

a lovely and underused stretch of pristine beach lined with sea grape trees, sand dunes, a boardwalk, a Vita exercise course and amenities such as changing rooms, picnic tables and barbecue pits. The park forms the southern border of **Surfside**, a sleepy residential enclave, less than a mile square, clotted with two- and three-storey apartment buildings and boasting little to entice visitors save the promise of less crowded beaches.

You don't need to see a city limits sign to know you've arrived in **Bal Harbour**, the elegant burg just north of Surfside. The landscape sports an expensive topiary manicure, luxury cars ply the streets, chauffeurs in caps keep the motor idling and the A/C on while madam shops: there's a distinct whiff of money in the air. In Bal Harbour, crime is low (the local police are notoriously zealous about dispensing speeding tickets), real-estate prices are high and the median age is at least 30 years older than anywhere on the southern half of the sandbar.

There are said to be more millionaires per capita in Bal Harbour than in any other city in the whole United States, and it shows. You need to be one to hang out here for long. **Bal Harbour Shops** (see p144) is an oppressively top-end mall where the concession list reads like a *Who's Who* of haute couture. Security guards in absurd faux-colonial uniforms and Styrofoam pith helmets prowl around its parking lots in golf carts.

**Haulover Beach Park**, just north of Bal Harbour, scores big points as one of the area's most scenic stretches of beachfront, offering unimpeded views spanning the southern sweep of Miami Beach. Worth the drive or straightforward bus journey from South Beach (take the S from Lincoln Road), the beach is fringed with dense vegetation that blocks out the visual pollution of nearby high-rises. Known primarily for its section of nude beach, Haulover also has a 1,100-foot fishing pier, picnic tables, concession stands and a kayak rental outfit for jaunts into the nearby

## Sand grab

Quick, grab your towel – Miami Beach is running out of sand. That's right. The ten-mile stretch of wide white sands – the one that attracts millions of tourists and generates billions of dollars in revenue – is being washed out to sea. It's no great surprise: Miami Beach has always been something of an illusion. Like almost everything in this manufactured paradise, the beach is man-made and maintained by army engineers at a cost of some \$3 million a year.

Nor is erosion a new phenomenon. Back in the 1960s, the name Miami Beach had become a misnomer, as the wide sands were reduced to a sliver. In front of certain hotels, there was no beach left: you had to use a ladder to climb into the sea. For a time, breakwaters were constructed along the beach to stop the sand from haemorrhaging. By the late 1970s, there so many bulwarks along the beach, critics said it resembled a military obstacle course (pictured).

Tourists deserted Miami and luxury hotels teetered on the brink – until the Army stepped in. In a huge \$64-million operation, between 1976 and 1980, the Army Corps of Engineers dredged sand from the bottom of the ocean floor and pumped it on shore. The result was spectacular: a 300-foot-wide beach comprising 13 million cubic yards of sand – equal to 600,000 dump-truck loads.

But after 30 years of dredging, the Army says there is no more usable sand left on the ocean floor. And the glorious beach is dwindling again – in some parts of Mid Beach, it is only 20 feet wide. The Army requested permission to scoop sand from other cities on Florida's east coast, but has been flatly rejected – sand is the bread and butter of every resort along this coast.

As a temporary solution, the county is spending millions trucking in prehistoric sand from a commercial mine inland, near the Everglades (six million years ago, that region was beachfront property). But this process is a logistical – and a financial – nightmare. Then there is the idea of using recycled glass bottles to make sand (glass, in actual fact, is made from sand). Fort Lauderdale is testing the idea, but only time will tell whether it works.

Now, in true US imperialist style, Miami is trying to buy its sand from small foreign countries. Dade County has asked the Federal Government to help pay for imported sand from cash-poor, sand-rich countries such as Mexico, Panama, Turks and Caicos, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.

There are several obstacles. For one thing, there is a federal law that forbids importing sand. If that law is overturned, naturalists worry that foreign sand could wreak havoc