

Popular destination remains successful, while catering to a new crowd and economy.



Within South Florida's tri-county area, certain locations boast reputations as the 'best-of-the-best' for shopping, dining, salons, and galleries. In Palm Beach County, Worth Avenue is the premiere place in much the same way that South Beach beckons to locals in Miami-Dade County. However, Las Olas Boulevard lies nestled between the two in Fort Lauderdale, rich in its history and still a popular locale since its meager as a dirt road beginnings in 1917.

Originally intended as a way across swampy wetlands to a barrier island at Fort Lauderdale Beach, "Las Olas" Boulevard translates to "The Waves" Boulevard in Spanish, aptly named for a street that epitomizes all that tourists and locals alike want when headed to the beach. The boulevard begins at the Museum of Art and continues to the once-renowned Elbo Room bar. Along the enticing thoroughfare, visitors will find a wide range of restaurants and bars, salons, banks, sidewalk cafés, jewelry stores, cigar bars, art and antique stores, fashion boutiques, and hotels among many other businesses.

Along with many air-conditioned options for escaping summer temperatures, Las Olas Boulevard also offers many outdoor events that take place once the sun goes down. Typical events include wine and food festivals, art festivals, holiday celebrations, and free outdoor movies during certain months of the year.



Fort Lauderdale began its rise in notoriety many years ago when the Elbo Room Bar was featured in the 1960 movie, *Where the Boys Are*. This led to rising popularity with Spring Break students, who headed to South Florida for sun, surf, sands, and sightseeing. The city hosted the college crowd for many years, logging an estimated 350,000 college visitors at its busiest season in 1985. However, city officials began passing strict laws to prevent the typical mayhem taking place every year and by 2006, college visitors declined in number to about 10,000.

While Las Olas Boulevard also has a well known and party-related reputation, the city of Fort Lauderdale boasts a much more historic heritage. Fort Lauderdale is named after a series of forts built by the United States during the Second Seminole War, with the three of the forts taking the name of Major William Lauderdale – commander of the detachment of soldiers who built the first fort. However, development of the actual city didn't begin until 50 years after the forts were abandoned at the end of the conflict.

Because of its proximity and popularity, Fort Lauderdale Beach, with its seven miles of palm-shaded white sands – has continued to be featured in a long list of additional movies over the years. In addition, the typical beachgoers and shoppers along Las Olas Boulevard are no longer representative of college students spending their loan money. It's now seasonal residents and locals that make up the majority of people shopping and dining during the day, with a 40-60-something crowd comprising the evening crowds who are out for a casual stroll or glass of wine at an outdoor café.

Recently, Las Olas Boulevard has also begun to nest members of the gay community. As such, some bars are taking advantage of this new group

of clients, catering to their preferences with nightly events aimed at attracting new business that will provide steady, year-round income, without the businesses having to rely on seasonal snowbird dollars to last.

Las Olas Boulevard has managed to survive, and even thrive, despite a fluctuating economy and changing crowd. One of the reasons for its continued success is as a historical hotspot for visitors eager to visit the past.

Whether it's a trip to Stranahan House (the oldest building in Fort Lauderdale, originally built as a trading post), or a sightseeing tour past the waterfront homes of the rich and famous, Las Olas Boulevard – along with Fort Lauderdale Beach – still manages to offer something for everyone.

Fort Lauderdale has been called the "Venice of America," due in part to its extensive waterway systems, but also because it has become a major yachting center, with almost 50,000 resident yachts and over 100 marinas. As the county seat of Broward County, Fort Lauderdale reported over 165,000 residents in 2010, and is expected to easily exceed 200,000 over the next year.

As evidenced by the quiet allure of the beach, along with regular arrival of tourists and daily visits by locals, the spirit of Las Olas Boulevard is alive and well. Continually showing itself as a survivor through a challenging economy and changes in clientele, the success of Fort Lauderdale continues to keep pace with similar areas of South Florida, proving it too has the staying power to remain a go-to destination for many years to come.

