

## The Best of South Florida

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**A** week in Miami is not unlike watching an episode of, say, *Access Hollywood* with a little CNN thrown in for good measure. Miami: the city to which J-Lo fled when she and Ben Affleck were on the outs; where Tom Cruise took Katie Holmes to celebrate her never-ending 27th birthday; the place where the paparazzi camps out for days hoping to catch a glimpse of something or someone fabulous; the place where former President Bill Clinton kibitzes with the head of a top modeling agency at a St. Tropez-ish beach club; where Janet Reno throws a politically driven dance party at a South Beach nightclub. And that's just a small sampling of the surreal, Felliniesque world that exists way down here at the bottom of the map. Nothing in Miami is ever what it seems.

What used to be a relatively sleepy beach vacation destination has awakened from its humid slumber, upped its tempo, and finally earned its place in the Palm Pilots of cutting-edge jet-setters worldwide. But don't be fooled by the hipper-than-thou, celebrity-drenched playground known as South Beach. While the chic elite do, indeed, flock to Miami's coolest enclave, it is surprisingly accessible to the average Joe, Jane, or José. For every Phillippe Starck-designed, bank-account-busting boutique hotel on South Beach, there's a kitschy, candy-coated Art Deco one that's much less taxing on the pockets. For each Pan-Mediterranean-Asian haute cuisinerie, there's always the down-home, no-nonsense Cuban bodega offering hearty food at ridiculously cheap prices.

Beyond the whole glitzy, *Entertainment-Tonight*-meets-beach-blanket-bacchanalia-as-seen-on-TV, Miami has an endless number of sporting, cultural, and recreational activities to keep you entertained. Our sparkling beaches are beyond compare. Plus, there are excellent shopping and nightlife activities that include ballet, theater, and opera (as well as all the celebrity-saturated hotels, restaurants, bars, and clubs that have helped to make Miami so famous).

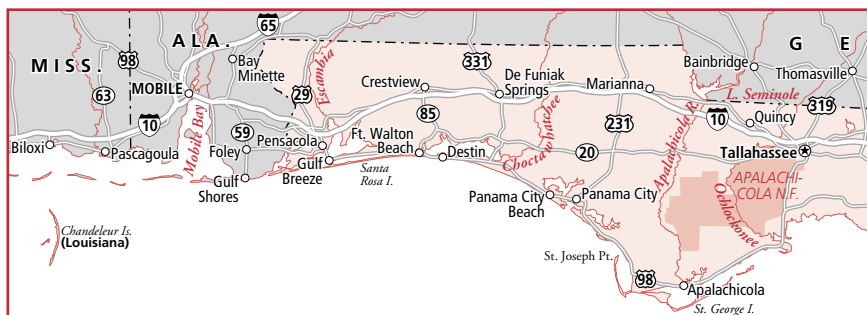
Leave Miami, be it for the Keys, the Gold Coast, or the Treasure Coast, and you'll expose yourself not only to more UV rays, but to a world of cultural, historical, and sybaritic surprises where you can take in a spring baseball game, walk in the footsteps of Hemingway, get up close and personal with the area's sea life, soak up the serenity of unspoiled landscapes, catch the filming of *CSI: Miami* or a big-budget Hollywood flick, and much more.

Forget what you've heard about South Florida being Heaven's Waiting Room. That slogan is as passé as the concept of early-bird dinners (which you can still get—they just no longer define the region). In fact, according to some people, South Florida *is* heaven. So what are *you* waiting for?

