

“Our Slice of Paradise”

By Jeff Lehman, Chairperson, Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority (MBVCA)



I love statistics. I enjoy comparing all of the places I have lived in my lifetime, which span from Papeete, Tahiti to Miami Beach (with many stops in between) and see how well they are faring. Yes, I am probably still trying to prove that 19 years ago, I made the right decision by finally settling down in Miami Beach. I think I did. As tough as times are across our country and around the world, Miami Beach has always proven to be resilient, engaging, and constantly recreating itself.

So about those statistics on our little island:

According to city-data.com, in 2009 our population was 88,065, and of those people,

Men represented 51.2% and Women 48.8%. Ethnically speaking, we were (no surprise) 49.8% Hispanic and 44.3% White non-Hispanic. 78.8% of our population has a High School Education or higher; 33.5% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher and 15.8% have a Graduate or Professional degree.

Unemployment, which was at a remarkably low level in 2006 (3.7%) is now (as of 2011) at 9.9%. We know that construction is slowly starting to creep up, and hospitality service jobs (especially restaurant jobs) are skyrocketing. Overall, we are faring as good as or better than much of the country. A resilient environment indeed. But are we secure that we are moving in the right direction, and keeping up with the worldwide competition for businesses, clients and talent?

Miami Beach is never without its drama. It is one of the things that keep us on everybody's minds. We are currently dealing with so many issues it is mind boggling: beach restoration, gambling, civic accountability, Memorial Day weekend, and the Convention Center to name a few. Billions of dollars on the table. Meanwhile, we are experiencing record tourism, hosting Polo on the Beach, new hotels such as SLS continue to open, and we are becoming well known for architectural significance (in addition to Art Deco) and creating a greener city (ridden a Deco Bike lately?)

The point is, we are, and if we are successful will continue to be, on the cutting edge of civic evolution. The MBVCA is committed to promoting this in all of our efforts – through significant dollars and oversight of the City of Miami Beach's PR campaigns, the development of 21st century technological advances to enhance the visitor experience and support the residential one, and to continue to re-invest millions of bed tax dollars in attracting, sourcing and motivating world class events that further identify us. If you don't agree with some of the things that the City is doing, then get involved! I am not referring to writing letters to the editor or even the commissioners. Roll up your sleeves and give this city some sweat equity like so many have done in the past 2 decades that I have been here, and for years before that, too. We're still a small, diverse city (note the statistics above) and all of us can have a hand in the direction that we are going, for the good of all.