

BURT WOLF TRAVELS & TRADITIONS MIAMI, FLORIDA

Greater Miami and the beaches are situated along the east coast of the Florida peninsula – a sophisticated, subtropical city on the same latitude as the Sahara Desert. It is usually bathed in bright sunlight and has an average temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Miami has been shaped by ocean waves, waves that formed barrier islands – waves that came in with hurricanes and rearranged the geography.

But the most significant waves to arrive on these shores were the waves of settlers. Like the waves from the ocean they sank into the soil and changed the shape and the texture of this place. The first settlers were probably groups of native tribes that came over from Siberia about 10,000 years ago and headed south. Even then people were looking for a warm place and a better life. In the early 1500s the Spanish popped in, followed by the English, then the Spanish had a second shot. And finally in 1821, the U.S. government took over.

After an ocean wave arrives and sinks into the Miami sand, it will often leave marks indicating its passage. And that is also true for the waves of settlers who came here.

The first major modern day immigration was made up of wealthy northerners searching for a place to get away from the winter cold. The first of



the big spenders came to Miami during the early years of the 20th Century and settled in an area known as Coconut Grove. In 1916, James Deering who made his fortune selling farming equipment through International Harvester, built one of the most magnificent winter homes in the area. These days it's open to the public. Deering wanted to create an

estate that looked like it was the home of an Italian family. A family that had lived in the house for 400 years, with each generation adding things from their own time. The property is called Vizcaya, which means the high place.

The old guard is still here but Coconut Grove also has a reputation for a slightly Bohemian lifestyle. An invitation to artists and craftsmen. These days Coconut Grove's attractions are outdoor cafes, good restaurants, local shops and just down the road from the Grove, the ever-popular Parrot Jungle.

The Parrot Jungle is a well-known bird sanctuary, wildlife habitat and botanical garden. Over a thousand birds live here, but my favorites are the birds that appear at the trained parrot show.

The Parrot Jungle is at the edge of the city of Miami, a reminder that even though this is a modern metropolis, it is surrounded by the natural wonders of the tropics. Drive south from downtown Miami for just thirty minutes and you are in the Everglades. The Everglades is one of the world's most unusual environments. When the summer rains soak the grasses, hundreds of rare plants and animals fill the park. During the dry winter season the animals come together around the limited water supply. Pools and ponds become ideal spots for visitors who want to take a look at the amazing environment. Vast saw-grass prairies, subtropical jungle, mangrove swamps.

Greater Miami is a compromise. A compromise between getting away from it all in a place like the Everglades or being part of it all in a place like South Beach.

During the Twenties Miami Beach was a major resort. People came to live it up, to do a little gambling, which was illegal but tolerated by the local government... to drink a little alcohol, which was also illegal and tolerated by the local government. During Prohibition, so much whisky came into Miami from the Bahamas that the Beach was known as the leakiest spot in America.

The largest immigrations to the United States took



place during the 1800s and 1900s. Europeans coming to Ellis Island in New York City, who for the most part were uneducated and poor and trying to improve the quality of their

lives. On the other hand, the Cubans who came to Miami during the 1960s were for the most part talented professionals and successful businessmen and businesswomen who feared Castro's Communism and were interested in maintaining the quality of their lives.

They hit Miami and immediately started setting up the businesses they had back home. Everything from local shops to international banks. They also reproduced Cuban Cuisine. One of the most famous Cuban restaurants in town is La Esquina de Tejas. It's run by Lian and Alex Chamizo. It is and has always been a labor of love.

LIAN CHAMIZO:

The first time I saw the man that would eventually become my husband I was ten years old. We were vacationing in Miami with my parents from New York and we stopped in for lunch, and I remember my mother making a comment as to the young boy behind the counter helping out his parents, and how noble. And little did I know I'd end up meeting him fifteen years later, and we'd marry, have two kids, and now we run the business together.

ALEX CHAMIZO:

Dad opened up the business thirty-five years ago, and he used to also be in the restaurant business in Cuba. And basically what we serve is authentic Cuban cuisine.

It's common knowledge that the Cuban sandwich served at La Esquina is one of the best in Miami. But some of the other authentic specialties include a traditional paella. A dish of shredded beef, actually, they call it shredded cow. Chicken and vegetables in a wine sauce. Marinated roast pork. And for dessert, a creamy flan and a pound cake soaked in three different milks.



LITTLE HAVANA

Miami has had its ups and downs but it has always found a way to come out on top. After years of being a gastronomic desert, Miami and the beaches had a restaurant renaissance during the 90s. Today it has dozens of interesting restaurants, and almost all of the food reflects the history of Miami's ethnic migrations and unique character.

When Ponce de Leon showed up in Florida in 1513, he was looking for the Fountain Of Youth. He must have missed Miami's South Beach. Ah, yes, shapes not found in nature.

