

# NATIONAL POST

## LIFE

### Miami vice (& virtue)



Having the Ritz-Carlton's Tanning Butler slather sunscreen on you: vice or virtue? Ritz-Carlton South Beach

Comments Twitter LinkedIn Email Recommend

Sarah Treleven, National Post Mar. 11, 2011 | Last Updated: Mar. 11, 2011 4:53 PM

#### Vice: South Beach

Oh, South Beach. Against all odds, I love you. I love that a string bikini doubles as both beach and bistro wear. I love your art deco buildings and old-school cruiser bicycles. I love your cosmetically altered ladies and Ed Hardy-clad men. I love your food, from fresh fish to Cuban stewed beef, and your commitment to extensive, girly cocktail menus. But most of all, I love that you're just so darn indulgent. It's almost impossible to be in South Beach -- even for work -- without feeling like you're on vacation.

**Gluttony** Despite the strict bikini dress code, this city can easily turn anyone into a glutton. At The Betsy Hotel's BLT Steak, the Miami outpost of the New York City institution, I gorged on too many ounces of perfectly marbled and grilled steak (with the help of my friend, Jim, whose dedication to beef eating did not go unappreciated), huge doughy onion rings, roasted Brussels sprouts with bacon, and cheese popovers. And the South Beach Food Tour offered a strolling, dinner-size sampling of a number of key culinary destinations, including La Marea at The Tides and Jerry's Famous Deli.

**Pride** If there's one place that makes you rethink your personal appearance, it's Miami. So when I arrived, week-old home manicure making my hands look like they had been submerged in a terrarium full of hungry weasels, it was time to step up my game. At the spa at the Ritz-Carlton South Beach, I tried the Carita Velvet Hands & Feet treatment, two hours of soaking and buffing bliss. I'm certain that my nails, painted a lovely shade of neon red, turned some heads later that night. (Even if my non-fake boobs put me at a comparative disadvantage.)

**Greedy** You know what I don't need? An unbelievably soft suede-lined, black leather purse with chunky zippers designed by boy wonder Alexander Wang. But shopping at The Webster has nothing to do with anything as gauche as "need" or "utility." (Though it might have some correlation with "insufficient funds.") The Webster is the kind of carefully curated, extremely pricey oversized boutique where you want absolutely everything -- from a Lanvin gold lamé dress to YSL suede pumps.

Envy I am extremely jealous of Miamians. Not so much for their limited body fat or bronzed skin or easy access to ceviche, but for their taxi drivers. I took six cab rides in Miami and each was more delightful than the last. One driver told me a heartwarming story about his father taking him to pick out the family Christmas tree every year, another moaned amusingly about hosting dinner for her sizable dysfunctional family, another offered me tips on the best Cuban food in the city, and yet another diagnosed (fairly accurately) my romantic difficulties immediately after I stepped into the cab.

#### Virtue: Canyon Ranch

With all that Miami vice, you could probably use a little virtue to balance things out. And so the venerable spa mini-chain, Canyon Ranch, has opened an outpost in Miami. The three-tower retreat, awash in soothing beiges and parked right on the beach, offers a huge full-service spa and gym, a vast array of fitness and nutrition classes, a small café for quick bites and coffee, a fantastic oceanview restaurant dedicated to clean and delicious meals, and comfortable all-suite accommodations. There's a no-fun stigma attached to good health, and Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa in Miami Beach is working hard to prove that living right can still feel indulgent.

#### SEARCH

News Stock Quote  GO

#### SERVICES

Newspaper	NationalPost.com
Get Home Delivery	News Feeds
Subscriber Services	Newsletters
Digital Paper	
Today's Paper	

About	Contact
Advertise	Contact The Post
Place A Classified Ad	Send Us A News Tip
Corrections	Letters To The Editor
Privacy Statement	About Your Event
Site Map	Feedback

#### TOOLS

- Change text size
- Print

#### MORE ON THIS STORY

Foursquare travel tip: Miami vice (and virtue)

Queen for a stay on the Mayan Riviera

Curative trips: Leaving on a spa train

#### RELATED TOPICS

- Alexander Wang
- Miguel Pando
- Foods
- Seafood

Prudence At Canyon Ranch, it was early to bed and early to rise - which wasn't difficult given the comfortable, sizable suite I'd been awarded. The interiors at the all-suite hotel are warm, contemporary and casual, which simply beckons relaxation. With my own kitchen, sitting room and oversized bedroom and bathroom (plus a balcony overlooking the ocean), I was more than content to retire early to my fluffy king-size bed, yawning contentedly while reading a schedule of the next day's activities.