## 1 Frommer's Favorite South Florida Experiences

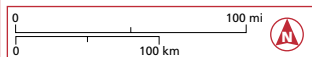
- **Driving along Florida A1A:** This oceanfront route, which runs north up Miami Beach, through Sunny Isles and Hollywood, and into Fort Lauderdale (starting at Ocean Dr. and First St. in Miami and merging onto Collins Ave. before running north), embodies the essence that is South Florida. From time-warped hotels steeped in Art Deco kitsch to multimillion-dollar modern high-rises, A1A is one of the most scenic, albeit heavily trafficked, roads in all of Florida.
- **South Beach Nightlife:** If you can handle it, you can boogie down until the sun comes up in cavernous, pulsating dance clubs, which are considered amongst the best in the world. Lounges aren't too shabby either. There's **Privé**, where the likes of Jessica Simpson, Janet Jackson and Paris Hilton, Kid Rock, Courtney Love and members of Mötley Crüe mix with a colorful crowd of local and international hipsters and then there's **Skybar, Privé, Mansion, Opium, the Setai, The Forge**, and, well the list goes on. Where else can us ordinary folk brush elbows with—or spill Cosmopolitans on—Hollywood starlets, entertainment moguls, and living legends but in South Beach's hot clubs, bars, and restaurants, many of which don't get going until the crack of dawn? See chapter 9 for more on Miami's nightlife.
- **Airboat Ride through the Outskirts of the Everglades:** Unfettered by jet skis, cruise ships, and neon bikinis, the Everglades are Florida's outback, resplendent in their swampy nature. The Everglades are best explored either by slow-moving canoes that really get you acquainted with your surroundings or via an airboat that can quickly navigate its way through the most stubborn of saw grass while providing you with an up-close and personal (as well as fun) view of the land's inhabitants, from alligators and manatees to raccoons and Florida panthers. See p. 248.
- **Dining at Big Fish Restaurant on the Miami River:** Some consider dining on the Miami River to be industrial chic; others consider it seedy in a *Miami Vice* sort of way. However you choose to look at it, by all means *do* look at it; the sleepy Miami River is nestled below the sweeping downtown Miami skyline, reminding you that even though you're in a major metropolis, things in this often-frenetic city are capable of slowing down to a more soothing pace. See p. 152.
- **Vizcaya Museum and Gardens:** Built in 1916, this Italian Renaissance-style manse on Biscayne Bay in Miami features 34 rooms of antiques, art, and tapestries; 10 acres of Italian gardens, statues, and fountains; a new orchid display; and a picture-perfect view of the skyline and Key Biscayne. See p. 184.
- **Wolfie Cohen's Rascal House:** You *will* wait in line at Miami Beach's landmark diner, but it's never dull, as the cacophony of mostly Northeastern U.S. accents will keep you entertained until you are seated in what seems to be an ancient vinyl booth. The octogenarian waitress will serve you corned-beef sandwiches, brisket, or potato pancakes, and, if you're lucky, she may tell you about the time Sinatra and his Rat Pack came in way back when. See p. 146.
- **Moonlight Concerts at the Barnacle State Historic Site:** Once a month, on or near the full moon

