

An aerial night photograph of Miami, showing the city skyline with numerous illuminated skyscrapers. In the foreground, a large, well-lit park with many palm trees and winding paths is visible. A highway with light trails from cars runs along the left side of the park. The sky is a deep blue with some clouds.

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Over the last decade, Miami — a time-honored, century-old tropical hideaway for tourists and celebrities — has evolved into one of the most successful and spectacular meeting and convention destinations in the world.

By John Buchanan

The "Miami" brand is built on a multifaceted foundation, from its rich architectural history to its ever-expanding multicultural influences from food to fashion and music. Today, the city's sprawling metropolitan area — which includes distinctive enclaves such as the downtown arts district, Brickell financial district, Coconut Grove, Coral Gables and Miami Beach — combines ultra-modern urban chic with a laidback, old-school resort charm. Despite the striking modernity of the city's hotel product, meeting venues and other infrastructure, it's still the fabulous beaches and subtropical climate, framed by an energetic Latin vibe, that warm planners to meetings Miami-style.

Much of its success, in terms of resurgent awareness and curiosity, grew out of the South Beach phenomenon that erupted in the late 1990s and drew the likes of the late, legendary fashion designer Gianni Versace, and in his wake models from all over the world, which led to a thriving fashion, movie and TV scene that picked up where "Miami Vice" had left off in terms of style and energy.

Next came the rapid evolution of the Brickell financial district, which is now the international banking capital of Latin America, and the downtown arts and entertainment district that is now home to some of the most acclaimed performing arts facilities in the world.

The Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, designed by global superstar architect Cesar Pelli, hosts a world-class season of theatre, symphony concerts and performances by Miami City Ballet, headed by iconic former dancer Edward Villella.

The New World Center, designed by legendary architect Frank Gehry and home base of the world-renowned New World Symphony headed by maestro Michael Tilson Thomas, is located in Miami Beach. The complex features SoundScape Park, where visitors can watch performances or films projected onto a 7,000 sq. ft. wall.

Another Miami landmark — one with a much longer history — is Bicentennial Park, located on a prime 30+ acre parcel of city-owned



The Pérez Art Museum Miami



Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science

Biscayne Bay waterfront, near American Airlines Arena. It includes the 2,600-foot Biscayne Baywalk. Now, however, the location is in the process of completing a major new attraction, Museum Park. Its cultural cornerstones are the new Pérez Art Museum Miami, which made its debut last year, and the Patricia and Phillip Frost Museum of Science, a \$275 million, 250,000 sq. ft. facility that will open next year. Other venues and attractions popular with groups include Miami Seaquarium, Zoo Miami, Jungle Island and NASCAR's Homestead-Miami Motor Speedway.

MEETING INFRASTRUCTURE

While Miami boasts cultural sizzle aplenty, it's the city's vast and diverse meeting infrastructure that gets the attention of planners. The Greater Miami area now has nearly 50,000 hotel rooms, from unique and charming boutique hotels famous all over the world to major-brand meeting-and-convention properties. In recent years, billions of dollars have been invested to make Miami competitive with any other destination in the country when it comes to top-quality accommodations and modern amenities.

One thing that further contributes to Miami's appeal is that virtually all of its hotels offer outdoor function spaces that showcase spectacular views of Biscayne Bay, from downtown or the Atlantic Ocean from Miami Beach. And Miami's subtropical climate means warm weather that allows for comfortable outdoor events throughout the year.

The ability to exploit local color includes rooftop pool decks, lushly landscaped tropical patios and gardens, expansive lawns overlooking world-renowned golf courses, and palm-lined courtyards and terraces with breathtaking views.

Meanwhile, Miami offers world-class convention and conference facilities. For decades, the Miami Beach Convention Center has been one of the most popular facilities in the world. Located at the heart of the Art Deco Historic District, the complex is within easy walking distance of all of South Beach's best known restaurants, bars and nightclubs. Opened in 1957, the center quickly earned iconic status when it served as the site where Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali) defeated

Sonny Liston for his first world heavyweight championship in 1964.

The facility's highest-profile user is the prestigious Art Basel, a critically acclaimed art fair that comes every year. To keep pace with its competition across the country, the Convention Center will begin a \$500 million renovation and expansion project after next year's Art Basel. And the art fair recently announced that it would stay in Miami for another five years, even through the renovation.

Another facility highly popular for smaller conventions and conferences is the Miami Convention & Conference Center, located between downtown and the edge of the Brickell financial district. It's a foundational element of the James L. Knight International Center/Hyatt Regency complex and features a 444-seat auditorium, a 117-seat tiered acoustically balanced lecture hall and 20 meeting rooms.

