



# There's more than VICE to MIAMI

Florida's most famous city may be known for its swinging nightlife, but it's a hotbed for high culture and art too, writes **Esther Shaw**

James Bond played his famous game of gin-rummy against Goldfinger at the Fontainebleu hotel



Miami mixes high art, great nightlife and beautiful beaches.

**A**S I JOGGED along the boulevard, with dolphins playing in the water to the left of me and fully-clothed chihuahuas to the right, I knew that I could only be in Miami. The city is famous for its art deco buildings and the posing on South Beach, of course, but there is more to the city than that. Miami has undergone a renaissance in recent years and emerged as a world-class arts, cultural and design destination.

Miami is a hotbed of artistic activity now, and home to the PULSE contemporary arts fair (5-8 March this year), as well as Art Basel Miami Beach, the sister event of Switzerland's Art Basel (3-6 December), the world's biggest art fair. The focus for the arts year-round, though, is the Cesar Pelli-designed Adrienne Arsht Centre for the Performing Arts, which contains an opera house, concert hall and theatre, playing host to the likes of the Concert Association of Florida, the Florida Grand Opera, Miami City Ballet and the New World Symphony.

It's not all high culture. If you prefer your art a little more funky, there is nowhere better than the Design District - think New York's Meat-Packing District or Shoreditch five years ago - now the hip neighbourhood where those in the know go. From here, head south to the Wynwood Arts District, a once depressed

The spectacular Italianate gardens of the Vizcaya Museum, overlooking the Biscayne Bay have some of the city's best views

urban area which is being gradually transformed into the hot-spot for emerging artists and uber-stylish stores.

While in Wynwood, sign up to one of the interactive art classes at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and once you've created your own masterpiece, take in the latest exhibitions in one of the district's many galleries. We spent a few hours at the pristine David Castillo Gallery ([www.castilloart.com](http://www.castilloart.com)) which showcases a range of emerging and mid-career artists.

If the art all gets a bit too much, then there are other, quirky sights too. Chief among them is the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, the 70-room mansion and 450-acre winter retreat of combine-harvester millionaire James Deering. Its spectacular Italianate gardens overlooking the Biscayne Bay have some of the most stunning views in the city. This place resonates with echoes of Venice, and behind the opulent marble and European antiques you'll find telephone systems, refrigeration and even lifts, all installed nearly a century ago.

And just before you sink onto your sunbed, one seaside must-see is the kitsch Casa Casuarina ([www.casacasuarina.com](http://www.casacasuarina.com)), the home of Gianni Versace, where he was shot dead over a decade ago. Situated at 1116 Ocean Drive, the place is now a private member's club which oozes sexiness and glamour, but anyone can experience its mosaic excesses by booking one of the scheduled tours offered daily at a cost of \$65 per person - including complimentary mimosa cocktail.

## HOTELS

After all this activity, you'll need a fabulous hotel to escape to; my time was split between the Fontainebleau on Collins Avenue, Miami Beach, and the Epic in downtown Miami.

The Fontainebleau, where James Bond and Goldfinger played that oh-so-famous hand of gin rummy by the poolside, reopened at the end of 2008 after a billion-





dollar re-fit. One of South Florida's most famous landmarks, the hotel was one of the long-term favourite Miami hangout for the likes of Elvis, Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack back in the day.

When it first opened in 1954, it stood as a monument to modern design and architecture, with its crystal chandeliers, circular ceiling and the grand stairs that go nowhere – all thanks to architect Morris Lapidus who, it is claimed, based his design on a film-set in which each person who enters could play a part.

The revamped Fontainebleau now rates among the best, with its elegant rooms, stylish restaurants, glamorous lobby cocktail bar, huge pool complete with poolside cabanas and sensational spa – all of which come with an overwhelming dose of opulence.

The Epic, on the other hand, which only opened in January this year, is a sparkling cosmopolitan destination on the bank of the Miami River at its convergence with Biscayne Bay – which affords many of the rooms spectacular views over the water. Located in vibrant downtown Miami, this sleek high-rise hotel is a truly urban hangout, complete with marina, spa, and and

15,000 square foot pool deck with two swimming pools.

## EATING

For fresh food at fair prices, head to Michael's Genuine Food & Drink ([www.michaelsgenuine.com](http://www.michaelsgenuine.com)) in the Design District – but make sure you leave room for the divine deserts.

