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Visiting Miami From Another Country

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Dear friends,

Welcome to Miami Beach 411. I am so pleased you found our website. We know Miami, and we want you to know all about it too. If you're visiting from another country, scroll down the page for some helpful tips to make your trip safe, easy, and most of all, fun!

Miami is a wonderful place - the sense of newness creates a feeling of optimism, where anything seems possible and fortune can strike at any moment.

But visiting Miami can be both exciting and nerve-wracking. We want you to avoid the uncomfortable part and feel like a local here.

Let's get started!

1 Facts & Figures

Population

Miami Beach: 87,975

Miami: 409,719

Miami Metro (Countywide): 5,413,212

Florida: 18,251,243

Area

Miami Beach: 48 km²

Miami: 143 km²

Miami Metro (Countywide): 6,296 km²

Elevation: 2 m

Average temperature: 25° C

Annual rainfall: 149 cm

Rainiest Months: Agosto y Septiembre

Hurricane Season: Junio a Diciembre

Annual visitors: 8 millones

Miami Beach nicknames: South Beach, SoBe, The Beach, The Sun & Fun Capital of the World

Miami nicknames: MIA, Magic City, The 305, The Gateway to Latin America, Cocaine Capital

Overcoming the Language Barrier

2

Miami is a melting pot of nationalities. We are used to people speaking broken English, so don't feel intimidated to practice your English here. Trust me, Miamians already speak broken English to each other. Don't fear making mistakes. We don't care about your mistakes. It's the fact that you're trying to communicate with us that we love.

Most taxi drivers are from Haiti and speak French, not Parisian French, but Haitian French. However, in restaurants and shops it is usually just English and Spanish. Most restaurants and hotels have people from other countries on staff. When arriving, ask if there is anyone around who speaks your language.



3 Staying Safe

Miami Airport has a bad reputation for baggage theft. Do not pack valuables in bags you plan to check at the airport. Your bags will pass through many unsupervised hands. Keep your camera, computer, jewelry, money, medications, and important documents in a carry-on bag.

Miami Beach, Brickell, Coral Gables, and Coconut Grove are safe neighborhoods. Nevertheless, bad things can happen anywhere. When you are on vacation stay alert and use caution with whom you give your trust. When exploring the city, don't look vulnerable. Walk with a purpose and be aware to what is happening around you.

You should also avoid walking on the beach after dark. It's not that it's very dangerous, but why put yourself in a vulnerable situation. And if you need to walk late at night, choose to walk a busy street.

If you visit a nightclub, it's easy to let your guard down when it's late and you've had a few drinks. But be aware that crime and theft does take place. Also, if you pay for drinks with a credit card, read your bill and make sure they are not charging you for items you did not purchase.

Preparing For the Weather

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With January averaging 19.6 °C, winter in Miami has mild to warm temperatures, but rarely below 10 °C. Summer highs generally range between 22–27 °C.

The rainy season begins in June, and ends in mid-October. During this period, temperatures are 29–35 °C, with high humidity, though the heat is often relieved by afternoon thunderstorms and a sea breeze. Much of the year's 1,420 mm rainfall occurs during this period, with the rainiest months being August and September.

The Hurricane season runs from June 1 through November 30. The most likely time for Miami to be hit is mid-August through the end of September.



5 What to Wear

Miami is generally a casual city. Shorts and light shirts are fine, but bring at least one heavier shirt or a light jacket, as the air conditioning can get cold indoors. Make sure you have comfortable shoes, you will do a lot of walking. And do not forget a swimsuit and beach towel, if you intend to go to the beach. You should also bring sunglasses and a small umbrella, especially if you are visiting during the rainy season.

If you are planning to go to the trendy nightclubs, you'll want to dress in your most stylish attire (think designer clothes and sexy dresses) or you won't get in.

Figuring Out the Time Difference

6

All major cities in Florida fall in the Eastern Time Zone (GMT-5). The time difference between Miami and Paris, Brussels, Geneva, Berlin, Madrid, Rome, Prague, or Copenhagen is 6 hours. This means, when it is 1800 hours in France, it is 1200 hours in Miami.

Speaking of time, being punctual is a big deal in United States. While Americans are informal in their dining manners, they consider it rude to ever be kept waiting. Things happen on time here, and lateness is not easily forgiven.

7 Paying With Credit Cards

In the United States, day-to-day spending is largely credit card-based. So when you're in Miami, plan to rely mostly on credit cards. Credit cards from any country work throughout Miami (at hotels, shops, restaurants, car-rental agencies, tour companies and so on); Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are the most widely accepted.