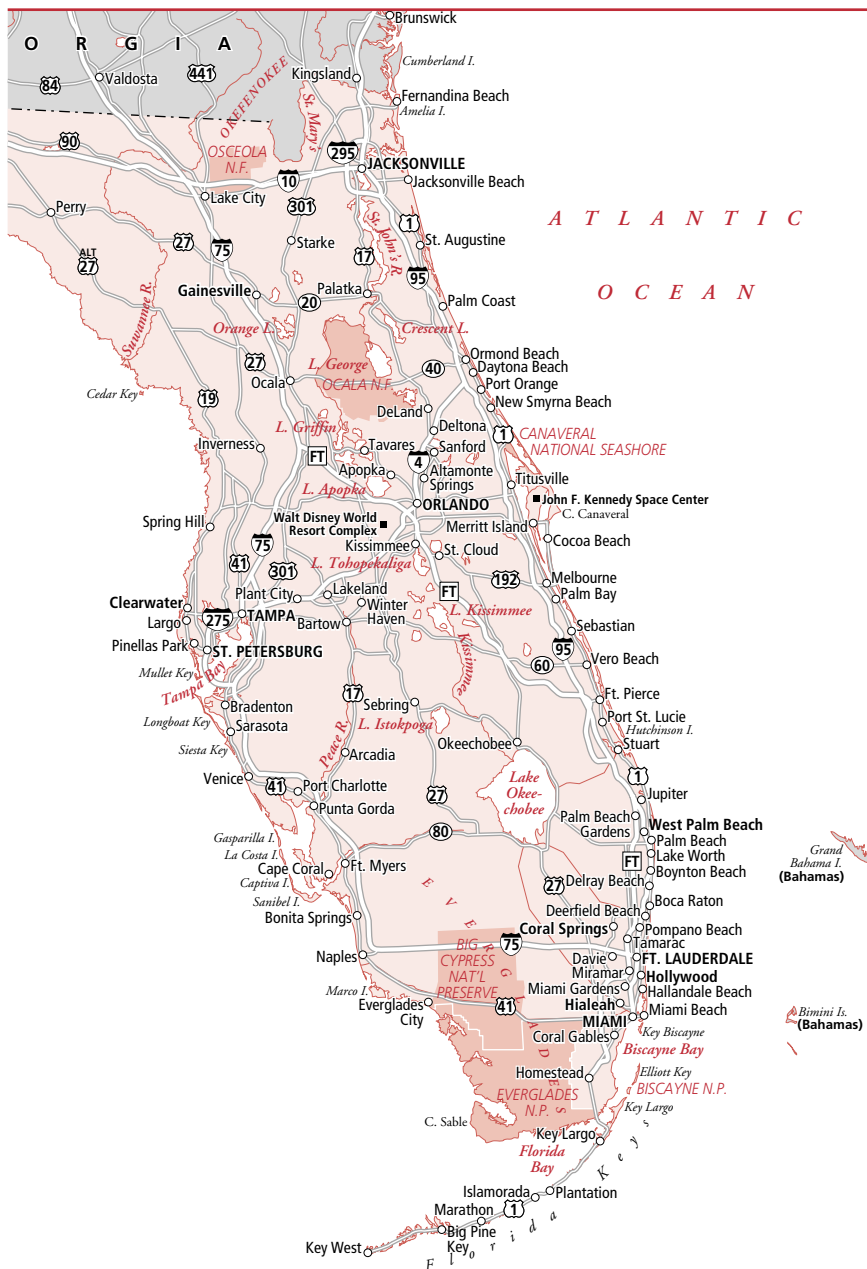
# Florida



G U L F O F

M E X I C O





(except during July and Aug), the Barnacle State Historic Site hosts a concert in the backyard of their charming 1908 Coconut Grove bungalow built on 5 acres of waterfront property. Listeners are welcome to picnic and bask in this sublime setting for a mere \$5. See p. 182.

- **Midnight Snacking at Versailles:**

This iconoclastic, gaudy Cuban diner in the heart of Miami's Little Havana is humming with the buzz of old-timers reminiscing about pre-Castro Cuba, local politicians trying to appease them, and a slew of detached people only there for the fantastically cheap and authentic Cuban fare. Much like its French namesake in whose image it's been literally mirrored, Miami's Versailles provides a palatial view of Miami's ever-changing Cuban landscape. See p. 158.

- **Watching the Cruise Ships Set Sail from South Pointe Park:**

Unless you're already on a boat, you can't get a better view of the monstrous cruise ships leaving the Port of Miami than from South Pointe Park, located at the southern tip of South Beach. If you stare long enough, you *will* feel like you're moving, which is almost as much fun as being on board. See p. 194.

- **Lunch at News Cafe on Ocean Drive:**

The quintessential South Beach experience, lunching at News Cafe is more of a spectator sport than a dining experience. What the Big Mac is to McDonald's, people-watching is to News Cafe, whose Ocean Drive location is one of the best sidewalk spots from which to observe the wacky, colorful mix of pedestrians on parade. See p. 141.

- **Sunset Cocktails at the Setai:**

The most luxe, most expensive hotel on South Beach may not be in everyone's budget, but the Friday night cocktail

parties there are, and should not be missed. See p. 83.

- **Partying at the Pawn Shop Lounge:**

Forget about Miami being stuffy and swanky. This downtown Miami club is one of the coolest places on the planet—housed in a former pawn shop and complete with a full-blown, big yellow school bus cum cocktail lounge, Airstream trailer cum VIP lounge, and jetliner fuselage in which you can enjoy more than a sample size of your favorite beverage. See p. 230.

- **Relishing the View from Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Recreation Area:**

You haven't truly seen South Florida until you've checked out the view from the southern point of Key Biscayne. Whether it's the turquoise water or the sight of Stiltsville—seven still-inhabited aquatic cabins dating back to the 1930s, perched smack in the middle of the Biscayne Channel—it may take a little coaxing to get you to leave. See p. 185.

- **Scuba Diving off Jupiter Beach:**

In 1988, Jupiter Beach lifeguard Peter Leo spotted an anchor and a cannon while on his routine morning swim. Turns out, they belonged to what is believed to be the shipwreck of a Spanish galleon dating back to the 16th or 17th century. Giving literal meaning to South Florida's Treasure and Gold coasts, this wreck is worth holding your breath for. See p. 319.

- **Happy Hour at Mai Kai:**

Polynesia meets Fort Lauderdale at Mai Kai, the trippiest Tiki hut this side of Tahiti, with its sarong-clad bartenders, a fiery hula show, and an exhaustive menu of frozen concoctions. See p. 335.

- **Discovering Your Inner Flipper at the Dolphin Research Center:**

Learn to communicate with and touch, swim, or play with the mammals at the nonprofit Dolphin Research Center in

## Impressions

*What could be better than to sit on the beach playing cards in my shirt-sleeves in January?*

—Anonymous Miami Beach resident

Marathon Key, home to a school of approximately 15 dolphins. See p. 265.

- **Eyeing the Estates on Palm Beach:** The winter playground for the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* set, Palm Beach is lined with jaw-dropping palatial estates. Though many of them are hidden behind towering shrubbery, head south on South County Road, from Brazilian Avenue, where you will see some of the most opulent homes ever built. Make sure someone holds the steering wheel if you're driving, because you *will* do a double take. See p. 348.
- **Boating through the Intracoastal Waterway:** The waterway that connects the natural bays, lagoons, and rivers along Florida's East Coast snakes around from the Florida-Georgia border all the way to the port of Miami. A ride through the Fort Lauderdale Intracoastal provides a sublime view of million-dollar waterfront houses. See p. 317.
- **Salsa Lessons at Bongo's Cuban Café:** If the only salsa you're familiar

with is the kind you put on your tacos, get over to Bongo's, the hottest salsa club north of Havana, where Miami's most talented salsa dancers will teach you how to move your two left feet in the right direction. See p. 227.

