

BRIEFS



DIY tourist signs face axe

An amateur scientist who has displayed handmade tourist signs at "Sweden's Stonehenge" for the past 20 years has been told to pull up stakes. Since 1997, self-described archaeo-astronomer Bob Lind has been putting up placards detailing his theory of the origins of Ales Stenar, a hilltop megalithic monument of 59 stone blocks in southern Sweden. He believes the stones represent a sophisticated solar calendar from the Bronze Age, but official Swedish heritage board signs state the stones, in the shape of a ship, are part of a Viking burial dating between 600 and 1000 AD. Lind said his theories have led to a significant rise in tourism at Ales Stenar, and he hopes he can work out a deal to keep his boards in place.

Cruise line vows an end to plastics

Norwegian cruise operator Hurtigruten has joined the growing crusade against plastic straws. The 125-year-old company has announced it is banning single-use plastics — everything from coffee lids to drink mixers to straws — as of July 2, with the goal of becoming the world's first plastic-free cruise liner fleet. "There is a lot of talk about the impact plastic has on our oceans. But it's time to take action," Hurtigruten chief executive Daniel Skjeldam said.

Airline warns of sunscreen peril to coral

Vacationers know better than to leave home without sunscreen, but now a U.S. airline is warning tourists that the lotions can have dangerous side-effects. Hawaiian Airlines has joined a campaign to educate visitors about the potential harm sunscreen can do to marine life. The carrier has been screening a documentary entitled Reefs at Risk, and crew members have handed out a chemical-free sunscreen alternative called Raw Elements that claims to be safe for marine life. The National Ocean Service in the U.S. has reported that oxybenzone, an active ingredient in most skin-care products, is "highly toxic" to juvenile corals and other marine life, the L.A. Times said. *Andre Ramshaw, Postmedia News*

PALM BEACH BEYOND THE SAND AND SURF

Family-friendly adventures abound in this south Florida enclave

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Arriving into Palm Beach, we could hardly wait to feel the warm, powder-perfect sand beneath our toes. I envisioned leisurely morning beachcombing sessions, followed by afternoons frolicking in the gentle waves. Pictures of ocean-front picnics, sandcastles and ice-cream cones on the beach would flood our social feeds. Although south Florida's weather and coastline were flawless for the duration of our trip, the pesky Atlantic just would not co-operate. So, what does one do on a beach vacation, if the ocean is too rough for swimming? The answer: explore every family-friendly, dryland adventure possible. Which we did, with gusto, and ended up having an absolute blast.

FLAGLER MUSEUM TOUR AND TEA

Our five-year-old loved touring the opulent 100,000-sq.-ft. Whitehall mansion, which was built in 1902 by oil tycoon Henry Flagler as a wedding present for his wife. Each of the 75 rooms in this iconic Palm Beach landmark has been exquisitely restored to reflect the home's original Gilded Age extravagance. The museum provides families with a fabulous self-guided activity book that encourages children to seek out unique artifacts, furnishings and design elements. We spent almost two hours exploring the lavish grand hall, library, ballroom, billiard, music, dining and drawing rooms, 12 guest bedrooms and master suite. It was only the lure of an elegant afternoon tea, complete with canapés, finger sandwiches, scones and berry lemonade, in the museum's Café des Beaux-Arts that convinced our kiddo to end the tour.

Insider tip: Visit the Flagler Museum Store for its beautiful selection of whimsical toys, games and giftware inspired by the Gilded Age.

PALM BEACH ZOO

Plan to spend a full day at the Palm Beach Zoo. This family-friendly haunt features educational shows, talks and animal feedings every half hour between 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. A parade of pink feathered, long-legged birds strutting their stuff at the 12:30 p.m. Flamingo Walk is just one of the highlights. In addition to enjoying the free programming, guests can register for paid behind-the-scenes animal experiences, including sloth, giant anteater and koala encounters. Feeding sweet potatoes to the zoo's three Aldabra tortoises was a magical moment for our family. After snack-time, we pampered the gentle giants with a bath and neck rub. It's hard to say who enjoyed our time together more. For lunch, the menu at the zoo's Tropics Café is a delicious surprise. If you like a bit of spice, try the blackened fish soft tacos, topped with coconut, pineapple coleslaw and Sriracha mayo.



Jr. vet in action at Loggerhead Marinelife Center. MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Another zoo-must for kids is playing in the interactive fountain. On-site changing rooms are available, so be sure to pack bathing suits, towels and sunscreen.

LOGGERHEAD MARINELIFE CENTER

Head to Juno Beach for a cool, up-close turtle encounter at the Loggerhead Marinelife Center (LMC) — a non-profit ocean conservation and turtle research and rehabilitation facility. Inside, you'll find exhibits showcasing the sea turtle species and coastal creatures native to south Florida. After learning all about leatherback, loggerhead, green, hawksbill and Kemp's ridley turtles, we ventured outside to meet the patients. Each year, the LMC names, treats and rehabilitates between 50 and 60 sea turtles, and on our visit, we counted upward of 25 patients recuperating in their private open-air saltwater tanks. The centre also offers a series of unique children's activities, like the Hatching Tales story time and Jr. Veterinarian Lab.

Our daughter was thrilled to don a white lab coat and weigh, measure, assess and treat her very own green sea turtle replica. The bonus? Most of the programming is included with your admission by donation.

If you're visiting around lunch or dinnertime, plan ahead and book a table at Guanabanas Restaurant in Jupiter Beach, located just 10 minutes from the LMC. With its tropical open-air concept, complete with woven tiki huts, live music and beautifully lit banyan trees, it's the perfect al fresco dining spot. Go for one of the fresh Florida seafood platters, like the tequila lime local catch. The portions are massive, so we shared a couple of starters, a main and dessert between our family of three.

SOUTH OCEAN BOULEVARD AND WORTH AVENUE

Cruise South Ocean Boulevard for the stunning water views and to gawk at the string of beachfront mega-mansions that fringe the coastline. As a month's rent for these sprawling vacation homes can surpass US\$100,000, it's a must-see while in Palm Beach. Inspired by our self-guided tour of the rich and famous, we popped by Worth Avenue to window-shop the luxury-brand boutiques and grab an early dinner at Costa Palm Beach, in the Esplanade shopping centre. Given its location, the menu prices are reasonable, and if you dine between 3-7 p.m. it will cost you even less. We ordered fresh, handcrafted cocktails and Mediterranean-inspired dishes, like calamari, mini falafel balls and jumbo shrimp cocktail with lemon harissa spiced cocktail sauce, from the Happy Hour menu. The food was delicious, and plenty filling for dinner.

DOWNTOWN AT THE GARDENS

For a kid-friendly shopping trip that won't break the bank, spend the evening at Downtown at the Gardens. My daughter — and husband — went crazy for the stores in this place. IT'SUGAR is like Disneyland for candy fans, albeit a nightmare for dentists and health-conscious mamas. That said, we enjoyed many belly laughs posing

IF YOU GO

November through April is considered peak season in Palm Beach, and you'll pay premium rates for accommodation. If possible, plan your trip for October or May to avoid the crowds and take advantage of temperate weather.

with ridiculously giant cereal boxes and Rice Krispies treats. Sloan's, a West Palm Beach ice cream shop, is another dreamy and decadent discovery. It's a shimmering pink wonderland bursting with house-made delights and cuddly stuffed toys, so leaving empty-handed is not an option. For dinner, grab an outside table at Grimaldi's Pizzeria. The brick-oven thin crust pizzas are exceptional — even though the owner has banned pineapple from the menu — and your kids can make and bake a doughy figurine while you wait. End the night with a ride on the old-fashioned wooden carousel.

TENNIS AND TROLLEYS

For tennis fans visiting in February, the Delray Beach Open offers superb value for families, as kids' tickets are half price. We attended 'Canada Day' for Denis Shapovalov's match, and there were a lot of little ones in attendance. Armed with a bucket of popcorn and large glass of ice cubes, our daughter happily munched her way through multiple sets.

After sitting for the better part of the afternoon, we returned to Palm Beach to ride the free hop-on-hop-off trolley and explore historic downtown. Park in the Hibiscus garage at CityPlace to start the 20-minute loop and jump off on the corner of Clematis and Narcissus Avenues for a leisurely stroll. End your adventure on the patio of Il Bellagio restaurant to watch the fountain show and, if you're lucky, catch some live music. As with most restaurants in Palm Beach, Il Bellagio's portions are huge and can easily be shared.

For more destination information visit www.arrivalstravel.com

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