



BURGER

KING



Miami is a glittering mecca for glamourpusses, but how about gluttons? **Hannah Summers** bins off the beaches and puts herself in the capable hands of local blogger Burger Beast, for a high-speed tour of the city's most outrageously heart-stopping fast food

My instructions are simple. "Wait for me in the car park at 9pm," the email reads. "And wear baggy pants." Baggy pants? For a break in Miami? No lycra, micro cut-offs or Lululemon yoga leggings? Can this be right?

It's gloriously right. After weeks of chatting online, I'm finally meeting my latest internet interest. His name: Sef Gonzalez. Our connection: an unhealthy obsession with patties, buns and everything that comes with them.

Sef Gonzalez, better known as the Burger Beast, may not be your typical glammed-up Miami local, but he knows and loves the city's food more than any ripped resident of Florida. Regarded as one of the most influential eaters in the region, he's also one of the biggest burger bloggers in the US – as his website can testify.

For the three days I'm in his hometown, he's tasked himself – and me – with a no-bun-left-untorn food tour: "I'm going to show you the real Miami," he promises me and my friend Tom. "Not a kale juice in sight."

He isn't lying. Donning our most forgiving trousers, we begin our challenge that night at Karla Bakery, a 24-hour Cuban cafe where locals gather for late-night carbs and caffeine. Ordering us to take a seat, Sef returns presenting paper bags bulging with guava-stuffed pastries, alongside slices of Cuban bread, liberally slathered with butter before and after toasting. Dip the buttered toast into your sugary, milky coffee, and you're fast assimilating into Miami's Latino community – the city is nicknamed the 'Capital of Latin America', thanks to its majority Spanish-speaking population.



It's just our first taste of Miami's thriving **Cuban culture**, and the next morning Sef introduces us to the neighbourhood of Little Havana. Far from the shimmering high-rises of Miami Beach, here the streets boast a salsa soundtrack, while the older members of the community play al fresco dominoes.

El Rey de las Fritas – meaning 'The King of the Fritas' – is the block's Cuban canteen of choice. Inside, the wall acts as a menu – untouched since the 1970s, it's lined with faded pictures of food photographed on doilies, the options shouted at us with garish retro block capitals.

Silver-haired residents perch at the counter beneath stark fluorescent lights, while other, younger diners lounge in low-slung baggy jeans, lazily eyeing up the waitresses. For a city famed for being crazily image conscious, this place shuns all Miami clichés, and for these customers, it doesn't matter who you're dining with – it's all about the food.

We soon see why. Sure enough, the famous Burger Beast's arrival doesn't go unnoticed. Plates come careering out the kitchen: the **Frita Cubana** is made of a thin, flattened ground-beef patty, heavily seasoned with paprika (to replicate the look and taste of chorizo), heaped with diced onions, crunchy julienne potatoes, optional cheese and egg (we opt in), stuffed into a toasted Cuban bun. A Batido de Mamey quenches

The Frita Cubana started life as a popular street food served from carts in 1930s Cuba. It was brought to Miami in the 1960s and can be found at most Cuban eateries in the city.

the salt-induced thirst, the sweet fruit juiced into a creamy shake, before an intense cafecito – a strong Cuban coffee – dulls the

food coma and sends us on our way.

We fall straight into the arms of Josh Marcus – chef and owner of Josh's Deli, which is located in the sleepy northern Miami beachside town of Surfside.

Around 54% of Miami's population is Cuban-American. Little Havana even has a Walkway of the Stars, honouring Latin celebs such as Gloria Estefan and Celia Cruz.

The red carpet's out, the regal treatment continues. But this time, the warm-up's over: "My friends here are over from England, so we'll try one of everything," the BB says, his laughter booming around the small cafe. Queue a satisfied group groan as we tuck into double portions of Josh's classics:

ABOVE: Glimmering high-rises + yachts = standard Miami glitz. BELOW: Expect all-American beaches and bodies to match



potato latkes (small pancakes) topped with tuna and spicy Sriracha cream cheese, bread wedged with thick slabs of pastrami (and an extra bag to go "for my mom and dad," Sef tells us), homemade bagels and, to round it off, a mammoth pastrami frita burger – that's 10% bacon, 80% ground chuck, 10% pastrami chunks.

