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Vacation/Staycation

Even though we live in what most would describe as a tropical paradise, sometimes, you need to escape at a local level. *Tropic* checks out 3 options.

vacationorstaycation?

After a hectic holiday season, sometimes it's nice to disappear... with or without a passport.

AFTER THE HOUSE GUEST crazed Holidays culminate with a frenzied New Years Eve, we think it's time to opt for a much needed rest. This could mean an exotic escape to a land where fresh-caught grouper is grilled and plated with sizzling hot fried plantain chips, all served up overlooking a pink sand beach, or it could mean turning off the phone and iPad, packing a swimsuit and little else, and driving to a local escape on the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic, enjoying rum drinks under a beach umbrella. Either way, you get the chance to unwind, swim, sun and maybe even read a book... On these pages, you'll find one spot that requires a passport, one that asks you to drive a few hours and one you could very easily get to by Uber or Lyft. Bon Voyage!

VACATIONORSTAYCATION PLUNGE BEACH HOTEL

For a relaxed, escape weekend without really having to leave Fort Lauderdale, how about a few nights at the new Plunge Beach Hotel in Lauderdale-By-The-Sea? The developers of these three (soon to be four) properties have created a little campus of buildings at the far northern end of this town's beachfront. This group has reimagined a couple of vintage buildings from the 1950s, along with a former Howard Johnson's, and it's truly the last thing you'd expect in formerly sleepy, Lauderdale-By-The-Sea.

The hotel's main lobby, if you can call it that, is unexpected to say the least. Looking like a mash-up of influences from Austin, Maui and Laguna Beach, the entire first level of Plunge's main building has been exploded. Walls removed, concrete, ductwork and electrical exposed, the sprawling first level contains a fab coffee shop, the Bean & Barnacle, the Octopus restaurant, tons of lounge space, communal tables with electrical hook-ups — (for you who just cannot separate from work) — and more. It's as if they've taken the successful formula of the urban, CitizenM hotel chain and applied it to a super-relaxed, beach setting, and done so supremely well.

This little local getaway has a lot to offer for a very sweet price. Sure, you could stay at the Ritz a few miles South, but an oceanview room there in January starts at about \$749 a night last we looked, and at Plunge, the rate was \$212. Better yet, at Plunge, you are right ON the sand... no pesky ATA to have to cross to get to the beach.

Of course there are the requisite pools for lounging around, but honestly, the wide, uncrowded beach is the draw here, and when you're done sunning or swimming, the BackFlip beach bar and kitchen is there to serve. Open from about 10am to Midnight, BackFlip offers excellent fare like crispy pork belly or garlic shrimp tacos, or snacks like chicharrones with lime salt and roasted jalapeño cream. Wash these down with signature libations like the aptly named Bigger Boat Needed, an alluring concoction



of gin, coconut cream, fresh lime juice and ginger beer. All of this is served up in an open-air dining pavilion that is, quite literally, on the beach.

If you book, ask for oceanfront or ocean view rooms in what they call their “beach building.” As much as we love that they renovated the little 50s building next door known as the bungalow, in our opinion, a mistake was made installing floor-to-ceiling impact glass that does not open, preventing you from hearing the ocean waves at night or getting the tropical breeze. The beach building does have sliders, offering that all-important connection to nature which, especially on the upper levels, is divine.

PLUNGE BEACH HOTEL

4660 El Mar Drive
Lauderdale-By-The-Sea
plungebeachhotel.com

TOP: Guest rooms are bright and contemporary.
MIDDLE: The Bean & Barnacle coffee shop.
BOTTOM: The Plunge’s wide open lobby and Octopus restaurant.