Helpful Tip: To avoid any hassles, before you travel, contact your credit card company and let them know when and where you will be using your credit card on vacation.

Exchanging Money

8

The financial industry hides the fact that you lose money each time you change it. On average, at a bank you lose 8 percent when you change euros to dollars. When you use currency exchange booths at the airport, you lose around 15 percent. If you must change cash in United States, banks usually have the best rate. Before you travel, get some U.S. dollars from your bank, and ask them which banks in the United States offer the lowest fees.

You won't have trouble finding an ATM in Miami, but be aware, there are high fees to retrieve money. There is an ATM usage fee, plus a currency exchange fee. Also note, the ATMs inside shops, bars, and gas stations charge the highest fees.



9 Paying with Cash

Although most places in United States accept credit cards, there are places where cash is needed. If you rent a car, toll roads accept cash only. Many parking lots only accept cash. Although most taxis accept credit cards, cash is still the accepted method of payment. Beach chair rentals, farmer’s markets, and public transportation is cash only. Tips are also appreciated in cash.

Using Mobile Phones and Calling Cards

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Traveling with a mobile phone is handy and practical. Whether you’re using a smartphone or a conventional mobile phone, the basics for how to make calls and send SMS (which Americans call texting) are the same. If you bring your own phone, be aware that roaming charges are very expensive.

If you are going to make a lot of calls, consider purchasing a prepaid mobile phone for vacation. They cost around \$35 for 30 minutes of use, and no contracts are necessary. You can buy the phones at Target and Best Buy, and even at most drugstores like Walgreens and CVS. You can also find prepaid phones at providers like AT&T and Verizon. The most affordable way to make International calls is to use an Internet calling app like Skype. Another option is to purchase a prepaid phone card. Phone card rates can be much less than standard calling rates. When shopping for a phone card, pay attention to the rates for the country you’ll be calling most. You should also look for a card that lets you review your calling history, either by phone or online. That way you can keep track of of how much you’re being billed and detect any calls you did not make.

Public phones are becoming more rare, but you can still find them at the airport and inside larger hotels. They all accept credit cards, but you may want to keep some change on hand should you need to make a phone call. You can call abroad from a phone booth, but it is expensive.

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Finding WiFi Nearby

In the United States, free WiFi is available at most McDonald’s restaurants and Starbucks coffee shops, and public libraries. Each WiFi network will require you to use a different password. The City of Miami Beach also offers a free WiFi network. The system was built so that at least 95% of the City will have outdoor WiFi coverage and at least 70% of the City will have indoor coverage up through the second floor of a building. To login to the network, look for the WiFi signals: City_of_Miami_Beach_WiFi & MBKIDS. These free connections are not secure. Do not transmit important information.



Taxis

As we mentioned, most taxi drivers in Miami are from Haiti and speak French. When you arrive at the Airport, you will find taxi service on the lower level just outside of Baggage Claim. Uniformed taxi captains will assist you to hail a taxi.

- The rate from Miami Airport to Port of Miami is \$21
- The rate from Miami Airport to Miami Beach is \$32
- The rate from Miami Airport to Key Biscayne is \$36
- The rate from Miami Airport to Aventura is \$46

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Public Transportation

Miami Metrobus travel planning assistance can be reached at 305-891-3131. Be aware, Miami's public transportation system is not as developed as it is in many cities. For example, it is difficult to travel between Miami and Fort Lauderdale using public transportation. There are also no underground trains in Miami, due to the high waterline. That being said, the **Airport Flyer "Route 150"** is an express bus between Miami Airport and Miami Beach that cost \$2.35. There is also a **free electric shuttle** that will take you anywhere you need to go in Miami Beach. To arrange pick-up call 305-409-6636.

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Miami Hotels and Lodging

Let me warn you, Miami Beach hotel rooms are generally smaller in size, compared to hotel rooms in other cities. Hotels rates in Miami are one of the United State's most expensive. People often complain about thin hotel walls and noisy neighbors. Most hotels do not offer free breakfast, or airport transportation, while many of them charge an extra resort fee of \$20 per day, or more.

We should also mention, Miami hotels are required by law to add sales tax AND resort tax, according to the area you are staying. Miami Beach hotels have a 7% sales tax, 3% Miami Beach resort tax and 3% Miami resort tax. The properties outside Miami Beach have a 7% sales tax and 3% Miami resort tax.

