

# The Miami Herald

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## The Miami Herald

HAITI AFTER THE DECADE  
 New school, new hope for young Haitians

By David Carlin and others  
 Haiti's new school, new hope for young Haitians

### 'A big fraud, big players'

Agents rid chain of mental health clinics accused of filing false claims



Agents of the FBI and state police are investigating a chain of mental health clinics accused of filing false claims. The investigation is part of a larger effort to combat fraud in the healthcare industry.

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### MIAMI'S CORE A CENTER OF ATTRACTION

The 41-story JW Marriott Marquis, which opens Friday, adds another 357 rooms to the area. The hotel is located in downtown Miami, near the intersection of Southeast Third Avenue and Biscayne Boulevard.

### President's prize another Cuba thorn

A new Cuban diplomatic mission, unveiled in Havana, is expected to become a thorn in the side of U.S. officials. The mission is seen as a challenge to U.S. policy towards Cuba.

## SOUTH FLORIDA TOURISM

# MIAMI'S CORE A CENTER OF ATTRACTION

The JW Marriott Marquis opens Friday as the latest luxury addition to downtown Miami's urban center.

BY HANNAH SAMPSON  
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British newlyweds Gemma and Philip Howard stepped onto the sidewalk outside their hotel one recent night and prepared to explore new territory: downtown Miami.

The couple stayed in South Beach on their previous visit but booked a room at the riverfront Epic Hotel for a few days before heading out on a Caribbean cruise.

"It's very city-like, isn't it?" Gemma said. "Completely different from South Beach."

Downtown Miami hoteliers and tourism boosters are hoping more visitors like the Howards seek out stays in the urban corridor as its latest high-rise hotel, the JW Marriott Marquis, opens



C.W. GRIFFIN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**WELCOME MAT:** The 41-story JW Marriott Marquis, which opens Friday, adds another 357 rooms to the area.

Friday across the street from the Epic at the intersection of Southeast Third Avenue near Biscayne Boulevard, just north of the Miami River.

The 41-story Marriott adds another 357 rooms — including

an exclusive boutique "hotel within a hotel" — to an area that has grown by more than 2,000 over the last 10 years.

It also adds a bit more shine to

•TURN TO HOTELS, 22A

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## Downtown hotels lure with metropolitan vibe

•HOTELS, FROM 1A

downtown Miami's status as a place to visit, said Travel + Leisure Editor Nancy Novogrod.

"Some people have become tired of South Beach," she said. "The downtown opportunity is very different and it signals the other possibilities of Miami — that it is a real place, a culturally vibrant city. It makes it in a way more solid as an all-around destination and a global city."

Opened earlier this year were the 65-room, budget-oriented Hotel Urbano — a former Hampton Inn on Brickell Avenue near the entrance to Rickenbacker Causeway — and Tempo Miami — part of a condo tower near AmericanAirlines Arena.

They followed the Viceroy Miami, in the sometimes-troubled ICON Brickell development, in 2009 and the Epic Hotel, part of the boutique Kimpton chain, in late 2008.

Earlier luxury hotels — including the Four Seasons in 2003 and JW Marriott, both on Brickell Avenue, and Brickell Key's Mandarin Oriental in 2000 — paved the way for the resurgence.

### A RECOVERY

While the lingering economic recession will likely slow the absorption of new hotel rooms into the market, Miami's improvement has been better than that of other top markets across the country, said Scott Berman, a hotel analyst who runs PricewaterhouseCoopers' leisure division out of Miami.

"The good news is that the recovery in Greater Miami is quite good," Berman said. "We're a lot better positioned as a destination than we were a year ago."

Occupancy rates downtown have rebounded so far this year over last — to nearly 69 percent from 61 percent — as business travel has picked up and groups have slowly started venturing into markets that were off limits during the economic downfall.

The downtown picture was bleak not long ago, its towering empty buildings a symbol of the real estate boom — and crash. But as prices dropped, younger residents moved in, transforming a business-only section of South Florida into a place where people work, live and hang out.

Mary Brickell Village, a shopping and dining center, bubbles at both lunch and dinner. New restaurants downtown — such as Zuma at the Epic Hotel and the JW Marriott Marquis' soon-to-open DB Bistro Moderne from award-winning chef Daniel Boulud — are generating excitement.

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, opened in 2006, has added popular new programs plus a restaurant and lounge. The new Miami Art Museum and Miami Science Museum, set to open in 2013 and 2014, respectively, are also expected to crank up buzz.

"The whole Brickell area is creating a strong downtown dynamic and young enthusiasm and energy," said Bernard Wolfson, whose company is opening a new Hampton Inn downtown next year. "That's not going to hurt my hotel. I have confidence in Miami."

The Miami Heat's new superstar lineup of LeBron James, Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade has upped enthusiasm for the area — leading to promotional potential for hotels eager to get bodies in the door.

Eric Jellson, area director of sales and marketing for Kimpton and the Epic Hotel, said he has a few guests checking in for an upcoming game as part of a Miami Heat offer that includes a room discount, transportation to the arena and a food and beverage credit.

It's a coincidence — but a stroke of luck — that the new JW Marriott Marquis opens with a full-size basketball court in its entertainment complex as Heat fever escalates.

"The timing, I think, in any sense is great," said General Manager Florencia Tabeni. "The Miami Heat, the economy is coming back, Latin America is coming back."

With more than 80,000 square feet of meeting and event space, the new hotel is targeting group business and Latin American business travelers. Its website advertises nightly rates from \$249. Its upscale hotel-within-a hotel, Hotel Beaux Arts — slated to open in early November with rates starting around \$400 — is geared to CEOs, entrepreneurs and celebrities.

The new JW Marriott also features a stainless



**THE LOUNGE:** At the JW Marriott Marquis, a lounge area offers computer connections and Wi-Fi.

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steel pool, tennis, virtual bowling (with a real ball and lane) and a golf school with simulators and putting greens.

These features — especially the meeting space — make the area more attractive for business groups, said William Talbert III, CEO of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.

## MORE VISITORS

For months, promoters have been angling for a downtown conference center to drive more visitors to Miami — which they say would help fill the new hotel rooms.

Even without that, downtown Miami has captured an increased share of the region's overnight visitors as the number of luxury hotels has grown. Leo Zabezhinsky, manager of business development and real estate for the Miami Downtown Development Authority, said downtown hosted 18 percent of the county's 11.9 million overnight visitors in 2009, compared to nearly 10 percent in 2002.

"We have grown our market share and really grown the attractiveness of downtown over the last 5-10 years simply by adding new quality product to the area," he said.

But since 2008, hotels downtown have been forced to slash prices to attract business — sacrificing dollars for heads in beds. Average room rates were about \$154 in the first eight months of 2010, compared to \$184 in 2008.

The jury is still out on how long it will take to fill all the new hotels — and at top prices.

"What normally might take a two-year period might take three, four years," Berman said. "You tend to have lower rates because you're going through this awareness period."

Meanwhile, older downtown hotels are polishing their images: The Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay, near the Arsht Center, will finish a \$31 million renovation in December that adds a new ballroom and board room and updates the guest rooms.

And the Mandarin Oriental, Miami, one of the early downtown arrivals in 2000, got some spiffing up for its 10th anniversary with refurbished rooms and a beach club.

"We pretty much have a brand new hotel," said General Manager Jorge Gonzalez. "Just like we did 10 years ago."



PHOTOS BY C.W. GRIFFIN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**THE LOBBY:** Paul C. Pebley, director of sales and marketing, and General Manager Florencia Tabeni talk business under the lobby chandelier.