

BRIEFS

Tour guide, driver get into a fist fight

A group of sightseers in Singapore got an eyeful of an impromptu boxing match when their tour guide got into a fist fight with their bus driver outside a mall called the Peace Centre. According to the Straits Times, the 38-year-old female guide and the 58-year-old male driver came to blows after a disagreement about when and where to pick up passengers heading to Orchard Road, one of Asia's premier shopping and entertainment hubs. When the bus arrived at the mall not all of the tour party were ready, so the guide asked the driver to return later. He then reportedly uttered a "vulgarity." The tour guide grew upset and the pair exchanged heated words before breaking out into a fight on board the bus, the paper said. Two people were later transported to hospital. Police, who arrested the driver and the guide, confirmed they were investigating a case of affray.

New scholarship for female pilots

A British airline marked International Women's Day by operating an all-female crew on one of its flights. Thomas Cook Airlines said the captain, first officer and seven crew on a recent flight on an A321 aircraft from Manchester to Gran Canaria, with 212 passengers on board, were all women. The Manchester-based carrier has also announced a new scholarship aimed at encouraging women to become pilots. Named in honour of French national Elise Raymonde de Laroche, who in 1910 became the first woman to receive a pilot's licence, the \$47,000 scholarship will see successful applicants trained at the Thomas Cook cadet pilot program in conjunction with Spanish aviation academy FTEJerez. "We want to raise awareness of the many opportunities to build a career and encourage more women into the aviation industry," said Paul Hutchings, U.K. managing director at Thomas Cook Airlines. The scholarship will run every year for the next five years.

Great Light joins Titanic offerings

The Northern Ireland capital of Belfast, which gave the world the ill-fated passenger liner RMS Titanic, is shining a new light on its shipbuilding heritage with the unveiling of an "exceptionally rare" beacon. The lenses in the 10-tonne, 130-year-old Great Light are said to produce "one of the strongest lighthouse beams ever to shine," according to the Titanic Foundation, which called the structure a unique heritage object. The Great Light — which was in operation from roughly 1887 to 2014 — and a new 500-metre Titanic Walkway on Victoria Wharf are two of the latest features unveiled at Belfast's 185-acre (75-hectare) Titanic Quarter, one of Europe's largest waterfront rejuvenation projects. The Quarter encompasses the Harland and Wolff yards, where the Titanic was designed and built, as well as a 120-bed Titanic Hotel. Three other hotels are in the works. The Titanic sank on its maiden voyage in 1912 after striking an iceberg in the North Atlantic, with the loss of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

Compiled by Andre Ramshaw, Postmedia News



The Regal Princess boasts plenty of activities and amenities children and adults will enjoy while they sail the Caribbean. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

TAKING A CRUISE WITH KIDS NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL

Caribbean tour with plenty of beach stops impresses

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach is stunning. A perfect stretch of powder-soft white sand, fringed by shallow turquoise water. From my lounge at the Royal Palms Beach Club — a pay per day, private beachfront restaurant and bar — I watch my daughter swim in the impossibly calm Caribbean Sea.

With not a wave or ripple in sight, it's as if she's playing in the world's most beautiful infinity pool. Discovering my all-time favourite beach will make it difficult to return to the ship, but such is the life of a cruiser. Tomorrow, we'll wake up to new adventures in Cozumel, Mexico.

If I'm honest, cruising with our five-year-old wasn't my first vacation choice. We're a well-travelled, foodie-focused family of three who prefer beachfront resorts with well-appointed rooms and extensive amenities.

In my inexperienced opinion, a cruise simply would not meet our needs. However, after embarking on a seven-day Western Caribbean voyage aboard the Regal Princess, I've changed my mind — with a few caveats, of course.

When cruising with children you need to choose your destinations wisely. Our kiddo is all about the surf and sand, so a port-heavy beach itinerary, with only three days at sea, was ideal.

