

# THE SOUTH FLORIDA GUIDE

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# Best Things To Do In Miami Beach



## Take a haunted history tour

Miami Beach is haunted, but not in the Southern Gothic, creaking-door way. This place is haunted like a nightclub at 5 a.m. – you feel it in the air, in the silence between bass drops. You’re not walking with ghosts; you’re schmoozing with them.

Book a haunted history tour, preferably at dusk. Your guide will walk you past hidden cemeteries, old hotels with blood-stained reputations, and the infamous Versace Mansion, where the fashion legend met his end on the steps of his home.

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## Hit the beach, but not just any beach

Yes, it’s called Miami Beach, and yes, the beach is phenomenal as long as it’s not tourist season. But here’s the thing: most people clog up the sand behind Ocean Drive like Star Wars participants at comic cons. Skip that. Go further north to Mid-Beach if you want space, or even up to North Shore Open Space Park, where the waves don’t have a cover price and the seagulls aren’t unionized.

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## Rent a deco bike and try not to die

Do you want the local experience? Rent one of those green deco bikes, the kind that look like someone welded a beach chair to a stress test. Then try to navigate a mix of bike paths, joggers, pigeons, rollerbladers, and that one guy pushing a shopping cart full of speakers blasting Bad Bunny.

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## Visit the Bass Museum

Tucked into Collins Park, an introvert at a rave, the Bass is one of those museums where art looks at you and says, "I bet you don't get it." And you probably won't. Which is fine. Heck I once went there and stood looking at a white wall and a bunch of cans of paint – "I bet it something profound." Then the curator came by and said: "Sir, that's not an installation... we're just painting that wall." [Read the Article](#)



## Grab Cuban coffee that could melt steel

Skip the hotel breakfast. Walk, bleary-eyed, to any ventanita (translation: little window of joy and caffeine), and order a colada or cafecito. This is rocket fuel disguised as coffee. You'll get a small cup and probably a few thimbles to share, because Miami assumes you brought your whole extended family. [Read the Article](#)



## Visit Lincoln Road

Lincoln Road is a pedestrian mall where you can buy a designer swimsuit, a \$12 smoothie, and a small identity crisis all within five minutes. On paper, it's shops and restaurants. In reality, it's a social petri dish. You'll pass street performers, glass-blowing artists, and a man offering to read your aura using a potato. There's a rhythm to it—a little offbeat, a little desperate, a little fabulous. Some people come here to buy.

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## Eat at a hotel restaurant (trust me)

Normally, hotel restaurants are where cuisine goes to die. But Miami Beach plays by different rules. Some of the best food here is hidden in plain sight, inside swanky hotel lobbies that smell like citrus money and spa candles.

Try the Broken Shaker at the Freehand for drinks and food that feel like a secret summer party in Havana. Or The Bazaar by José Andrés at the SLS if you want to spend money in a way that makes you question capitalism, but also cry tears of truffle-induced ecstasy.

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## Get lost (on purpose)

The streets are a grid. The sun is high. There are many people. But Miami Beach gives you XP points for wandering. Walk away from the noise. Find the side streets. See where the Art Deco bleeds into forgotten motels and palm-shaded apartments that haven't changed since 1962.

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# The Best Things To Do in Fort Lauderdale



## Las Olas Boulevard

This is the main artery: a shopping runway, a slow-motion car show, a drunken anthropology study the likes of which Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall could write research on. Here you can watch a man in a \$2,000 blazer argue with a parking meter, or see a Yorkie wearing more diamonds than some Saudi Arabian princes... Oh wait, that is a Saudi Arabian prince...

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## Fort Lauderdale Beach

White sand. Blue water. None of the “do you know who I am?” energy from Miami. Folks in these neck of the woods have done time. But, like all ruffians and possible sociopaths, they are great conversationalists. They will help you out. They will, like Tony Soprano, charm you. And in that beach-like atmosphere you will love it.

Why go? Because you actually want to enjoy the beach without dodging bottle service carts and drone photographers. Also, the beach walk smells like coconut sunscreen and poor decisions. But in the best way.

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## Bonnet House Museum & Gardens

A 1920s mansion turned museum that feels like Gatsby moved to the tropics and got into exotic fruit cultivation. "There was a green light?... Daisy? Oh right, I forgot about her once I met Sofia. She's from Venezuela and there are things she can do... Did I tell you she's a gymnast?"

There are murals, swans, and a weird amount of seashell art.

Why go? Because you'll leave wondering if maybe, just maybe, you too could live in a house with its own orchid room and a pet monkey.

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## The Water Taxi

You board thinking, "Oh, a boat ride!" But you end up 90 minutes deep into a floating episode of Lifestyles of the Rich and the Felonious. The captains have the goods and the gossip. Who just sold their mansion, which yacht got raided by the DEA and where to get the best stone crab claws after midnight.