Take a break from the galleries in the Wynwood Arts District and lunch at Joey's ([www.joeyswynwood.com](http://www.joeyswynwood.com)), a contemporary Italian cafe and the first new restaurant to open here since the area began its transformation.

If you're seeking sexy cuisine, style and sophistication get your name down at Andu ([www.andurestaurant.com](http://www.andurestaurant.com)) in Upper Brickell, and your dining and imbibing needs will be met with both flair and flamenco.

And, for a wholly theatrical eating experience, take a table at Barton G The Restaurant ([www.bartong.com/restaurant](http://www.bartong.com/restaurant)) on the west side of South Beach, and prepare for your taste buds to be tickled, along with the rest of your senses; this

trendy restaurant, which counts the likes of Tom Cruise and Will Smith among its regulars, is anything but ordinary.

## NIGHTLIFE

Whatever your agenda, there's no escaping the fact that Miami is a party place, and as day turns to dusk, Ocean Drive is once again the place to find the perfect drinking venue. Head for the bars which are, in the main, attached to the hotels along the strip: The Delano on Collins Avenue ([www.delano-hotel.com](http://www.delano-hotel.com)) is still the place to be seen, with a pool that is solely there for posing, while the pimped-out Louis Bar & Lounge has just opened at The Gansevoort South at South Beach.

Spend any amount of time in this glittery, glamorous place where the beautiful parade around by day, and party hard by night, and you'll need little convincing that Miami is truly unlike any other American city – or any other city for that matter.

For visitor information go to [www.miamianbeaches.com](http://www.miamianbeaches.com) or call the Greater Miami UK office on 01444 443355.

## GETTING THERE

American Airlines (020 7365 0777; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) flies up to twice daily non-stop between London Heathrow and Miami; prices start from £388 per person.

British Airways (0844 493 0787; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) offers daily flights twice a day from Heathrow to Miami; prices start from £383 per person.

Virgin Atlantic (0870 574 7747; [www.virginatlantic.com](http://www.virginatlantic.com)) offers daily flights from Heathrow to Miami from £321.

## WHERE TO STAY

The Fontainebleau Miami Beach ([www.fontainebleau.com](http://www.fontainebleau.com)) offers superior rooms from \$299 per night for two people, including breakfast.

The EPIC Hotel ([www.epichotel.com](http://www.epichotel.com)) offers premier rooms from \$269 per night including a hosted wine reception.



## TRAVEL NOTES | by Timothy Barber



The Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Sha Tin

## New Hyatt hotel for Hong Kong

Business travellers to Hong Kong can now make use of the 567-room Hyatt Regency Hong Kong, Sha Tin, which boasts views over Tolo Harbour, Lion Rock, Ma On Shan peak and Sha Tin Racecourses. There's a spa, banquet and meeting spaces, and the two-floor Regency Club, with a VIP concierge and sky terrace lounge, as well as the luxury suites and design you'd expect. [www.hyatt.com](http://www.hyatt.com)



Grand Hotel du Lagon in Reunion

## Off the beaten track in Reunion

Reunion Island, in the Indian Ocean, is a ruggedly beautiful place to get away from it all in a more active way than the beach-life on offer in nearby Mauritius. Newly renovated, the Grand Hotel du Lagon reopens this month, and it's a pretty sumptuous base from which to explore the bike trails, paragliding, canyoning and mountain refuges in the area – and beaches too, of course. [www.naiaderesorts.com](http://www.naiaderesorts.com)

## New hotel for Bermondsey

South London is gaining a funky new hotel, mixing luxury design with a taste for the eccentric. At the Bermondsey Square Hotel you'll be able to order a pillow fight from room service, enjoy the services of a mustard sommelier and even get hold of special dog beds for your pet pooch. Opens Apr 14, booking now with rates from £89. Call 0870 111 2525 or email [reservations@bermondseysquarehotel.co.uk](mailto:reservations@bermondseysquarehotel.co.uk)



The seas around Cuba are great for fishing.

## Fly-fishing in Cuba

If dipping your line in the local river doesn't quite satisfy your fishing interests, head to Cuba, where the island of Cayo Largo lies in a huge flats area averaging just six feet of water, ideal for casting a fly, with snapper, grouper, snook and barracuda among the fish to be caught here. Two-week break including flights from Gatwick and 14 nights in four-star hotels, £1,250. Visit [www.captivatingcuba.com](http://www.captivatingcuba.com)