

Foreigners and Americans Flock to Miami

Welcome to This is America from VOA Learning English. I'm Madeline Smith.

And I'm Mario Ritter.

Today we tell the story of the Miami, Florida. The area is very popular with travelers. The clear skies and sunny days bring people from all over the world. Some visitors return to live in the warm weather and the beautiful semi-tropical environment.

You can find Miami easily on a map of the United States. It is on the southeastern end of the southern state of Florida. Miami is part of Dade County, which contains many other cities and towns. Together, those neighborhoods make up the area known as Greater Miami.

The name "Miami" comes from an Indian word. Many Native Americans lived in the area when the Spanish arrived in 1565. However, the native population decreased because of European diseases and war with the European settlers. The natives who remained lived under Spanish control until 1821, when Spain sold Florida to the United States.

The Seminole Indian tribe strongly opposed American rule. The Seminoles fought three wars with the United States Army. Finally, in about 1858, the Seminoles withdrew to the wet, tropical land of the Everglades, where they refused to surrender.

In the 1890s, the Miami area had fewer than 500 white American settlers. Over the next century, three women strongly influenced the development of the area. The first was Julia Tuttle. She is known as the Mother of Miami.

Julia Tuttle was a wealthy widow from the north who owned land in Miami. She believed that Miami could someday be an important link between the United States and South America. So, she offered land to businessman Henry Flagler, who owned what became known as the Florida East Coast Railway system. He extended his railroad to Miami.

The area grew quickly after the railroad arrived in 1896. But, a powerful ocean storm damaged Miami in 1926. Then, in the 1930s, the Great Depression slowed most new building projects.

The city began growing again after World War II. Miami became a leading center of trade with countries in the Caribbean, Central America and South America. Many people from other parts of the United States moved to Florida permanently to enjoy the warm weather.

Only 50 years after Julia Tuttle made her deal with Henry Flagler, the population of the Greater Miami area had grown to about 500,000 people.

In 1947, the writer Marjorie Stoneman Douglas helped people in Miami understand how development could destroy the Everglades. The Everglades are huge wetlands. They include grasslands and a very shallow, slow river. Marjorie Stoneman Douglas' book, called "River of Grass," explained how important the Everglades were to the survival of Miami. That same year marked the opening of the Everglades National Park.

The third woman to influence Miami was Barbara Baer Capitman. During the 1970s, she organized a campaign to save Art Deco style buildings in the city of Miami Beach.

Many business people and local officials opposed Barbara Capitman's efforts. They saw old and damaged buildings, but she saw historic architecture.

She succeeded in having the Art Deco area added to the National Register of Historic Places. Miami Beach is now famous for the more than 800 colorful buildings designed in the Art Deco style.

Today, about two million people live in and around Miami-Dade County. Many adults leave colder climates to retire in its warm weather.

Miami is also home to many immigrants from around the world. About 50 percent of people in the Miami area come from Spanish-speaking countries in Central America and South America. Haitians are the second largest immigrant group. Canadians sometimes call the Miami area Quebec-in-the-Tropics because so many French Canadians retire there.

MUSIC: Jimmy Buffet, "Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes"

Miami has thousands of manufacturing companies. The port of Miami is a center for international trade and passenger ships. The warm weather has helped the local agriculture industry grow to be one of the largest in the United States.

Tourism is another of the city's most important industries. About ten million people visit Miami every year. There are more visitors from other countries than from the United States.

Many visitors come to swim in the warm waters of Biscayne Bay or the Atlantic Ocean. Some take boat trips into the Everglades, where they can see many kinds of birds. They might even see alligators.

Visitors to the Miami area can enjoy many kinds of sporting events. They can also choose from among many music, theater and dance performances.

The music of Cuban-American rapper Armando Perez represents some of the culture of Miami. He uses a stage name of Pit Bull when he performs. He is also called Mr. Worldwide.

Here he performs "Feel This Moment" with singer Christina Aguilera. The song is from his album "Global Warming."

Most Cubans in the Miami area came to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. They came after Fidel Castro ousted Cuban leader Fulgencio Batista in 1959.

Cuban-Americans play an important part in Miami politics. Miami-born Marco Rubio represents Florida in the United States Senate. Joe Garcia represents part of Miami in the House of Representatives. Like Senator Rubio, Congressman Garcia's parents came from Cuba.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen was born in Cuba. She also represents part of the Miami area in Congress.

Some Cuban-Americans live in a Miami neighborhood called Little Havana. Visitors to the main street, called Calle Ocho, or Eighth Street, leave with the smell of strong Cuban coffee and businesses where people roll tobacco into cigars.

Visitors can eat traditional Cuban food at restaurants like Versailles. This unofficial Cuban community center has been included in books and films about life in Miami.

That was "Conga" sung by Gloria Estefan, another Cuban-American.

Miami is home to many people from other Caribbean countries. More than 100,000 Haitians live in the Greater Miami area.

One neighborhood is known as Little Haiti. The walls of some of the buildings there are painted with huge murals. The pictures tell the history of the Haitian people.

A restaurant called Tap Tap in Miami Beach is known for its Haitian food and for performances by the singer and Haitian activist Manno Charlemagne.

Like many people in Miami, he fled repression in his country. Later, he returned to Haiti and served as the mayor of Port Au Prince. Here he sings in Haitian Creole.

The reporter and fiction writer Carl Hiaasen writes for the Miami Herald newspaper. Local people tell their friends from other places to read his books to understand Miami. The writer says he gets all of his ideas from south Florida newspapers.

CBS News correspondent Steve Kroft spoke to Mr. Hiaasen for the television news show "60 Minutes." The reporter asked about some of the people who appear in Mr. Hiaasen's novels.

STEVE KROFT: Are these stories true or inventions of your imagination? Professional wheelchair thief?

CARL HIAASEN: True.

STEVE KROFT: School board candidate whose legal residence turned out to be a tool shed?

CARL HIAASEN: True.

STEVE KROFT: South Florida mayor who tried to hire City Hall workers to kill her husband?

CARL HIAASEN: Yep. Yep. I believe she's gotten a new trial since then. But there was testimony that she solicited for a hit man in City Hall.

STEVE KROFT: All those are true?

CARL HIAASEN: I wish I had made them up. I wish I had made them up.



Writer Carl Hiaasen says the true stories of Miami are much wilder than those he could invent.

This program was written by Jerilyn Watson and Onka Dekker. I'm Madeline Smith.

And I'm Mario Ritter. Join us again next week for another report about life in the United States on the VOA Learning English program This Is America.