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# TROPICAL LIFE

Posted on Sat, Sep. 09, 2006

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*First of a series*

## Where DO singles mingle? Some untraditional places to seek out Mr. or Ms. Right

BY JILL BAUER  
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As much as we all hate to admit it, our mothers are always right. When it comes to advice about meeting that special someone, my mom has often told me that "it's not the when, it's the who."

But if you are single and you live in South Florida, the first thing you ask yourself is not "When?" or "Who?" It's "Where?" Where's the best place to meet that better half?

Before setting out to explore all the options in the Magic City and environs, we called Ian Kerner, renowned sex therapist and the author of several books on relationships including *Be Honest -- You're Not That Into Him Either*. A regular contributor to *Cosmopolitan* and *Maxim* magazines and host of a weekly Sirius



PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**HOT SALSA:** Odalys Perez and Sergio Velazquez check out Yuca Lounge, where salsa lessons are offered on Friday nights.

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Network call-in radio show on relationships, Kerner is someone we knew would have some answers.

"My advice for meeting someone is stop focusing on dating per se and start thinking of ways that you can develop your sense of self. Take classes, go to wine tastings, go to places where you can start a conversation that's not reduced to a pickup line," says Kerner.

"Make yourself as busy as possible so you almost have no time for dating. When people are doing things to develop themselves they are taken into new venues and are re-energized and ultimately we are attracted to people who are energetic and vital and who are expanding themselves.

"I meet so many daters who are stuck in a rut. Don't put yourself into situations where you are looking. Put yourself into situations where you can just start conversations," Kerner says.

And with that sage advice, we hit the road looking for fun in all the right places. And we found it. All over South Florida.

Here are some atypical yet exceedingly obvious places where single people, men and women, gay and straight, hang out just to enjoy themselves. Places that require little effort and yield some sort of payoff -- even if Mr. or Ms. Right doesn't immediately appear.

Of course, this list is just a beginning and is certainly not finite.

For that, dear reader, we rely on your feedback and suggestions.

**HAVE A HAMMER?**

Debbie Mandel, author of *Turn On Your Inner Light: Fitness for Body, Mind and Soul*, explains the appeal of meeting at The Home Depot: "Men are looking for self-reliant women who can fix things and take some of the responsibility off them."

She adds, "Some weddings have been celebrated at the Home Depot where the couple originally met." Home Depot spokeswoman Sheriee Bowman confirmed this: "One Indiana couple wed this year in the parking lot of our Fort Wayne store in the exact two parking spaces where they met."

We visited a Home Depot on a recent Saturday afternoon and spoke to several single customers, including 40-year-old Wolfgang Arias, a reference trade manager at Barnes & Noble who lives in Miami Shores.

"I take salsa lessons to meet women," he said, "but I come here all the time and it would be nice to meet a woman at Home Depot."

If you've run out of home improvement tasks and need an excuse to be there, check out the website ([www.homedepot.com](http://www.homedepot.com)) for weekend do-it-yourself clinic schedules.

**THE WRITE ONE**

There is literally -- and literarily -- something for everyone at Books & Books' three South

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Florida stories. We highly recommend stopping by for free live music on Friday nights in the courtyard of the Coral Gables store and Wednesday nights at the Lincoln Road location in Miami Beach. "When you're meeting someone in a bookstore it allows for a conversation to go in directions where you can learn a lot about each other. It's a conversation about the world of ideas," said Books & Books owner Mitchell Kaplan. "I remember a while back there was some chick lit author speaking at the store and like 45 women showed up and only two guys. The guys were there because they knew it'd be an event attended by women."

For a list of events, visit [www.booksandbooks.com](http://www.booksandbooks.com) or call 305-442-4408.

Too far to drive?

Word has it that the bookstore to frequent in Broward County is the Barnes & Noble at 2051 N. Federal Hwy. in Fort Lauderdale. Especially popular are Open Mike Poetry night, at 7:30 p.m. the second Monday of every month, and the Gay & Lesbian Reading Group at 7:30 p.m. the first Tuesday. "There's a lot of interaction here," says Barnes & Noble spokeswoman Helen LaForge. "This is a happening place." For information on events: 954-561-3732 or [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com).

### **GET FRESH**

Hey, they don't call it a supermarket for nothing. When we asked South Floridians about great meeting places, Publix was a unanimous favorite. And according to Publix spokeswoman Anne Hendrix, there is always something going on at one of the 240 stores, whether it's a wine tasting or a holiday festival.

"Also, don't forget Dolphins season," Hendrix said. "Sunday morning is the tailgater crowd and you can't miss them. They're all dressed up and are excited about the game and they have something to talk to each other about."

