

# MIAMI NICE

**ADRIAN GILLAN steers you around the Art Deco, palmed, sea-view chic of Miami South Beach.**

WHEN the railroads came to Miami in the nineteenth century, they brought down with them rich, leisured Americans seeking sun. The roaring twenties were interrupted only briefly by depressions and hurricanes; then increased migration and resultant poverty from South America and Cuba brought in the notorious drugs-fuelled 80s crime spree – Miami Vice and Scarface times – which is now, thankfully, all but gone; to be replaced by A-list celebs and beach-loads of queers – especially on South Beach's famous sandy spit which the local council spends millions on, trying to save it being washed away, which would be like Dolly minus her baps!

## GAY MIAMI

MOST national carriers fly direct to Miami International – a short drive from South Beach or Downtown. American Airlines ([www.americanairlines.co.uk](http://www.americanairlines.co.uk)) fly direct from Heathrow daily.

The low-key but luxurious **Hotel Astor** (956 Washington Avenue; Tel: +1 305 531 8081; [www.hotelastor.com](http://www.hotelastor.com)) offers elegance and comfort without gimmickry or attitude – just three blocks from the ocean and mere steps from the great gay pulse.

Alternatively, **The Standard Miami**

(40 Island Avenue, Miami Beach, Florida 33139; Tel: 001 305 673 1717; [www.standardhotel.com](http://www.standardhotel.com)) offers a glorious luxuriously minimalist, health-conscious retreat, just across from South Beach on Belle Isle. It has an extensive spa – offering treatments majoring in massage and mud – and its large grounds and pool lap against Biscayne Bay, delivering the most spectacular sunsets every evening on cue.

Miami's **South Beach** – or SoBe (pronounced "so-bee") – has the colour of Rio, the intensity of Manhattan and the tropical ambience of the Caribbean, all on a long island just a 10-minute drive east of Miami's main Downtown urban sprawl.

SoBe's queer quarter is centred in the world's most significant, and thankfully now nationally protected, swathe of 1920s and 30s **Art Deco mansions** – each one as individual and scrumptious as a well-iced fairy cake, all with glorious pastel hues which take on a brand-new dimension of luminosity when lit up after dark.

Although, Miami's finest cultural asset is undoubtedly her built Art Deco heritage, the city also boasts a range of theatres and several world-class ensembles – including the **New World Symphony Orchestra** and **Miami City Ballet**.

Along pedestrianised **Lincoln Road Mall**, you'll find numerous gay-run or gay-friendly cafes, galleries and shops, notably between Collins and Michigan avenues. Further south – overlooking the fine white-sanded beach itself – is the famous **Ocean Drive**; best cruised down slowly in a large open-top car at night or sauntered along dreamily on foot by day. Do take time to check out the **Versace Mansion** (1116 Ocean Drive), one of the few private residences on the strip and scene of the fashion designers infamous murder.

For something classy in the shopping department, check out the **Miami Design District** ([www.designmiami.com](http://www.designmiami.com)) – a square mile in Downtown Miami, featuring fantastic shops, side-by-side with museums and galleries.

There are loads of gay-friendly grubberies along Lincoln Road Mall. For home-from-home, try **Balans** (1022 Lincoln Road Mall; Tel: +1 305 534 9191; [www.balans.co.uk/miami.html](http://www.balans.co.uk/miami.html)) – the US outpost of those London stalwarts, with its inexpensive fusion fare. Or try the queer-buzzing **Palace Bar & Grill** (1200 Ocean Drive; Tel: +1 305 531 9077), right opposite the gay beach.

Many of South Beach's larger mainstream warehouse clubs throw gay nights. Otherwise – excepting at White and Winter Party influx times – regular gay clubbing here tends to be on a smaller scale.

The **Laundry Bar** (721 Lincoln Lane; Tel: 01 305 531 7700), just behind Lincoln Road Mall, is a fun space – full of functioning washing machines, so feel free to strip your kit as you down a pint. On Lincoln Lane Mall itself, the vast and ever optimistically-titled **Score** (727 Lincoln Road Mall; Tel: +1 305 535 1111) is heaving any night after 10pm – whether at its street-sprawling tables, front bar, rear club or upper dancing lairs!