- **Exploring the Design District after Dark:** After waiting patiently for this arty, funky area to hit its comeuppance, Miami's hipsters have finally been rewarded with cool bars, lounges, and restaurants that exude that New York City SoHo-meets-Meatpacking District vibe.
- **Sundays at Alabama Jack's:** There is nothing like hanging out, chugging a cheap beer, chowing down on amazing conch fritters, and watching a bunch of sauced octogenarians dressed like extras from Hee Haw line dancing to incredible live country music, all in a Sunday's afternoon. Even better is the spectacular waterfront setting that makes you truly appreciate why you're in Florida in the first place. See p. 261.

## 2 The Best Beaches

- **For Tranquillity: Matheson Hammock Park Beach** (☎ 305/665-5475) in South Miami features an enclosed man-made lagoon that is flushed naturally by the tidal action of the adjacent Biscayne Bay. The serene beach is surrounded by the bay's warm, calm waters and a backdrop of tropical hardwood forest. See p. 172.

The beach at **Bahia Honda State Park** (☎ 305/872-2353) in Bahia

Honda Key is one of the nicest and most peaceful in Florida, located amidst 635 acres of nature trails and even a portion of Henry Flagler's railroad. See p. 279.

- **For Watersports: Hobie Beach** (☎ 305/361-2833), located on the south side of Key Biscayne's Rickenbacker Causeway, is one of the most popular beaches for watersport enthusiasts, featuring jet-ski, sailboat, windsurfing, and sailboard rentals;

shade, if necessary, from the Australian pine; and a sublime view of the picturesque downtown Miami skyline. See p. 172.

- **For People-Watching: Lummus Park Beach** (☎ 305/673-7714) is world renowned, not necessarily for its pristine sands, but for its more common name of **South Beach**. Here, seeing, being seen, and, at times, the obscene, go hand in hand with the sunscreen and beach towels. See p. 172.

Not nearly as scenic, but still heavily populated, **Fort Lauderdale Beach** (☎ 954/468-1597) is the site of many a bacchanalian Spring Break, Frankie and Annette, and now, an eclectic—albeit calmer—mix of young, buff beach bums. See p. 316.

- **For Nature Lovers: MacArthur Beach** (☎ 561/624-6950), in West Palm Beach, is considered by many nature enthusiasts to be the most beautiful nature park in South Florida, with a nice stretch of beach set against a lush and diverse background of foliage, plus a state-of-the-art nature center and renowned sea turtle awareness program. See p. 365.
- **For Nude Sunbathing:** For that all-over tan, the place to be is the north end of **Haulover Beach** (☎ 305/944-3040), nestled between the Intra-coastal Waterway and the ocean. A gay, nude beach is also there, as is an area for nude volleyball. See p. 172.

- **For Seclusion:** The producers of *Survivor* could feasibly shoot their show on the ultra-secluded, picturesque, and deserted **Virginia Key** (☎ 305/361-2749), on Key Biscayne, where people go purposely not to be found. See p. 173.

- **John U. Lloyd Beach State Park** (☎ 954/923-6711) in Dania Beach is unfettered by high-rise condos, T-shirt shops, and hotels, and remains intact with an untouched shoreline surrounded by a canopy of Australian pine to ensure that your seclusion is, indeed, highly guarded. See p. 317.

- **For Gay Beachgoers:** South Beach's **12th Street Beach** (☎ 305/673-7714) is the beach of choice for gay residents and travelers who come to show off just how much time they've spent in the gym, and, of course, catch up on the latest gossip and upcoming must-attend parties and events. Oftentimes, this beach is the venue for some of the liveliest parties South Beach has ever seen. See p. 173.

- **For Kids:** Miami's **Crandon Park Beach** (☎ 305/361-5421) is extremely popular for families with kids because of the shallow water created by a neighboring sandbar. Convenient parking, picnic areas, a winding boardwalk, and a multi-ethnic mix of families grilling, dancing, and relaxing are the benchmarks of this beach. See p. 170.

### 3 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel:** With a guest registry that reads like a who's who of history crossed with an engrossing whodunit, Miami's monumental, Mediterranean revivalist-style **Biltmore Hotel** (☎ 800/727-1926 or 305/445-1926) opened its doors in 1926. Guests ranging from Al Capone to the duke and duchess of

Windsor loved the stately hotel so much that they never left, so say those who claim the hotel is haunted. Ghosts aside, this national landmark boasts the largest hotel pool in the continental United States as well as a 300-foot bell tower modeled after the Cathedral of Seville. See p. 113.