For serious business conferences and educational or training seminars, another good option is the Biltmore, a National Historic Landmark property built in 1926. The AAA Four Diamond hotel features 273 guest rooms and 70,537 sq. ft. of indoor/outdoor meeting and function space located within the hotel and the adjacent Conference Center of the Americas at the Biltmore. The hotel has 14,000 sq. ft. of indoor space and 24,000 sq. ft. of outdoor space; and the Conference Center of the Americas has 14,797 sq. ft. of indoor space and 17,740 sq. ft. of outdoor event space. Individual facilities include three ballrooms surrounded by expansive terraces, breakout rooms, two state-of-the-art amphitheaters, and executive boardrooms.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Although to the uninitiated Miami might appear to be a homogenous megatropolis, it is in fact a patchwork of distinct neighborhoods, each of which can claim its own charm and appropriateness for a particular group.

Over the last decade, downtown Miami — the part of the city located along the famous Biscayne Boulevard corridor — has been



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Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts

re-engineered into one of the country's top arts-and-entertainment districts as a result of the development of the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, which served as a powerful catalyst for an explosion of art galleries, and an eclectic collection of excellent local restaurants and shops.

At the heart of the neighborhood is the Miami Design District, a neighborhood conceived and developed by local entrepreneur Craig Robins, a pioneer of the early South Beach scene two decades earlier. The easily walkable Design District is dedicated specifically to innovative fashion, design, architecture and dining experiences.

Located south of downtown Miami is Coconut Grove, established as a famous brand decades before developers started resuscitating the Miami Beach neighborhood that would become known worldwide as South Beach. Once an arts colony, Coconut Grove is now a shopping and dining mecca known for its quaint boutiques, art galleries, restaurants and cafes. It's also home to the landmark Vizcaya Museum & Gardens on Biscayne Bay. Built in 1916, Vizcaya — one of Miami's most celebrated attractions — is an Italian Renaissance-style mansion that can host indoor functions or deliver an unforgettable experience in its famous outdoor gardens.

Another one-of-a-kind venue in Coconut Grove is the Cruz Building, a glamorous three-story venue highlighted by coral stone outside terraces. Its stunning interiors are brimming with extraordinary features and amenities that include soaring ceilings, monumental stained-glass windows, European antiques and sculptures, massive hand-carved mahogany bars, a dramatic brass and marble staircase, wrought ironwork and sculptures, and more — all lit by interior gas flame lanterns and museum-quality antique chandeliers.

Southwest of downtown Miami is Coral Gables, the area's oldest and most iconic community, famous for its lavish Mediterranean Revival architecture and home to the University of Miami. Developed during the 1920s during the Florida land boom that led to the creation of the entire metropolitan area, Coral Gables was one of the country's first planned communities and is still highly regarded for its strict zoning regulations. In fact, Coral Gables was designed to be only four blocks wide and just over two miles long, with Ponce de Leon Boulevard bisecting it. Its developers sold the fact that every business in town was within easy walking distance, a trait that makes Coral Gables even more popular in the 21st

century. And like Miami's other neighborhoods, Coral Gables offers a range of restaurants and shops. One of its most distinctive and popular offsite meeting venues is Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, which features the only indoor rainforest in the U.S. Another coveted venue in Coral Gables is the Venetian Pool: a spring-fed lagoon carved out of coral rock, this historic landmark and swimming pool features cave-like grottos, stone bridges and waterfalls.

Despite the longstanding appeal of places such as Coconut Grove or Coral Gables, there's no doubt that in recent years Miami has been best known for the South Beach district of Miami Beach. Just 21 blocks long and a few blocks wide — from the Atlantic Ocean to Biscayne Bay — South Beach is home to one of the world's most acclaimed collections of architectural gems in its Art Deco District, a number of them designed by fabled architect Morris Lapidus.

Along Collins Avenue, Lincoln Road and Ocean Drive, its three main streets, South Beach now features the most famous restaurants, bars, retail shops and nightclubs in all of Miami. As a result, celebrities from movie stars to rock stars to supermodels frequent the destination, which constantly reinforces its reputation as one of the hippest places on earth. So, while South Beach is popular with small groups with a taste for adventure, it is more popular for incentive programs.