For example, a Miami Beach hotel may cost \$150 a night. The combined local taxes are 13%. 13% of \$150 is \$19.50. This means that \$19.50 will be added to the price of the hotel to cover the tax and the total sum that must be paid is actually \$169.50 a night (and this does not include the extra "resort fee" most hotels add).



If you don't know exactly what you're looking for, finding a place to stay can be a confusing. Here is a breakdown of the different types of hotels you will find, and how Miami lodging works:

Hostels:

Are you on a budget, or traveling alone? Then a hostel is the place for you. They offer private or shared rooms at a very cheap price, starting around \$12 a night. Many offer free meals, and all have a bar serving cheap drinks, free WiFi, and a festive atmosphere. More attractive for the young traveler, hostels are only located in South Beach and are a good alternative to the cheaper priced hotels.

Art Deco Hotels:

These are small hotels made from refurbished apartment buildings from the 1920s. Art Deco hotels are usually only two or three floors high. The hotels are found in Miami Beach, along Ocean Drive and Collins Avenue, between 5th and 17th street. Many of these hotels have renovated the lobby area into restaurants and bars. Most of them are independently owned, with smaller rooms, and rarely have swimming pools. Quality can be hit and miss, so it is always a good idea to check the reviews.

Oceanfront Hotels:

The bigger hotels are found along Collins Avenue, starting at 15th Street. These are large high rise hotels, with swimming pools and direct beach access. They offer full amenities, and many of them also have restaurants, bars and nightclubs inside. These hotels are the more expensive and exclusive places to stay.

Mid Beach & North Beach Hotels:

While most choose to stay in South Beach, Miami Beach also has oceanfront hotels along the beach in Mid and North Beach. This area is still in Miami Beach, just further north along the coast by only a few miles. These hotels are a little less expensive, yet still have all of the amenities of the South Beach counterparts. You can often find cheaper hotel rates, if you stay north, plus enjoy a quieter stay and a more secluded beach.

Downtown & Brickell Hotels:

The hotels in downtown are typically less than a mile from the port, which makes them a convenient place to stay for people taking a cruise. Another perk is viewing the downtime skyline from your hotel room. The skyline ranks third in beautiful city skylines behind New York and Chicago. There is a range of options to choose from, such as the Holiday Inn, to luxury hotels such as the Epic and Mandarin Oriental.

Key Biscayne & Coconut Grove:

Key Biscayne is a 40 minute drive from Miami Beach, accessible only by car via a toll bridge. It costs \$40 in a taxi from Miami airport, and if you do not have a car for your vacation, it is an isolated area. The same goes for Coconut Grove. It is a busier area to stay than Key Biscayne and is a student neighborhood due to its proximity to the University of Miami. Both areas are good if you do not intend to leave the hotel during your stay and want to relax by the pool all day.

Miami Airport Hotels:

Miami Airport is located about 10 miles from Miami Beach and 7 miles from the Port of Miami. There are many chain hotels near the airport that offer a cheap night's sleep, as well as free breakfast and airport shuttle service. The Embassy Suites and the Sofitel are two of the nicest of the airport hotels.

Vacation Apartments & Home Rentals:

If you are in a big group, enjoy doing your own thing away from the crowds, vacation rentals can offer an affordable way to vacation. You can stay long or short term in apartments or houses that are privately owned and enjoy your time here with your own kitchen, privacy and space.

How To Book a Cheap Hotel Room In Miami:

Step 1: [Search Our Price Comparison Site](#) - Note the lowest price you find for the hotels you are interested in.

(www.miamibeach411.com/Hotels/hotel-search.htm)

Step 2: Call the Hotel and Ask For a Discount - To look up the phone number of the specific hotels you've noted in Step 1, go to Google and search the hotel's name. By calling the hotel directly, you can frequently get a lower rate than the one advertised on the web. Always ask for a discount when you speak to the hotel. If they don't offer you a discount, ask them if they will upgrade you to a better class of room at that rate.

American Restaurant Rules

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American restaurants will be a little different than what you are used to. One of the biggest surprises is the service, which can seem rushed, when you are wanting to relax and enjoy a meal. Americans spend about 1 hour having dinner. At restaurants, fast service is considered normal, but if you are feeling rushed, just say so, and the waiter will slow down.

Another thing that may shock you is the portion size — everything from sandwiches and salads to steaks and desserts are huge. To save money, order wisely. Since main dishes are often big enough to share, add a salad or appetizer to supplement. Don't worry about coming off as cheap — this is how Americans dine. It's perfectly acceptable to split meals or order just a salad or sandwich, even for dinner. And if you have leftovers, don't be embarrassed to ask for a "to go" container, Americans do it all the time.

