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## IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR IN MIAMI

(MIAMI) – Vacationing families in the know have always been hip to Miami's myriad attractions. But as the city developed its image in recent years as a sophisticated tropical resort destination, trend-conscious travelers have been more visible than the toddler through teens set. But now, with an influx of both new and expanded attractions with fresh family appeal, a new crop of luxury resorts that cater to families and the arrival of national hotel chains offering affordable family accommodations, Miami has once again reinvented itself as a fun and exciting destination for all ages and budgets.

With a great mix of natural wonders to explore, fun-filled tourist attractions to discover amidst Miami's unique multicultural vibe and the always-present lure of beach, ocean and bay, Miami spoils families with a multitude of choices.

### ***Five-Star Family Fun***

The spoiling starts at check-in for families who now view Miami as a conveniently located luxury resort destination. New properties that have opened in the past few years offer all of the upscale amenities of similar resorts in the Caribbean and Hawaii -- in what is often a far more accessible location. Families can vacation in style at five-star beachfront properties that specialize in pampering guests and their children, catering to every imaginable whim. Pint-sized guests receive extra special attention -- with perks ranging from free dining to their own little bathrobes.

When quality family bonding gets to be a little too intense, guests at Miami's top resorts can take advantage of programs designed to give families a break from each other. Guests at the **Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne** can indulge guilt-free in signature spa services, such as an Everglades Grass Body Wrap, secure in the knowledge that their youngsters are safe and happy at the *Ritz Kids* pool and spa. At the **Loews Miami Beach**, a massive free-form pool and easy beach access are the primary lures, but the *Loews Loves Kids* program brings it up a notch with welcome gifts for children under ten, supervised recreational programs, lending game libraries and special children's menus.

At the **Mandarin Oriental Miami**, children are greeted with a special welcome gift, their own bathroom amenities and bathrobes and complimentary in-room DVD players and discs. **The Four Seasons Hotel** offers a *Kids for All Seasons* activity center stocked with cotton candy and popcorn machines kids and offering arts and crafts, board game tournaments, computer games and more.

**The Sonesta Bayfront Hotel - Coconut Grove** Located within steps of the shopping, dining and nightlife of CocoWalk and Streets of Mayfair and feature spectacular views of Biscayne Bay and the Miami skyline.

Miami's **Doral Golf Resort and Spa** has been the site for great family getaways for over 40 years and offers Camp Doral, a full-fledged daily program that will occupy the most tireless of rugrats. There's plenty to enjoy together as well -- from tennis to the water slide at the Blue Lagoon Water Park to just lounging around. At the historic **Billmore Hotel** in Coral Gables, the venerable resort offers *Family Values*, a program that rewards families with free dining from the children's menus, nightly milk and cookie delivery, passes to area attractions and many other perks. Miami Beach's **Fontainebleau Resort**, the Loews Miami Beach and others offer children's camps or special programming designed to appeal to families.

For budget-conscious families, Miami is one of the world's best-kept secrets for affordable accommodations. Summer temperatures are moderate, while hotel and motel rates drop as much as 50 percent. Meanwhile, large hotel chains, including Doubletree, Marriott, Holiday Inn, Homewood Suites, Travelodge and many others offer affordable accommodations year round -- many with built in kitchens for cooking on a budget -- in locations that are convenient to beaches and tourist attractions.

## **Life's a Beach**

With a year-round mild climate and unrivaled water access, Miami is the perfect international destination for families that like to spend their time enjoying the great outdoors. Whether that means plopping down on one of Key Biscayne's family-friendly beaches with plenty of sand toys, snorkeling in **Biscayne National Park** or canoeing through the **Florida Everglades**, visitors will find plenty of ways to entertain themselves in this natural paradise. Those who want to get their feet wet never need to look far to organize a day on the bay – from fishing charters to catamaran rentals, from jet skis to kayaks, in locations from North Miami Beach's **Oleta State Park** to Coconut Grove, opportunities to leave dry land behind, if only for a few hours, are everywhere.

Miami Beach is the stuff of legends, stretching from the tip of South Beach to Sunny Isles Beach, more than 15 miles of white sand, considered one of the nation's top ten beaches by *The Travel Channel* for many years running. On South Beach, wander over to Ocean Drive for a cool drink and to people watch at an outdoor café, or head to quieter North Shore Park in the heart of Miami's rapidly transforming MiMo North Beach neighborhood. Key Biscayne's **Crandon Park** features a carousel and playground suitable for younger children, while Matheson Hammock offers a gentle lagoon area where toddlers can safely waddle. Haulover Beach is the site for fishing charters and water sports, bicycle and even kite rentals. Active families can choose from locations throughout the city to sail, dive, snorkel, windsurf, surf – even try kiteboarding as part of their active Miami vacation. Newly renovated **South Pointe Park** offers kid friendly splash fountains, and lots of room for a playful afternoon, not to mention it is also pet friendly.

