

Miami, Florida: A Unique Place

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

For as many years as I can remember, I've wanted to visit [Miami, Florida](#), but it was only recently that I finally made it there. Although we took our time getting there from Walt Disney World, I was pleasantly surprised by how easy the journey was down there. It's not somewhere you'd head to for the day from Orlando, but from Disney's Vero Beach Resort, well, that's a possibility.

So why would you want to visit Miami? Anyone who's seen Miami on the small screen over the years may well wonder that, with the famous Miami Vice show and now CSI: Miami, but for me, there was one over-riding reason why I wanted to see this city for myself -- Art Deco buildings.

If you love this style of architecture, like I do, then you'll be in heaven in Miami, with over 800 preserved buildings in the Art Deco District, which is centered on South Beach. Stroll along Ocean Drive and almost every building you see is of that style with vibrant colors, such as blues, pinks and yellows. They're a joy to see and bring the beachfront to life. Many of them are, unsurprisingly, hotels, with names such as the Colony, Avalon, Cleavelander, Leslie, and Carlyle amongst those that you should make sure you catch on your visit. Mainly centered between 6th and 14th streets, this isn't traditional Art Deco, but a fun Florida interpretation of it. Look at some of these properties and you'll be reminded more of a cruise ship than a building, and that makes for a very unique place.

Art Deco is, of course, not the only attraction on South Beach. As the name suggests, many people are attracted here by the lure of the amazing expanse of sandy beach, but even on the beach you can't escape the Art Deco feel. One of the highlights for me was seeing for myself the lifeguard huts, again with their fun colors. Everywhere you look around here, you get the feeling of fun living. I had read that this beach is very much home to the Beautiful People and we certainly saw some who could fall into that category, but it was nice to see many who didn't. It's a place to hang out and relax, and perhaps indulge in many of the activities offered here, such as parasailing or banana boat riding.

Despite what you may have read or heard, not all of Miami's main visitor attractions lie in South Beach. Head over one of the bridges connecting it to the mainland and you'll see a very different side to Miami and one that's common to every city in the world, that of skyscrapers in the downtown district. It is home to the unique Metromover, a driver-less

shuttle that runs in a loop above your head around downtown Miami. It makes for a unique sight and a different way to get around.

Downtown is also home to the Bayside Marketplace, an entertainment complex on the shoreline, which gives some beautiful views over the bay. It's home to a wide range of places to eat and shop, including the Hard Rock Cafe, which is an impressive sight, and for all us Disney fans, a Disney Store, which we, of course, had to visit during our stay!

Head west out of downtown and you'll come across the area that reputedly pays more tax than anywhere else in the whole state of Florida. Coral Gables was George Merrick's idea, who wanted to create a part-Spanish, part-Italian city. It cost something like \$100 million and that was an even bigger sum of money back in the 1920s, when Coral Gables was established. Sadly, following the Wall Street crash, the city was never completed, but what's there is quite something. The houses here are all superb, although not ridiculously grandiose.

Perhaps the best known building, which is exceptionally grand, is the Biltmore Hotel. Staying here must be a real treat for anyone, like me, who enjoys swimming, as it is home to the largest hotel swimming pool in the US. It's like having your own lake in your backyard. Think of any Disney hotel and this place matches it. The architecture is striking, making it a landmark in Miami. It's a shame that it's no longer part of the Disney Vacation Club's Concierge Collection, as I would've loved to have stayed here on our DVC points.

Another very unique neighborhood, which everyone who comes to Miami should see, is Little Havana. As the name suggests, it's home to a vibrant Cuban community and that's clear to see throughout this superb area. It was delightful to walk through here and see the vivid murals, watch the older men playing dominoes in Maximo Gomez Park and to see the cigar shops.

The multi-cultural feel continues at the city's number one visitor attraction, [Vizcaya](#), which was completed in 1916. Designed as a winter retreat for the industrialist James Deering, he wanted to re-create a 16th century Italian estate and he did a superb job of it with this building. It's possible to explore both the interior and the gardens outside, although sadly when we were in town, the rain put paid to us seeing the latter, which is a shame. From the quick glimpse we got of them through the torrents, they looked beautiful. Inside is an amazing array of stunning rooms, including the music room with its striking chandelier, the dining room, which is modeled on a Renaissance banquet hall, and the master bedroom, with its marble walls and silver plaques. It's easy to see, as you pass through each room, why most of

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Miami's visitors make sure to stop here on their tour of the city.

Miami certainly has plenty to offer the visitor, with boat trips out through Biscayne Bay to see the city from the water and the [Everglades](#) nearby, offering a day out with a difference. We found our time here flew by, as there was just so much to see and do and it's a city we hope to get back to one day, as it's enchanting and full of life and, of course, Art Deco buildings!

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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