I feel fat, but we're not done just yet. Sinking into the sweet relief of Sef's air-conned 4x4, we roll through the Miami traffic to Wynwood, the Magic City's hipster art district. At the side of a thoughtfully graffitied road waits Jefe's – one of Miami's many food trucks. "When you think about what a burger should be, this is it," Burger Beast tells me, giddy at the thought of us trying it. "It's the quintessential burger, and trying to stop at one bite is... difficult." He may be smiling, but it's no joke. Who could resist the super-soft bun and patties blanketed in gooey cheese? Ordering it 'Burger Beast-style' means there's no sign of salad, just small fried onions and lashings of owner Jack's secret sauce.

Tom's eyes start to glaze over, a sure sign that we're done for the day. Sef deposits us back in the hyperactive playground of South Beach where, de-robing to reveal bulging bellies, we stroll the talcum-white sand, gazing behind sunglasses at the showy parade of pecs and pert bums. So this is the Miami that Big Willie was raving about. Gone are the days of the city's 1950s reputation as a 'snowbird'

WE TUCK INTO THE PASTRAMI FRITA BURGER: 10% BACON, 80% GROUND CHUCK, 10% PASTRAMI

Photographs by (top left) Sean Pavone / Alamy; (right page) Hannah Summers



PLACE:
Jefe's food truck

ORDER:
Double Cheezer,
Burger Beast-style

BEST FOR:
A quick burger or
taco in Wynwood



PLACE:
Josh's Deli

ORDER:
Potato latkes with
tuna

BEST FOR:
Chilled out brunch in
sleepy Surfside



PLACE:
Marie's Delights
food truck

ORDER:
Apple pie cinnamon
rolls

BEST FOR:
Dessert at BB's fest



PLACE:
Proper Sausages

ORDER:
Dub sausage in a
Portuguese muffin

BEST FOR:
Breakfast, and a
serious beer selection



PLACE:
Karla Bakery

ORDER:
Cafe con leche
and tostada con
mantequilla

BEST FOR:
24-hour carbing



PLACE:
La Sandwicherie

ORDER:
Napoli in a croissant

BEST FOR:
Coffee, sandwiches
and salads just off the
beach



PLACE:
El Rey de las Fritas

ORDER:
Frita Cubana (it's the
best in town)

BEST FOR:
Cuban culture and
food in Little Havana



PLACE:
Cheeseburger Baby

ORDER:
Bacon cheeseburger
with mushrooms

BEST FOR:
Late night/early
morning cravings





settlement – the blue
rinse retirees are now
outnumbered by cavorting
twenty-somethings, all teeth,
tans and toned thighs.

There's hope for us yet. We attempt a
brisk walk along the water, where the sand
is peppered with colourful wooden lifeguard
huts, the paint fading in the dazzling Florida
sunshine. It's a half-arsed attempt at some
cardio before the city's bars inevitably
take hold of us. At hut 14 (that's 14th
Avenue), the beach
is flanked by pastel
Art Deco buildings,
neon hotel signs,
bars and volleyball
courts showcasing
energetic locals slick
with sweat. We flirt
with the prospect of
an outdoor gym session, but happy hour
beckons; super-strong margaritas come in
goblets the size of a football.

The Beast's wake-up call is eager and
early – there's some ground to cover. It
starts with breakfast at Proper Sausages, a

*Portuguese muffins
differ from English
muffins by being
sweeter and larger,
making them great
for burgers (you find
lots of Portuguese
muffin burgers in
NYC's East Village).*

neighbourhood institution and essentially
a butcher's shop that serves blinding
sandwiches, where people queue for
kilograms of meat to take away and also
leave with a snack for the road. Ours is a
spicy pork patty, with oozy cheese and a
fried egg squished into a **Portuguese muffin**,
which we munch in Burger Beast's car while
James – the Beast's favourite British band –
sing about getting laid.