One of Miami's most historic sites, Coral Gables' **Venetian Pool** is formed from an old coral-rock quarry and fed 820,000 gallons of spring water daily. Considered one of the world's most unique and breathtaking municipal swimming pools, the non-chemical pool provides a nice break from the chlorine and salt water, and the beautiful coral rock keeps the water nice and cool even in the summer sun. Hailed as one of the best destinations for families by locals and tourist guides alike, the Venetian Pool is a great alternative to the beach for family fun in the sun.

Golf and tennis are also prime attractions; in addition to courts and courses linked to resorts, there are more than 200 public tennis courts in Miami-Dade County

including Crandon Park Tennis Center, home to the U.S. Tennis Association's Player Development Program and the National Junior Tennis Team and host for the Sony Ericsson Open, the world's fifth largest professional tennis tournament. Some of the most challenging and beautiful golf courses in the world are found in Miami from the Miami Beach Golf Club to Doral's famed Blue Monster. There are also numerous public courses, including Crandon Park Golf Course, which is considered one of the most beautiful and difficult par-72 courses in the state and has been rated in the top ten courses by *Golfweek* and as one of America's top 75 upscale courses by *Golf Digest*. Other public courses include International Links and Miccosukee Golf Club in South Dade and Greynolds and Haulover Golf Courses, further north.

### **Mutual Attraction**

Evoking the essence of Miami with a mix of history, education and just plain fun, local tourist attractions offer much more than a break from the beach for families visiting Miami. **Jungle Island**, which relocated in 2003 to Watson Island in close proximity to resorts and cruise ship terminals, is a 18.6-acre theme park that is home to more than 3,000 exotic animals and 500 species of plants. Here, visitors enjoy animal stage shows, one-of-a-kind interactive aviaries, plant nurseries, jungle trails, a petting farm and educational exhibits, as well as world-famous parrot shows, a new Serpentarium and Jungle Theater, an Everglades Habitat and much more -- all nestled on a lush tropical island.

Nearby, the **Miami Children's Museum** features interactive exhibits, including a miniature supermarket, television news studio, cruise ship and a giant sandcastle slide. MCM is one of the ten largest children's museums in the United States and destined to be one of the most successful.

One of Florida's most popular tourist attractions, Miami **Seaquarium**, gained notoriety as the location for filming of 1960s hit TV show *Flipper*. Indeed, "Flipper" still has his own daily show at the Seaquarium, as does Lolita, the killer whale, and the other fascinating sea creatures who reside at South Florida's largest marine aquarium. Miami Seaquarium also offers Salty's Pirate's Playground, feeding sessions with sharks and manatees as well as many other educational programs. The Seaquarium unveiled its new dolphin habitat, Dolphin Harbor, in 2007. The new \$5 million habitat features a

12,000-square-foot, 700,000-gallon dolphin pool surrounded by an 8,000-square-foot meeting facility and is home to the park's expanded "Swim with our Dolphins program."

Families also enjoy spending time with the rest of the animal kingdom at Miami's acclaimed **Metrozoo**. One of the world's great zoos and the only one in the continental United States located in a subtropical climate, Metrozoo opened a new \$35 million exhibit, Tropical America, in 2007. Larger than the average American zoo, the 27-acre exhibit features jaguars, anacondas, giant river otters, stingray touch tanks and more. The zoo is also home to the American Bankers Family Aviary Wings of Asia exhibit, with more than 300 birds representing 70 species of exotic, rare and endangered Asian birds in a large free flight area that feels like an Asian jungle. Another popular attraction at the zoo is Dr. Wilde's World, including a new Wild Earth Jeep Simulator where guests can take a virtual African safari.

Several attractions located in the area near Metrozoo hold special appeal for families. **Monkey Jungle**, owned and operated by the DuMond family for three generations, is home to 400 primates, most running free on a 30-acre reserve. It is one of the few protected habitats for endangered primates in the United States and the only one that the general public can explore. Another homegrown family-owned attraction, **Everglades Alligator Farm** invites visitors to enjoy an exhilarating airboat tour into the surrounding Everglades and a stroll around the farm to see the alligators, crocodiles, caimans and wildlife that reside there, as well as a great display of local and exotic snakes. **Coral Castle** probably wins the designation for "most offbeat" tourist attraction. Kids will love the quirky construction, built over the course of 20 years with homemade tools by one man in a seemingly impossible display of strength and obsession.

At the **Gold Coast Railroad Museum**, the kids will be clamoring to play with wooden model train sets, including the beloved Thomas the Tank Engine, while everyone will want to climb on board displays of historic railroad equipment, including such treasures as the Ferdinand Magellan, Franklin D. Roosevelt's private railroad car. Transportation buffs will also want to check out the **Weeks Air Museum**, located at Tamiami Airport west of downtown Miami. Visitors can explore the fascinating history of aviation, reliving the events of World War II from a pilot's perspective while viewing a historic display of aircraft and aviation artifacts.

Families who seek insight into Miami's early settlers can visit the **Miccosoukee Indian Village** and discover centuries-old culture alive and well just minutes from downtown. Guided tours take you through the past, present and future of the tribe through craft demonstrations, a museum and alligator wrestling, while airboat rides through the River of Grass are available. Other nearby facilities offering alligator exhibitions, airboat rides and natural wildlife and plant tours also include Coopertown Airboat Rides and Florida Seminole Tourism and AH-TAH-THI-KI Seminole Museum Everglades Adventures. The Miccosoukee Tribe also operates a multi-service gaming and entertainment complex that offers plenty of video games and recreational activities for the whole family to enjoy.