To really save money, seek out alternatives to restaurants. Ethnic eateries, delis, and fast-food chains with salad bars are good for an inexpensive meal.

More American restaurant customs you may find strange:

- When you enter a restaurant, wait to be seated. Don't try to seat yourself.
- Don't be surprised to find your fork and knife wrapped in a paper napkin.
- After your appetizer, don't get mad if the waiter does not replace your fork and knife.
- The minute you sit down, you will be offered free water with ice.
- Carbonated water (also known as club soda, soda water, sparkling water, seltzer water, or fizzy water) is expensive. If you want bottled carbonated water you will have to ask for "sparkling" water.
- Most restaurants offer free refills with soda, coffee and tea.
- The salad is served before your meal, not after.
- When ordering a salad, you may be asked which dressing you prefer. American restaurants like to offer elaborate salad dressings. You are safe with Italian, most other dressings are either sweet, or creamy. "French" dressing is not oil and vinegar, it is a creamy dressing made with ketchup.
- In Europe, what is called the entree is often called the main course in America.
- Unless you are in a French restaurant, cheese is never offered at the end of the meal.



Some people say, to find a good restaurant, ask your hotel receptionist, but since hotel employees are required to recommend the hotel restaurants, we have found you will get a more honest recommendation talking with waiters and bartenders.

Tipping Tips

16

United States has a social institution called “tipping.” Basically, the price on the menu at any place which serves food is not the real price. The real price is 15% higher. However, Miami Beach is the exception, where some restaurants and bars include the tip, so make sure to check your bill to avoid double tipping.

The standard tip is 15%. If you are dissatisfied with the service you may leave less, or even nothing at all, but if you were well served 20% is appreciated. Taxis work the same way. It is considered very rude not to pay the gratuity.

17 Shopping for Food, Clothing, and Electronics

One aspect of shopping in the United States that often confuses visitors from other countries is the sales tax. In Europe, a Value-Added Tax (VAT) is included in the price of everything sold. In the United States, it’s different in most cases. For example, Miami adds a 7% “sales tax” on purchased items that is not marked on the label or menu. The tax will be added to the price at the cash register or added on the bill. Alcohol, cigarettes, medicines, restaurant meals, clothing, electronics, jewelry, and many other items, except gasoline, can have a tax tacked on to it at the end.

That being said, Miami is known for fabulous shopping. Below are the most popular places to splurge, save a few dollars, or just window shop:

Food:

Publix is the largest grocery store chain in Florida. Drug stores also sell food and alcohol. You can also find small Cuban markets in Miami with food and vegetables for sale. If you are staying in a hotel, we suggest doing some food shopping to avoid the high cost of food and drinks at the hotel.



Sawgrass Mills:

Famous for its factory outlet stores, this mall offers great bargains and dining opportunities. It's located in Broward County, 30 minutes north of Miami.

Dolphin Mall:

The Dolphin Mall, located just west of Miami Airport, offers shoppers over 200 restaurants and stores.

Aventura Mall:

This is the largest shopping mall in Miami. The main department stores include: Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom and Macy's. The mall also has over 300 specialty stores, including Louis Vuitton, Abercrombie & Fitch, Apple, and Diesel.

Bal Harbour Shops:

For high-class shopping, few places compare to Bal Harbour Shops. Stores include Tiffany, Prada, Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

Lincoln Road:

Full of stores, boutiques, art galleries, and restaurants, this open-air pedestrian mall in Miami Beach is a fun place to shop and people watch. The mall also offers a farmer's market on Sundays.

Electronics:

Visit a Best Buy store for low priced electronics, computers, mobile phones, video games, and more. There is a Best Buy store located in Miami Beach on 5th St. and Alton Rd.

Most malls and stores open at open at 10:00 AM and close at 9:00 PM. Drug stores and food stores may close later, or even be open 24 hours a day. Just about all shops are open on Sunday. When you buy something, remember to keep the receipt, you will need it if you want to return your purchase. Large stores usually offer a 30-day return policy.

Topless and Nude Sunbathing

18

Topless sunbathing in United States is forbidden. However, Miami Beach is the exception, where women are allowed to sunbathe topless on the beach between of 1st Street and 16th Street.