GETTING THERE

No destination has invested more money in recent years on state-of-the-art transportation infrastructure than Miami. Miami International Airport, which delivers formidable airlift from across the U.S. and around the world, offers new and renovated terminals and a recently installed high-speed train that whisks arriving passengers from plane to baggage claim and then on to a new Intermodal Center that connects attendees with private and public transportation, car rentals, limousine services and taxis in one convenient location. A new Metrorail service transports arriving passengers to downtown Miami. ■



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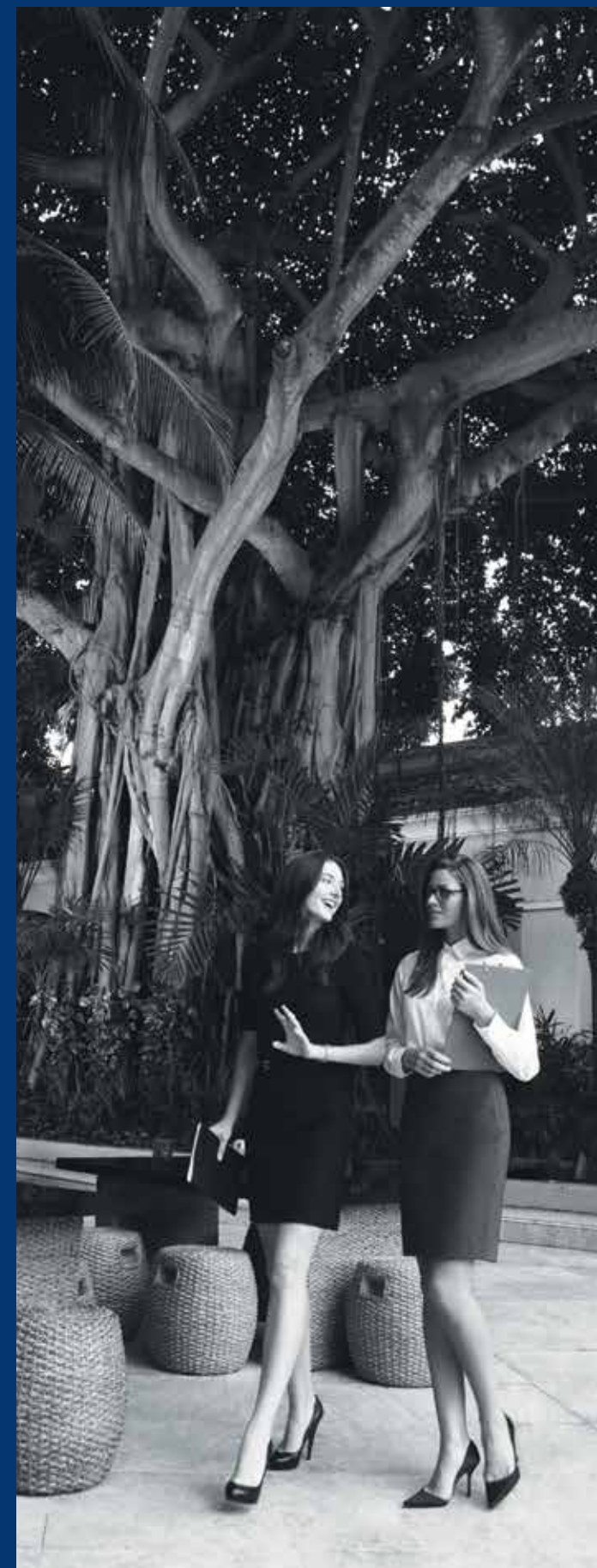
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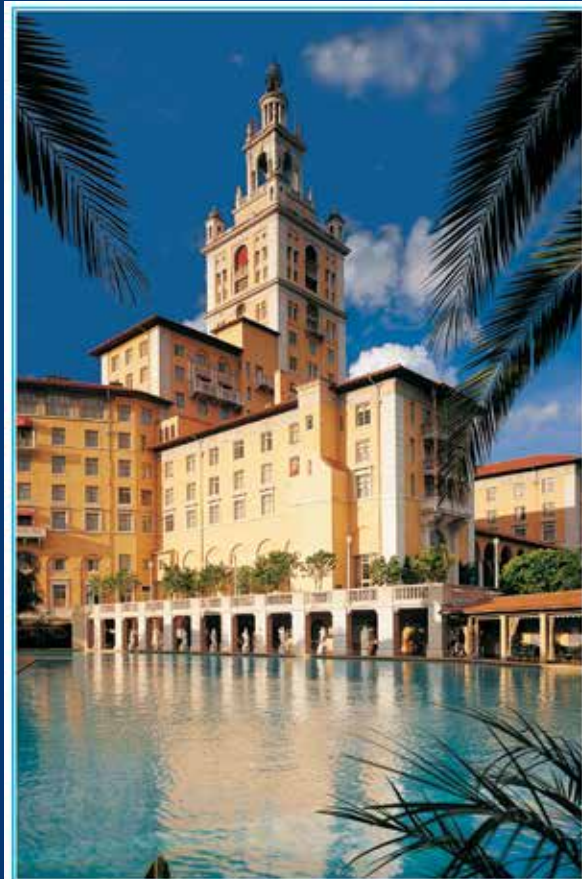