A ten minutes delightful stroll south down Washington Avenue lands you at **Twist** (1057 Washington Avenue; Tel +1 305 538 9478; [www.twistsobe.com](http://www.twistsobe.com)), the longest running of SoBe's gay venues, with its two stories of bars, dance floors and cozy lounges.

If still on the prowl, cut inland down 11th or 12th Street to **Flamingo Park** to "take airs" 24/7; or, by day, check out the herds of preening pecks on the **gay beach opposite 12th Street** – just look for the rainbow flags and mounds and mounds of pumped-up flab-cum-flesh.

A little further afield, visit the **Everglades National Park** – 10,000 islands hidden within swamps and marshes along the Wilderness Waterway; or hop on the Tri-Rail up to **Fort Lauderdale**, "the American Venice", with its new-money mansions and yachts amidst miles of canals. Or jump a Greyhound bus to **Key West** – the southernmost pearl in a string of islands that starts curling out down towards Cuba at Key Largo, itself just forty miles below Miami. More on Key West in next week's issue.

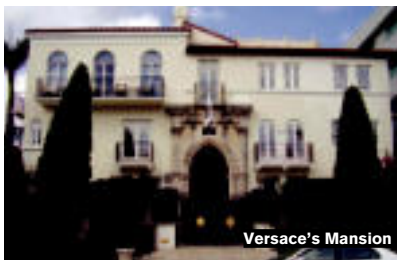
## > Further information

The next famous fundraising 10,000-strong **White Party** ([www.whiteparty.com](http://www.whiteparty.com)) happens 22nd – 27th November 2006; with its next sister event, the 5,000-strong **Winter Party** ([www.winterparty.com](http://www.winterparty.com)), set for March 2007.

Also, the world famous **Winter Music Conference** ([www.wintermusicconference.com](http://www.wintermusicconference.com)) every March is heaven for dance music enthusiasts.

Meantime, the 8th **Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival** ([www.mglff.com](http://www.mglff.com)) runs 21st- 30th April 2006.

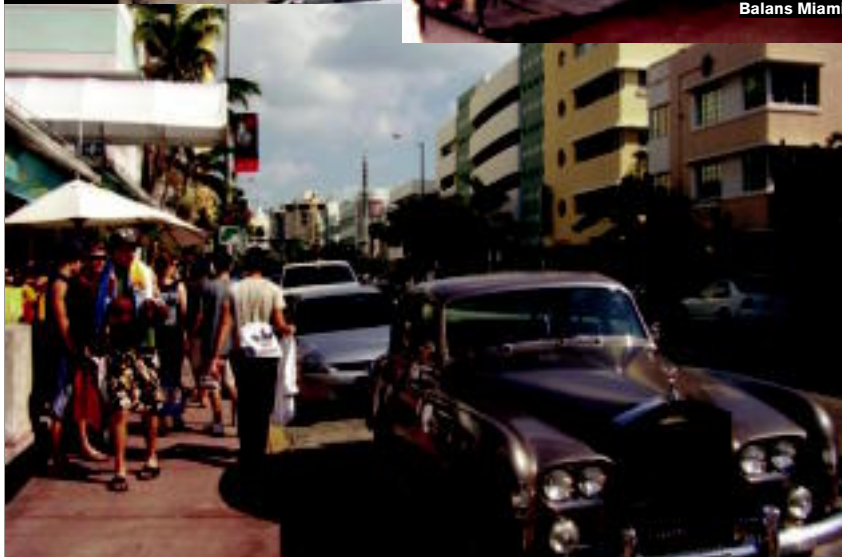
For further information, visit [www.gogaymiami.com](http://www.gogaymiami.com); or [www.mrmiamibeach.com](http://www.mrmiamibeach.com) where you can contact "Mr. Miami Beach" himself, the outrageous, delightful, self-professed "old tart" that is Mr Michael Aller, allegedly "available to assist you in any way, 24/7".



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