

South Beach

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This article is about the section of Miami Beach known as South Beach. For more options see South Beach (disambiguation).

South Beach is the section of Miami Beach, Florida that encompasses the southernmost 23 blocks of an island separating the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. This area was the first section of Miami Beach to be developed, starting in the 1910s, thanks to the development efforts of Carl G. Fisher, the Lummus Brothers, John Collins, and others. The area has gone through numerous man-made and natural changes over the years, including a booming regional economy, increased tourism, and the 1926 hurricane that destroyed much of the area.

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South Beach



A portion of the southern part of the South Beach skyline as seen from Biscayne Bay. Photo: Marc Averette

History

South Beach started as farmland. In 1870, Henry and Charles Lum purchased 165 acres (668,000 m²) for coconut farming. Charles Lum built the first house on the beach in 1886. In 1894, the Lum brothers left the island, leaving control of the plantation to John Collins, who came to South Beach two years later to survey the land. He used the land for farming purposes, discovering fresh water and extending his parcel from 14th Street to 67th in 1907.

In 1912, Miami businessmen the Lummus Brothers acquired 400 acres (1.6 km²) of Collins' land in an effort to build an oceanfront city of modest single family residences. In 1913 Collins started construction of a bridge from Miami to Miami Beach. Although some local residents invested in the bridge, Collins ran short of money before he could complete it.^[1]



Part of the South Beach skyline at night looking east from the southwest side of the island. Photo: Marc Averette

Carl G. Fisher, a successful entrepreneur who made millions in 1909 after selling a business to Union Carbide, came to the beach in 1913. His vision was to establish South Beach as a successful city independent of Miami. This was the same year that the famous restaurant Joe's Stone Crab opened. Fisher loaned \$50,000 to Collins for his bridge, which was completed in June, 1913. the Collins Bridge was later replaced by the Venetian Causeway.^[2]

On March 26, 1915, Collins, Lummus, and Fisher consolidated their efforts and incorporated the Town of Miami Beach. In 1920 the County Causeway (renamed MacArthur Causeway after World War II) was completed.^[3] The Lummus brothers sold their oceanfront property, between 6th and 14th Streets, to the city. To this day, this area is known as Lummus Park.

In 1920, the Miami Beach land boom began. South Beach's main streets (5th Street, Alton Road, Collins Avenue, Washington Avenue, and Ocean Drive) were all suitable for automobile traffic. The population was growing in the 1920s, and several millionaires such as Harvey Firestone, J.C. Penney, Harvey Stutz, Albert Champion, Frank Seiberling, and Rockwell LaGorce built homes on Miami Beach. President Warren G. Harding stayed at the Flamingo Hotel during this time, increasing interest in the area.

In the 1930s, an architectural revolution came to South Beach, bringing Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and Nautical Moderne architecture to the Beach. To this day, South Beach remains the world's largest collection of Streamline Moderne Art Deco architecture. Napier, New Zealand another notable Art Deco city, makes an interesting comparison with Miami Beach as it was rebuilt in the Zigurat Art Deco style after being destroyed by an earthquake in 1931.

By 1940, the beach had a population of 28,000. After the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army Air Corps took command over Miami Beach.

In 1966, South Beach became even more famous when Jackie Gleason brought his weekly variety series, *The Jackie Gleason Show* to the area for taping, a rarity in the industry. Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, South Beach was used as a retirement community with most of its ocean-front hotels and apartment buildings filled with elderly people living on small, fixed incomes. This period also saw the introduction of the "cocaine cowboys," drug dealers who used the area as a base for their illicit drug activities. *Scarface*, released in 1983, typifies this activity. In addition, television show *Miami Vice* used South Beach as a backdrop for much of its filming due to the area's raw and unique visual beauty.

While many of the unique Art Deco buildings, such as the New Yorker Hotel, were lost to developers in the years before 1980, the area was saved as a cohesive unit by Barbara Capitman and a group of activists who spearheaded the movement to place South Beach on the National Register of Historic Places.

Before the famous TV show, *Miami Vice*, SoBe was considered a very poor area with a very high rate of crime. Today, it is considered one of the most wealthy and prosperous commercial areas on the beach. Despite this, poverty and crime still exist in some isolated places surrounding the area.^[4]

In the late 1980s, a renaissance began in South Beach, with an influx of fashion industry professionals moving into the area. Most major modeling agencies had offices in South Beach, and fashion photographers frequently used the area as a backdrop for their photo shoots.

