

Travel

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'The menu had more than 100 gins: Madrileños have gone totally crazy for G&Ts'

Tom Chesshyre enjoys a "gintonic" or two in Madrid

Main picture: the rooftop pool at the Gale Hotel. Below: the SLS (3)



The hottest hotels in Miami

From a high-end Art Deco hostel to an elegant newcomer in South Beach, **Lydia Bell** picks the 20 best places to stay. Plus where to eat and where to party

1 Freehand Miami

The Freehand is the answer for communally minded travellers who seek a chic, culturally relevant crash pad but can't pay top dollar. Branding itself a "high-end hostel", (and owned by the Sydell Group, which runs the NoMad hotel in New York and the Saguaro brand) the Freehand has reinvented the historic Indian Creek hotel, a 1930s Art Deco gem a block away from the beach.

There is shared accommodation with bunk beds and a plethora of private rooms with an array of possible sleeping arrangements. There's a social courtyard, bocce courts, ping-pong and bikes for rent – so far, so hostel – but the Roman & Williams-designed rooms, Bar Lab menus, funky cocktail bar, art and organic fruit and veg garden all surprise. **Details** doubles from \$240 (£150), beds from \$30 (001 305 531 2727, thefreehand.com)

2 The Mandarin Oriental

Away from the beach, in Midtown's up-and-coming Brickell district, the Mandarin Oriental's bland but perfectly pitched formality keeps occupancy rates high. On a 44-acre island in Biscayne Bay, the Mandarin has the only five-star spa in Miami, specialising in everything from Ayurvedic massage to Balinese, fine dining at Azul and excellent sushi at Café Sambal. A little bay beach has been created with sand brought in from elsewhere in Florida. **Details** doubles from \$259 (00 800 2828 3838, mandarinoriental.com)

3 SLS South Beach

With pole position on "Millionaire's



Row" (Collins Avenue) the SLS, carved out of the 1939 Ritz Plaza, is the new party girl du jour. Interiors-wise, it's the encore to Philippe Starck's fit-out of the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills, while the rock guitarist Lenny Kravitz is behind the penthouse suite and one of the poolside bungalows. Starck's whimsical creations include a blood-red lobby with pillars scrawled with phrases in disparate languages, a check-in desk themed around an American summer camp and a Hyde Beach club plastered with Hawaiian surf memorabilia. The restaurants, bars and club are key: there's excellent sushi at Katsuya and Spanish fusion at José Andrés' Bazaar. **Details** doubles from \$255 (001 305 674 1701, slssouthbeach.com) ▶

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4 St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort & Residences

A short skip from Bal Harbour Shops — once the place to shop for labels, now in decline as Midtown moves into the ascendancy — the new St Regis is renowned for excellent dining and pool areas. Its three glass skyscrapers rise above a sprawling section of beach and marble finishes, signature art, butler service and a serious spa lend luxury. Jean-Georges' J&G Grill, an oceanfront grill and a Mediterranean restaurant complete the foodie landscape. It is a seamless resort experience away from the craziness of South Beach.

Details doubles from £350 per night (001 305 993 3300, stregis.com)

5 The National

The National is for the nostalgically minded: this 1939 landmark on Miami Beach may be the only Art Deco grande dame to have kept the past as it is, rather than “re-imagine” it. There is no wow factor or party scene, but there are Deco light fittings and furniture, a ceiling mosaic inspired by Tamara de Lempicka, and a Blues Bar with a giant oak counter, jazz and rare whiskies. Rooms are divided between compact historic rooms in the tower (with dark-wood joinery and white linens creating a simple, elegant look) and more spacious pool suites that line one side of the main pool. The National has everything you need — just don't expect intuitive service, pioneering cuisine or buzz.

Details doubles from \$399 (001 305 532 2311, nationalhotel.com)

6 Soho Beach House

Arguably the most fashionable hotel in Miami Beach right now, Soho Beach House spurns South Beach in favour of a quieter nook 20 blocks north which owner Nick Jones has nicknamed “Mid Beach”. With only 50 rooms it has an aura of exclusivity, particularly at its two pools, three bars (a Latin lounge, a Tiki Beach bar, and a roof top bar with cabanas and mini pool) and its truly excellent outpost of the restaurant Ceconi's, with its modern Venetian fare. There's a Cowshed onsite for addicted Brits plus a “snug” for bad-weather fun.

In the rooms, tiles and textiles, fussy chandeliers and mahogany beds recall 1940s Cuban glamour.

Details doubles from \$255 001 786 507 7900, sohobeachhouse.com)

7 W South Beach

The vast new W South Beach has epic beach views from its teal-on-white ultra-plush rooms. The funky lobby, filled with exciting modern art, exudes a moneybags buzz as celebrities and solvent hedonists pile in. Onsite restaurants include Mr Chow (the third opening for this Chinese restaurant brand after New York and Beverly Hills) and Soleà, a Mediterranean feast-haven. Fun-filled elements include tennis and basketball courts, “Swing” and “Swoosh”, W's signature Bliss Spa and Grove, a lushly foliaged garden edging the pool. Everything is light, fun, crisp and humorous. In Miami, the hyper-branded W Group has found its spiritual home.

