

Traveling with Jewish Taste®

Miami: 'Little Israel'

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



With palm trees standing sentry along the avenues, the visitor to Miami enjoys an evening stroll in air heavy with the perfume of bougainvillea and oleander. The residential areas of "The Magic City" are so quiet that the walker can hear her footfalls.

Move a few miles to South Beach and the scene is noisy, sophisticated, and boisterous, a place to see and be seen.

Miami, aka "Little Cuba" and "Gateway to the Americas" is the fourth largest urbanized area in the United States, behind only New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. And, with a census of over one-half million Jews, a full ten-percent of this city's population is Jewish – the source of yet another of Miami's nicknames, "Little Israel."

Located on a broad plain between the Everglades to the west, and Biscayne Bay to the east, Miami Beach has attracted millions of tourists in the not-quite-100 years since it was incorporated. With an average January temperature hovering around sixty-seven degrees, and no record of any snow accumulation ever, its tropical climate makes it the ideal destination for heat-seeking Northerners every winter.

I have fond childhood memories of visiting my Bubbie in Miami Beach and reveling in the warmth and salt-tinged air.

At that time she rented an apartment in South Beach, home to retired folks on fixed incomes – like Bubbie, and her pinochle playing cohorts.

They originally began congregating here in small apartment buildings and Art Deco hotels because anti-Semitic developers, such as Henry Flagler and Carl Fisher, refused to sell land to Jews "north of Fifth Street" – and Jews were also refused service at hotels and restaurants, and denied membership in country clubs.

Thus, the area known as "SoFi" ("South of Fifth") – sold to Jews by developer brothers John and James Lummus – became home to the people and the many synagogues, restaurants, and Yiddish theaters that supported and entertained the Jewish community.

But, on a recent trip to South Florida, I saw but a whisper of the old apartment

buildings. Beginning in the 1980s, with an influx of fashion industry people, South Beach began evolving into the hip area it is today.

No longer a poor neighborhood with a high crime rate, today it is one of the

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'Art Basel Miami Beach,' the world's largest exhibition presents art for every taste



Lincoln Road, South Beach's premiere shopping area



Calm can be found in Holocaust Memorial Park

Floribbean Fish with Pepper-Papaya Jam

Believe it or not, one of the fish you may use was once known as the "Jewfish," making it an appropriate, if ironic, choice for this month's recipe. Luckily, the "Committee on Names of Fishes" (yes, there really is such a committee!) renamed it "Goliath Grouper" in 2001. Spicy pepper and sweet papaya balance each other nicely in this fish entrée that reflects its Florida and Caribbean heritage.



Ingredients

The Jam:

1 cup red bell pepper, diced
3/4 cup papaya, peeled and diced
1/2 teaspoon jalapeño pepper, chopped
1/4 cup water
2 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Dash salt
1/2 teaspoon fresh lime juice

1-1/2 tablespoons dry-roasted cashews, chopped
2 tablespoons flour
2 egg whites, lightly beaten
2 six ounce fillets of mild white fish, such as cod, haddock, tilapia, or grouper
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons butter
Lime wedges for garnish

The Fish:

1/4 cup panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)
2 tablespoons flaked sweetened coconut

Preparation:

Start by preparing the jam. Combine first 3 ingredients in a food processor; process until smooth. Combine water, sugar, red wine vinegar, and dash of salt in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook until sugar dissolves, stirring frequently. Reduce heat to medium. Add pureed bell pepper mixture; cook 7 minutes or until thickened and reduced to one-half cup, stirring frequently. Remove from heat; stir in lime juice. Cool.

Preheat oven to 350°.

Now, for the fish: Place the panko, coconut, and cashews in food processor; pulse until cashews are finely chopped. Place panko mixture in a shallow dish. Place flour in another shallow dish; place egg whites in another shallow dish. Sprinkle fillets with one-eighth teaspoon salt and black pepper. Dredge 1 fillet in flour. Dip fillet into egg whites; dredge in panko mixture, gently pressing coating onto fillet to adhere. Repeat procedure with remaining fillet, flour, egg whites, and panko mixture.

