



Wynwood Kitchen & Bar

EATING Miami



Take a hot spin around this foodie paradise.

story and photos by Kate Zimmerman

Once upon a time, Miami's South Beach was known as "God's waiting room" because of its over-abundance of leathery retirees roasting themselves in the sun.

That was the 1970s. Beyond that spectacle and its attendant air of decrepitude, drug-related crime was rampant, and even the city's most attractive early 20th century buildings were fading fast.

Then a farsighted woman called Barbara Capitman helped form the Miami Design Preservation League, which got almost a square mile of South Beach placed on the National Register of Historic Places. **Now nobody messes with the Miami Beach Architectural District's Art Deco, Nautical Moderne and Streamline Moderne buildings.** The chic, graphic outline of their low, pale rooftops dazzles against the bright blueness of the south Florida sky.

There's still a slightly edgy vibe, in part because the late designer Gianni Versace's flamboyant mansion is located on Ocean Drive, fronting the long swath of public beach. He was famously murdered one morning in 1997 as he opened its gates.

The nearby beach's lifeguard stations are now as brightly coloured as old-time circus tents. Architect William Lane re-designed them after the devastating impact of 1992's Hurricane Andrew. So retro style, opulence, a hint of naughtiness and a smidge of carnival atmosphere welcome the visitor to South Beach.

"SoBe" is the most southerly neighbourhood in Miami Beach, a barrier island that runs along the coast of downtown Miami. By night, dance enthusiasts hit its restaurants and clubs in boldly abbreviated outfits after the "disco naps" that divide their daily and nightly activities. By day, smart visitors invest in a foodie tour, getting an insider's lowdown on what's cool to eat and where to find it.

This is definitely not a WASP-y white bread scene. According to Wikipedia, as of 2000, some 55 percent of Miami Beach residents spoke Spanish as their first language, 33 percent spoke English, with French, Portuguese, German, Italian, Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew adding their own spices to the hotpot. As a result of this intriguing melange, enterprising chefs have plenty of stimulation.

They also have a crazy number of ingredients from which to choose, including tasty sea creatures. The region's sub-tropical climate nurtures an array of fruits and vegetables that would make a Canadian cook weep.

I hooked up with Miami Culinary Tours (miamiculinarytours.com) for two brilliant strolls. The first took place in South Beach, where our Australian guide pointed out various **◀Art Deco architectural styles** between refreshing beverages and delicious bites.

She started us off on the balmy outdoor lounge of 660 at The Angler's Boutique Resort, which was apparently Ernest Hemingway's preferred Miami hotel. There we were each presented with a scallop *tiradito*, a silken tango of tender raw shellfish and a sauce made of passion fruit, aji amarillo chile, red onion and lemon, garnished with garlic chip and avocado.

Our guide had a firm grasp on the flavours that make South Beach special, from the coffee called *colada*, a 4-oz. cup of sweetened espresso served with several tiny cups for sharing, found at Cuban cafes like David's, to the Argentinean empanadas stuffed with shredded chicken at Charlotte Bakery. Our nine stops on this particular tour took us to the vivacious South American fusion restaurant Bolivar for a Colombian drink called *refajo*, a refreshing blend of aguila beer and Columbian "kola-flavored soda," and to the ultra-chic white-on-white Miami Beach Caffe & Restaurant, where, before our eyes, the chef made us strawberry ice cream using liquid nitrogen. We sashayed into singer **◀Gloria Estefan's Larios on the Beach**, a handsome 20-year-old Cuban eatery, for fried green plantains formed into cups and stuffed with *picadillo* – minced beef, Creole spice, raisins and olives – and Cuban Creole shrimp. The tour wound up with award-winning gelato at Milani Gelateria on restaurant-studded Espanola Way.

My second tour was of rough-and-tumble Little Havana, where Argentinean guide and food critic Grace Della warned me away from approaching the base of a particular tree because that's where locals who practice Santeria sometimes leave

IF YOU GO...

Trying to choose a place to stay in Miami? South Beach is one of the more expensive choices but it's plenty lively. If you're looking for action and excitement – the Kardashians' DASH boutique is in the nabe, as is a party palace called The Clevelander – South Beach is ideal.

Check out the 1939 Nautical Moderne *boite* called Essex House, which bears the distinctive round windows and corner entryway that denote this architectural style. Henry Hohauser, whose architectural firm has been called "the originator of modernism in Miami Beach," designed and built Essex House, and Al Capone used to play cards there. Its chic Art Deco vibe and airy rooms are distinctive and thoroughly memorable, and Zen Sai, its outdoor Japanese-style *izakaya*, offers terrific small plates of pub-style food.

If you crave more peace and quiet than you'll find in South Beach, try the Coconut Grove neighbourhood's Grove Island Hotel & Spa. Equipped with a view of Biscayne Bay, it's a 10-minute ride to the shops and restaurants of downtown Coconut Grove, but feels like a quiet, secluded modern resort. Its pool area, with all kinds of inviting nooks for sun-drenched reading, is splendid. The on-site Gibraltar Restaurant's executive chef is Gerd Richter, who knows a thing or two about pleasing sophisticated palates (his truffled eggs benedict is divine).