- **Most Expensive Luxury Hotel:** With room rates *starting* at \$1,000 a night, a guest list that reads straight off of a Hollywood premiere, **The Setai** (☎ 305/520-6100) and its dotting, professional Asian staff, awe-inspiring decor, and outstanding cuisine, is decadence and extravagance at its fullest. See p. 83.
- **Best Cheap-Chic Hotel:** West Palm Beach's **Hotel Biba** (☎ 561/832-0094) is a funky, single-story, converted 1940s motor-lodge-turned-boutique hotel featuring an oversized swimming pool, Asian gardens with sitting areas, a reflection pond, and the ultrahip Biba Bar. Rooms start at \$100. See p. 359.
- **Best Celebrity-Saturated Hotel:** **The Shore Club** (☎ 877/640-9500 or 305/695-3100) still reigns as Miami's number one celebrity magnet, attracting stars and starlets who you'd find at A-list Hollywood parties. While the terminally trendy Skybar isn't necessarily the hottest spot in town, swank sushi joint Nobu always brings 'em in. See p. 84.
- **Best Role-Playing Hotel:** With rooms such as "Me Tarzan, You Vain," or "Best Whorehouse," South Beach's **Pelican Hotel** (☎ 800/7-PELICAN or 305/673-3373) takes the concept of escapism to an entirely new level. See p. 95.
- **Best Out-of-Place Bed-and-Breakfast:** Located on the outskirts of gritty, bustling downtown Miami is the historic **Miami River Inn** (☎ 800/468-3589 or 305/325-0045), housed in five restored clapboard buildings dating back to 1906. By the looks of this place, you could swear you were somewhere in New England—until you step out for a breath of the balmy air. See p. 112.
- **Best Hotel in a League of Its Own:** **Jules' Undersea Lodge** (☎ 305/451-2353) in Key Largo really gives you the low-down on the full Keys experience by requiring all guests to scuba 30 feet underwater to get to their rooms, which are literally located under the sea, in the mangrove habitat of Emerald Lagoon. See p. 272.
- **Best Art Deco Hotel:** **The Raleigh Hotel** (☎ 800/848-1775 or 305/534-6300) in Miami is the reigning diva of Deco, dating back to 1940. It features one of the most photographed palm-lined swimming pools, reminiscent of the days of Esther Williams. See p. 89.
- **Best Gatsby-esque Hotel:** As you drive up to the **Breakers** (☎ 800/833-3141) in posh Palm Beach, you can't help but feel the spirit of Jay Gatsby beckoning you into this mammoth Italian Renaissance-style hotel. See p. 356.
- **Best Beach Hotel:** Miami's **Beach House Bal Harbour** (☎ 877/782-3557 or 305/865-3551) was inspired by the great beach homes of the Hamptons, Nantucket, and coastal Maine, and when you stay here, you will feel like someone's houseguest rather than an anonymous hotel guest. See p. 100.
- **Best Inexpensive Hotel:** It's hard to find a hotel on South Beach with both good value and excellent service, but the **Crest Hotel Suites** (☎ 800/531-3880 or 305/531-0321) delivers as one of Miami's best bargains as well as coolest hotels. See p. 92.
- In Key West, the **Grand** (☎ 888/947-2630 or 305/294-0590), despite its name, will not leave you with a huge tab at the end of your stay. The rooms in this hotel are bright and airy and the proprietor works hard to keep you happy. See p. 302.
- **Best for Families:** In Miami, the **Sonesta Beach Resort Key Biscayne** (☎ 800/SONESTA or 305/361-2021) is known for its complimentary



- children's programs led by trained counselors who supervise kids, grouped by age, in pool and beach activities and on field trips including dinner, movie, and museum excursions. Fees apply for meals/certain excursions. See p. 108.
- In Fort Lauderdale, **Marriott's Harbor Beach** (☎ 800/222-6543 or 954/525-4000) has a Beachside Buddies program for children ages 5 to 12, offering half-day and all-day children's activities that range from seashell collecting to hula-hoop contests. The 8,000-square-foot, free-form swimming pool, expansive sand beach, and instant access to water toys also keep kids entertained. See p. 325.
  - The **Boca Raton Resort & Club** (☎ 800/327-0101 or 561/395-3000) has activity programs designed for distinct age groups. Upon registering children in the program, each parent is given a beeper with a 60-mile radius so that they may be contacted by their children at any time. See p. 342.
  - **Best for Romance:** In Miami, the **Hotel Place St. Michel** (☎ 800/848-HOTEL or 305/444-1666) is a cozy European-style hotel whose wood-floored dark-paneled rooms are adorned in antiques, transporting you from sunny Florida to gay Paris. See p. 114.
  - Imagine an intimate haven on your own private island and you've got **Little Palm Island** (☎ 800/343-8567 or 305/872-2524), located just 3 miles offshore in the Florida Keys, accessible only by boat or seaplane, and quite possibly the closest thing to paradise, with only one telephone on the entire island. See p. 281.
  - Although it's 2 blocks from Duval Street—Bourbon Street South—**The Gardens Hotel** (☎ 800/526-2664 or 305/294-2661) is Key West's most romantic, Eden-istic hideaway that's worlds away from the madness. See p. 297.
  - In Palm Beach, modeled after a quaint English inn, the **Chesterfield Hotel** (☎ 800/243-7871 or 561/659-5800) is absolutely seductive, thanks in part to its sexy, sultry Leopard Lounge, its cozy fireside library, and Churchill's Cigar Room. See p. 357.
  - **Best Guesthouses/B&Bs:** The **Villa Paradiso** (☎ 305/532-0616) may be smack in the heart of frenetic South Beach, but once you're inside you're worlds away, with rooms facing a sun-drenched courtyard and a host who is genuinely glad to see you, unlike some of the more attitudinal staff found in other nearby hotels. See p. 99.