**Faith** I have faith in incremental change, and Canyon Ranch offers the opportunity to do right by your body in a way that still feels like a vacation. The activities are plentiful, including Buff Ballet Booty and Vinyasa Yoga classes, meditation and aquafit offerings, lectures on organic food and detoxification, luxurious facial and body treatments, and a very well equipped gym. But for all of the people I saw wearing lycra spandex, sucking down carrot-ginger concoctions from EEZZ's Juice Bar, there were also a lot of people taking it easy on the beach or sunning themselves around one of the pools -- completely guilt-free.

**Temperance** I'm often a fan of overdoing it: too much red wine, too many canapés, that one last whisky I didn't need (as I'm counting out quarters to make sure I have enough for the cab ride home). But Canyon Ranch offers delicious, delicious moderation. The restaurant offers fresh, well-prepared dishes -- including Cobb salad, artichoke fries with housemade ketchup, crab cakes (which really hit the spot after an day spent being re-mineralized in the spa's water therapy circuit), and wonderful desserts (the key lime tart is heavenly). The portions are reasonable, and you won't leave the table feeling guilty.

**Courage** Unlike the reputation of many spas, Canyon Ranch Miami doesn't operate like a minimum-security prison. You're in Miami, so why not have a night on the town? It does, however, take some courage to leave the property. The outside world suddenly felt strange, unfamiliar and non-spa like. I went over the wall one night, heading to OLA Miami at the Sanctuary Hotel for a sensational meal of tart ceviche, tender, braised pork and marlin tacos (happily defying my aforementioned commitment to moderation), but I had become so relaxed in just two days at Canyon Ranch that I initially left the property without my wallet, cash or keys. It's a miracle I remembered my shoes.

#### Meet the Tanning Butler

On my trip to Miami, I had the rare pleasure of speaking with the world's only "Tanning Butler"<sup>™</sup> (property of The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach) -- and the slightly more dubious honour of conducting my first-ever professional interview while wearing a bikini. (Turns out it's a little awkward.)

Twenty-year-old Miguel Pando, he of the adorable smile and bronzed biceps, easily visible in his de rigueur tank top and shorts, has missed a calculus review to meet with me. (When he's not butlering at the Ritz, he's studying accounting.) I feel bad, but not bad enough to turn down his offer of lotioning and spritzing.

Pando trolls the Ritz's elegant pool area and beachfront from noon until 4 p.m. every weekend, offering to apply tanning lotion (the high-end, pleasantly scented Hampton Sun line) to "hard-to-reach places" and spritzing guests with Evian. For birthdays and bachelorette parties, he'll sometimes throw in extra perks like a cake or well-chilled bottle of Champagne.

Pando was scouted on the street in spring of last year, after the former Tanning Butler was scooped up by an Armani campaign. (That's Miami for you.) "They wanted someone who has a personality, who wasn't a wallflower and could engage guests," Pando says, grinning widely.

And then it was time to strip down. In order to write this story fairly, and to provide an accurate assessment of the smooth, capable hands of the world's only Tanning Butler, I took off my clothes, stretched out over the white terrycloth cabana bed and submitted to my journalistic duties.

Notebook still in hand, sunglasses shading my eyes and melting under the hot Miami sun, I ask Pando if anyone has ever asked for anything inappropriate, something unbecoming the office of Tanning Butler. He pauses, reflecting. "Sometimes people ask if I can apply lotion to their easy-to-reach places," he says, smiling shyly. "But I try to keep things professional."

#### If you go

**Accommodations** Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa (6801 Collins Ave.; 800-742-9000) is the place for relaxation and revitalization, The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach (1 Lincoln Rd.; 786-276-4000) is an elegant place to work on your tan, and The Betsy Hotel (1440 Ocean Dr.; 866-792-3879) is a clean, contemporary, boutique hotel.

**Food** BLT Steak is ideal for all of your beef-related needs, OLA Miami at the Sanctuary Hotel makes exceptional everything, but particularly ceviches, braised pork and vegetarian entrees, and the South Beach Food Tours (855-642-3663) offers a walking smorgasbord of food and Miami fun facts.

**Budget busting** The Webster (1220 Collins Ave.; 305-674-7899) is a great place to browse and, for those of us in an only moderately lucrative creative field, start thinking about finally submitting those law school applications.

[Get the National Post newspaper delivered to your home](#)