Essex House:
1001 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach,
essexhotel.com

Grove Island Hotel & Spa:
Four Grove Isle Drive, Miami,
groveisle.com

OTHER STUFF TO DO...

Take a golf cart tour of the 37-acre **Fruit & Spice Park**, which grows more than 500 varieties of tropical fruits, spices and vegetables, most of which will be new to Canadians. Did you know that the niceberry, for example, tastes like a brown sugar pear and was once used in the manufacture of Chiclets, ice cream beans actually do grow on trees, the African sausage tree is quite a sight, and every part of the horseradish tree is edible? The park is 35 miles south of Miami and is open daily.
miamifruitandspicepark.org

In 2009, Miami developer Tony Goldman invited such international graffiti and street artists as Shepard Fairey (creator of the iconic poster of Barack Obama) to cover the exterior walls of the Wynwood district's warehouses with fresh designs. You can actually go on a Vespa tour of this sprawling, ever-changing open-air museum called the **Wynwood Walls** and the **Wynwood Doors** with Roam Rides. There are some 50 galleries, four museums, restaurants and artists' studios here, as well. **The Wynwood Kitchen & Bar features gorgeous "graffiti" art by Fairey.**
thewynwoodwalls.com

Dine at **Tuyo**, the **Miami Culinary Institute's** downtown penthouse restaurant, which boasts a stunning skyline and bay view. Celebrated chef Norman Van Aken uses such local treats as caviar from farm-raised Sarasota sturgeon and enlivens his elegant cracked conch chowder with saffron, coconut, orange and star anise. Chicago chef Charlie Trotter, no slouch himself, once described Van Aken as "the Walt Whitman of American cuisine."
tuyomiami.com

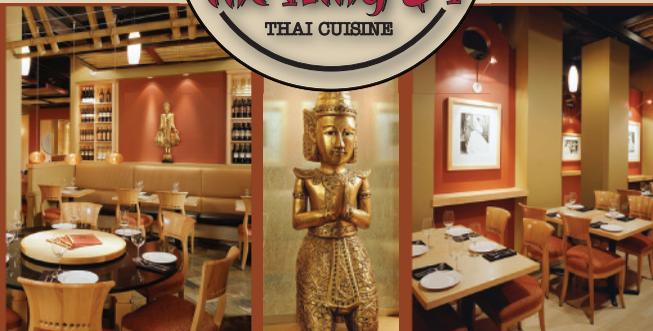
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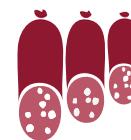


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animal sacrifices. This neighbourhood was clearly a different kettle of conch soup from chi-chi South Beach.

Della pointed out that the Spanish people who colonized Cuba after Columbus landed there in 1492 imported African slaves and then Chinese workers to the island. Whatever other effects these newcomers may have had on the existing population of Caribbean Indian peoples, the rich mix of influences on Cuba's culture and cuisine means that African taro root, plantains and bananas, and the classic Chinese juxtaposition of sweet with sour, are as much a part of the culinary heritage of Cuba as Spain's *arroz con pollo*.

But that was Cuba, and we were in the United States. In the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Cubans immigrated to the Miami region, fleeing the rule of Communist leader Fidel Castro. Many of them settled in a neighbourhood just west of downtown Miami that soon became known as Little Havana. Over the years, some of these ex-pats moved on to chicer addresses and immigrants from Central and South America diluted the Cuban demographic.

Della's tour took us along the main street, Calle Ocho, from galleries glowing with vibrant Cuban-American paintings to The Cuba Tobacco Cigar Company, where cigar-makers puff on their wares while rolling new ones.

There was time for a quick ham croquette at hoppin' local hangout El Pub, its walls festooned with Cuban-American baseball memorabilia. We gulped down freshly pressed sugar cane juice (called *guarapo*) amidst heaps of huge Florida avocados, bonito, and papayas at the open-air fruit market called Los Pinareños Fruteria, whose roosters wandered around its back alley.

Finally, we sat down at **Exquisito for a lip-smacking medianoche** (midnight sandwich), a favourite of hardworking Cuban factory workers whose companies moved to Key West in the 1920s and '30s. They'd get home late and make these sandwiches with egg bread, ham, roast pork, Swiss cheese, garlic pickles, mustard, and match-stick potatoes on the side. They're as delectable in their own way as SoBe's scallop *tiraditos*.

Evidently, Miami's culinary adventure never quits. It's one delicious town. ❖

Kate Zimmerman admits she only spent seven minutes at a hip Miami rooftop bar and the rest of her time joyfully pigging out.

city palate crossword solution

Congrats to everyone who completed the crossword puzzle published in the last issue of City Palate!

There were more entries than ever before but in the end there were only two people that got everything correct. We decided to give away two sets of tickets instead of just one:

Congratulations to **Jean Rawling** and **Jim & Susan Stein** who won two tickets to **ATP's Wine Tasting Fundraiser, Flavours of BC's Naramata Bench.**

