

Introduction

Conceived as a winter playground, Miami has always attracted dreamers, fantasists and escape artists. Critics snipe that it's plastic, but the fact that a tropical paradise has been manufactured out of a swamp is a modern miracle – the American dream with palm trees thrown in. As architect Addison Mizner put it: 'The landscape gives you no help in Florida. You must make your own.' And Miamians sure did, perhaps heeding the words of another florid architect, Morris Lapidus, who famously said: 'Less is not more... If you like ice-cream, why stop with one scoop? Have two. Have three. Too much is never enough.'

Just like the artificial bodies that lie on the sand, even the beautiful beaches here are fake, created by engineers. As for the glitzy architecture, all that art deco makes you feel like you're in a film. The huge Latin American population adds to the romance of it all; they too came here to escape and start fresh.

But reality is catching up with the fantasy. Those big beaches are running out of sand. The subprime property crisis has left a sea of empty condos. Older residents are now trying to escape *from* Miami, with its high costs and crowds. And all the extravagance is tasteless in the face of urban poverty (Tom Wolfe, who satirised Manhattan excess in *Bonfire of the Vanities*, is setting his next novel in Miami).

On the tourism front, meanwhile, critics say that South Beach has sold its soul and gone Vegas, the hipsters replaced by the hordes.

Yet the clouds have a silver lining. The South Beach backlash may be Miami's saving grace, as the scenesters broaden their horizons. Chic new boutique hotels, for instance, are moving away from the beach. Attracted by low rents, the kids are colonising new areas on the mainland – Downtown, Wynwood, the Design District – and cool restaurants, bars and clubs are following, leaving South Beach attitude behind. The booming art scene has finally put the city on the cultural map too. In short, Miami is suddenly more than just a beach.

As for the city's economic woes, they might help Miami take stock – and bounce back. Thanks to the property slump and weak dollar, bargains are there to be had. Poverty is still a problem, but planners are trying to fashion a brand new landscape, not out of a swamp this time, but out of the slums, with a bold regeneration scheme. So Miami may soon be an urban paradise, as well as a tourist one. In the meantime, the sun is still shining, the sea is still warm and the mojitos are flowing. Good news for Miami's core fans: dreamers, fantasists and escape artists. Wouldn't you like to get away?

ABOUT TIME OUT CITY GUIDES

This is the fifth edition of *Time Out Miami*, one of an expanding series of more than 50 guides produced by the people behind the successful listings magazines in London, New York, Chicago, Sydney and many more cities around the world. Our guides are all written and updated by resident experts who have striven to provide you with all the most up-to-date information you'll need to explore Miami, whether you're a local or a first-time visitor.

THE LOWDOWN ON THE LISTINGS

Above all, we've tried to make this book as useful as possible. Addresses, telephone numbers, websites, transport information, opening times, admission prices and credit card details have all been included in the listings, as have details of other selected services and facilities. However, owners and managers can change their arrangements at any time. Before you go out of your way, we

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