There is also a “clothing optional” beach at the north end of **Haulover Beach Park**. The beach is located between Sunny Isles and Bal Harbour, and the nude beach section is clearly marked. There are three sections of the nude beach: the gay section to the north, the swingers area in the middle, and the nudists on the south end.

19 Cheek Kissing

Cheek kissing is not very common in the United States. However, that is not the case in Miami, because of the large amount of Latins and Europeans here. Therefore, cheek kissing is considered appropriate among friends and acquaintances: a man and a woman and two women, but cheek kissing is not very common among two men. The number of kisses is usually just one.

Keeping a Sense of Humor

20

Americans have a good sense of humor, but stereotypically speaking American humor is different than other countries. Typical American humour is not subtle; it is made up largely of boisterous joking and slapstick exaggeration, so don't be surprised if an American starts teasing or joking around with you. It is a sign of affection and closeness. Don't let the culture shock damper your trip. Knowing how to keep your sense of humor while traveling will help you enjoy your time away from home.

21

Florida Alcohol Laws

United States has very strict laws regarding drinking alcoholic beverages. It is against the law for anyone under 21 years of age to drink beer, wine, or any type of alcohol, not even with an adult, or in the privacy of your home. There is no exception to this law, regardless of your nationality.

The hours that alcohol can be sold vary by city and state. Most cities stop serving alcohol at 2:00 AM. However, in Miami Beach, bars close at 5:00 AM, and there is even a section of Downtown Miami that is allowed to sell alcohol 24 hours a day. However, drinking is not allowed on the beach, or on public streets.



Dealing with the Police

22

For the most part, Miami police are trustworthy and helpful toward visitors from other countries. You will find them courteous and professional. Nevertheless, when dealing with the police, keep your hands in view and don't make sudden movements. Avoid walking behind them. Also, never touch the police or their equipment.

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Contacting the Consulate

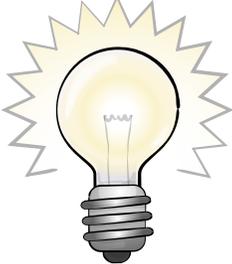
If you lose your passport, or need official help contact your consulate. To assist you, we prepared a list of Miami consulates and contact information. [See the list](#)

If You Need Medical Help

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If you need serious medical attention, go to the nearest hospital emergency room, but be prepared to receive a bill for treatment. Hospitals in United States are extremely expensive, compared to other countries. However, the law requires hospitals must provide care to anyone needing emergency treatment regardless of citizenship, or the ability to pay. In Miami Beach, the **Mount Sinai Emergency Room** is located at 4300 Alton Road. Their phone number is: 305-674-2200. Emergencies requiring police, fire or medical aid can be reported by dialing 9-1-1 from any telephone. The use of this number is for emergencies only. If you do not speak English, ask the hotel front desk, or even a person on the street for assistance.

Helpful Tip: The emergency room is for people with life-threatening emergencies, or anything that could have severe long-term affects on you. If you simply want something checked out, then you need to go to a community health clinic so the staff there can determine how bad your problem is and where you should be treated. **Miami Beach Health Clinic** is located at 710 Alton Road. Their phone number is: 305-867-5805. [See more clinics](#) (<http://www.miamibeachhealth.org/Locations/>)



If it's after hours and the health clinics are closed, but you have a problem that you're concerned about, your other option is an urgent care facility. An urgent care facility is a great alternative to the emergency room. The cost is cheaper, and the facilities are usually open late. **Miami Beach Urgent Care Center** is located at 1355 Alton Road. Their phone number is: 305-672-0777.

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Why You Should Use Miami Beach 411?

We help you have the best vacations humanly possible.

Some people don't know this, but in addition to Miami Beach 411's blogs and our travel forum, we are also a full-fledged tour company. Everyday, we're on the road, giving people just like yourself guided tours around Miami. We're also taking people on airboat rides in the Everglades, boat cruises around the celebrity homes, trips down to Key West and up to Orlando.

If you want to see Miami's most interesting places, our [Original Miami City Tour](#) is perfect for you. We guide you through all of Miami Beach and the Art Deco District, and then cross over into the City of Miami to to see hundreds of interesting sites you may not have realized existed.

Our **Everglades Eco Adventure** includes an exciting airboat ride and is also a lot of fun.

We can also offer you **private transportation** to and from the airports, seaports and hotels.



[Visit our Travel Store to learn more](http://secure.miamibeach411.com/)
(<http://secure.miamibeach411.com/>)

Contact us today! We're happy to assist with whatever you may need!

- The Miami Beach 411 Travel Team

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