Too bad about De Leon. Florida did little for him. But he and his fellow explorer, Hernando De Soto, did a lot for Florida, especially when it comes to eating and drinking. They were the first two guys to bring cattle and pigs to North America, and the Franciscan missionaries who followed them brought in Spanish recipes, rice and European spices. So, the Spanish influence on the food of Miami goes back for well over 500 years.

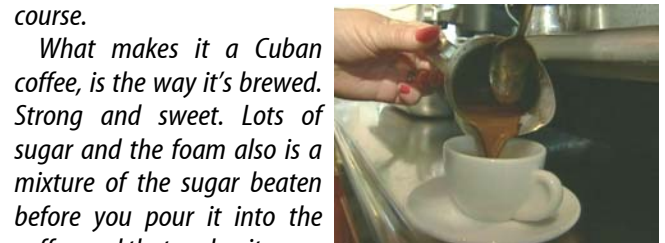
Today the best place to see and taste that influence is in Miami's Little Havana, and the best place to start is the bakery at Versailles. My guide is Herb Sosa, a Cuban-American, a friend, and a serious eater.

HERB SOSA:

Breakfast in Little Havana is a variety of fried and baked goods. We've got everything from croquetas, croquettes, pastelitos, which are a nice, light, flaky, pastries that can be filled with anything from meat to guava to cream cheese or a combination of both. Empanadas, guava pastries, and a type of Cuban bread called patines, which means a roller skate, because it resembles a roller skate with the wheels. The codfish fritters are also a delicacy and, certainly, a favorite, and all of that has to get washed down with Cuban coffee, of course.

What makes it a Cuban coffee, is the way it's brewed. Strong and sweet. Lots of sugar and the foam also is a mixture of the sugar beaten before you pour it into the coffee and that makes it come up to the top.

A Cuban breakfast can also include a variety of omelets and



WHERE TO EAT



LA ESQUINA DE TEJAS
18457 PINES BLVD.

PEMBROKE PINES, FL 33029
TEL: 1.954.443.0020

VERSAILLES BAKERY
3555 EIGHTH STREET

LITTLE HAVANA, FL 33135
TEL: 1.305.444.0240

[HTTP://VERSAILLESCUBAN.COM/](http://VERSAILLESCUBAN.COM/)

EL REY DE LAS FRITAS
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MIAMI, FL 33165
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sandwiches. These are references to our Spanish heritage. You can get the sandwiches and the omelets filled with everything from prosciutto ham to salmon, tomatoes, and

just about anything you'd like. They're formed like a cake. Built up and then sliced in triangles. The layers are nice and filling for breakfast, lunch, dinner, late night, any time you're hungry.

At about midday, you can pop into El Rey de las Fritas Cubana. A Fritas Cubana is a Cuban frito. It's a tradition in Cuba. It's a patty, U.S. choice ground beef with spices in it. Then add onions and homemade potatoes on a Cuban roll. And the recipe here has been passed down for generations.

If you enjoy the food in Little Havana, you might like to look at some plates for it to go on, in which case you should stop into the workshop of the Curras twins.

Ronald and Nelson are identical twins. But they were born a day apart, which put them under different astrological signs, very unusual for identical twins. Also one is right-handed and the other left-handed, which makes one the mirror image of the other. But those are about the only differences between them. They were born in Havana in 1940 and came to Miami in 1980. They are ceramists, and they make plates, tables and lamps in their home in Little Havana.

Their grandfather who lived in Spain started a ceramics business, and they carried on in the tradition. They draw their ideas from the flora and fauna of Cuba, their native homeland, the colors, the architecture, the plants, the animals, everything, that reminds them of their old Cuba.



The colors are inspired by the Tropics. They're hot, vibrant, like the Tropics. Ronald and Nelson Curras work simultaneously and together on both the concepts as well as in the actual work. One would start the design. The other one would continue, or vice versa, and also, when it comes to the murals with the ceramic tiles, they lay the tiles out and don't have any preconceived ideas or notions on what the design will be. They just start and take it as whatever inspires at the time.

TROPICAL DECO

Much of the food on Miami Beach is designed to look good and make the diners feel good and so is much of the architecture. Miami Beach is home to the largest



concentration of Art Deco buildings in the world. Art Deco got started in Paris at the beginning of the 1900s. The objective was to take design elements used in industry and translate them into the decorative

arts. The streamlined forms in a railroad train or an ocean liner find their way into the architecture of the buildings, strong vertical lines, rounded corners, portholes, etched glass and the first widespread use of neon lighting. During the 1920s and 30s over five hundred Art Deco structures were put up on Miami Beach. They were Art Deco but with a Miami Beach spin. The Art Deco here came to be known as Tropical Deco. The colors became

bright pastels. Concrete awnings called eyebrows were placed above the windows to shade the rooms from the hot afternoon sun. The objective of Tropical Deco was to make people feel that they were having fun in the sun, even though the Great Depression was going on back home. By 1960, however, these wonderful buildings were



running down. In response, the Miami Design Preservation League, and forward-looking investors took on the task of redeveloping the area. Tony Goldman was one of the first people to understand the value of preserving what was left in this area, and restoring the rest.