Currently

Today, the South Beach section of Miami Beach is a major entertainment destination with hundreds of nightclubs,



Famous Ocean Drive on Super Bowl XLI weekend
2/3/2007. Photo: Marc Averette

restaurants and oceanfront hotels. The area is popular with both American and international tourists, with German being the third most spoken language after English and Spanish. The large number of European tourists explains South Beach's tolerance of topless sunbathing, despite being a public beach. Another unique aesthetic attribute of South Beach is the several colorful and unique lifeguard stands, still used today by South Beach's lifeguards.

Geography

South Beach is traversed by numerical streets which run east-west, starting with First Street and the largely pedestrianized Lincoln Road (between 16th and 17th). It also has 13 principal Roads and Avenues running north-south, which, from the Biscayne Bay side, are Bay Road, West Avenue, Alton Road, Lenox Avenue, Michigan Avenue, Jefferson Avenue, Meridian Avenue, Euclid Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, Drexel Avenue, Washington Avenue, Collins Avenue (Route A1A), and Ocean Drive. There are three smaller avenues (that do not run the entire length of the beach) in the Collins Park area, named Park, Liberty, and James. Most locals agree that South Beach's northern boundary runs along Dade Boulevard from Lincoln Road on the bay side of the island, and heads east-north-east until it connects with 23rd Street, which forms the northern boundary on the ocean side.

Residential neighborhoods

As of 2005, it has Miami Beach's highest property values. Although mostly residential, the area is also home to several large scale development projects and large buildings such as Portofino Tower and sister buildings such as ICON (spearheaded by designer Philippe Starck), Continuum, and Murano at Portofino. This area has several notable nightlife destinations, including Opium Garden, Privé, Nikki Beach Club, and Pearl. It also has several smaller, upscale bars and restaurants, including the world-famous Joe's Stone Crabs, Smith & Wollensky's steak house, and China Grill.

Flamingo Park is the neighborhood directly north of Fifth and expands from Alton Road on the west to Washington Avenue on the east, with its northern boundary being Lincoln Road; it does not include Lenox. This area consists mainly of low rise apartment buildings, with commercial development largely limited to Alton Road, Washington Avenue, and Lincoln Road. Presently, there is little notable nightlife, with the exception of Tantra on 15th Street. It is also home to Flamingo Park, one of South Beach's public parks, which includes recreational facilities such as tennis, racketball and basketball courts.

Flamingo West is a neighborhood of single family homes that spans from north of the Park to Lincoln Road on Lennox and Michigan Avenues.

Collins Park is South Beach's most "up and coming" neighborhood, according to the Miami New Times. The newspaper cites the new Sanctuary Spa Resort, an updated public library, and several open projects as evidence for its claim. Collins Park is contained by 17th Street to the south, 23rd Street to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, and Washington Avenue/Pinetree Drive to the west. It is directly across from the Miami Beach Convention Center. Collins Park consists mainly of low rise art deco buildings built in the 1930s and 1950s; it is also the location of the Bass Museum of Art. The area is currently undergoing gentrification, as many of the old apartments from the 1980s (many of which still have bars on their windows) are being purchased by major New York and South Florida real estate developers to be converted into condominiums.

Additionally, many high-rise buildings are located along Bay Road and West Avenue, and there are multifamily residences located north of Lincoln Road and east of Collins Park. The Flamingo, the world's largest apartment complex, is located on Bay Road.

Commercial and Other Areas

Lincoln Road



Ocean Drive - South Beach, View towards the north with the Victor Hotel on the left of the picture.



Española Way and Drexel Avenue - Plaza de España (view towards the north).



The Clay Hotel on Española Way Washington Avenue.

Lincoln Road is an open-air pedestrian mall, considered South

Beach's premiere shopping area. It is home to many restaurants and several

night clubs, such as Score and Funktion, as well as many retail outlets. While Lincoln Road was one time rather downtrodden, with its unique boutique shops and restaurants, since the 1960s it has had "an esoteric chic that maintains its trendy appeal." (ref. Ocean Drive Magazine) It is located in between 16th Street and 17th Street and spans the beach in an east-west direction. Among the late 1990s restaurants on Lincoln Road was one owned by actor Michael Caine, and managed by one of his daughters. The restaurant has since closed. Lincoln Road commerce is greatly facilitated by the 17th street parking garage.