### **APPLE OF YOUR EYE**

Word -- or should we say, WordPerfect -- has it that the Apple Store is the new place to meet people. With daily workshops on everything from Podcasting to Getting Started on your Mac, the stores -- on Lincoln Road, at The Falls and in Aventura -- are drawing huge crowds.

We visited the Aventura store on a Sunday afternoon and the Lincoln Road store on a Friday night and both were bustling. People were definitely checking each other out -- and maybe even clicking. For workshop information: [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com).

### **ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT**

All levels of rowing are taught by the Miami Beach Rowing Club at the Ronald W. Shane Rowing Center, and there's an equal mix of male and female members. As Elaine Roden, the center's executive director said, "There's always flirting here. People are walking around half naked."

The center has events where men and women row together and club members often congregate for barbecues. In the fall the club is adding full moon kayaking tours. For information: [www.rowmiamibeach.com](http://www.rowmiamibeach.com) or 305-861-8876.

### **NETWORKING GROUPS**

Networking Groups such as YUPRO (Young Uprising Professionals Referral Organization) are popping up all over town. Although YUPRO, a group made up of young entrepreneurs, does not bill itself as a singles organization, 90 percent of its members are single.

We caught up with the participants at one of their recent gatherings at Lucky Strike bowling alley in Miami Beach -- yet another great place to strike up a conversation -- and found a well-rounded group of intelligent professionals, ages 27-38.

"Quality yields quality and there's an instant bond here. We're all professionals and we have a lot in common. And your married friends view the world differently," said YUPRO member Will Springer, a 34-year-old account executive.

Contact Rachelle Ginsberg at [rachelle@usacommercial-residential.com](mailto:rachelle@usacommercial-residential.com).

### **PUPPY LOVE**

Too long a paws between relationships? Maybe it's time to leash up Fido and stop by China Grill's Dogs Gone Wild event from 5 to 10 p.m. every Sunday. "Our entire patio is dog-friendly," said general manager Steven Haas. "There's a puppy lounge for those who don't want to eat dinner, and there's a puppy park where the dogs have a baby-sitter."

The Dogs Gone Wild for Singles event has gotten popular enough for the *Today Show* to tape recent festivities. Info: [www.chinagrillmgt.com](http://www.chinagrillmgt.com) or 305-534-2211. Address: 404 Washington Ave., Miami Beach.

### **HEAD OVER HEELS**

For those who think there aren't enough smarties in our midst, check out Miami's Mensa chapter, which boasts a membership of 300 and often schedules social gatherings. According to Mensa's national website, "there have been many marriages made at Mensa."

Chapter president Liz Hernandez said that people are welcome to attend up to three meetings before taking the IQ test. And lest you think Mensa doesn't attract a cool enough crowd, note that Geena Davis and Steve Martin are just two of Mensa's many famous members.

For a wild and crazy time -- and information on testing and social activities -- contact Bob Lessne at 305-271-0012 or check out [www.miami.us.mensa.org](http://www.miami.us.mensa.org) or [broward.us.mensa.org/](http://broward.us.mensa.org/)

### **CAN'T BE BEAT**

If you have to choose one place to be on a Friday night, try salsa lessons at Salsa Mia (at Yuca Lounge) on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach. With a relaxed lounge atmosphere and a welcoming staff, it's impossible not to feel at home here -- whether you have two left feet or can shake your bon-bon with abandon.

"I think this is fantastic," said 27-year-old Juan David who was there for first time. "I've been looking for an atmosphere like this. . . . Everybody's like a family. You can see and feel the energy."

You don't need to bring a partner, and gay participants can learn both the leader and follower role, says owner Susan Fisher. Information: [www.salsamia.com](http://www.salsamia.com) or 305-987-3033.

### HOT TICKET

Looking for a picture perfect romance? This combination movie theater-bar-pool hall-live music venue could be the place to find your very own matinee idol. Open since April, Cinebar at Sunrise Cinemas at Las Olas Riverfront is the only movie theater chain in Broward County that serves beer and wine that moviegoers can bring into the theater.

"A lot of single people congregate here on the weekends," said manager Mike Eder. "People sit around and listen to music and have a few drinks and it's a calmer atmosphere than going to clubs."

And listen up, Dolphins: Beginning Sept. 17 you can watch the game on the big screen in one of the 15 state-of-the-art auditoriums. The theater is at 300 SW First Ave., Fort Lauderdale. Information: 954-761-9400 or [www.sunrisecinemas.com](http://www.sunrisecinemas.com).

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