Parents of stargazers and budding naturalists will also want to schedule a trip to the **Miami Science Museum**. Traveling and permanent exhibits are largely geared toward children exploring subject matter from dinosaurs to the properties of physics. Daily shows point out the stars of the season, while the Wildlife Center houses rare birds of prey and reptiles. While exploring this neck of the woods, everyone will want to check out nearby **Vizcaya Museum & Gardens**, the lavish waterfront Italian Renaissance mansion built by industrialist James Deering in 1916. Perfectly suited for Miami's subtropical climate, **Fairchild Botanical Tropical Garden** draws thousands of horticulture lovers annually to the 83-acre botanical garden which boasts extensive collections of rare tropical plants, including palms, cicadas, flowering trees and vines. Children can enjoy a naturalist treasure hunt, identifying various plants, insects and animals as they wander the lush, expansive grounds. After all that walking and exploring, the kids will want to cool down -- right next door to Fairchild is **Matheson Hammock Park**, which features a toddler-friendly lagoon style beach, perfect for a late afternoon dip.

### ***Take a Walk on the Wild Side***

Nowhere else in the United States does such a wealth of natural resources present itself as in Everglades and Biscayne National Parks. The hammocks, pinelands, wetlands, mangrove forests and seashores of Miami-Dade County that remain

undeveloped and protected within these practically adjacent parks are home to an unrivaled and diverse array of flora, fauna and marine life.

Covering 1.5 million acres, **Everglades National Park** is the third largest in the U.S. National Parks system. Made up of sawgrass prairies, mangrove swamps, subtropical jungles and the warm waters of Florida Bay, the park is home to a rare community of plants and endangered animals that inhabit the seemingly endless grassy waters. Visitors to the park can enjoy self-guided and ranger-led tours and activities from the Main Visitor Center at the Park's entrance, or journey deeper into the Everglades for a more extensive experience in the Florida wilderness.

Families may want to drive to the town of Flamingo, 38 miles from the park's main entrance and featuring many rare birds and exotic wildlife. Exciting sites along the drive include Anhinga Trail and the Pahayokee Overlook. World-class fishing is one of Flamingo's irresistible lures. The park's waters provide thousands of acres for fishing: shallow water flats channels and mangrove keys are home to snook, redfish, snapper, trout, largemouth bass and sea catfish. To the north, the Shark Valley entrance to the Park offers one of the best places to observe wildlife. Take a tram tour or rent a bike to traverse a 15-mile route. A 65-foot observation tower gives you a bird's eye view of the River of Grass.

A rarity among national parks, **Biscayne National Park** is primarily aquatic. Of its 173,000 acres, 95 percent are under water. Teeming with sea life and plants, the park encompasses the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay, the longest stretch of mangrove forest left on Florida's coast, living coral reefs and 40 of the northernmost Florida keys. Getting out on the water is the key to discovering the wonders of Biscayne National Park. At the Dante Fascell Visitor Center, it is possible to join glass bottom boat tours, snorkeling and dive trips and island excursions or rent canoes and kayaks. Fishing is excellent, with snapper, snook and barracuda among the most common catch. Patch reefs provide a snorkeler's paradise. In shallow waters less than 10 feet deep, the living coral is home to a variety of sea life, including tropical fish, sponges and the spiny lobster. Manatees, dolphins and five species of sea turtles call the waters of Biscayne Bay home, as do moray eels, stingrays, squid, starfish and hundreds of varieties of fish.

Eco-adventurers will also want to tour the 450-acre **Deering Estate**, located at the edge of Biscayne Bay. A wealth of natural and archaeological resources thrive at this

site as does a variety of wildlife such as the gray fox, spotted skunks, squirrels, butterflies and birds. Fossilized bones of extinct animals such as the mammoth, dog-sized horses, tapirs, jaguars, sloths and bison have also been found on the estate.

Other opportunities to ruminate on Miami's natural wonders exist closer to downtown and resort areas such as idyllic Key Biscayne. Here, the **Marjory Stoneman Douglas Biscayne Nature Center** offers hands-on marine exploration, coastal hammock hikes, fossil-rock reef walks, bike trips, local history lectures and beach walks to aquatic tourists. Throughout Miami, the Miami-Dade Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of naturalist-led eco-adventures including hammock walks, kayak, snorkel and canoe trips, and bike trips for all age groups and skill levels.

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) is an independent not-for-profit sales and marketing organization whose mission is to attract visitors to Greater Miami and the Beaches for leisure, business and conventions. For a vacation guide, visit our website at [www.MiamiAndBeaches.com](http://www.MiamiAndBeaches.com) or call 1-888-76-Miami (US/Canada only) or 305-447-7777. To reach the GMCVB offices dial 305-539-3000. Meeting planners may call 1-800-933-8448 (US/Canada only) or 305-539-3071 or visit [www.MiamiMeetings.com](http://www.MiamiMeetings.com).

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