Ocean Drive

Ocean Drive is the easternmost street in South Beach, and stems from south of First to 15th Street, running in a north-south direction. Ocean Drive is responsible for the South Beach aesthetic that most out-of-town visitors expect. It is a popular Spring Break and tourist area, including the famous, yet predominantly local, Pearl and Nikki Beach night spots. It is also home to several prominent restaurants (including "News Cafe," "Mango's," and the MTV-popularized "Clevelander") and is the site of Gianni Versace's former ocean front mansion. Because of its great value as a place for people watching (beautiful women rollerblading in bikini's and such), it is heavily cruised and parking is hard to find. However, experience indicates that if you get there early enough in the morning (before 930am) on a weekday, or (before 900am) on a weekend, there is a good chance you can snare a spot right on Ocean Drive. Have plenty of quarters to feed the parking meters (actually machines which print parking vouchers) if you find a space on Ocean Drive, because illegal parking tickets are expensive. There is green space with palm trees (see nearest photograph to your left) between Ocean Drive and the sands of the beach, which makes a good place for relaxing out of the sun.

The Carlyle Hotel on Ocean Drive near 13th Street is an iconic Art Deco landmark. Built in 1939, it is one of the most sought after settings for photo shoots, televised programming, Hollywood and independent film-making. It was the outside setting for the 1996 MGM film *The Birdcage*.

Collins Avenue

Collins Avenue runs parallel to Ocean, one block west. It is also State Road A1A. Collins is home to many historic Art Deco hotels, and several nightclubs to the north, including Mynt and Rokbar.

Española Way

Española Way, which runs from Collins Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue, was conceived by N.B.T. Roney (of the Roney Plaza Hotel) in 1925 as "The Historic Spanish Village," modeled after the romantic Mediterranean villages found in France and Spain. Today it consists of art galleries, restaurants, and quirky shops.

Alton Road

Alton Road is the main westside north-south street located 1-3 blocks from Biscayne Bay. On the part that traverses South Beach, the road is host to many local businesses, including dry cleaners, small furniture stores, small grocery markets, non-chain restaurants and fast food restaurants. It is mainly residential once it crosses Michigan Avenue north of South Beach.

Washington Avenue

Washington Avenue is one of the best-known streets in South Beach. Running parallel with Ocean and Collins, Washington is notorious for having some of the world's largest and most popular nightclubs, such as Crobar and Mansion. During "season" (October 15th to May 15th) the street is jammed with traffic until early in the morning (as late as 6 am) every night of the week. In the 1990s explosion of South Beach as a nightclub venue, its nightclub moguls included Ingrid Cesares, whose investors included the singer Madonna Ciccone.

Nightlife

South Beach has a very active club and bar scene. It is host to over 150 clubs and other destinations, most of which close at 5 am. South Beach can be expensive, and access to nightclubs is often difficult for non-locals who do not have connections, or do not plan their evenings in advance. Access to the more popular nightspots can cost anywhere from \$20-60 for entry (depending on event and venue) and sometimes comes with a wait of several hours, in addition to evaluation by door staff.

Nightlife in South Beach is dynamic and ever-changing, although some watering holes like The Clevelander and "The Deuce" have remained steadfast tourist destinations on Ocean Drive for well over a decade. Clubs constantly change decor, name, and owner, so it is difficult to state at any given time which clubs are popular. The average club is only open for about a season or less. Recently, the local government has been taking steps to prevent these short-lived venues from establishing themselves at all.

Fashion shooting

South Beach is one of the world's foremost locations for fashion shoots, making the Miami area the model shoot capital of the United States. Approximately 1,500 models live in the area, with many more arriving during the prime fashion shooting season, running from October to March. Ocean Drive is the most popular place for shoots, but back streets are often used as well.

Transportation from Miami Airport

A Taxicab from Miami International Airport costs \$32 flat rate for up to five passengers. You can also reach South Beach from MIA by using the Miami Dade Transit System. The Bus route J will take you to Miami Beach, and you can transfer to either bus routes C or H to take you to South Beach.

See also

- Spring Break
- List of upscale shopping districts
- Aimee Friedman



Girls dancing at Mango's bar on Ocean Drive

External Links

- Virtual South Beach community driven website
- Miami fan site, links to Miami & South Beach related information
- Photos of Miami, South Beach and Miami Beach by local residents
- Postcards of South Beach

Notes

- [^] Muir. pp. 108-9.
- [^] Muir. pp. 109, 111, 137-8.
- [^] Muir. p. 137.
- [^] MSNBC: South Beach: Life imitates art, quite vicely www.msnbc.com

Diary of a South Beach Party Girl by Gwen Cooper

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Gallery



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