

# SHOPPING

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Did you know the average American consumes as much energy as 31 Indians? A good chunk of that statistic could be probably attributed to the shopping habits of Miami.

The ingredients are all there. Warm weather. Beaches. Tourists – folks on vacation always splurge. Latin culture, which, to be frank, puts a bit of emphasis on appearance. All those immigrants, who have turned South Florida into a sunny international bazaar, who came to America to consume and buy things they simply couldn't access at home. You don't flee communist Cuba to totally reject consumer capitalism.

And most importantly, there's a lot of money floating around. This might blow your mind: a 2008 report by the *South Florida Sun Sentinel* estimated that if you included people's property and possessions, one in 10 residents of Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties are millionaires. And maybe millionaires up north act with understatement, but folks here like to live the good life and show off while they're doing it. This is Miami, folks; that sun makes you wanna strut.

So there's a big shopping scene here, as overstated and in your face as a South Beach ensemble of rhinestone-studded jeans, silk muscle shirt, shiny belt buckle and diamante-encrusted shades. It's also as occasionally innovative as a Design District showroom of funny furniture that challenges your conception of 'chair' and laughs while it does it.

There are malls here – lots of 'em – although thanks to the weather, many are open to the elements and feel a little more organic than your average consumo-plex. And despite the genius Americans possess for Starbucking the shopping experience, there's some distinct browsing within Miami's neighborhoods.

Always be aware the Miami shopping scene reflects the tastes of the city's inhabitants. Miami is a creative city, but it's a very commercial one as well, so those tastes can either be startlingly original, or startlingly amateurish attempts at recreating the original. For example: South Beach clothing stores. At their best, they're glamorous and sexy – of course, this is South Beach – but to use the *Zoolander* analogy, they're Magnum. No-one else can replicate the look they sell. To continue with the *Zoolander* theme, the worst stores sell Blue Steel: superficially, the aesthetic looks the same, but it's somehow tackier, less well put together, and trashier. Learn to differentiate between store A (hot) and store B (ho) and you're on your way to becoming a Miami shopping maven.

## NOSING AROUND BY NEIGHBORHOOD

South Beach is, of course, high end. Among the chains are some beautiful boutiques, to say nothing of the pleasures of taking a window-shopping stroll down Collins Ave, Washington Ave or Lincoln Rd. Art galleries are scattered throughout the city, but there's obviously a glut in Wynwood and the Design District, which also rule the roost for concept furniture and design stuff (duh). In North Miami Beach, the Bal Harbour shops are an incredibly upscale parade of high-end brand names; look, there are live models twirling around in Saks Fifth Ave!

Downtown has some tame malls, particularly Bayside Marketplace, and dodgy looking (but deal-making) electronic places in the otherwise empty streets near Government Center. Little Havana sells plenty of

Latin tat, from Jesus statues to anti-Fidel anything to excellent salsa CDs, and here and in Little Haiti you can explore a new side of the American consumer experience: *botanicas* that sell *vodou* (voodoo) and *Santeria* ingredients. Can you get *sangre de dragon* (dragon's blood) in the Gap? Right on the other end of the scale is Coconut

## top picks

### SHOPPING STRIPS

- Collins Ave south of 9th St, South Beach
- Grand Ave, Coconut Grove
- Lincoln Road Mall, South Beach
- NE 40th St, Design District
- Miracle Mile, Coral Gables