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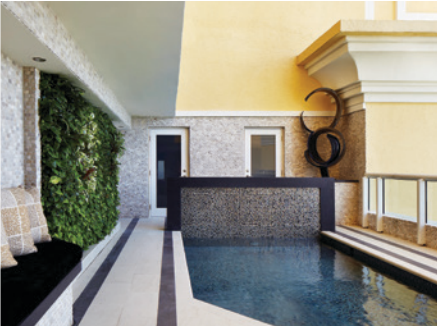
*Mary Fisher's globally
inspired interiors*

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IN ADDITION TO ITS ACQUA EXPERIENCES, ACQUALINA RECENTLY UNVEILED A NEW PENTHOUSE SUITE THAT INCLUDES A DINING ROOM AND A LARGE TERRACE WITH A PRIVATE SALTWATER SWIMMING POOL.



QUICK TRIPS

MEMORY Makers

Beyond luxury, Acqualina’s Acqua Experiences inform and delight

By Daphne Nikolopoulos

As the demand for experiential travel increases, top resorts are repackaging guest activities into lifestyle offerings. For example, it’s nice to have a lagoon-style pool, but providing scuba diving instruction with a PADI master in that pool is even better. The idea is to engage guests and help them create memories, which is the real currency of travel.

Acqualina Resort & Spa on Sunny Isles Beach jumped on that bandwagon early and now has a catalogue of at least a dozen Acqua Experiences that vary from yacht cruises to etiquette classes for children. Most are expert-led, and some are quite exclusive. For example, A Taste of Miami exposes guests to the best of the local food scene, including some hidden gems, with the guidance of a Miami food writer who understands the subtle nuances among Cuban *medianoches*. The private tour takes a maximum of four guests into Wynwood, Little Havana, and, of course, the beach for a sampling of everything from *anticuchos* to *arepas*, with a few craft cocktails thrown in for good measure.

Any food tour really should visit Acqualina’s own Il Mulino and its new sister restaurant, AQ Chop House. Il Mulino is a southern copy of the New York Italian restaurant, including all the classics from the original and a couple of Miami-specific twists. AQ Chop House is more casual and bright, with seating both indoors and on the terrace overlooking the ocean. This is essentially a high-quality steak house, but the crudos and seafood are equally enticing. Don’t miss the sushi (the AQ Roll with spicy tuna, salmon, and jalapeño is a good bet) or go all out and opt for the seafood tower, with oysters, crab, shrimp, and lobster. And trust us on this: Do not skip the truffle fries.

Another guest-favorite experience is Spinning with the CEO. Deborah Yager Fleming can sprint and jump with the best of them during the spin classes at RedBike, which emulate the energy and pulsing lights of a night out in the city. For families, the Art of Social Decorum etiquette class teaches children good manners for any social environment, and Wildlife at Acqualina allows them to get up close and personal with rescued animals, as well as learn about wildlife conservation practices. A fun activity parents can share with their children is Painting by the Sea. Art instructors bring all



BETWEEN HAMMOCK NAPS AND DIVINE MEALS AT AQ CHOP HOUSE AND IL MULINO, SAMPLE A FEW OF THE RESORT’S ACQUA EXPERIENCES, SUCH AS KAYAKING THROUGH OLETA RIVER STATE PARK, TAKING A SPIN CLASS WITH HOTEL CEO DEBORAH YAGER FLEMING, AND UNLEASHING YOUR CREATIVITY WITH PAINTING BY THE SEA.

the supplies and participants bring the creativity, setting up easels outdoors and painting whatever strikes their fancy. Even those who have never painted before, and never thought they could, surprise themselves with their creations.

In Miami, spending a day on the water is strongly encouraged, if not downright compulsory. Acqua Experiences’ three-hour private yacht cruise is a particularly memorable way to accomplish that. Not only can guests lounge, Champagne in hand, on the sundeck, they also have the opportunity to snorkel or dive around a secret sandbar, where dolphins, sea turtles, and tropical fish frolic.

Another way to enjoy the water? Kayaking through Oleta River State Park on Biscayne Bay. Though Oleta is located in the city (hence its designation as an “urban park”), it feels miles away thanks to serene mangrove trails and a profusion of bird life. Acqualina guests paddle along the bay with a private guide to arrive at Sandspur Island for swimming and sunning. All in all, a perfect Florida day.

Not all “wow” moments at Acqualina are part of the Experiences program. The resort’s newest feature is a 7,725-square-foot penthouse perched on the forty-sixth floor, with bird’s-eye views of the Atlantic. This is a presidential suite on steroids: five bedrooms, a huge living room with fireplace, a saltwater swimming pool with cabana guest house, a 10-seat dining room, a Crestron smart-home system—and a \$20,000 per night price tag. (acqualinaresort.com) ◀

