

CITIES IN THE STATES: MIAMI

Cultures mix and match in Miami

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South Beach lifeguard tower.

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Sixth in a series highlighting cities to which you can fly nonstop from Boston.

Sun-blasted beaches, tumblers of mojitos, and beautiful people cavorting in clubs that stay open till dawn. That image, although true, is only part of what defines this dynamic destination. Miami and Miami Beach are actually two cities with distinct neighborhoods where the cultures of the Americas mingle: art and cortaditos in Little Havana; upscale boutiques in the Design District; streamlined Art Deco architecture on South Beach; and fabulous food everywhere. With its melting pot of people and traditions, Miami always surprises.

DAY 1:

11 a.m. Jump start the day with a sugary café con leche in Little Havana. Eighth Street, known as “Calle Ocho,” is more tourist-friendly than ever, especially the section between SW 12th and 17th avenues. Grab a seat indoors or order coffee from a streetside window at one of many places including El Exquisito Restaurant (1510 SW Eighth St., 305-643-0227, www.exquisitorestaurant.com) and El Pub Restaurant (1548 SW Eighth St., 305-642-9942). Art galleries, cigar stores, and souvenir shops sell all things Cuban, such as at Little Havana to Go (1442 SW Eighth St., 305-857-9720) where you can pick up postcards, memorabilia, and guayaberas, traditional men’s shirts with two pockets. Stroll past domino players at Maximo Gomez Park — a.k.a. Domino Park. Sample ice cream at Azucar, featuring tropical flavors such as Key lime pie, coconut flan, and sweet plantain. (1503 SW Eighth St., 305-381-0369, www.azucaricecream.com), or try a fruit smoothie made with mamey, mango, melon, and more at Los Pinarenos Fruteria (1334 SW Eighth St., 305-285-1135).

1 p.m. Linger over lunch in the shady courtyard or in the stylish interior at Oak Tavern (35 NE 40th St., 786-391-1818, www.oaktavernmiami.com, \$8-\$18) where chef David Bracha serves tapas-size plates of tasty items like bacon marmalade toast and deviled eggs, as well as grass-fed burgers, crab po'boys, wood-oven-grilled pizzas, salads, and larger plates such as squid ink spaghetti and snapper filets. After eating, stroll the Miami Design District, an area that has transformed itself in the past 10 years from a sleepy spot to purchase bathroom fixtures and fabrics into a glitzy high-end shopping district for designers, architects, art lovers, and fashionistas. Check out the latest must-have items at Christian Louboutin, Louis Vuitton, Cartier, Prada, Emilio Pucci, and more, or peruse design showrooms including Holly Hunt, Jonathan Adler, Design Within Reach, and Kartell. Download a map at www.miamidesigndistrict.net

6 p.m. Wave at the departing cruise ships as you head to Miami Beach along the MacArthur Causeway. Hobnob with the artsy crowd at the Wolfsonian—Florida International University (1001 Washington Ave., 305-531-1001, www.wolfsonian.org, free Fridays 6-9 p.m.), a museum with exhibits that explore the role of design at the height of the Industrial Age (1885-1945). Or view contemporary paintings, works on paper, photography, and sculpture at the Williams McCall Gallery (110 Washington Ave., 786-359-4321, www.williamsccallgallery.com).

8 p.m. Feast inside or al fresco at La Locanda (419 Washington Ave., 305-538-6277, www.lalocandasobe.com) in the up-and-coming neighborhood known as South of Fifth. This upscale trattoria is where residents (and tourists in the know) head for tasty Italian food that won't blow your budget. Don't miss the silky tagliolini with porcini mushrooms, veal scaloppini, and brick-oven-baked pizzas with crispy crusts (\$7.95-\$29.95). Save room for dessert (\$8-\$14); the Nutellino della Locanda (Nutella, pizza strips, vanilla ice cream, whipped cream) is a made-to-share crowd-pleaser.

DAY 2

On South Beach, you can ditch the car. In a neighborhood of fine-dining restaurants and fast-food joints, upscale boutiques and souvenir stores, plus cafes, bakeries, nightclubs, and more than a few tattoo parlors, it's fun — and easier — to walk. Or cover more ground by renting a bicycle at one of the many Deco Bike stations in town (\$4-\$24, www.decobike.com) or ride the South Beach Local (25 cents, www.miamibeachfl.gov/visitors/scroll.aspx?id=14134, an air-conditioned bike- and wheelchair-accessible minibus).

9 a.m. Ease into the day with cold pressed vegetable and fruit juices (\$12) followed by a choice of yogurt, fruit, omelet, cured salmon, bagels, pastries, and more at Dolce Italian Café & Bar (\$3-\$15, 1690 Collins Ave., 786-975-2550, galehotel.com/dine) at the Gale South Beach & Regent Hotel. Sit inside or on the veranda.

