



Miami weekend trips for first-timers

Liana Lozada, Special for USA TODAY 8:03 p.m. EDT May 1, 2014



It's nearly impossible to squeeze-in all there is to see, do, and experience in Miami in one weekend, but, it's worth a shot. This condensed to-do list keeps time-consciousness in mind while highlighting city icons, area history, and emerging trends.

[Miami Design Preservation League Center on Ocean Drive](#): Miami Beach is renowned for its Art Decor architecture and features dozens of historic buildings outlined in geometric shapes painted in

pastel hues. The Miami Design Preservation League (MDPL), whose headquarters lie on the post-card worthy Ocean Drive, specializes in maintaining Art Deco's integrity city-wide while also providing researched insight on Art Deco's international significance. These experts also host Art Deco walking tours for \$20. Those wishing to peruse Miami's famed buildings at their own pace can opt for a self-guided audio tour. Once the tour wraps, drop into MDPL's vintage and Deco-inspired gift shop for some rare collectible items.

[Visit Stiltsville with History Miami:](#) History Miami prides itself as Miami's historical and cultural caretaker and plans its exhibits and events around South Florida's juxtaposing past and promising future. The museum's event roster includes numerous tours, but the best among them is Dr. Paul George's boat tour of Key Biscayne, Stiltsville, and the Cape Florida Lighthouse. Stiltsville is a unique wood stilt house community built on Biscayne Bay's southern sand banks. This History Miami Tour departs from the Bayside Marketplace (401 Biscayne Boulevard) and costs \$54 for non-museum members and \$25 for children 12 and under. Advance reservations and payment are required.

[Wynwood Arts District:](#) What was once a desolate neighborhood filled with abandoned warehouses has now become the epicenter of Miami's artistic reinvention: The Wynwood Arts District features blocks of murals painted by celebrated street artists. Once the murals went up, art galleries and artist studios moved in, and retail businesses soon followed. The Wynwood Arts District Association has created an online map to help newbies navigate the neighborhood. Several Miami museums and art associations also host Wynwood bike tours. Local food options include Wynwood Kitchen & Bar, JugoFresh, Panther Coffee, Jimmy's Kitchen, Joey's, SuViche, The Butcher Shop, and R House.

[Bayside Marketplace:](#) The Bayside Marketplace cuddles Biscayne Bay in Downtown Miami with two stories of open-air shops, restaurants, and lifestyle experiences. In addition to its 140-plus retailers, Bayside boasts live music and entertainment daily and acts as a docking point for various boat tours and excursions.

[Big Bus Tours:](#) Despite being the quintessential tourist marker, Big Bus Tours are the best way to see all of Miami quickly. These open-top buses breeze through Brickell, Little Havana, and Coconut Grove and allow riders to hop on and off as they please. Big Bus Tours' convenient online map helps visitors plan their leisure stops prior to boarding. Big Bus Tours provide 24 hour or 48 hour ticket options: Tickets begin at \$35.10 for adults and \$26.10 for children.

[Freedom Tower/MDC Museum of Art + Design:](#) The historic Freedom Tower is located in Downtown Miami within walking distance of the previously recommended Bayside Marketplace. As Miami has evolved, so has its landmark Mediterranean-inspired beacon. The Freedom Tower was built in 1925 to serve as *The Miami News'* headquarters. In the 1960s, it became "Miami's Ellis

Island" for Cuban refugees fleeing Fidel Castro's regime. This National Historic Landmark currently embodies Miami Dade College's Museum of Art + Design which showcases contemporary works that emphasize societal discourse. The museum is open to the public Wednesdays through Sundays from noon – 5 p.m. Admission is free.

[The Fontainebleau Miami Beach:](#) 4441 Collins Avenue is rooted in Miami legend and lure. Over time, the Fontainebleau has seen its fair share of Hollywood glamour, movie sets, and mobsters; most recently, the hotel underwent a multimillion dollar renovation, courting major industry players to its famous oceanfront locale and completely redesigning itself from top to bottom. These days, its expansive grounds include LIV Nightclub, one of the most popular nightclubs in the country, as well as acclaimed restaurants like Scarpetta and Hakkasan. Outside, cabanas line multiple free-form pools with killer views of the boardwalk and beach.

[South Pointe Park:](#) South Pointe Park's panoramic views of Downtown Miami, Fisher Island, and the Atlantic Ocean are a photo-lover's dream. This serene green space is a quiet piece of heaven on South Beach's southernmost point. There's something for everyone here: a kids playground, a promenade for walkers, and the popular Smith & Wollensky restaurant for those looking to people watch over wine. The beach is also just steps away, making for a two-for-one experience unlike anywhere else in Miami.

[Everglades National Park:](#) Everglades National Park is the country's largest subtropical wilderness. Known as the "River of Grass," it harbors rare wildlife, including the Florida panther, alligator, and manatee. The park holds tours by tram and by boat, and promotes hiking, biking, and canoeing through the grounds. The famous boat tour explores a chain of islands and mangrove inlets known as Ten Thousand Islands, which is the largest expanses of mangrove forest in North America.

[Little Havana Food Tour:](#) Miami's Cuban community plays an important role in the city's overall identity; Miami's food, music, and culture have all been directly impacted by the Cuban influx of the 1960s. Calle Ocho (8th Street) is the Cuban community's epicenter and marks the starting point of one Miami's best food tours. Miami Culinary Tours takes flavor explorers on a two-hour, six-stop walk through Little Havana, sampling everything from classic Cuban sandwiches to flan ice cream. Peeks at Domino Park, cigar rollers, and local galleries are also on the agenda. Tickets are \$59 per person and must be reserved in advance.

[The Shops at Midtown Miami:](#) When it comes to nailing down a place to eat, The Shops at Midtown Miami are your best bet. Restaurants and fast casual joints make up the neighborhood's storefront majority and cook up everything from Asian-fusion fare to truffle-topped grilled cheeses. Midtown is anchored by superb haunts like Timon Balloo's Sugarcane Raw Bar Grill and Bocce Bar, as well as refined Mexican spot Mercadito and Italian eatery Salumeria 104.