Genesis of the Royal Palms . . .

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With The Royal Palms on the cusp of a major expansion and redefinition into a 62-room luxury boutique gay hotel, let's look back over all this classic resort has accomplished.

Coming a long way from its origins as a pioneering gay guest house, The Royal Palms is transforming itself in early 2011, expanding into two neighboring properties to become a full-service gay boutique hotel accommodation whilst retaining the charm and intimacy of the luxury all-male gay guest-house at the RP's heart. Richard Gray takes stock of two decades of innovations that made The Royal Palms the premier all-male accommodation in Ft Lauderdale, and put this ever-more gay South Florida city at the top of the list of America's gay beach and resort hotspots.

When The Royal Palms opened its doors in 1991, it quickly became a pioneer in a gay travel sector that was only just beginning to muscle-up and expand beyond simple gay bed-and-breakfasts. At the time, Ft. Lauderdale was maybe a day trip for gay South Florida travelers staying at a Miami hotel. Today's must-go Fort Lauderdale area destinations of Wilton Manors and Sebastian Beach and Las Olas strip were but a twinkle in gay travelers' eyes.

"Very quickly, Royal Palms became the new breed of gay accommodation not only in Greater Fort Lauderdale, but in the USA," says Richard Gray. "Many other gay places to stay were

started by guests of the Royal Palms who were so impressed they were inspired to start their own gay guesthouses," he adds.

Finding the recipe for a perfect gay resort meant some experimentation.

"Initially I did not embrace nudity poolside," Gray remembers, "but it was the most requested question on the phone. After a year I finally made the leap and made the property a clothing-optional resort. I never looked back after that."

The Royal Palms was on its way to become a gay guesthouse of frolic, fun, and luxurious relaxation that it's known for today, and a favorite with gay travelers' offers.

By 2000 Fort Lauderdale had a meteoric rise, becoming the top gay resort destination in North America and boasting over 20 gay accommodations.

At The Royal Palms, continuity goes hand in hand with continual reinvention. But no matter how it transforms, some things will always stay the same. "My goal was always to be able to be offer the best possible," Richard relates. "I wanted guests to be proud to stay at the The Royal Palms, I wanted the community to be proud of the The Royal Palms and of course I was proud of The Royal Palms' accomplishments."

"What impresses our guests most are a handful of things," Richard Gray continues. "The property is immaculately maintained, our housekeeping is flawless, and our customer service is outstanding. I do believe there is a little 'snob' and 'pride' factor in staying at The Royal Palms."

What's the most fun part of being king at The Royal Palms? "Meeting great people from all over the world," Richard says. "Many times guests check in and they are a bit grumpy. Maybe their flight was delayed or they had to wait for their rental car or maybe they got lost driving to The Royal Palms. We don't know, but I always tell my staff that the challenge is to win that guest over, and 99.99% of the time we do that. I love that."

The pleasure Royal Palms staff take in assuring their guests have a good time will stay the same, even as it adds a boutique accommodations and $159-a-night hotel deals to its offerings. "In the history of gay accommodations there is none anywhere in the world that has received so many awards – both gay and mainstream – and received so much media recognition. The Royal Palms is the gay property that so many gay properties aspire to be. Richard Gray himself is the most honored individual in International Gay & Lesbian Travel; an inductee in the International Gay & Lesbian Travel Hall of Fame and also a recipient of the MTV/Logo Gay + Award for Achievement in Gay Travel, are some of his numerous awards."

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