Details doubles from £305 (001 305 938 3000, whotels.com)

8 The Standard

The Standard's position on the waters of Belle Isle in Biscayne Bay means it's one of the few top South Beach hotels with skyscraper-and-sunset views. With sister hotels in LA and Manhattan's Meatpacking, it is a self-conscious departure from the brash, party-haven SoBe (South Beach) template: this is a place for lolling by the laidback pool, in the tropical gardens, or in your simple-but-cool cabana accommodation — after all, this was the creation of retro-cool king André Balazs, who turned the old Lido Spa & Resort into a nouveau-1960s haven splashed with Scandinavian primary colours. The much-loved spa is the spiritual home of the upmarket American hippy, holistic and hydrotherapy orientated.

Details doubles from \$269 plus tax (001 305 673 1717, standardhotels.com)

9 Viceroy Hotel

The Viceroy is what SoBe hoteliers call “off site” — an up-and-coming but beach-free Brickell Avenue in Midtown (albeit with a waterfront setting), but the interiors work hard to make this blank-canvas 50-storey city tower interesting. The lavish rooms boast four-posters and

copious marble, but the public spaces are the treat: a 2009 collaboration between the designers Kelly Wearstler and Arquitectonica, whose party piece is a 15th floor that includes a two-acre deck with human-sized chess set, an 80-person hot tub and the longest infinity pool in Florida. On the lofty 50th floor there's FIFTY, an inside-out bar and restaurant with cabanas and Downtown

views. The Philippe Starck white-on-white spa is the icing on the cake.

Details doubles from \$179 (00 1 305 503 4400, viceroyhotelsandresorts.com)

10 The Gale

The intimate Gale opened at the end of 2012 and has a growing band of devotees for its unpretentious elegance. Teensy compared to the other Collins Avenue behemoths — it cannot offer a beachfront position (though you can pop across to use the Shelbourne's club over the road for a \$25 resort fee) but it does have personality and a friendly boutique vibe. The crisp navy, tan and white palette (repeated in the comfortable though compact rooms) is smartly retrospective in feel, inspired by the villas of the Italian Riviera. Vintage black and white South Beach photography lines the walls. Dolce Italian is the small modern Italian restaurant and bar, which shirks the super-bustling trend. The tiny Regent Cocktail Club is pleasingly vintage: the bartender chips ice from a giant block with a pick. A pared-down pool area on the roof tops it off.

Details doubles from \$149 (001 305 673 0199, galehotel.com)

11 The James Royal Palm

The James opened last December, and Lauren Rottet's interior design has retained something of the unadorned marvel of the original Royal Palm, with minimal fuss in the decor: a green-glass

front desk, porthole windows, timber wall panelling and terrazzo flooring, clean-lined retro furniture and graphic curtains. Other than that, it boasts the usual elements of an ambitious Collins



Avenue opening: two pools, indoor-outdoors spa focusing on salt therapies with anti-ageing expert Oz Garcia as in-house consultant; famous restaurant (CATCH's first outpost outside New York City); farm-to-table local cuisine (Florida Cookery) and a subterranean club (SL hails from Manhattan's Meatpacking district). Box-fresh white rooms are enlivened with splashes of greens, aquamarines, teals and tans. **Details** Doubles from \$349 per night B&B excluding taxes (001 305 604 5700, jameshotels.com)

12 The Betsy

The Betsy eschews the usual brassy South Beach interior for a glamorous, old-fashioned colonial style — and throws in rock-star service. Independently owned, with just 61 rooms and suites, this Georgian-style Florida mansion at the quiet northern peak of Ocean Drive is bang in the middle of the Art Deco district: from its rooftop you

gaze over Lummus Park and the ocean. The building got a 21st-century refurb about five years ago from Diamante Pedersoli and Carmelina Santoro, protégées of Ralph Lauren: plantation shutters, tropical plants and crisp biscuit stripes arrived. New York steakhouse BLT joins a cool sushi bar, and there's live music at the weekends. **Details** doubles from \$225 B&B (001 305 531 6100 thebetsyhotel.com)

13 The Townhouse

For a stylish budget option in the middle of the action, the 69-room, two-penthouse Townhouse ticks all boxes. Unique selling points include India Mahdavi's jaunty signature red and white decor, complimentary Parisian breakfast and wi-fi (not a given in this town) and the buzz of its rooftop bar. There's no pool, but proximity to the beach means it doesn't matter. Bond St Sushi, the popular outpost of the NY favourite, closed down, but on its way is pop-up Mister Wolfe, a bar-club doling out mini shitake burgers. **Details** doubles from \$148 B&B (£92) (001 305 534 3800, townhousehotel.com)

