly fireworks before returning to my seat to gobble up my hot and fresh churros de Madrid, which hit the spot perfectly.

INDIAN DELIGHTS SOUTH OF DOWNTOWN

Orlando has come of age, becoming an internationally respected city for its diverse culinary options. Among them is Amit Kumar's Bib Gourmand-rated Bombay Street Kitchen, a good quality for good value South Indian-inspired eatery that caters to all palates. I meet Chef Amit who explains that when it comes to his street food menu, he doesn't compromise on authenticity. While several vegetarian curries pique my interest, I'm a sucker for a Frankie, a.k.a. Bombay Burrito with paneer, onion and chutney, and perhaps too enthusiastically add a dosa, stuffed with potato and cabbage, served with coconut sambal. A sweet, tangy sherbet known as Kala Khatta with Indian blackberry offers a welcomed respite from the Orlando heat.

Michelin recognition and appreciation never hurts, and when it comes to Miami and Orlando, international validation has served to magnify what local chefs and restaurateurs have already known. Florida sits at the crossroads of converging cultural influences, and in turn, will continue to attract global culinary influencers who aren't afraid of taking risks, and setting new trends. **DS**

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TRAVEL PLANNER

For details on Michelin-starred restaurants in Miami and Orlando, visit guide.michelin.com/us/en/florida/miami/restaurants and guide.michelin.com/us/en/florida/orlando/restaurants. For hotel reservations in Miami, see Loews Miami Beach Hotel loewshotels.com/miami-beach, and in Orlando check out Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek hiltonbonnetcreek.com and Lake Nona Wave Hotel lakenonawavehotel.com. For travel information about Miami and Orlando visit miamiandbeaches.com and visitorlando.com; and for Florida see visitflorida.com.

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