

The New York Times

By MIREYA NAVARRO

After a tumultuous summer, Miami seems to be settling into a promising autumn. Crime — after the Versace murder and a manhunt that held the world's attention in July — appears to be under control, and last month voters defeated a proposal to essentially abolish Miami and merge it with Dade County.

Culturally, the city is as vibrant as usual. The Miami Ballet recently began its season with honors for its founding artistic director, Edward Villella, who this year received a national arts medal and Kennedy Center honors; next month brings the opening of "Drummin'," a work that blends artistic influences as diverse as this city itself.

The city and the beaches to the north suffered a jolt on July 15 with the murder of Gianni Versace in front of his Miami Beach mansion. Although Miami officials say the crime had no noticeable effect on tourism, Mr. Versace's Mediterranean Revival house on Ocean Drive, always an attraction, now seems to be an obligatory stop for tourists.

Over all, crime is down, including tourist robberies, which have decreased with such enforcement efforts as more police patrols at the airport and beaches, officials say.

Several miles to the south of the city, the 1.5 million-acre Everglades National Park is celebrating an anniversary. Before the park was dedicated by President Truman 50 years ago, opponents railed about "the alligator and snake swamp bill" that had created it. As the park, the first in the nation so designated for ecological importance rather than scenic grandeur, celebrates its anniversary Dec. 6, plans are being made for festivals on both coasts of South Florida, and a year-old visitors center has replaced the one destroyed by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

The center, about one hour south of Miami, has exhibits, videos and interactive presentations on subjects such as "Gators In Motion." Although much of the park can be seen only by boat or canoe, the 38-mile road from the visitor center to Flamingo Lodge, where most tours start, offers trails and points of interest that begin to give a sense of a wilderness once inaccessible to most. The parkland is now the target of a multimillion-dollar Federal plan to protect it from development.

Events

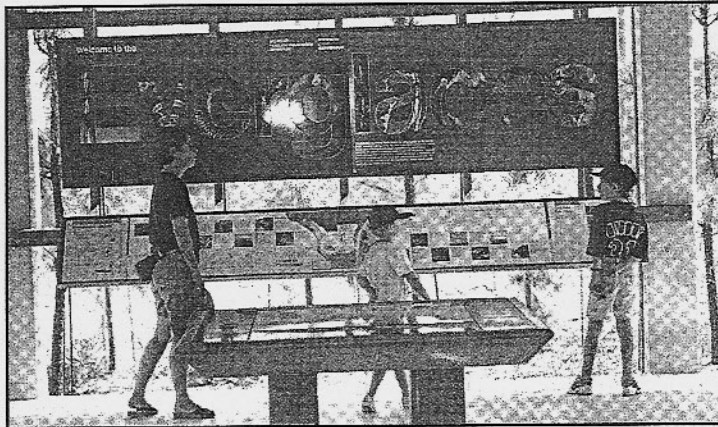
The Miami City Ballet performs at the Jackie Gleason Theater, 1700 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach. Performances include a company premiere of Balanchine's "Theme and Variations," Oct. 31 to Nov. 2, and a Balanchine-choreographed "Nutcracker," Dec. 26 to 30. Tickets are \$17 to \$55 for the repertory program and \$20 to \$60 for "The Nutcracker." Call (305) 532-7713.

"Drummin'," a Miami Light Project production that combines percussionists from Miami neighborhoods, symphony musicians, modern dancers and video images for "a rhythmical dialogue" to a score by Tania León, composer in residence of the New York Philharmonic, has its premiere engagement Nov. 7 to 9 at the Lincoln Theater, 541 Lincoln Road in Miami Beach. For tickets, \$20 to \$30, call (305) 531-3747. At a family matinee Nov. 8, children under 16 pay \$10.

A literary celebration takes place Nov. 16 to 23 at the annual Miami Book Fair International at the Wolfson Campus of Miami-Dade Community College, at 300 Northeast Second Avenue in downtown Miami. An outdoor street fair will include more than 200 exhibits by booksellers and publishers. About 250 authors, including Joyce Carol Oates, Jamaica Kincaid and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, will give lectures and sign books. Admission is free; for information, call (305) 531-3747.

MIREYA NAVARRO is Miami bureau chief of The Times.

WHAT'S DOING IN Miami



Murray Sill/Silver Image, for The New York Times

The Ernest F. Coe Visitors Center offers an introduction to Everglades National Park.



Len Kaufman

The Art Deco district of South Beach continues its rebirth.

mission, call (305) 237-3258.

The self-titled World's Largest Indoor Flea Market, Dec. 3 to 7, will bring more than 1,000 booths of new merchandise — from jewelry and crafts to electronics and bathroom fixtures — to the Miami Beach Convention Center, 1901 Convention Drive. It could be a one-stop Christmas-shopping spree. Admission: \$3.50, \$1 ages 6 to 12. A five-day pass is \$5; (305) 651-9530.

The Fairchild Tropical Garden, 10901 Old Cutler Road in Coral Gables, is a splendid 83-acre park with lakes, secluded paths and a showcase of exotic plants, including a large collection of palms and cycads. Its annual garden festival, with food and music, is Dec. 6 and 7 from 9 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. The \$8 admission is good both days; (305) 687-1651.

Sightseeing

A sunset tour of Florida Bay, a boat cruise of a mangrove forest and rentals of canoes, fishing skiffs and bicycles are some of the recreational possibilities at Everglades National Park, off Florida's Turnpike. The Ernest F. Coe Visitors Center is open 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. daily; (305) 242-7700. There is a \$10-a-car park admission.

The Flamingo Lodge and Marina is the departure point for the Florida Bay Cruise; \$10, \$5 for children. The Backcountry Cruise, a two-hour look at wildlife, is \$16, \$8 for children. Canoes rent for \$8 an hour, bicycles \$3, kayaks \$11 and skiffs \$22. Half-



and full-day rates are available; (941) 695-3101.

Miami Beach's Art Deco district continues its renaissance, as 1930's hotels are constantly being renovated in the historic neighborhood of South Beach. The Miami Design Preservation League offers walking tours every Thursday at 6:30 P.M. and every Saturday at 10:30 A.M. From the Art Deco Welcome Center

Vital Statistics

POPULATION (1996 estimate)

City 365,000
Metro area 2.1 million

WEATHER IN OCTOBER

High 83°
Low 72°
Days with rain 16

HOTEL

(Seasonal rate May 1 to Jan. 1)
Room for one with tax \$142.00

DINNER FOR ONE

With tax and tip but not drinks \$27.35

TAXI

Upon entry \$ 1.10
Each additional mile \$ 1.75
From the airport \$ 12.00

CAR RENTAL FOR A DAY

Midsized car with unlimited free mileage \$46.50

All figures except population and taxi fares are averages.

Sources: Runzheimer International, Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, Dade County Planning Department, Times Books World Weather Guide

rooms, most with kitchenettes, for \$65 to \$85 (after Dec. 16, \$89 to \$110) and eight two-story suites for up to six people for \$99 (\$145 in the winter). Continental breakfast is included; weekly and monthly rates; (800) 588-7918, fax (305) 868-3392.

Luxury: The Tides, 1220 Ocean Drive in Miami Beach, is the newest addition to Chris Blackwell's collection of hotel properties, including the Marlin and the Casa Grande. All 45 rooms in the 10-story renovated Art Deco hotel face the ocean across the street and are decorated in white and cream. Each room has a telescope, CD player and a television with VCR. There is a restaurant outdoors under umbrellas, and another inside adjoining the strikingly beautiful lobby. Rates: \$275 to \$375, \$425 to \$2,000 for suites and penthouses. Continental breakfast is included; (800) 888-7678, fax (305) 672-2881.

Another Art Deco landmark that reopened this year after extensive renovation is the 160-room National Hotel, 1677 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach. The small, cozy rooms have either Art Deco or tropical décor, in green and blue. The highlight at this beachfront hotel is a narrow 203-foot-long pool, which has made it a favorite for receptions. Until Dec. 19, \$200 to \$280; \$225 to \$345 after. Suites are \$490, \$570 in winter. A Continental breakfast buffet is included; (800) 327-8370, fax (305) 534-1426.

Where to Eat

The Forge Restaurant, at 432 41st Street in Miami Beach, offers a lovely outdoor garden or a more formal dining room with stained glass and a bustling bar. The menu is loaded with à la carte meats, like a 48-ounce porterhouse steak on the bone (\$66.95), and free-range Montana venison filets (\$23.95). Side dishes big enough for two include mashed sweet potatoes (\$4.95). The crab cakes (\$10.95) are highly recommended. Dinner for two with wine from a 3,000-bottle cellar costs about \$185; (305) 538-8533.

Los Ranchos, with locations in Miami's Bayside Marketplace, Coral Gables, Kendall, Sweetwater and the Falls shopping center in South Miami, features Nicaraguan cuisine. It is known for churrasco, a center-cut tenderloin charbroiled steak (\$15.99) and tres leches, a delicious spongecake soaked in three kinds of milk (\$3.25). It also offers meats and seafood, all served with gallo pinto rice (mixed with small red beans) and plantains. Dinner for two with wine is about \$50; (305) 375-8186.

Café Tu Tu Tu, at 3015 Grand Avenue, in the Coco Walk shopping mall in Coconut Grove, is a casual place where local artists' works are sold (the artists themselves are usually working in the restaurant). Dish-

come in small portions to be red tash style, and include a red tuna sashimi (\$7.25), shrimp a cayenne-pepper honey sauce r rice (\$7.95) and assorted pizzas, rolls, salads and Spanish appetizers. Four dishes with a bottle of wine t about \$50; (305) 529-2222.

The Courtyard Café at The Biltmore Hotel, 1200 Anastasia Avenue, in Coral Gables, serves a \$13 buffet ch Monday to Saturday in a beautiful setting. It includes salads, cold and pastas; diners can sit under brellas in the courtyard. (While he hotel take a peek at the sprawl-pool.) The buffet is \$6 with a full-entree (starting at \$12). A meal two with wine is about \$50. On day, the buffet becomes a brunch ravaganza for \$39 a person. Its 20 gas stations — including sushi, ta and seafood — and unlimited mpagne or Mimosas make it a good deal. Reservations recommended brunch; (305) 445-8066.

In Miami Beach, Pizza e via da Leo, 826 Lincoln Road, (not to be confused with Da Leo, restaurant across the street), has outside tables for people watching and thin-crust pizzas, pastas, hamburgers, sandwiches and grilled entrees. Dinner for two with a carafe of wine comes to about \$30; (305) 538-0803. ■



at 1001 Ocean Drive at 10th S The 90-minute tours cost \$10. N the Welcome Center this year recommended for those who t to set their own pace is a one self-guided audio tour of the d costing \$5, from 11 A.M. to 4 daily; (305) 672-2014.

Biscayne National Park, 45 utes south of Miami, is one of t aquatic national parks. As mu 95 percent of the 180,000-acre p underwater; the rest includ chain of islands between Bis Bay and the Atlantic. Enter a Southwest 328th Street in F stead; (305) 230-7275.

At the park, Biscayne Nation- derwater Park Inc. runs a three tour of the marine park, coral and tropical islands in southe- cayne Bay and the Atlantic on a \$3- foot glass-bottom boat daily at 10 A.M. Rates: \$19.95; children under 13, \$9.95; 65 and older \$17.95. Its scuba trips are \$55 (equipment rental is extra), and leave at 9 A.M. on weekdays, 8:30 A.M. on weekends. Snorkeling trips depart at 1:30 P.M. daily; \$27.95 with equipment. Canoes rent for \$8. Reservations are required; call (305) 230-1100.

Where to Stay

The 50-room Abbey Hotel, at 300 21st Street in Miami Beach, opened last February in all its 1940 Art Deco splendor. Doubles, decorated in pink and green and with marble bathroom floors, are \$125 to \$265, and include Continental breakfast in a whimsical lobby painted to resemble the sky. The hotel is across from the Bass Museum of Art, with 15th- to 17th-century paintings, and two blocks from the beach. Phone (888) 612-2239, fax (305) 672-1663.

coln Road pedestrian mall and the Jackie Gleason Theater. It offers 44 quiet rooms sparsely furnished in white, with queen beds. Doubles: \$135, with Continental breakfast; (305) 531-6588, fax (305) 531-4580.

A good option for families is the Pelican Creek Hotel at 6580 Indian Creek Drive in Miami Beach. Formerly a condominium, the hotel was renovated and now offers 46 spacious