

More room for the wealthy but none for the poor?

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Revamped Pier Sixty-Six, new Broward Convention Center hotel loom as tourism catalysts for 2025

Few Florida cities and counties that consider themselves tourist destinations are starting the New Year with a hand as rich as the one held by Fort Lauderdale and Broward County.

On the west bank: The nearly finished 800-room Omni Hotel, which is a linchpin of the publicly financed expansion of the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center. The hotel is scheduled to open in September.

On the east bank: The [re-imagined Pier Sixty-Six resort](#) by Orlando developer Tavistock with the famous rotating “Pier Top.” The hotel operation, now with 325 rooms, formally opened its doors on Jan. 13.

At an annual January forecast lunch sponsored by Visit Lauderdale, the county’s tourism promotion arm, President and CEO Stacy Ritter touted a cruise industry that [funneled 4 million passengers](#) through Port Everglades, which counts itself as a port of call mainly for luxury cruise lines these days. The volume was an increase of 39% over 2023. She also pointed to growth in “hotel demand,” which reflects a daily average of hotel rooms sold.

The hotel community generated \$125.4 million in tourist development tax dollars, the agency said in a statement, and saw a

1.5% increase in “hotel demand,” which is a measure of average daily rooms sold.

The new year is expected to see the opening of five new hotels, including the 29-story Omni, adding more than 1,490 rooms and enhancing the destination’s appeal for conventions, events, and leisure travel. There will be more luxury, albeit higher prices, but the higher-income visitors are continuing to pay prices that have elevated since COVID-19, analysts and executives said.

By Costar’s count, the Greater Fort Lauderdale area is home to 39,000 rooms across 430 hotels.

Colm O’Callaghan, vice president and managing director for the Pier Sixty-Six resort, acknowledged his sales and marketing group has its own work to do to make the newly minted \$1 billion project stand out in the U.S. and international markets.

“There’s always room for improvement,” said longtime developer Charlie Ladd, the immediate past DDA chair who is building a 12-story boutique hotel on Las Olas Boulevard. “When Fort Lauderdale compares itself to other cities — would you rather drive from the Fort Lauderdale airport to the convention center and downtown? Or would you rather drive to Miami? It’s a pretty easy call.”