In a large oven proof pan that has been coated with vegetable spray, melt butter over medium-high heat, being careful not to burn. Add fillets; cook 2 minutes or until lightly browned on bottom. Turn fillets over. Place pan in oven; bake at 350° for 8 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Garnish with lime wedges and serve immediately with jam.

Serves 2

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wealthiest and most prosperous commercial areas on the beach, with high-rise apartment buildings and hotels. As for those beautiful Art Deco hotels, a citizens' group lobbied to preserve a one-square-mile area of them on South Beach; this sector is a gem now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Lincoln Road, one of the first pedestrian malls in the country, has also evolved. Back in the day we sampled such exotic fare as mango and papaya juice, certainly not featured in the A&P while I was growing up in Pittsfield. But, this time we drank iced Starbucks coffee. Always a destination, Lincoln Road is now considered South Beach's premiere shopping area, and is home to restaurants, night clubs, galleries, and boutiques.

If it is true that "living well is the best revenge," Jews became, despite the early hurdles, one of the most influential and philanthropic groups on Miami Beach.

Despite its Hollywood image as mere glitz, Miami is home to many theaters, museums, parks, and performing arts centers, including the Ziff Ballet, the Knight Concert Hall, the Carnival Studio Theater, the Peacock Rehearsal Studio, and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, home of the Florida Grand Opera.

Other performing arts venues include the New World Symphony House, the Actor's Playhouse, the Jackie Gleason Theater, and the Wertheim Performing Arts Center.

Miami plays host to many shows and events, including the annual "Miami Fashion Week," the "Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Miami," and "Art Basel Miami Beach" – the world's largest art exhibition, drawing thousands of collectors from across the globe.

Of particular interest to the Jewish visitor are the Jewish Museum of Florida and the Holocaust Memorial. The former's collections of documents, oral histories, and artifacts focus on the themes of immigration, family/synagogue/institutions, community relations, and Jewish contributions to the arts, culture, and commerce of Florida.

The Holocaust Memorial, opened in 1990, was developed by a small group of Holocaust survivors as a permanent memorial to the memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Architect and sculptor Kenneth Treister designed his interpretation of the Holocaust as both a structure and sculpture garden that combine memorial, solace, and education about the genocide of the Jews. The park is a peaceful and beautiful calm in the din of the city.

When it comes to dining out; you will find that Miami has a gastronomy all its own. A blend of flavors reflecting its multifaceted population has resulted in what is known as "Floribbean Cuisine."

Miami also has ethnic restaurants of every kind, from Italian to Thai to, of course, deli. And, virtually every one of these eateries has at least one kosher equivalent, so the kashrut-keeping visitor need never go hungry.

Dozens of kosher restaurants dot the Greater Miami landscape.



Ballet, a cultural focus in Miami



Miami's Holocaust Memorial presents sculptures in remembrance of the six million Jewish victims



Yesteryears' Art Deco architecture preserved



The influx of the fashion industry saw Miami become 'hip'

Carol Goodman Kaufman, an organizational psychologist and writer, is the author of Sins of Omission: The Jewish Community's Reaction to Domestic Violence (Westview Press, 2003). She serves on the National Board of Hadassah and chairs the Jewish Community Relations Council of Central Massachusetts. Kaufman divides her time between Worcester, West Stockbridge, and the world.

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South Beach, the place for sophisticates to 'be seen'

The PJ Library – Important Reminders!

"PJ Library" families, if you have changed your email address please notify Susan Frisch Lehrer, Coordinator of The PJ Library at (413) 442-4360, ext 14 or jfb.volunteer@verizon.net, so that you can continue to receive the 'Library's' periodic newsletter and other important information.

Berkshire County families with children ages 6 months through 8 years are eligible to receive free monthly Jewish books and CDs.

To join or to renew your subscription, contacts are welcomed as noted above.

Until the supply runs out, 2009-2010 Jewish Calendars, generously provided by Jonathan Denmark of the Berkshire Insurance Group, Inc., are available for pick-up at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, 196 South Street, Pittsfield, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.