It's a unique experience to wake up and explore a new country each day. For us, this was definitely a highlight. Princess offers a wide selection of shore excursions at every port — from immersive cultural experiences and high-adrenalin adventure activities, to laid-back beach parties.

You can purchase on-board; however, the more popular excursions should be booked in advance of sailing as they sell out quickly. We learned this the hard way and missed out on a beach day in Jamaica. Rather than go it alone by taxi, we joined a cool, chef-guided culinary tour that included a rum tasting and jerk cooking demonstration. Given the excursion wasn't suitable for kids, we left our daughter on board at Camp Discovery, which is a handy option for parents wanting to experience adult-oriented activities.

The Camp Discovery children's camp (ages three through 12) was, by far, our little one's favourite part of the cruise. On sailing days, the camp transforms into Discovery at Sea and features games and activities inspired by Shark Week and Animal Planet. Port destinations are also incorporated, which for our voyage included a Mexican Fiesta night.

Programming runs from 9 a.m. through 10 p.m. daily — closing for two hours over lunch and dinner. Extended late-night, in-camp

babysitting can also be reserved for just \$5 per hour, per child. While our daughter happily crafted, learned about marine life and played with her new shipmate buddies, we explored the Regal Princess's amenities.

My top child-free indulgence was the BIOTEC Radiance Renew facial at the Lotus Spa. At US\$169, the 50-minute treatment is in line with resort pricing, however, if you wait and reserve a service on port days when it's quieter on board, the spa always has discounted packages on offer.

For lower priced pampering, book in at The Sanctuary — an al fresco adults-only oasis on the top deck of the ship. Here, while lazing on comfy plush sunbeds, we enjoyed healthy meals and refreshments, excellent service and panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea.

At just US\$20 for a half-day pass, The Sanctuary is well worth the price. Tip: book an afternoon time slot to take part in a delicious high tea on the sea.

While the standard ship dining was good, we preferred the more intimate meals served in Regal Princess's two specialty restau-

rants. In the Tuscany-inspired Sabatini's, the cow's milk burrata with golden beets, mint basil vinaigrette and toasted hazelnuts, and the handmade buckwheat wide ribbon pasta with braised beef cheek are outstanding.

