

CITY INSIDER BEHIND THE SCENESTERS IN MIAMI

BY NECÉE REGIS, MIAMI

It's no mystery why visitors from northern climes flock to Miami. In addition to tropical breezes, Latin beats and an international art and fashion scene, the city is a hedonist's delight — beautiful people on non-stop parade.

But after being hyped for more than a decade, sometimes it's hard to separate the glam from the good here. Ocean Drive on South Beach is the ubiquitous image you see in movies and on TV, though many of the restaurants along this strip are mediocre and overpriced.

Instead, much of Miami's best — from art-deco hotels to great urban beaches with a funky array of decoratively painted lifeguard shacks, volleyball nets and hard-packed surfaces for running and biking — are free of charge. Just don't forget your sunscreen.

What's coming up

People come to Florida to relax on the beach — and eat and drink. What better way to do all three than at the **South Beach Wine and Food Festival** (305-460-6563; www.sobwineandfoodfest.com)? Now in its fifth year, this event from Feb. 24 to 26 showcases chefs such as Ferran Adria and Jose Andres, as well as wine and spirit producers. The signature event: a Grand Tasting Village in two huge tents by the ocean.

Using chocolate syrup (and other ephemeral materials like dirt and string), Brazilian artist Vik Muniz makes images he then photographs. His show — Vik Muniz: Reflex — will be at the **Miami Art Museum** from Feb. 10 to May 28 (101 W. Flagler St.; 305-375-3000; www.miamiartmuseum.org).

From March 24 to 28, the **Winter Music Conference** (The Wyndham Resort, 4833 Collins Ave.; 954-563-4444; www.wmcon.com) brings dance-industry fans to a five-day networking event featuring more than 280 performance events, including a DJ spin-off. Wear your boogie boots and don't expect to get much sleep.



RONNA GRADUS/AP

Diversions

For authentic Cuban food and culture, **Little Havana** is a great destination on any day. But at **Viernes Culturales** the last Friday of the month, a four-hour street fair starting at 7 p.m. captures the spirit of this animated ethnic enclave with live music, food, arts and crafts (Calle Ocho, between 14th and 17th Avenues; 305-644-9555; www.viernesulturales.com).

Architecture buffs, and anyone else drawn to the colourful structures built along the beach in the 1930s, will appreciate a 90-minute walking tour of the **Historic District** offered by the Miami Design Preservation League (Art Deco Welcome Center, 1001 Ocean Dr.; 305-535-2645; mdpl.org/tours.html). The focus is on art-deco and Mediterranean-revival styles. Or, if you prefer to meander at your own pace, self-guided audio tours are

available in five languages.

Shoppers will want to head to the open-air market every Friday, Saturday and Sunday on the pedestrian-only **Espanola Way** (between 14th and 15th Streets, and Drexel and Washington Avenues). There, pink Spanish-style buildings house restaurants and boutiques, and tables on the street are piled with pottery, jewellery, hand-crafted clothing and fresh flowers.

Locals walk a little farther west for crêpes and *café au lait* at the tiny bistro **A La Folie Cafe** (516 Espanola Way; 305-358-4484).

Where to stay

The glitterati still like to visit the **Delano Hotel** (1685 Collins Ave.; 1-800-697-1791; www.delano-hotel.com), where designer Philippe Starck transformed the lobby from mere entryway into a theatrical experience, with larger-than-life

lamps, wafting white curtains and whimsical furniture. The pool is a study in elegance, complete with a table for two in the shallow end. Doubles start at \$525.

The **Hotel Nash** (1120 Collins Ave.; 1-800-403-62; www.hotel-nash.com) is a boutique hotel closer to the heart of the Deco District. And, though it's not on the water, the beach is only a block away. Standard rooms start at \$209.

For those on a budget, but who still want a good location, the **Best Western South Beach** (1050 Washington Ave.; 1-888-343-1930; best-western.com) took over the former Kenmore Hotel, an art-deco gem. Bonus: a pool in a garden setting with a view of the passing traffic along lively Washington Avenue.

Where to eat

At trattoria **La Locanda** (413 Washington Ave.; 305-538-6277), owner

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Francesco Cavaletti — flashing his thousand-watt smile — can be spotted darting through tables. Don't miss the penne dell'Appennino, a mix of wild mushrooms with a touch of truffle oil.

For perfectly cooked and creative seafood dishes such as sea bass on ginger-laced spinach, nothing can beat **Nemo** (100 Collins Ave.; 305-532-4550; nemorestaurant.com).

There are any number of competent restaurants serving Cuban food in Little Havana. But for something a notch above, there's **Tete** (1444 SW 8th St.; 305-858-8801), where classically trained chef Caprice Tassinari puts a gourmet spin on traditional Cuban fare.

After dark

The inside bar at the **Raleigh Hotel** (1775 Collins Ave.; 305-534-6300; raleighhotel.com) has classic deco lines. Or sit beneath the stars and the palms at the poolside bar. On Sundays, there's an after-beach soiree around 5 p.m. (though bathing suits are not acceptable attire).

Hard-core rockers will like **Rok Bar** (1905 Collins Ave.; 305-535-7171; www.rokbarmiami.com), owned in part by ex-Motley Crue member Tommy Lee and dubbed "the anti-club." Or hop next door to the jamming club **Mynt** (1921 Collins Ave.; 786-276-6132) in the upper Collins Avenue club district.

If you're still hunting for fun, head to the mainland's hot club **Nocturnal** (50 NE 11th St.; 305-576-6996; www.nocturnalmiami.com), where the Friday night "Local Celebrity Party" gets started around 4 a.m. The 20,000-square-foot space accommodates 600 clubbers on its dance floor, with an overflow crowd on the rooftop patio.

Necée Regis has spent the past 10 winters in Miami Beach

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— Laszlo Buhasz

WATCH

DON'T FORGET YOUR PASSPORT

Host David Rocco takes a lively 10-day backpack route through Nicaragua. After making the requisite stops in Managua, Grenada and other tourist areas, he delves into the culture of the tiny village of Riva, trying local cuisine and hiking through an ancient pirate fortress. He also works in time for trinket shopping and visits to several active volcanoes. *CTV Travel, Monday at 8 p.m.*

— Andrew Ryan

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