



Miami Vice Goes Nice

FORGET SLEAZY BARS AND BEATEN-UP MOTELS, THE NEW **MIAMI** IS A PLAYGROUND IN PARADISE. HELEN RUSSELL SOAKS UP THE ENERGY OF AMERICA'S HOTTEST HANGOUT

FAST LANE

ABOVE An aerial shot of Miami
BELOW Colourful, art deco buildings abound

THE SAND IS WHITE, THE WATER'S CLEAR, AND SWEEPING UP against the cobalt-blue sky is an iconic curved façade, flanked by palm trees. It is sexy, suave, and seriously bling. Ladies and gentlemen, in the words of the great poet and philosopher Will "The Fresh Prince" Smith: "Welcome to Miami."

The famed Fontainebleau Miami Beach hotel was the first of many masterpieces from Morris Lapidus, the flamboyant architect and designer who defined the 1950s "Miami Beach" resort style. Crystal chandeliers, gold columns, circular ceilings and a staircase to nowhere give the Fontainebleau the feel of a movie set, full of old-school American glamour. Elvis, Sinatra and the Rat Pack were all regulars in their day and Fontainebleau was even the setting for Bond's amorous encounter in the 1964 film, *Goldfinger*.

But it hasn't all been plain sailing for the sun-

shine state's biggest tourist trap. Four years ago, Miami had the highest crime rate in the US and a serious reputation for sleaze. Since then, mayor Manny Diaz has turned it around and Miami is now one of the cleanest and safest cities in the country. The city has also benefitted from new investment, with Fontainebleau being revamped for a cool one billion dollars last year and used as the location for the Victoria's Secret fashion show, attracting the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Hudson, Lenny Kravitz, Heidi Klum and Seal. There's also the Philippe Starck-designed

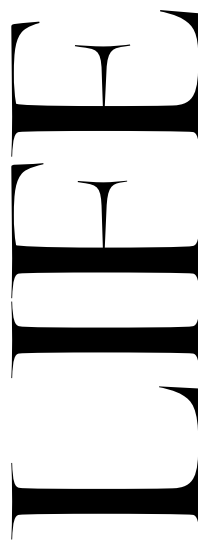
Delano Hotel, down on South Beach, and the newly opened Epic. Branding itself as the "front door to downtown Miami," Epic Hotel offers impeccable service, your own pet goldfish and a sea view from your bath for definitive decadence. Nearby are Fisher Island and the aptly named Star Island, where celebs have homes in some of the most exclusive zip codes in the US.

Another des res is Casa Casuarina, which became one of the most photographed houses in the US after Gianni Versace was murdered on its steps in 1997. Built in 1930 by philanthropist and oil heir Alden Freeman, the villa was bought by Versace in 1992 after the fashion legend fell in love with it. No expense was spared with the villa's exterior, and Versace had builders working night and day to create the outrageously lavish terrace and pool, complete with 24-karat gold tiles. Versace was already much loved in the town



HIGH LIFE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The Miami skyline; super yachts are part of the regular Miami scene; parties on South Beach are legendary; Casa Casuarina



UNDER THE SUN

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Miami's famed South Beach district; vintage cars are a common sight; Miami's stunning beach; the Cuban influence is apparent on Miami's cultural scene

Sunshine pastels, sculpted art deco and Mediterranean revival architecture make Miami's landscape unique

for creating the T-shirt and pastel jacket look for Miami Vice, and he embraced the South Beach scene, luring close friends Madonna, Cher and Elton John to stay at Casa Casuarina. Madonna was such a regular visitor that she was given her own suite, and the pop princess first met Guy Ritchie at Donatella Versace's millennium party at Casa Casuarina.

The family sold Casa Casuarina in 2000 to telecommunications mogul Peter Loftin, who turned it into the invitation-only, private members club it is today. Membership starts at US\$50,000 but non-members can stay in one of the villa's 10 suites. The owner's suite starts at US\$10,000 a night, complete with 24-hour concierge, butler, and pretty much anything your heart desires, including, should you wish, an ultra-king sized bed that "sleeps six comfortably." Discretion is key but the concierge will reveal that Tom Cruise, Eva Longoria and Paris Hilton are all fans.

Casuarina is at the heart of old Miami. On one side of the legendary Ocean Drive is South Beach, while the other is lined with the infamous sunshine pastels, sculpted art deco and Mediterranean revival architecture that make Miami's landscape unique. The area became

run down in the '80s, and much of South Beach was slated to be torn down. Property developer Tony Goldman, the man behind the regeneration of New York's Soho, decided to turn it around and raised funds to restore the area. Today it is pulsing with life. Cadillacs and Buicks cruise up and down Ocean Drive, while bronzed beauties, muscled men and wizened old ladies in pink velour tracksuits promenade along the sea front.

