

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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★★★★ \$5.00

DJIA 39781.27 ▲ 289.24 0.7%

NASDAQ 14401.84 ▲ 0.2%

STOXX 600 506.77 ▲ 0.5%

10-YR. TREAS. 4.270%

Oil \$81.07 ▼ \$0.20

Gold \$2,102.40 ▲ \$24.50

EURO \$1.0862

YEN 151.61

Best of Florida Luxury Properties

Special Advertising Feature



Forté Luxe, an enclave of 15 luxury townhomes and 13 docks on a peninsula in the Intracoastal Waterway, is a perfect location for boaters who love to fish and cruise.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEAVENSCAPES

LIFE ON THE WAVES

Get to know the allure of South Florida

by Julie Bennett

South Florida has become one of the most popular boating hot spots in the world. Sitting along the 1,100-mile Intracoastal Waterway that stretches from Norfolk, Virginia to Key West, it boasts hundreds of miles of waterways, access to the Atlantic Ocean and numerous bays, canals and rivers. Add to that its miles of stunning beaches, subtropical climate and 250-plus days of sunshine a year and you have a year-round paradise for recreational boaters.

But the biggest reason for Florida's popularity is the enthusiasm of its boaters. "Boating is the source of one of my life's greatest passions," says Marius Fortelni, the developer building Forté Luxe, an enclave of luxury townhomes and docks on the Intracoastal in Jupiter. "Once you start boating, it does not let you go."

BROAD APPEAL

With over 120,000 boats currently registered in South Florida, and over a million across the state, Fortelni is far from alone. Boats of all kinds cruise South Florida's waterways, including kayaks, sailboats, pontoons, fishing boats, cabin cruisers, yachts and superyachts — luxurious vessels of 80 feet or more.

The best area for yachting (or yacht sightseeing) is Greater Fort Lauderdale, which boasts a marine community that caters to the lifestyle and culture of its 50,000 yacht owners. Touted as the yachting capital of the world, this area is also known for

being the home of the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, the largest in-water boat show in the world. This five-day event, held in late October each year, attracts an international audience of over 100,000, and the show's 3 million square feet of space gives visitors access to over 1,300 boat displays and \$4 billion of products, from simple boating accessories to the largest superyachts.

From Jupiter all the way to Miami, yacht and traditional boat owners patronize the Intracoastal Waterway's numerous ports of call, including hundreds of marinas, boat-servicing centers, yacht clubs, nightlife scenes and waterfront restaurants. "There are restaurants and cafes along the waterway where you can pull up in your boat and soon be eating lamb chops and watching a billion dollars' worth of yachts cruise by," says John True, president of Oceanfront Real Estate and Development in Juno Beach.

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PLENTY OF FISHING

Not surprisingly, the vast waters of South Florida offer bountiful opportunities for deep-sea fishing, sport fishing and inshore fishing. According to the American Fisheries Society, Florida supports some of the largest recreational fishing in the country, with the number of anglers (as well as the number of days anglers spend fishing each year) greater in Florida than in any other state.

South Florida's rich ecosystem offers a variety of fishing adventures, including fishing tournaments and charters, in its many habitats. With its diverse waters and fishing grounds, one might spend a day casting for tarpon in Biscayne Bay, grouper at shipwreck and coral reef sites, and sailfish in the warm water highway of the Gulf Stream or peacock bass in Miami's canals.

Joey Eichner, senior vice president of Catalfumo Companies, developers of The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Palm Beach Gardens, which has its own marina, says, "We fish for anything we can find: grouper, yellowtail, snapper, and every now and then we pull in a sailfish. We release almost everything, but we do keep some grouper if they are a good size for eating. Fishing here never gets old. I'm 58 and I'm not tired of it yet."

GET PHYSICAL

For those seeking a more active boating experience, South Florida offers a variety of water sports like waterskiing, tubing, jet skiing, kayaking, canoeing, paddle boarding, wakeboarding, and even airboating in the Everglades. Snorkeling and scuba diving opportunities are endless, as there are a plethora of dive sites and charter boats available to get up close and personal with coral reefs, shipwrecks, tropical fish, sharks, sea turtles and moray eels.

For adventures beyond the local waters, South Florida boaters and anglers enjoy their proximity to other popular destinations like the Florida Keys and the hundreds of islands that make up the Bahamas.

Boating is getting even more popular. A 2023 study by the National Marine Manufacturers Association found that recreational boating saw a 36% increase in economic activity compared to 2018, citing significant growth and demand coming out of the pandemic. Americans, the study found, sought out boating and fishing experiences, joining the boating community in record numbers.

POPULARITY RISING

The study estimated an annual economic impact of \$31.3 billion from Florida's recreational boating, supporting over 7,100 businesses. Much of that activity likely comes from repeat boat buyers. "I started boating with a small boat when I was young," Eichner reveals. "As we get older, our boats seem to get bigger."

Besides boosting the Florida economy, boaters support each other, Fortelni explains. "Boaters are special people, like any community with a shared mindset, like golfers. We like to get together, share information and look at new boats."

Multiple boat owner Joe McDonnell, who's been boating since he was a kid, says that most of his friends are boat owners, too. He laughs, "If you live in South Florida and do not have a boat, something's wrong."