

# SAVORING SURFSIDE

Small In Size But Packed With Flavor

BY SARA LISS



# For

YEARS THE TOWN OF SURFSIDE EXISTED HAPPILY under the radar of "hot" Miami neighborhoods.

It was an in-between spot that most sped through on their way to or from Bal Harbour, its swanky northern neighbor. But a slew of high-profile projects — like The Four Seasons Surf Club which opened in 2017 — began casting a spotlight on this otherwise sleepy beachfront enclave that is home to great restaurants and a vibrant community. As a resident of Surfside for over 15 years I have seen the town evolve from a lesser-known neighborhood to a world-class resort town.

Then the tragedy of the Champlain Towers collapse brought national attention on Surfside for unthinkable, heart-breaking devastation. While the close-knit community suffered immeasurable loss, we also came together in a massive outpouring of love, energy and mobilization to help first responders and families cope with this unimaginable situation.

Restaurants of our diminutive "downtown" donated to feed hundreds while continuing to be a dining destination because Surfside, which is only a half-square mile, is home to over 25 restaurants, bars and dessert spots. The concentrated three-block radius is also home to a large number of kosher dining options with chefs whipping up surprisingly inventive cuisine.

Here are some of our favorites, brimming with delicious reasons to visit.



THE HARBOUR GRILL

Leaving Lyon, France for the tropical shores of Miami, owner and chef Gilbert Amsellem found a culinary niche waiting to be filled in Miami twelve years ago. Combining both steakhouse and bistro classics, the two sister eateries Harbour Grill and Harbour Bistro have amassed a loyal following offering kosher Prime Dry Aged Meats as well as a wide selection of innovative sushi and French dishes.

The elegant dining room feels posh without being stuffy, with white tablecloths and dark woods creating an intimate atmosphere. Executive Chef Fabrice Di Rienzo (also hailing from Lyon) worked in France's finest kitchens under world-renowned chefs Pierre Orsi, Daniel Boulud, Paul Bocuse and Bernard Loiseau.

Many dishes on the menu satisfy epicureans but it's the housemade artisanal (pork-free) charcuterie board for which Amsellem worked for years to perfect that is the star of the show. A rustic wooden board comes arrayed with dried chorizo, Italian coppa and beef prosciutto — each cured in-house and redolent with pepper, thyme and personality. The beef bacon is cured in maple syrup and salt and is smoked over maple wood.

The cured meat sets the stage for an elegant meal comprised of chicken liver mousse with cognac, duck gnocchi in a sauce forestiere (wild mushrooms) and a variety of chops and steaks like a wagyu ribeye, braised lamb shank and a traditional Korean BBQ composed of sliced wagyu short rib and beef bulgogi cooked tableside on a hot grill. Pescatarians have plenty to choose from starting with creative sushi rolls like faux shrimp tempura or the Toro Krudo, a bluefin tuna sashimi style served in a ponzu sauce. There's also salmon a la plancha (on the grill) and branzino cooked in the southern France Provence style boasting tomatoes, herbs and olives.

9415 Harding Ave.; 305.861.0787; theharbourgrill.com



CAFÉ RAGAZZI

The name means "kids" in Italian but there's nothing juvenile about this upscale spot owned by Venezuelan singer Ricardo Montaner along with his wife Marlene. Occupying the corner of 95th Street and encased in large glass windows, this iconic trattoria has held court for over twenty years, having been the "anchor" restaurant on the strip before other eateries joined to create Surfside's busy dining district. And, once upon a pre-pandemic time, lining up outside this Harding Avenue landmark was a rite of passage for any pasta lover who wanted to experience a cozy, comfortable setting for linguini carbonara, penne puttanesca and seafood-leaning mains like the zuppa di pesce, a sized-for-two splay of shrimps, scallops, mussels and more over pasta.

Nowadays you'll probably find it a little easier to get inside where big bowls of pasta, rich sauces, fresh ingredients and ever-flowing wine are the many reasons diners can't get enough of this 50-seat restaurant. Perhaps it's the way the staff greets diners by name or the do-it-yourself bruschetta, a petite bowl of chopped fresh tomato studded with big chunks of garlic with plenty of olive oil and herbs that comes complimentary with a basket of fresh bread, or the fresh-made pizzas and antipasti, that keeps both visitors and locals coming back, season after season to this Italian stalwart.

9500 Harding Ave.; 305.866.4495



26 SUSHI & TAPAS

With sleek decor and an eclectic menu, this sushi emporium is not just for the city's kosher-observant movers and shakers. A mod dining room with white leather wall panels, cushy banquette seating and trendy pendant lighting sets the stage for top notch Asian cuisine with Latin American influences.