## 4 Best Dining Bets

- **Best for Celebrating a Big Deal:** The **Forge Restaurant** on Miami Beach (☎ 305/538-8533) is a multichambered, ornately decorated (and priced) monument known for its decadent wines, steak, and fish. See p. 144.
- **Best Romantic Restaurant:** **Casa Tua**, in South Beach (☎ 305/673-1010), offers exquisite Italian cuisine in a Mediterranean villa that's hidden from the street with lush landscaping and an iron gate, resplendent outdoor garden, cozy Hamptons-esque dining room, communal kitchen, and intimate upstairs lounge and patio. See p. 124.
- **Best Restaurant for Zone Dieters Not on a Budget:** **Prime 112**, in

South Beach (☎ 305/532-8112), serves the best aged beef this side of Chicago, not to mention \$20 Kobe beef hot dogs, dried sticks of bacon at the bar in lieu of peanuts, and, if you must cheat, the best truffle-infused macaroni and cheese you'll ever eat. See p. 129.

- **Best Waterfront Dining:** It's a tossup between Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, but whichever you prefer, there are two restaurants that provide front-row seats to both. The Mandarin Oriental Hotel's global fusion restaurant, **Azul** (☎ 305/913-8258), faces the Miami skyline and beautiful, tranquil Biscayne Bay, while the Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne's **Cioppino** (☎ 305/365-4500) faces the Atlantic, but its Mediterranean cuisine could have you thinking you're floating off the coast of, say, Portofino. Tough decisions, but both are winners. See p. 150 and p. 106.
- **Louie's Backyard** in Key West (☎ 305/294-1061) offers Caribbean cuisine and one of the best views of the gulf you'll ever have. See p. 304.
- **Best Restaurant Not Worth the Wait for a Table:** The legendary South Florida institution known as **Joe's Stone Crab Restaurant**, in Miami Beach (☎ 305/673-0365), refuses to take reservations, but that doesn't stop people from clawing their way into the restaurant for a table—despite a wait that's often in excess of 3 hours. Thing is, if only they knew about **Joe's Take Away**, directly next door, the only thing they'd be waiting for is seconds. See p. 127.
- **Best Cuban Restaurant:** There's always a debate on who has the best, most authentic Cuban cuisine, but for those of you who have never been to Havana, Miami's **Versailles**, in Little Havana (☎ 305/444-0240), is *the*

quintessential Cuban diner, featuring enormous portions at paltry prices. See p. 158.

- **Best Old School Steakhouse:** Miami's **Capital Grille** (☎ 305/374-4500) may be part of a chain, but its dry-aged steaks are still a cut above the rest. See p. 150.
- In addition to the **Forge Restaurant** (see above), **Christy's**, in Coral Gables (☎ 305/446-1400), is another top carnivorous choice, with superb steaks and famous Caesar salads. See p. 162.
- **Best New World Cuisine:** It's a tossup between the restaurants of the original founders of the palate-pleasing fusion of Florida and Caribbean (Floribbean) ingredients: **Norman's**, in Coral Gables (☎ 305/446-6767), owned by James Beard chef Norman van Aken, and **Chef Allen's**, in Aventura (☎ 305/935-2900), owned by chef Allen Sussner. Whichever chef's cuisine you choose, they both do wonders with mangos. See p. 162 and p. 148 respectively.
- **Sexiest Restaurant: The Restaurant at the Setai**, on South Beach (☎ 305/573-3355), brings an exotic, authentic Asian vibe to a place where even Italian restaurants serve sushi. The Indo-Asian decor, dim lighting and reflecting pools give way to a very exotic, erotic Kama Sutra vibe. See p. 83.
- **Best Scene: Nobu**, in Miami Beach (☎ 305/695-3232), is the unrivaled sushi den in which everyone from Justin Timberlake to Madonna have been spotted swooning over their sashimi. See p. 128.
- **Taverna Opa**, also in Miami Beach, Hollywood, and Ft. Lauderdale (☎ 305/673-6730; 954/929-4010; 954/567-1630, respectively), makes the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* look like a big fat bore with its own plate breaking, table dancing, ouzo

pouring version of a Greek bacchanalia. See p. 225.

