



The Dune Bar is convenient to anyone spending some relaxation time at the beach.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY RITZ-CARLTON

## PACK YOUR PORTMANTEAU

# A RECIPE FOR RELAXING LIKE ROYALTY

story and photos by **LEIGH CORT**

## Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island continues to demonstrate why it's a Top Resort

**M**ore than 30 years after the Ritz-Carlton opened its doors to the Atlantic Ocean on Amelia Island, the mystique of its appeal hasn't lost its luster.

If you have visited in the past for an overnight stay, dropped in for a day-visit to the spa, ordered a cocktail at the lobby bar or stayed for a 5-star dinner at SALT (which originally opened as The Grille), then you might recall a memorable experience like no other in Northeast Florida.

For first-time visitors, perhaps you wonder what the excitement is all about; but once you entrust your vehicle to the seasoned bellmen, they'll make you feel like royalty.

At first glance, the façade appears somewhat austere. But step inside and the glossy elegance that has come to define the resort's brand has truly

become what I've always believed it could be and just a bit more! There's a reason why this hotel is the recipient of two prestigious AAA Five Diamond designations, the travel authority's highest rating. In addition to the resort's lodging award, SALT is also honored for world-class service and imaginative menus.

Busy front desk check-ins are handled with graceful care, even including a flute of champagne if you're waiting to register on busy days. Concierge Steven and Michael keep guests feeling comfortable if you've arrived early, hearing a reassuring, "Please relax. I'm at your service while you're waiting for your room. May I offer you a beverage or an hors d'oeuvres at the Lobby Bar?"

Clearly, the broad expansive ocean vistas from every seat in the lobby feels like an elegant living room with fireplace, sofas and seating for conversation. Each vignette is perfect for relaxation from quiet sunrise mornings until late night partying ends. If you're an early riser, you can watch silhouettes walking along the beach or gathering on the oceanfront lawn with a steaming coffee from First Drop, the casual, easy walk-in and take-out

coffee bar serving pastries, snacks and informal fare throughout the day.

With accommodations featuring balconies either with an ocean vista or island view, they make in-room "fine" dining one of the best ways to relax in your room without worrying about a vacation alarm clock. The personalized service is ideal for the guest who likes to really enjoy the room. Weather permitting, food and beverages (from fine wines to imported teas that are poured for you if you choose) can be set up on your private balcony from 6 a.m. until midnight; stylish menus reflect the culinary excellence in all the Ritz's restaurants.

Voted among the Top Resorts in Florida by Travel+Leisure 2022 as World's Best Award and Conde Nast Traveler 2022 Readers' Choice Award, the Ritz-Carlton Amelia Island has been viewed in a respected echelon of vacation destinations for 30 years. There is a fine balance of luxurious accommodations, exquisite culinary adventures, island explorations on and off the beaten path, birding and nature excursions, kayaking and paddleboard

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tours.

They are famous for creating memorable family fun with their renowned Ritz Kids Program of supervised games, crafts, movies, dinners, treasure hunts and themes that are offered for full- and half-day options. There are many planned activities if you're interested in cycling the numerous scenic, yet hidden, island bike paths — guided nature walks with a respected naturalist, hunting for shells and shark teeth with a hotel recreation team member.

Turn the page to wellness and explore the unforgettable spa that embodies a holistic approach to well-being amid the gentle rhythm of ocean waves. The menu of spa treatments is in their inspired and timeless setting to soothe and nourish. Treat yourself to something as stressless as "Heaven in a Hammock." It's 100 minutes that was created on Amelia Island to combine the benefits of "zero-gravity" and touch therapy in the gentle rocking motion of a hand-woven hammock. Just close your eyes and visualize the movement



Don't let the somewhat austere exterior deceive you. Inside, it's pure elegance.

of the tide with gentle masseuse hands creating a complete sense of comfort that connects your mind, body and spirit. The vibe at the Ritz-Carlton is all about blending in with the surrounding environment in a quiet, natural and stylish way.

For culinary fans who look forward to adventurous dining, this hotel doesn't disappoint. Rise early, slip into First Drop and take away an artisanal beverage. Then you should plan to enjoy at least one visit to their casual restaurant Coast for a lavish and savory Amelia Breakfast Buffet served until 11:30 a.m. Wear your beach attire, feel at home with flipflops or gather for

a family celebration. Everything is appropriate whether sitting indoors or on the covered outdoor verandah.

Keep in mind that there are seven totally unique dining options at the resort. With friends and family, enjoy Tidewater Grill; it's designed with a laidback nautical ambiance. Catch a game on large screen TVs, share seafood and American grill classics, discover local beers and signature cocktails.

A day at the beach should always include a visit to the Dune Bar — perfectly named for its rustic dune-side breezy style a few steps from the sand. Craft beer, casual order bites from the grill and a place to play cornhole, too. Weather permitting here!

A favorite gathering place for many years is their expansive magnificent lobby with The Lobby Bar as its centerpiece. Yes, it's a vibrant atmosphere, rather sophisticated and romantic. Each made-to-order sushi presentation and other bites are served with utmost pride from mid-afternoon to late night partying! It's known for a wonderful 5:45 p.m. daily gathering where you can experience "First Call,"

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a presentation of infused bourbons. Musicians fill the lobby with marvelous listening-and-dancing music where



Retail Director  
Nailah Nash

you can savor The Smoked Old Fashioned; both are worthy of adding to your vacation planner.

Dressing up is a wonderful reason to pack your favorite evening dress or dinner jacket, although there isn't

a formal dress code, only suggested if you're planning to indulge in the stunning "night to remember" SALT. For these special occasions, a visit to the resort's Luxe Shops is recommended. Retail director Nailah Nash continues to search the globe for the best designers and distinctive luxury items that you might not find anywhere else. Each season, she and her retail team always have recommendations for a new outfit, designer accessory or holiday gift.

The most unusual facet of shopping



A tasty dessert at SALT.

here is working with one of the 10 on-property professional personal shoppers who are available either when you walk in or make an appointment while on vacation.

Nash flies around the United States just to study luxury retail establishments to make sure that the Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island stands above.

SALT is a kaleidoscopic dining voyage! Today's fashionable chefs are cooking with more exotic salt, which doesn't mean it's going to taste salty — especially with their magical colors, salt flakes and tiny crystals. It's no surprise that the Ritz-Carlton's radiant restaurant embraces this global phenomenon. SALT's Chef Okan

Kizilbayir spares no culinary wizardry to thrill his guests and the professional service makes you feel as if you're a foreign dignitary.

If you have a daring palate, the Chef's Seafood Adventure lives up to its name with five courses and paired wines. Each stunning dish features the finest ingredients of the season. The chef's choices change daily, but imagine beginning with Osetra Caviar and a sweet harmonious ending of Paris Brest for dessert. The overall dinner screenplay includes masterful sommeliers whether selecting a full-length show or just one magnificent act featuring an entrée and champagne! SALT is a work of art.

Alas, it's time to leave the "Ladies and Gentlemen Serving Ladies and Gentlemen." There is no mystery about why Amelia Island's legendary resort is continuing in the traditions that impressed us decades ago. Everyone's warm and sincere greeting extended to the fond farewell reminds us that this sweet getaway does enliven the senses for a moment in time. I can't wait to crave another "squiggle of raspberry puree next to my warm lime beignet!"



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