Executive Chef Gian G. Morales hails from Puerto Rico but is classically trained in European cuisine, having honed his skills at Silberdiel, a one Michelin Star restaurant in the German Alps and later joining Starr restaurant group in 2017, working at Makoto, Le Zoo and Steak 954. You can see these influences in dishes like the Mushroom and Truffle Baked

Hand Roll topped with fresh black truffle and the Passionfruit Ceviche brimming with tender mahi-mahi bathed in a passionfruit aji amarillo leche de tigre. Starters of faux scallops tempura battered in a sweet and spicy sauce and crunchy lettuce wraps with tempura battered mahi in an aji amarillo aioli are also crowd pleasers as are the seabass dumplings and homemade tequeños.

9487 Harding Ave.; 305.570.2626; 26sushitapas.com





**MENDEL'S BACKYARD BBQ & BREW**

Hefty slabs of beef are the headliners at this kosher barbecue joint, with plenty of decadent sides and sauces to accompany the carnivorous feast. Run by pitmaster and co-owner Mendel Segal, the meats at Backyard are cooked with hickory and applewood in their genuine Southern Pride Smoker and includes favorites like "Dinosaur" beef short ribs as well as lamb saddle and smoked whole rack of veal (both of which need to be ordered 72 hours in advance). The Southern Fried Chicken can be ordered as a half or a whole chicken, with the option to be served on a soft and crispy waffle. Other belly-filling dishes not usually seen on kosher-oriented menus are the truffle fries "poutine" topped with brisket and a sausage platter made with chorizo and merguez. Sides of grilled corn, cast iron mashed potatoes, and burnt ends brisket baked beans keep the gluttony going.

9472 Harding Ave.; 305.763.8818; backyardbbqmiami.com



**VISH**

This healthy hummus bar aims to give diners an elevated experience of the chickpea "dip" that is a staple in Israeli cuisine. The fast-casual kosher eatery serves its homemade rendition with a variety of tasty toppings like sautéed mushrooms, fava beans, hard-boiled egg, cumin, sweet paprika, olive oil and parsley alongside fresh Yemenite pita bread. In Hebrew, vish means "wiping," an action that bears cultural significance in the Middle East as that was the most common way to enjoy hummus in older days — literally wiping it off the plate with a fresh piece of pita. Falafel and shakshuka are also on the menu as well as tahini-based shakes and smoothies.

9545 Harding Ave.; 305.763.8074; vish.rest



BY THE OBSERVER AS STYLING: DANIELA REIS

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**LA PLAGE AT THE GRAND BEACH HOTEL**

Start your experience off with a cocktail at the rooftop bar at this glossy hotel. Perched on the 12th floor and overlooking the city to the west (with a gorgeous view of the sunset) and the ocean to the east, you'll get the highest view in town (Surfside has building codes restricting anything higher than 12 floors). For dinner, reserve a table on the beachfront patio on the ground level where Executive Chef Stephane Caporal (formerly of the Fisher Island Club) has created a menu infused with authentic European and Latin dishes. Think cold tomato gazpacho with lemon basil sorbet and duck confit with sweet potato puree and herb-roasted heirloom carrots. It all pairs divinely with the salty ocean breezes.

Located inside The Grand Beach Hotel, 9449 Collins Ave.; 305.534.8666; grandbeachhotel.com



**THE FOUR SEASONS SURF CLUB**



This luxe hotel is home to two elegant restaurants and an award-winning "Champagne Bar" where turn-of-the-century glamour melds perfectly with a modern take on dining and mixology. White jacket-clad waiters hold sway at the lobby bar where you can start with a creation by master barman Valentino Longo (winner of 13th Annual Bombay Sapphire Most Imaginative Bartender competition), sure to impress you with a memorable cocktail.

Come mealtime, choose between the Thomas Keller-created Surf Club restaurant featuring nostalgia-leaning dishes of Lobster Thermidor and Beef Wellington or the newly-unveiled Lido Restaurant helmed by Executive Chef Antonio Mermolia. The latter specializes in Mediterranean cuisine rooted in the chef's Southern Italian culture where sea bass with charred and marinated zucchini beckons along with pizzas made from dough fermented for 72 hours. Pasta lovers will not want to miss the house-made ravioli stuffed with Mozzarella di Bufala, tomatoes and basil.

The setting for all this Italian bounty is the grandeur of The Surf Club's fabled ballroom, once home to the 20th century's most talked about parties and culinary affairs and now an arched mahogany dining room that gives way to the ocean views of the Lido Terrace. Dining here is a transportive experience, being both emblematic of Miami's heyday and trumpeting a new and more glamorous future for the city. **O**

9011 Collins Ave.; 305.330.4000; fourseasons.com