- **Best Sunday Brunch: The Blue Door** on Miami Beach (☎ 305/674-6400) turns the sleek and chic Delano lobby into a help-yourself-to-everything, calorie-busting Sunday brunch of gourmet fare and insanely good desserts. See p. 124.
- At the stately Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, **Palme d'Or** (☎ 305/445-1926) rolls out a regal buffet that's good enough to feed royalty. Delray Beach's **De La Tierra** (☎ 561/272-5678) features a gourmet all-you-can-eat \$35 brunch *including* alcoholic beverages—an unheard-of value that comes complete with a stunning outdoor garden setting. See p. 163 and p. 345.
- **Best View: Big Fish**, in Miami (☎ 305/373-1770), is all about gritty-chic, located on the Miami River, where tugboats and cargo ships slink by as you indulge in fresh fish and sip good Italian wine under the glow of the brilliant downtown skyline hovering above. See p. 152. On South Beach, the cavernous **o-R-o** (☎ 305/673-3444), offers sweeping, panoramic views of the Miami Beach Marina and Miami city skyline. See p. 128. **Red Fish Grill** (☎ 305/668-8788) is ensconced in Coral Gables' Matheeson Hammock Park and located on the edge of a saltwater lagoon, a setting so blissfully distracting, you may forget to pay attention to what's on your plate. See p. 165. **Le Tub** (☎ 954/921-9425) may not be considered fine dining, but when you sink your teeth into one of their incredible burgers while overlooking the Intracoastal, nothing could be finer. See p. 334.
- **Best Haute Cuisine: Mark's Las Olas**, in Fort Lauderdale (☎ 954/463-1000), and Miami's **Table 8** (☎ 305/695-4114) are both run by celebrity chefs Mark Militello (whose New American cuisine restores the faith of gourmands whose palates once belonged to the Pan-Asian Fusion movement) and Govind Armstrong, a charismatic chef who launched his career at the tender age of 13 with Wolfgang Puck at L.A.'s legendary Spago. See p. 329 and p. 130.
- **Best People-Watching: The News Cafe**, in South Beach (☎ 305/538-6397), practically invented the sport of people-watching, encouraging its customers to sit at an outdoor table all day if they want, lingering over the passing parades of people while sipping a cappuccino. Lincoln Road's Euro-fabulous **Segafredo Espresso** cafe (☎ 305/673-0047), provides a front-row seat to the hordes of people who parade along the pedestrian mall. See p. 141 and p. 225.
- **Best Comfort Food: Big Pink**, in Miami Beach (☎ 305/532-4700), serves kitsch in large doses, featuring TV dinners served in compartmentalized trays. It's fun and funky, and the food's pretty good, too. See p. 135.
- **Best Italian Food:** Miami Beach's **Macaluso's** (☎ 305/604-1811) would make Tony Soprano very proud of his Italian heritage, thanks to Chef Michael's expertly prepared Staten Island-meets-SoHo cuisine. See p. 137. **Tuscan Today Trattoria**, in Ft. Lauderdale (☎ 954/566-1716), churns out primo Tuscan fare in its imported-from-Italy wood-burning brick oven. See p. 333.
- **Best Kids' Restaurant:** South Miami's **GameWorks** (☎ 305/667-4263) is the brainchild of co-owner Steven Spielberg, whose virtual reality and video games contribute to the actual reality of kids cleaning their plates so that they can play. The videogames also appeal to adults, as

do the restaurant and full bar, which make nights at GameWorks a 21-and-over hangout. See p. 205.

- **Best Mexican:** The fresh, authentic Mexican fare at **Baja Cafe**, in Boca Raton (☎ 561/394-5449), will have you swearing off Taco Bell forever. And the gourmet Mexican fare in Fort Lauderdale's lauded **Eduardo de San Angel** (☎ 954/772-4731) is *Like Water for Chocolate* and from the Gods. See p. 346 and p. 330.
- **Best Star-Studded Sushi Restaurant:** **Nobu**, at The Shore Club hotel in Miami Beach (☎ 305/695-3100), is known for its star sushi chef and owner, the legendary Nobu Matsuhisa, but the raw facts about this restaurant are as simple as its stellar clientele (which includes Madonna, among others): It's unquestionably the best sushi in town. For fabulous sushi minus the Hollywood vibe, Miami Beach's **Shoji Sushi** (☎ 305/532-4245) is at the top of the A-list. See p. 128 and p. 133.
- **Best Seafood:** **Sunfish Grill**, in South Beach (☎ 954/788-2434), is simple, unpretentious, and consistently serves the freshest fish in

town—any which way you desire. See p. 331.

