



A local's guide to Miami's art museums, outdoor must-sees, and more

Gallery owner David Castillo shares his favorite spots in his hometown.

Tommie Ethington - Aug 25, 2023



Art Deco hotels along the Ocean Drive in the morning, South Beach, MiamiImage: Alexander Spatari/Getty Images

*In **My Top 11**, we tap local experts, makers, and community members to share their 11 best recommendations for the perfect mix of off-the-radar and tried-and-true places to eat, play, and shop, all to help push your itinerary to the next level.*

David Castillo grew up in Miami in the 1970s as the son of Cuban immigrants and opened his eponymous gallery in Wynwood in 2005. At the time, the neighborhood consisted mostly of abandoned warehouses, but today it's one of the most happening places in the city with craft breweries, upscale boutiques, and Wynwood Walls, a

Traveler's Choice Award–winning outdoor museum featuring murals by world-renowned street artists.

The David Castillo Gallery now resides in the Design District but one thing hasn't changed: Castillo's focus on championing LGBTQ+ artists and artists of color. His forward-thinking approach to contemporary art made him one of the first local gallery owners to earn a coveted spot at the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair.

And while the Miami of his youth may look different these days, Castillo says it offers a little something for everyone: "If you want the fast-paced nature of a city like New York, Miami has it all—restaurants, nightlife, the arts, shopping. But it also has a very quiet side—beaches, nature walks, tree-lined streets. Depending on your mood, the city can always deliver."

Below, Castillo shares 11 of his favorite places and experiences, from old-world museums to a longstanding, family-owned seafood joint. Read on to discover his guide to Miami.

1. Step back in time at the Vizcaya Museum & Gardens.

"It's a part of 'Old Miami' and never loses its appeal," says Castillo of the Vizcaya Museum & Gardens. Originally built in the early 1900s, the estate is a monument to a variety of architectural styles from Rococo to Neoclassical. Of the 34 rooms open to the public, many are themed around a specific Italian city. Outside, the maze-like gardens have 18th century sculptures, including those salvaged from villas around Venice, and a fountain designed by the same architect who made the fountain in front of Rome's Pantheon. Go early to avoid the crowds and the heat (AC is not on the list of the home's impressive original amenities).

2. Brunch at Pinch Kitchen + Bar.

On the outskirts of Castillo's Miami Shores neighborhood, you'll find the eclectic Pinch Kitchen + Bar. "It's an American bistro with lots of twists on traditional recipes," Castillo

says. Case in point: their tropical take on French toast that comes stuffed with guava and whipped cream cheese and topped with guava maple syrup.

3. Bike along a causeway.

With nearly 250 days of sunshine and miles of bike-friendly paths, one of the best ways to see the city is on two wheels. Castillo recommends a ride along the Venetian Causeway or palm tree-lined Rickenbacker Causeway Beach. Both offer views of the water and the skyline.

4. Stay at The Standard Miami Beach.

In town during Art Basel? Castillo says that The Standard Miami Beach is the perfect home base. “It’s a nice 15-minute walk to the convention center and it has the tried and true island feeling of Miami,” he says. After a long day spent ogling art, recoup at the hydrotherapy spa, which features open-air mud baths, a Roman waterfall hot tub and an arctic plunge pool.

5. Dig into fresh seafood at Joe’s Stone Crab.

Also on Miami Beach, Joe’s Stone Crab is “a Miami must.” When Hungarian-born Joe Weiss opened the small lunch counter back in 1913, the only way to get to it was via ferry. Bridges and paved roads make the journey easier now, but you can still expect the same hospitality and just-caught seafood served up by Joe’s descendants. “The old school wait staff, the amazing cocktails—it’s an experience you have to have at least once,” Castillo says.

6. Eye modern art at the de la Cruz Collection.

Less than a 10-minute walk from Castillo’s gallery is another Cuban-American owned outpost: the free de la Cruz Collection. Showcasing the private collection of the de la Cruz family, the museum is Castillo’s favorite. “It’s a 101 of late 20th century art with some modern classics peppered in,” he says.

7. Dine on fresh pasta, pizza, and house-cured meats at MC Kitchen.

MC Kitchen, a modern Italian restaurant in the Design District, is Castillo's go-to for a celebratory dinner. "I love Jorge the bartender and the food is always consistently good," he says, adding that the grilled octopus appetizer is non-negotiable. You also can't go wrong with the fresh pastas or inventive pizzas—think toppings like Brussels sprouts and black truffle or figs and prosciutto with a cipollini marmalade.

8. Make your way through the mangroves at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park.

It's only a short 20-minute drive from downtown but Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, on the island of Key Biscayne, feels worlds away. "You will instantly be transported to your most relaxed state," Castillo says. Take a tour of the iconic Cape Florida Lighthouse, rent a kayak to explore the ancient mangrove wetlands, or simply do as the locals do and post up under an umbrella on the white-sand beach—touted as one of the best in the country.

9. Try Cuban classics at La Casita.

Castillo doesn't have to think long when it comes to the city's best Cuban food: "That's an easy one," he says. "La Casita in Coral Gables." Tostones rellenos, buñuelos, a memorable Cubano sandwich—the long-standing restaurant offers up quintessential dishes in a simple setting. "Don't miss the oxtail if you happen to go on a day when that's the special," he says.

10. See a show at the Olympia Theater.

The Olympia Theater has lived many lives since opening downtown in 1926, first as a silent movie theater, then as a host to Vaudeville acts, blockbuster films, and major performances. Elvis Presley, B.B. King and Luciano Pavarotti have all graced the stage, surrounded by Moorish architecture and a ceiling that simulates the night sky. "I saw my first art exhibits there and my first musicals," Castillo says. "The twinkling lights above and the ornate Atmospheric Style never fail to take you out of the hectic contemporary moment as you settle into a performance."

11. Head south to Key West.

Home to key lime pie, pastel-colored cottages, and the The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum (a Traveler's Choice Award winner), Key West is an ideal day or overnight trip from Miami. "It's timeless, special, full of history, and a tropical wonder," Castillo says. "And it's just a magical three-hour drive away."