But Miami also has some new attractions. As well as Art Basel Miami, the city can now boast a creative hub in the Wynwood art district. The area, formerly famed for its shoe factories, now has a host of hip, start-up galleries and cafes filled with artists in square glasses and skinny jeans. There's also the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) North Miami, which runs "contemporary

FLYING COLOURS

ABOVE The neon lights of the art deco district on Ocean Drive is a landmark Miami scene

MIAMI



NIGHT OWL

FROM TOP
Cocktail drink from the Mansion Club; the party scene in Miami is legendary

art boot camps” for visitors to try out new styles and learn about their context. Curator David Castillo set up his gallery in 2005. “It was pretty edgy when I first came; there were syringes and prostitutes in the parking lot and a homeless shelter next door,” he says, laughing nervously. “But now it’s the place for contemporary artists to be and be seen.” Castillo has had several acclaimed exhibitions since he opened and is now home to one of Miami’s sharpest talents, Glexis Novoa.

For something a little more risqué, there’s the

World Erotic Art Museum over on Washington Avenue. It’s run by Naomi Wilzig, a diminutive Jewish grandmother with an extraordinary collection of soft, and not so soft, porn and erotic ephemera dating, she claims, from biblical times to the present day. She has been collecting erotic art for 12 years and has amassed a collection worth around US\$10 million.

You’ll never starve in Miami and eating outside is big news here, probably because the people-watching is almost as good as the food. Try Sushi Samba on South Beach for Peruvian/Brazilian/Japanese fusion (sounds mad, but it works). Their edamame with lime is to die for and the berry crushes are perfect for when you need to detox. And you will, especially after a blowout at Barton G The Restaurant, run by event impresario Barton G Weiss, which prides itself on being the ultimate in food theatre. The seafood medley starter comes on dry ice in a martini glass worthy of Dita Von Teese; entrees such as “flashdance grouper” are served with a moving fish, fries in a wrought-iron stand and vegetables in wheelbarrows. Portions are enormous, and even the cocktails are macho, accompanied by liquid-nitrogen popsicles. It’s packed with orchids, beautiful women and the great and the

good of Hollywood on holiday (Tom Cruise and Will Smith are regulars).

But don’t expect anything to happen in a hurry. Take your watch off and relax: you’re on Florida time now. No one eats until 10pm, and don’t even think of hitting the clubs until after midnight. The Gansevoort South hotel’s VIP lounge, Louis, presents the perfect opportunity to flash your plastic (cards and bodies), with an interior decked out in pink wild donkey hide and pimped-up Louis XIII thrones. Or try the live music and killer cocktails at Andú restaurant and lounge on 7th Street. Since 60 per cent of the Miami population is Hispanic (most of whom are Cuban), the city has a fabulous Latin music scene and it’s not hard to find yourself salsa-ing the night away. The nightlife in Miami is legendary and there’s no shortage of big clubs, cool bars or chilled lounges where you’re bound to run into a celebrity or two.

And after that? Well, it turns out that New York isn’t the only city in the US that never sleeps. There’s just time to hit the beach for a power walk with the beautiful people at dawn before getting out there and doing it all over again. No one ever said being this cool was going to be easy. ■

TALL STORIES

ABOVE The Setai hotel is a favourite among celebrities
TOP RIGHT Downtown Miami



WHERE TO STAY
FONTAINEBLEAU HOTEL & RESORT

4441 Collins Ave., Miami Beach
www.fontainebleau.com

EPIC HOTEL

270 Biscayne Boulevard Way, Miami
www.epichotel.com

THE SETAI

101 20th St, Miami Beach
www.epichotel.com

DELANO HOTEL

1685 Collins Ave, Miami Beach
www.delano-hotel.com

WHERE TO EAT

BARTON G THE RESTAURANT

1427 West Avenue, South Beach
www.bartong.com/restaurant

SUSHI SAMBA

600 Lincoln Road, Miami Beach
www.sushisamba.com

ANDÚ

141 SW 7th Street, Miami
www.andurestaurant.com

WHERE TO GO
MANSION CLUB

1235 Washington Ave
www.mansionmiami.com

CLUB NIKKI

One Ocean Drive Miami
www.nikkibeach.com/miami

MOKAI

235 23rd St, Miami Beach
www.mokaimiami.com