That's when things start to get serious.
“I want you guys to meet my parents,” Sef
announces, and it's on to the parking lot of
the Magic City Casino, where every month
the Burger Beast holds the Wheelin' Dealin'
Street Food Festival. It's Miami proper – no
tourists, no tans – just food-loving families
enjoying the city's best food trucks on a
Saturday night. Sef's mum, dad, wife, friend,
cousin, niece, nephew, neighbour and dog
gather around our table, each insisting we
try a bit of their meal. It's a feast ranging
from zesty tacos to foot-long hotdogs,
and finishing with doughy, generously
iced apple pie cinnamon rolls “made
especially for your visit by my
neighbour,” Sef tells me with a grin. ▲

Experiences

MIAMI



EAT THIS

LA SANDWICHES

Trendy off-beach café
with giant baguettes and
croissants stuffed with cheese,
meat and tropical fruit.

229 14th St, South Beach and 34
SW 8th St; lasandwicherie.com

WHEELIN' DEALIN' STREET FOOD FESTIVAL

The variety at WDSFF is huge,
but save room for the cinnamon
rolls at Marlie's Delights.

Magic City Casino; 3rd Sat of every
month; burgerbeast.com

MEAT

Out in Boca Raton, MEAT's a bit of
a drive, but it's worth the effort for
the Wisconsin beer cheese soup
and Juicy Lucy burger.

980 North Federal H'way;
meateateryboca.com



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For more information visit grandamericanadventures.com or call 0333 003 8231.



ABOVE: The view at night from the man-made Brickell Key to Miami's Brickell neighborhood, south of the Downtown area

With our waistbands finally threatening to snap, the Beast and his family send us off to experience Miami's famously hedonistic nightlife. Glitzy bars and gold Lamborghinis define **Ocean Drive**, but we prefer Washington Avenue, or "dirty Miami", as the glamorous bikini bods tell us. Clubs and bars line the street, and the neon signs contain fewer five-star hotel names, and more of the 'naughty girls enter here' kind.


The queue outside one particular bar winds its way along the pavement, under a rainbow flag that sways in the balmy heat. It's Twist – Miami's longest-standing gay club – and thanks to our "cute" English accents, we're soon ushered inside to rooms crammed with up-for-it guys and a smattering of girls dragged along for the drama. We ping-pong our way around seven bars playing salsa, pop and EDM before finally settling on the vibes of the Bungalow Bar, where hip hop blares out, testosterone smacks

us in the face, and the heady combination of creatine-inflated muscles, tequila and 'pay for gay' erotic dancers turns Tom weak at the knees. Propped up at the bar, we spend hours ogling the Cuban gods' smooth chests and clenched bum cheeks, vaguely concealed by the skimpiest of boxers.

With all these glorious taut and toned abs, it's impossible to not think about my own stomach, and the Beast's earlier words echo in my ears: "Go to Cheeseburger Baby at the end of your night, it's one of the best burgers in Miami."

Slouching on stools inside the verging-on-dingy joint, our evening's finale comes

ROOMS ARE CRAMMED WITH UP-FOR-IT GUYS AND A SMATTERING OF GIRLS

at 5am when we select our patty size, toppings and sauce, and wait for our parcels to arrive. Tearing open the paper reveals a glistening mound of delicious, salty meat and bread, so damn good that we can't resist ordering another. "Burger Beast," we slur, bumping burgers mid-air, "this one's for you." 

See more of Burger Beast's recommendations at burgerbeast.com; Hannah Summers writes a blog about burgers and, er, Bruce Springsteen at burgersandbruce.com

GETTING THERE

British Airways (0844 493 0787, ba.com) offers sale fares to Miami from £462 return.