10:30 a.m. The Miami Design Preservation League offers 90-minute guided walking tours of the Art Deco, Mediterranean Revival, and Miami Modern (MiMo) architectural styles in the historic district. All tours depart from the Art Deco Welcome Center (1001 Ocean Drive, 305-672-2014, www.mdpl.org/tours, \$15-\$20). Order tickets online or arrive 15 minutes before tours depart. The gift shop offers one-of-a-kind Deco-themed items including posters, jewelry, postcards, memorabilia, and more.

1 p.m. On a hot sunny day, you can't beat the beach. Colorful lifeguard stands are marked with adjoining street numbers, making it easy to find your way. Surfers and locals hang between First and Fifth streets; the gay crowd gathers at 12th. In March, spring breakers invade the strip between Sixth and 10th streets, leaving a trash-strewn mess in their wake. For a quieter scene, head north above 16th. Stop by one of the many huts operated by Boucher Brothers and an attendant will set you up with a lounge chair or umbrella (www.boucherbrothers.com, \$15-\$20); they also provide ADA beach wheelchairs for handicapped beachgoers. Before settling on the sand, pick up lunch-to-go at Le Sandwicherie (229 14th St., 305-532-8934, www.lesandwicherie.com). Enjoy a salad, smoothie, shake, or fresh juice drink, and sandwiches served on French bread or croissants, including traditional offerings (roast beef, ham, turkey, tuna) as well as pate, Camembert, saucisson, and smoked salmon all splashed with the store's signature vinaigrette and piled high with toppings (\$5.50-\$9).

Feeling adventurous? Sign up for an hourlong ride with Miami Beach Parasail and soar 500 feet above the ocean. Located at 16th Street on the beach behind the Loews Hotel. (305-266-4144, www.miamibeachparasail.com, \$65-\$75).

6:30 p.m. Don your hippest duds and head to the Living Room Bar for a farm-to-cocktail experience in the sleek lobby of the W Hotel. Sample beverages crafted with a variety of citrus fruits, organic produce, house-made infused oils, edible flowers, and spice blends (2201 Collins Ave., 305-938-3000, www.wsouthbeach.com/living-room-bar, \$16).

8 p.m. The Dutch, a casual fine-dining spot for a splurge, is also in the W Hotel (2201 Collins Ave., 305-938-3111, www.thedutchmiami.com). This American restaurant features oysters (\$2.50-\$3.50), caviar (\$75-\$165), seafood platters (\$80-\$130), 28-day aged beef steaks (\$54-\$110), plus fanciful snacks, appetizers, and entrees such as steamed red snapper in coconut curry broth and roast Maine lobster (\$24-\$69). Or dine in style at Tongue & Cheek (431 Washington Ave., 305-704-2900, www.tandcmiami.com), featuring big-flavor American fare such as fried chicken with pickled red cabbage, linguine with Key West pink shrimp, and crispy pork belly and pig ears with polenta (\$17-\$32).

11 p.m. Thought you would go to bed early? Silly you. Leave your attitude at the door at Radio Bar, a casual lounge at the extreme south end of the beach designed to be vintage-homey. Play pool while sipping Bulleit Bourbon, Jameson Irish Whiskey, or one of 20 craft beers. (814 1st St., 305-397-8382, www.radiosouthbeach.com, cocktails \$12). You'll find live music nightly at Jazid (1342 Washington Ave., 305-673-9372, www.jazid.net, cover \$10), a tiny club with a sticky dance floor and some of the best local groups around featuring roots-rock and fusion bands that incorporate Afro-Cuban reggae, cumbia, ska, jazz

best local groups around featuring rock, rock and fusion bands that incorporate funk, Cuban, reggae, calypso, ska, jazz, merengue, and hip-hop sounds. For velvet-rope nightclub treatment, hobnob with celebs and wannabes at Cameo (1445 Washington Ave., 786-235-5800, www.cameomiami.com, cover \$30) or Mansion (1235 Washington Ave., 305-695-8411, www.mansionmiami.com/dev, cover \$30).

DAY 3

Noon Show up when the doors open and avoid long lines at Khong River House (1661 Meridian Ave., 305-763-8147, www.khongriver.com). Enjoy traditional rural foods of northern Thailand, designed to be shared, such as fish in banana leaf, and chicken noodle curry (\$14-\$37).

1:30 p.m. There are plenty of shopping opportunities on Lincoln Road, an outdoor mall between Alton Road and Washington Avenue (www.lincolnrroadmall.info). Dominated by big name chains such as H&M (541 Lincoln Road), American Apparel (720), Victoria's Secret (901), and more, it's still possible to find boutiques offering products you haven't seen back home, such as BASE (939) and Consign of the Times (around the corner at 1635 Jefferson). Most Sundays in winter, the Antique & Collectible Market of Miami Beach offers vintage clothing, jewelry, and other treasures. (www.antiquecollectiblemarket.com). For culture, see the exhibitions and art studios at Art Center South Florida (800 and 924). Find the perfect reading material for your flight home at Books & Books (927).