- **Best Late-Night Dining:** In addition to the 24-hour **News Cafe** (see above and p. 141) and **Big Pink** (see above and p. 135), **Jerry's Famous Deli** (☎ 305/534-3244; p. 136) on South Beach serves a deluge of deli food 24/7. Ft. Lauderdale's **Lester's Diner** (☎ 954/525-5641; p. 334) is a 24-hour institution, serving classic greasy-spoon fare at ridiculously cheap prices. The **Floridian Restaurant**, also in Fort Lauderdale (☎ 954/463-4041), serves everything from eggs to steaks, 24 hours a day, but the vantage point for people-watching rates higher than the food. See p. 333.
- **Kitschiest Dining:** **Wolfie Cohen's Rascal House** (☎ 305/947-4581) is a must for those looking for a retro-fabulous North Miami Beach experience, with a wait staff as old as the vinyl booths and the best corned beef on rye south of the Lower East Side. See p. 146. **Dogma Grill** (☎ 305/759-8434) is a cool little hotdog stand whose motto is "A Frank Philosophy." See p. 155.

## 5 The Rest of the Best

- **Best Museum:** A collector's dream come true, Miami's **Wolfsonian** is a treasure trove of miscellany (a matchbook that once belonged to the King of Egypt) and artifacts hailing from the propaganda age of World War II. See p. 181.
- **Best Spa:** **The Spa at The Standard Hotel** (South Beach; ☎ 305/673-1717) What used to be an old school, Borscht Belt-style Miami Beach health spa is now one of the hottest, trendiest places to take a Turkish bath in a bona fide Hamam, let out steam in a cedar sauna, or get spritzed in the

hotel's sublime Wall of Sound Shower.

- **Best Cultural Experience:** A walk through **Little Havana** is a fascinating study in the juxtaposition and fusion of two very vibrant cultures in which pre-Castro Cuba is as alive and well as the McDonald's right next door. See p. 65.
- **Best Cheap Thrill:** Riding the **Metrorail** in Miami. Originally created to relieve traffic congestion, the city's billion-dollar transportation network is hardly used by commuters and is little more than Miami's own

version of Disney's Monorail. Nonetheless, for little more than a dollar, you can tour many of Miami's neighborhoods and see much of its skyline without having to stop, look at a map, or ask for directions. See p. 66.

- **Best Snorkeling Spot: Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary,** Bahia Honda State Park. With 5.3 square miles (8.5 sq. km) of gorgeous coral reef, rock ledges up to 35 feet tall, and a colorful and motley marine community, you may never want to come up for air. See p. 281.
- **Best Public Golf Course: Miami's Biltmore Golf Course,** Biltmore Hotel. If it's good enough for former President Clinton, it's good enough for those of you who don't travel with a bevy of Secret Service agents. But the real question is: Are *you* good enough for the course? The sixth hole is notoriously difficult, with distracting water hazards among other difficulties. Nonetheless, it's an excellent course with picture-postcard setting. See p. 113.
- **Best Dive Bar: Jose Cuervo Underwater Bar.** In May 2000, the legendary tequila company celebrated Cinco de Mayo by submerging an actual, \$45,000 full-size bar and six stools about 600 feet off South Beach's First Street beach. For expert divers, this bar is more than your average watering hole. See p. 192.
- **Best Place to Satisfy Your Morbid Curiosity: The Murder, Mystery, and Mayhem Bus Tour.** Not that we're implying anything here, but

Miami is a haven for people like O. J. Simpson and, at one time, Al Capone. It's a place where shady characters come to reinvent themselves. However, at times, they also tend to reincriminate themselves. See the spots where some of these criminals fell off the wagon—it's morbidly delicious. See p. 190.

- **Best Latin Club:** Although the predominant language spoken at Miami's **La Covacha** is Spanish, the only word you really need to know here is *agua*, because you will certainly need it after working up a sweat on the dance floor. Music—the best Latin music in town—is, in fact, the common language at this rustic, open-air Latin dance club that features salsa, merengue, and Latin rock. See p. 232.
- **Best Dance Club:** You know you're in a serious dance club when patrons are fawning all over the star DJ who flew in from Germany rather than Britney Spears, who has been seen sipping champagne in the club's VIP room. The aforementioned happens all the time at **crobar**, South Beach's proven dance club champion. See p. 229.
- **Best Offbeat Experience:** Although it's little more than a tropical shantytown, **Jimbo's**, located at the tip of Virginia Key, is consistently fantastic, with no-frills smoked fish, beer out of the bucket, and colorful locals, all of which make it the best offbeat and off-the-beaten-track experience in South Florida. See p. 159.