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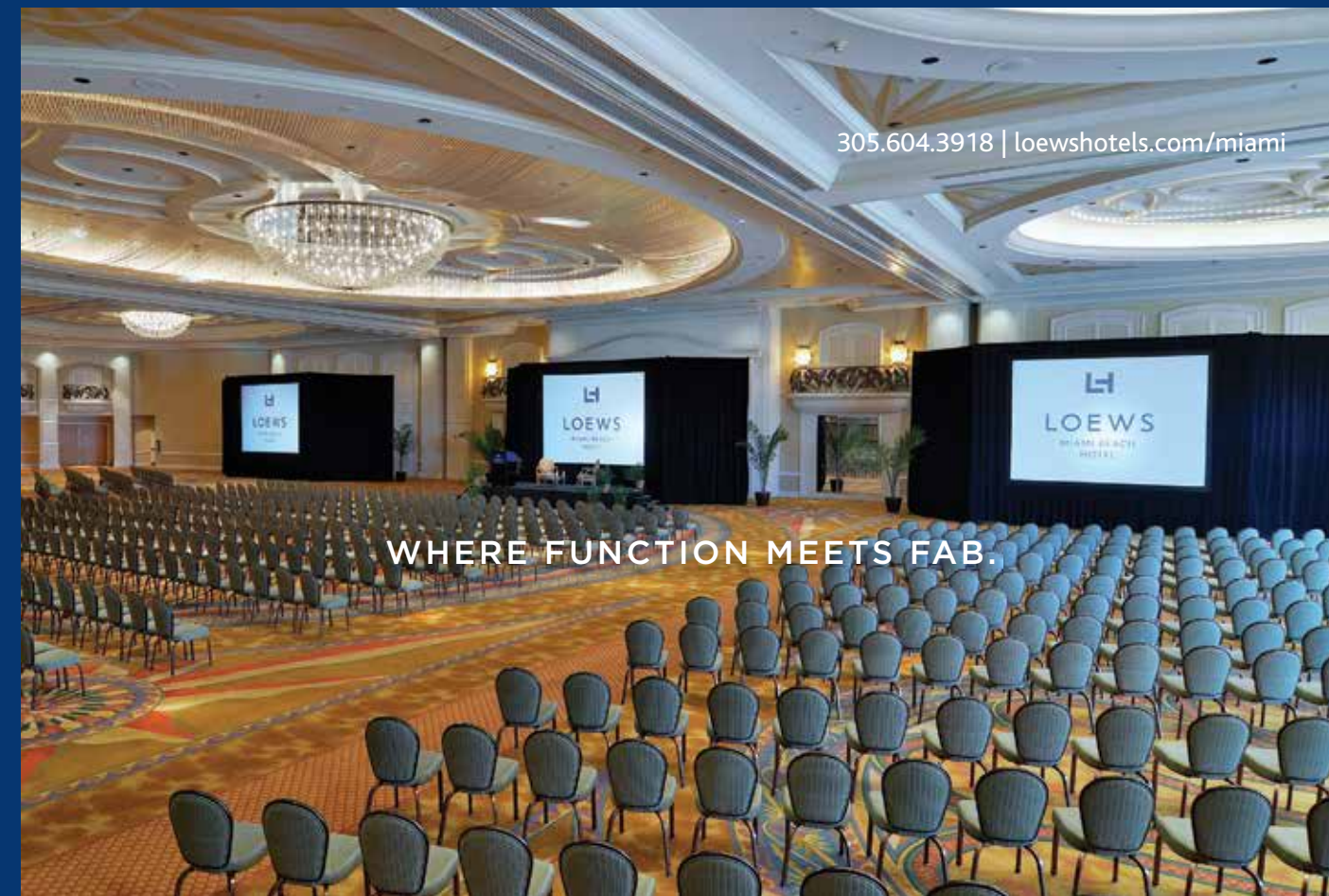
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