TONY GOLDMAN:

I saw a rhythm of two and three and four story buildings along an ocean street with a public park and a great beach. A fascination of colors and shapes that had a rhythm and a connection as a family member would to another family member. When you have similar architecture in critical mass it becomes powerful, as opposed to having a piece here and a piece there from different times different places. But the Art Deco district of South Beach is in critical mass 800 buildings all built within eight to ten years of each other. So it's a massive statement of architecture and a slice of time that is captured in for real, not in a Disneyesque approach. But it's captured for real.

THE SUNSHINE STATE

It appears that the same things that attract tourists (good food, good weather, lots of sunlight, interesting locations), also attract fashion photographers and their models. Miami Beach has become one of the world's most important centers for outdoor fashion photography and film. They've become multi-million dollar businesses. As you walk along the beach you can see the art form in action.

And now for an art form that's completely different. These are works of the Scull Sisters. They are famous throughout Miami. Three-dimensional murals that celebrate the street life of South Florida. And here they are now – the twins, Sahara and Haydee, and Haydee's son Michael. In 1969, a freedom flight from Cuba brought them to the U.S. They were on their way to New York, but when they saw Miami, they knew this was the right place for them. And boy, are they right for Miami. Like Salvador Dali, they are as much an art form as the work they create.

MICHAEL SCULL:

We decide what's going to go into our murals by thinking about it and talking. Like a football team we talk about it and then we say how we're going to do it and all that.

When it comes to the painting Mom is number one. She starts in the background. My aunt does the different accessories, you know, to make the 3-D effect. And then I work on some of the figures, and my mom also, and we exchange that like that.

It takes a minimum of two weeks for a small painting. And one year for a large painting. Like the bar in Mango's.



The Queen Elizabeth the painting was our most exciting painting. When the Queen of England visited Miami, the City of Miami commissioned a painting to greet the Queen with. We did something with the Queen's portrait at the Vizcaya Palace – that's in Miami. They thought that it would be an appropriate place to place the Queen. And she's a Queen she should be in a palace. In the background you see the Vizcaya Palace, and she's standing on one of those stone boats that they have and she's kind of feeding manatees in the water with gloves – she's wearing gloves and feeding the manatees. And they're kind of smiling to the Queen.

The murals are owned by important collectors. They have a unique vision and if you look carefully at their images, your own view of the subject matter may change and that's one of the criteria for a serious work of art.

To come here just for the warmth and the water is to miss much of what this area has to offer. Let me show you what I mean.



The Miami City Ballet is quickly becoming one of the most respected ballet companies in the world. It was founded in 1986 by Edward Villella, the first American-born male star of the New York City Ballet.

Today, the Miami City Ballet has over 15,000 subscribers, and over 10,000 single ticket buyers each season. It appears all over the world, and is busy creating works that incorporate the social dances of this century into the traditional ballet of the past. To see The Miami City Ballet



in action is to see the future of music and ballet in America. As the Miami classical arts community grew, it not only became a place where great artists came to perform, but also a

place where young artists came to train. The Old Lincoln Movie Theater at the heart of the art deco district on Miami Beach has been converted into the headquarters of The New World Symphony. It's North America's only full time national training center for young orchestral musicians who want to prepare for professional careers.

Another organization that will give you a look at the musical future of America is Jubilate. It started out in 1995, when a group of friends put together a vocal group to help celebrate Black History Month. Since then, it has expanded into the Jubilate Vocal Ensemble, and the Jubilate Symphony Orchestra. The Orchestra is one of three in the United States that are primarily managed and staffed by minority musicians.

Miami is also the world epicenter for street parties. The tradition goes back to 1915, but like everything else in Miami it is constantly reinventing itself. One of the



biggest is Carnival Miami, which celebrates the Latin flavor of the community with a nine-day festival of music, parades and food. It finishes off in a daylong block party on the legendary Calle

Ocho in Little Havana.

Miami and the Bahamas have teamed up to produce the Goombay Festival. With everything from the Royal Bahamian Police Marching Band to Junkanoo parades, it looks like Bay Street in Nassau was picked up and transported to Coconut Grove.

Miami is the home of the annual Orange Bowl football game and the Orange Bowl parade, which has become one of the world's largest and most colorful nighttime parades.

But festivals in Miami



don't all feature marching bands and floats. Miami has developed into one of the most sophisticated arts and cultural centers in the U.S. There are dozens of arts festivals, including Art Deco Weekend, a celebration of the Jazz Age, right in the middle of the Tropical Deco district.

Almost every week some group in Miami is having a party to celebrate something... the town has an ongoing dedication to having a great time.

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2200 LIBERTY AVENUE

MIAMI BEACH, FL 33139

TEL: 1.305.929.7010

WWW.MIAMICITYBALLET.ORG

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541 LINCOLN ROAD

MIAMI BEACH, FL 33139

TEL: 1.305.673.3330

WWW.NWS.ORG

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TEL: 1.305.644.8888

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