14 The Setai

The Setai is one of the most luxurious (and expensive) hotels on the beach, comprising an historic Art Deco building plus a 40-storey glass tower that sports the fancier rooms. The dusky Asian-inspired design is contemporary-beautiful. In the lobby, antique grey Shanghai bricks join Burmese teak lattices, Thai hurricane lights and mother-of-pearl wall mosaics; the gardens include lily-filled pools and Chinese courtyards. The rooms have black granite baths, silky soft furnishings and jade pieces. There are three pools of varying temperature. Dining options range from Asian street food to Mediterranean, and the zen-like spa specialises in Balinese therapies. Book for after November, as the pools and their bars are closed for renovation. **Details** doubles from \$375 (001 305 520 6000, thesetaihotel.com)

15 The Delano Hotel

The opening of this Philippe Starck-engineered incarnation of the hotel in 1994 signalled Miami's switch from down-at-heel seniors' backwater to hot destination. Those days are long gone, but this angular Art Deco princess on Collins Avenue occupies a special place in Miami hearts. The 1994 design still holds, more or less, in the inside-outside lobby and white-on-white guest rooms. The palm-fringed pool is sociable rather than tranquil, the subterranean club FDR is a Miami institution and food options include Italian and sushi. **Details** doubles from \$439 (£270) (001 305 672 2000, delano-hotel.com)

16 Raleigh

This smallish Deco gem (104 bedrooms) on South Beach is best known for its curvaceous 1930s pool, often described as the prettiest in America, where movie stars once bronzed their shapely legs (these days it hosts boozy Sunday afternoon parties). The Martini Bar is a vintage classic. Detractors complain that the hotel's retro furniture, cedarwood 1940s wardrobes and old-school bathrooms are "tired"; now it's all change as the developers behind the SLS next door and the W have acquired the hotel. The end of the year

will see a big facelift. The owners have already opened a Michael Schwartz restaurant, which celebrates modern American cuisine. **Details** doubles from \$255 (001 305 534 6300, raleighhotel.com)

17 King & Grove Tides

All-suite The Tides, perched at the top of gaudy Ocean Drive, is often cited as a favourite hotel for discerning Miami regulars: Deco (built in 1936), it is just ten storeys high and has super-roomy, breezy, pared-down cream and taupe bedrooms, all with ocean views. Kelly Wearstler's interior design — she wanted to create the feeling of "walking into a sea shell" — is a pretty breath of fresh air, a mélange of corals, dusty roses, soft peaches and earthy browns. There's La Marea, a seafood restaurant with a great degustation menu, and the Coral Bar for rum-infused cocktails. **Details** doubles from \$275 (£170) plus tax (001 305 604 5070, kingandgrove.com)

18 Hotel New Yorker

This jolly crashpad offers a splash of lighthearted 1950s Florida colour without the hefty price tag. The powder blue-and-white bolthole is a 2009 reworking of an original 1953 motel and still sports the original neon signs. Situated in the Modern Architectural District (MiMo), it's been in the family of Walter and Shirley Figueroa for 30 years. Fifty guest rooms sport simple comfort, aquamarine walls, spacious beds, flat screen plasmas and free wi-fi. It's a ten-minute taxi ride to Miami Beach, but there's a lounge-surrounded pool plus a friendly bar. Other boons include a \$10 airport shuttle. Downsides include a no-frills breakfast, compact rooms and the potentially noisy motel-style layout (ear plugs are provided). **Details** doubles from \$109 B&B (001 305 759 5823, hotelnewyorkermiami.com)

19 The Shore Club

One of the less fashionable hotels in the



Collins Avenue set, The Shore Club has been untouched since 2001 (an eternity for Miami), when the British architect David Chipperfield provided crisply modern interiors for the Deco bone structure. Guest rooms are simple and pared down, and there is a series of laid-back public spaces, from the breezy white lobby to the labyrinthine gardens. The no-reservations Nobu and an outpost of LA's SkyBar keep the hotel afloat. There's a spa with outdoor terraces and a laid-back inside-outside Italian chophouse, Terraza.

Details doubles from \$285 (001 305 695 3100, shoreclub.com)

20 Lord Balfour

A new star joins Miami's small constellation of chic economy hotels. On Ocean Drive, steps from the beach, this 64-room incarnation has taken the original 1940 moniker of the hotel. James Balfour was a Scottish earl, Prime Minister (1902-05) of Great Britain and an eccentric. British accents include full English breakfasts and afternoon teas.

The palette is neutral with flashes of bright colour, while vast images of tattoo artistry by the photographer Justice Howard add quirkiness as behind-bed murals. The rooms have rainforest showers, fancy toiletries, flat screens and decent thread counts — but at a discount. Added draws include the gym, free wi-fi, pool and a decent bar serving Theakston's Old Peculier and \$12 cocktails.

Details doubles from \$199 (001 305 673 0401, lordbalfourmiami.com)



Where to eat and where to party







