



Don't hate Miami because she's beautiful. America's sexiest city has brains too.

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MIAMI

Miami is Americas sexiest city. The sun-kissed metropolis is this countrys answer to jet-setting hot spots from Monte Carlo to Marrakesh.

Theres South Beach and its continuous parade of socialites and stars, models and millionaires, who make Ocean Drive pulse with activity 24/7.

Theres upscale Coconut Grove, hugging Biscayne Bay, with its European-style sidewalk cafes and chic boutiques. Theres Coral Gables, with its tree-lined boulevards chock-a-block with Mediterranean-style mansions. Well, you get the idea. But before you get another idea that Miami is all style and no substance, I want you to know that this sexy metropolis has a serious side as well. I found out just how serious on a recent visit.

A Museum Like No Other

Raise your hand if you think the prospect of spending half a day at a science museum isnt exactly what you had planned for your vacation. Those of you with your hands in the air probably havent had an opportunity to visit the Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science.

Opened just last May in downtown Miamis Museum Park, the 250,000-square-foot structure is a combination Science Museum, Aquarium and Planetarium, all under one architecturally eye-popping glass roof with incomparable views of the city.

Some may find the ticket price a bit steep \$29 for adults and \$20 for children ages 3 to 11. But considering that with that price, you get one ticket good for what is essentially three different experiences, I think its a bargain.

Start off your visit with the three-level aquarium, taking a trip from the surface view of Floridas waters to the depths of its seas.

The top level, Vista, is a journey through South Floridas watery ecosystems from mangrove swamps and the Everglades to the Gulf Stream. Giant clear tanks put you face to face with all manner of aquatic creatures, from hammerhead sharks to large turtles.

Descend one level down to the Dive, and you can experience without getting wet the majesty of undersea life. Some 30 aquariums offer a peek into a living coral reef and the millions of organisms, from colorful coral to multi-hued fish, that inhabit it.

Finally, venture into the Deep, a mysterious undersea domain where graceful

jellyfish engage in aquatic ballets. The aquarium experience ends with a chance to observe sharks and other denizens of the deep through the prism of a 31-foot oculus lens.

As dazzling as the aquarium is, the nucleus of the museum is the science exhibits, which range from prehistoric dinosaurs to space-age technology (the Feathers to the Stars exhibit shows both ends of the spectrum).

No doubt every visitor will have his/her favorite exhibit mine was Brain: The Inside Story, which takes one on an interactive journey through the human brain.

End the day with a show at the 250-seat Planetarium where six 3D projectors and surround sound create a stunning, sensory-filled spectacle. I was so impressed I went back for an evening performance of To Space and Back, a one-hour laser show where planets collided and meteors showered, all choreographed to the music of Queen.

There is so much to see and do at the Frost that you may find the half-day you had planned just isnt enough time.

Art and Drama

Just across Museum Park from the Frost Science Center is Miamis flagship contemporary art museum, Perez Art Museum. With a focus on 20th and 21st century art from the Atlantic Rim (the Americas, Western Europe and Western Africa), it has 1,800 works encompassing painting, sculpture, video, photography and installation art.

While well-known artists such as Diego Rivera are represented, much of the focus is on works resulting from the Cuban diaspora, with artists such as Jose Bedia Valdes and Wilfredo Lam.

The sleek exterior of the waterside museum is as artistic as the works inside. The three-story building has a wide canopy, creating a shaded veranda, complete with a hanging garden which serves to merge the indoor and outdoor spaces.

Accolades for the Arsht

No less a talent than Harry Connick Jr. calls the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts one of the great music halls in the world.

Thats quite a mouthful considering that the Center has only been open since 2006, the gift of businesswoman and philanthropist Adrienne Arsht, who also sits on the board of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Nevertheless, the multi-theater venue has been referred to as the catalyst for Miamis cultural transformation.

With its three resident companies Miami City Ballet, Florida Grand Opera and New World Symphony, along with traveling theatrical companies, the Arsht Center definitely raises the bar on the citys arts scene.

Im still not sure what I thought of the play I saw, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Topdog/Underdog by Fort Knox native Suzan-Lori Parks. What I am sure of is that it played to a packed house of serious theatergoers the kind you routinely see at Off-Broadway arty venues.

Another thing Im sure of is that the Arsht is one of the most spectacular structures Ive seen anywhere. Its two main buildings are connected by an expansive outdoor Plaza for the Arts overlooking Biscayne Bay, where, if you time it right, you can sometimes catch anal frescoperformance.

Its hard to decide which is the most elaborate feature of the complex the Art Deco Carnival Tower preserved from a 1929 Sears Department Store, or the floor-to-ceiling glass mosaic which illustrates the act of artistic expression itself.

In retrospect, the Frost Science Center, Perez Art Museum and Arsht Center for the Performing Arts may not be the main reasons someone chooses the city as a destination. Still, they are proof that you shouldnt hate Miami because its sexy. It has a brain as well.

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