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## Hugh Taylor Birch State Park

It's a miracle this green lung still exists. One side: beach. Other side: jungle. In between? Locals jogging like they're being chased by debt collectors. But that's Florida for you. This scene happens all over the place. St. Augustine, Miami, Key West

Why go? Because after two days in Fort Lauderdale, you will need to sweat out the "It's five o'clock somewhere" mentality..

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## NSU Art Museum

Big, bright and teeming with art that ranges from “profound social commentary” to “this looks like my kid’s finger painting.” Why go? Because it’s the only place in town where the bartender doesn’t know your name yet.

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## Lauderdale-by-the-Sea

It’s as if a postcard from 1973 came to life and learned how to make frozen daiquiris. Pastel motels, fishing piers, locals who still think The Eagles were “that new band.”

Why go? Because you need one day in Florida where the wildest thing that happens is a man in flip-flops giving you fishing tips and asking about your wife’s marital status, cause, “free love man. Monogamy is a state sponsored prison.

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## Jungle Queen Riverboat Cruise

Old-school tour with dinner, jokes older than your parents, and a slow drift past all the things you can’t afford. Oh, did I mention there’s an option for an all you can eat BBQ on an island? And while you’re making the gods envious and people in other countries marvel at the absurd abundance and commercialism of the Gringo State of Mind, you’ll be treated to a Polynesian show with fire dancers, fire eaters, and drummers. It’s basically “Lilo and Stitch” but with actual Stitches about to go gonzo if you so much as take a look at their chicken tenders.

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# What To Do in Key West



## Watch the sunset at Mallory Square

This is called the Sunset Celebration. If you went to Key West and missed out on it, well, you didn't go to Key West. You don't go to Mallory Square just to watch the sunset. No, you go to let the circus happen to you. Fire jugglers. Sword swallowers. Conch shell musicians playing the national anthem. A tightrope-walking cat troupe (AGAIN, this happens)

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## Take a Hemingway House tour

Yes, Ernest Hemingway lived here. Yes, he wrote here. But let's get one thing straight: the real rulers of this house are the 60+ six-toed cats descended from Papa's own feline sidekick.

These cats roam the Spanish colonial estate like they're on salary and they are, in a way, cause the Chamber of Commerce actually has them on their yearly budget, providing for their food and welfare.

They sleep where they want and pose for your photos. Honestly, they are more respected than some Florida residents. The house itself is a literary temple, sure – but the cats? The cats are the content.

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## Visit the southernmost point

Here's the thing: it's iconic, yes. But it's also a fight club disguised as a photo op. And the first rule of this Fight Club? You don't talk about the 5 year old who shouted obscenities reserved for prison inmates because "you cut into her photo opt."

That concrete buoy – which technically isn't even the real southernmost point (shoutout to Ballast Key, 10 miles farther south) is swarmed at all hours by selfie battalions. You certainly should see it. But then you should flee. Treat it like a sacred relic and a live grenade: touch, click, bounce.

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## Drink a Rum Runner at Sloppy Joe's

Sloppy Joe's is where Hemingway allegedly drank, fought, brooded, and drank again. Today, it's a boozy madhouse with live music, t-shirts, and bartenders who could talk down a Bengal tiger in spring heat. The Rum Runner is the local rite of passage – part drink, part spiritual possession. You'll wake up with three new friends, a half-finished novel on your Notes app and maybe a rooster feather in your pocket.

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## Take a Ghost Tour

Key West is haunted. Not just metaphorically, but like, haunted-haunted. Why? Well, two things. One, ghosts can't travel over water – according to people who know these things. So, they are trapped.

Secondly, Key West's real name is "CAYO HUESO" – which translates to Bone Key. Why? Cause when early Spanish settlers descended on the island they uncovered mountains, and by that we mean mountains, of bleached out human bones. The place was a communal burial ground for native tribes.

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## Rent a bike

Don't rent a car. That's a sucker move. Key West was made for two things: feet and wheels that don't go above 12 mph. Rent a cruiser and pedal your way through pastel chaos. You'll pass Victorian mansions, conch-style bungalows, actual people disguised as zombie parades (seasonal) and possibly a drag queen race. The air smells like salt, sunscreen and Malibu.

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## Grab Cuban coffee and a guava pastry at 5 Brothers

This tiny little shop is where locals go to re-caffeinate and get re-centered. The café con leche here is rocket fuel disguised as a morning beverage. The guava pastries? Sugar bombs blessed by old abuelas who know things you don't.

You'll need the energy, because after this, someone's probably going to ask if you want to go "snorkel a shipwreck with an ex-marine who owes me a favor."

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## Visit Fort Zachary Taylor

Historic? Yep. Haunted? Definitely. Good beach? One of the best in Key West. However, given that Key West is mostly coral beaches, it's not a great endorsement. The better beaches are one island over.

Fort Zach is like the weird lovechild of a Civil War documentary and a Jimmy Buffett song. You can tour the 19th-century brick fortress, hear tales of buried armories and Confederate conspiracies and then take ten steps and end up tanning on crushed coral. You might spot a pelican, a ghost and a minor TikTok star all within 30 seconds. No promises on the order.

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