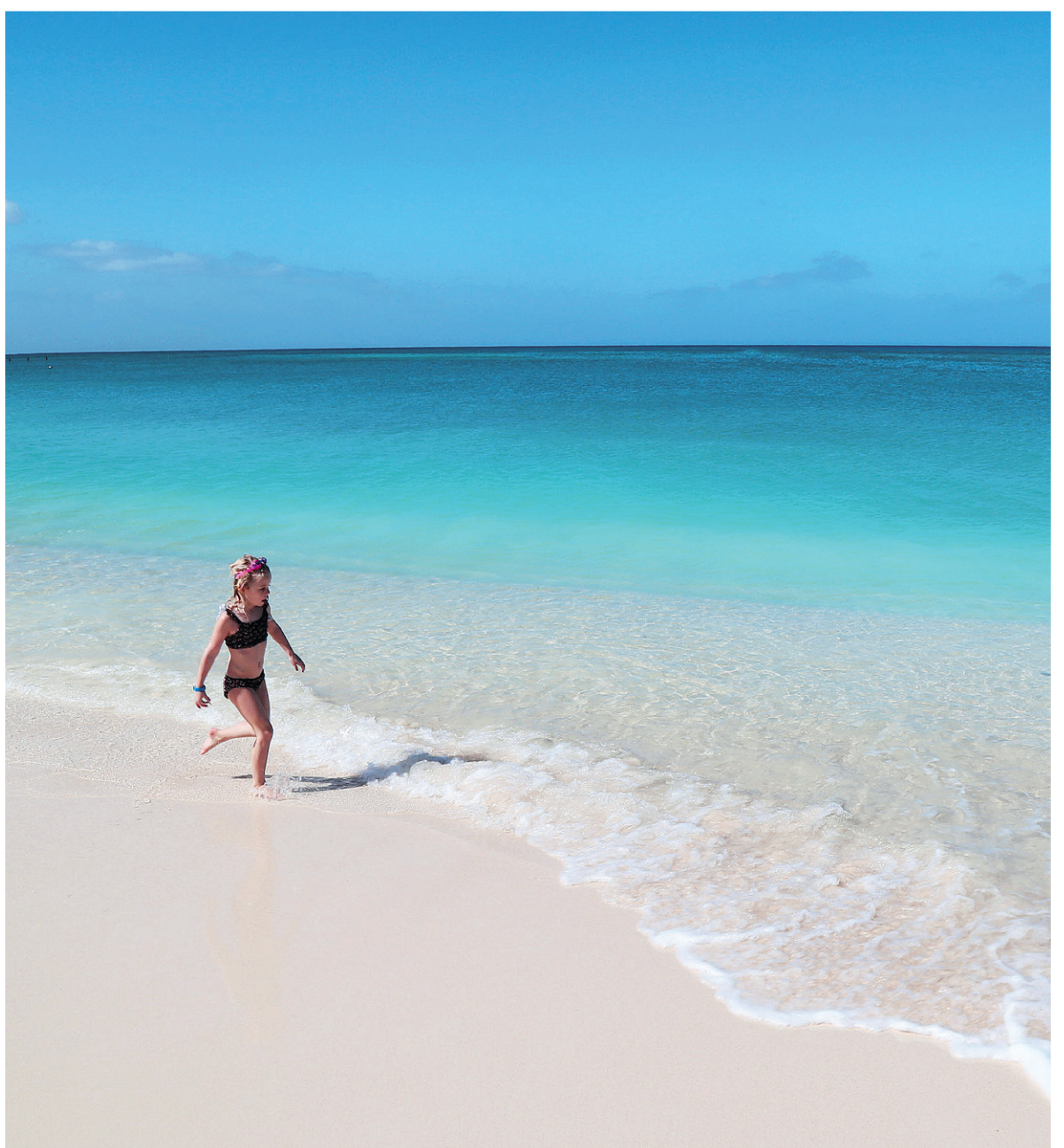
However, it is the black and blue onion soup with Jack Daniels and a Roquefort crust, and the bone-in rib-eye at the Crown Grill that my husband still raves about. Although children are welcome at both restaurants, given the surcharge of \$25-\$29 per person, we reserved tables on the nights our child was booked into the Discovery Club.

It's also impossible to be bored on a cruise ship. From exercise classes, dance lessons and poolside entertainment, to culinary demonstrations, comedy shows, lounge singers and movies under the stars, you'll always find something unique to occupy your time.

We really enjoyed our first cruise, and the ability it gave us to easily explore multiple destinations over a short period of time. This, coupled with the many child-friendly amenities that our daughter loved, makes it very likely that we will set sail again.

IF YOU GO

What surprised me most about the cruise was the efficient use of space in our cabin. We booked a mini-suite, which included a single pullout suitable for a child, and although the cabin is much smaller than a standard hotel room we never felt cramped. For families who spend more time in their room, due to earlier bedtimes and napping schedules, I recommend a balcony cabin at a minimum. Even if you don't use the outdoor space often (we didn't), you'll enjoy a more open feel. Budget for excursions and, if you're a foodie, factor in on-board spending at the restaurants and lounges. As with most cruise lines, alcohol is not included on the ship, and while beverage packages can be purchased for unlimited coffees, wine, beer and cocktails, we found it more economical to order by the glass. Bring bottled water and toys or busy books for your children to play with during embarkation, disembarkation and tendering. We spent a fair bit of time "waiting" and this helped ease the boredom for our daughter. For more destination information, visit www.arrivalstravel.com



The writer's daughter enjoyed the picture-perfect Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman.