

MIAMI BEACH CONVENTION CENTER

By: Peggy Benua

Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority Board Member



Miami Beach is an iconic brand for the domestic and international tourist. Our city enjoys a reputation as a unique tropical destination offering fun and sun along with urban amenities such as shopping, world class dining and entertainment. This combination affords Miami Beach a competitive advantage over many destinations both domestic and international.

In 2010 over 12.6 million visitors came to South Florida and generated over \$18.8 billion for our local economy. In Miami Beach, tourism generated \$36.6 million in resort tax. The average visitor stays over 6 nights, is 42.6 years old and spends about \$200 per day or \$1400 in expenditures during their visit. Tourism is Miami Beach's number one industry.

The Miami Beach Convention Center is a very important demand generator for area hotels and other businesses which rely on visitors and their spending power. The Convention Center is home to major annual shows such as the South Florida International Auto Show, Miami International Boat Show, and North America's most important contemporary art fair, Art Basel Miami Beach. Additionally, the facility hosts local and national corporate meetings of all sizes. In 2011, 30 meetings were held in the MBCC with an economic impact of over \$138 million.

The Miami Beach Convention Center enjoys a rich history. In 1964 Mohammed Ali defeated Sonny Liston to become the youngest world boxing champion in history. In 1968 and 1972 the city hosted the Republican National Convention and in 1972, the Democratic National Convention.

But the current condition of the Convention Center puts our competitive advantage as a destination at risk. Last renovated in 1989, the Miami Beach Convention Center has not kept up with other markets in terms of size and modernization. In the last six years, the facility has had over \$35 million in continuing upgrades; however, these improvements have not kept up with newer and larger convention centers in other markets. While still attractive to some meetings, other high end groups that have stated that they will not return until the center has been either modernized or expanded.

The local hotel community has been waiting 10 years for a Convention Center expansion since it was first suggested to add a ballroom to the existing facility. With the risk of losing more meetings accelerated by proposed projects across Biscayne Bay, the Center has gained additional focus and urgency; enthusiastically endorsed by local business leaders and hoteliers. The Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Miami and Beaches Hotel Association are working together to support an increase in the Miami Beach resort tax by 1%, solely dedicated to Convention Center improvements. This effort has been supported by the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Convention Center Advisory Board. These groups have requested that the Mayor and City of Miami Beach Commission approve this as a voter referendum to be included on the August 2012 ballot. Referred to the City of Miami Beach Finance Committee meeting scheduled for April 19th, it is their hope that this referendum will then be approved by the City Commission at the May 9th meeting. The resort tax increase, paid by tourists, not residents, is a critical part of the overall plan to renovate the existing convention center and protect tourism on Miami Beach.