

Florida Trend

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HOTELS **Finally, Room at the Inn**

by [Ellen Forman](#)



The W Fort Lauderdale is set to open in June;

Twenty years after rowdy college kids got the boot, Fort Lauderdale's famed Strip has gone luxe.

A new five-star St. Regis Resort sells \$46 steaks on the same oceanfront spot where the Candy Store held wet T-shirt contests. The W Fort Lauderdale, with 346 rooms and 171 residences, is slated to open in June. A 24-story, 301-suite Trump International Hotel & Tower, built in the style of an Art Deco ocean liner, plans to open in 2009. In the past four years, hotel operators have invested \$1 billion, bringing 1,300 hotel rooms.

The beach has come a long way since the 1980s, when tough new city laws sent spring breakers packing and beach businesses reeling.

The opening of the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center in 1990 — with no attached hotel — brought some business to hotels near the beach. Tourism marketers courted Europeans, Northeasterners, Orlando visitors, families, gays and lesbians. Many came, but higher-end travelers continued to favor South Beach and Palm Beach. Without more top-end resort hotels, "there was nowhere to put these

people,” says Nicki Grossman, president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The real estate market helped solve that problem. As condos and condo/hotels slumped, resorts remained solid investments. Now hoteliers are moving farther inland, seeking approval for new downtown properties. The most striking deal: Hilton announced plans to build a long-awaited hotel on the convention center property, with no governmental cash subsidy.

Grossman says the city is now setting its sights on attracting affluent South Americans, many with friends and relatives living in Broward. The bureau has a \$5-million advertising budget, up from \$3 million three years ago.

Broward County Visitors (in millions)	
2000	7.6
2001	7.8
2002	8.1
2003	8.9
2004	9.4
2005	10.1
2006	10.4
2007	10.7

Source: Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau



Trump International Hotel and Tower (left), slated for a 2009 opening; and the five-star St. Regis Resort.