

TravelLife



WINTER 2023

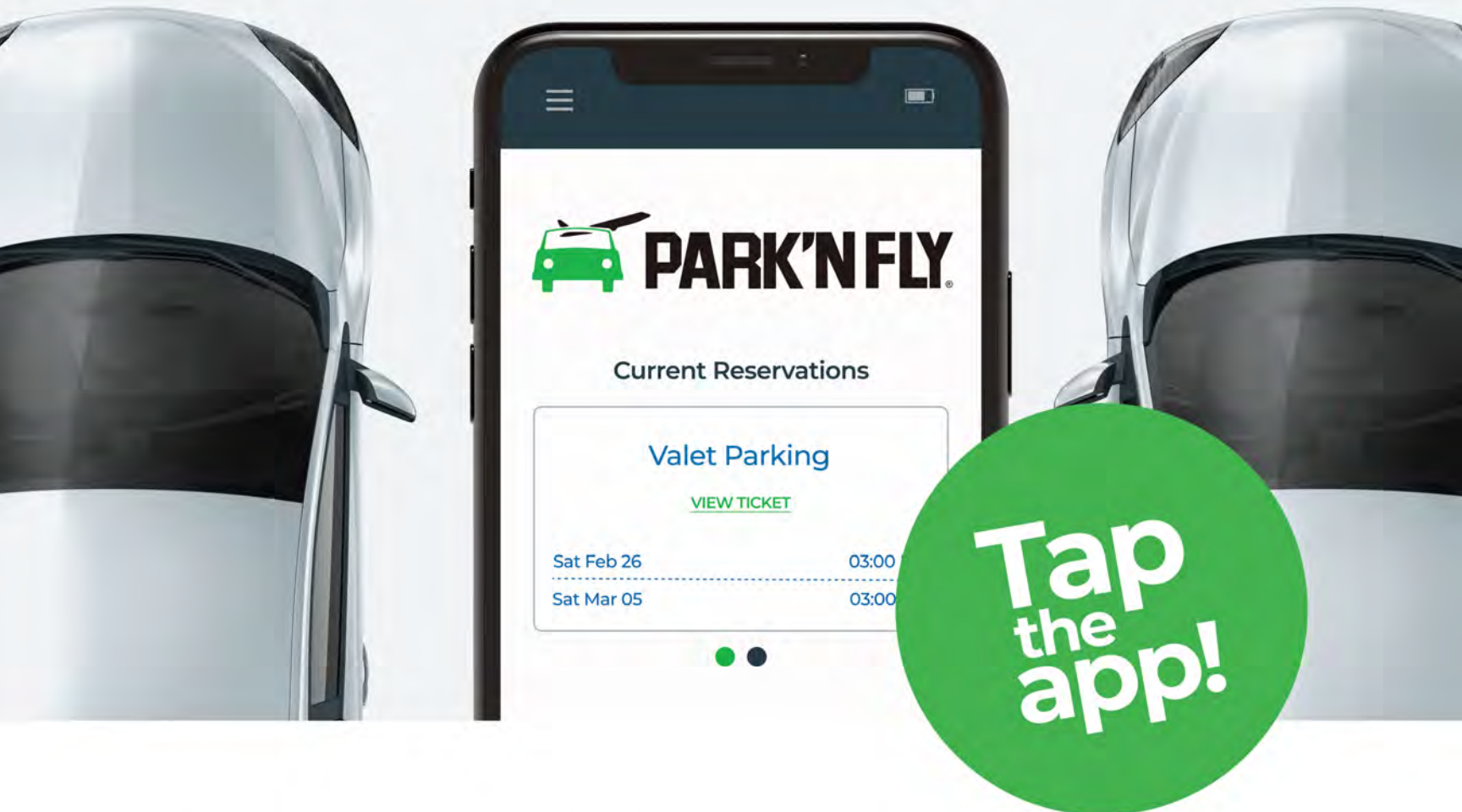
Delicious Detours

OUR CULINARY COLLECTION

Plus
Let's Go Florida!

SPECIAL ISSUE

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CONTRIBUTORS

We asked some of our contributors to tell us about a destination currently on their culinary bucket list and why.



KIM PEMBERTON

A CELEBRATION OF SEASONAL SEAFOOD IN HAWAII, Page 22

I still fondly recall one of my best meals ever was Japanese at Wakuda, by two-Michelin-star-awarded chef Tetsuya Wakuda, at The Venetian in Las Vegas. If I could go anywhere in 2024 for food it would be Japan, and specifically Kyoto, which boasts 203 Michelin-star restaurants. Fine dining is always a priority in my travels, but I'd also love to explore Kyoto's street food scene and wander through the 400-year-old Nishiki Market, with its hundreds of food stalls and shops. Being a pescatarian I'm all about fresh seafood and sushi. Here's hoping my culinary bucket list comes true.



DEBRA SMITH

EXPLORING THE MANY SIDES-AND TASTES-OF THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN, Page 20

I love a great dessert and I can't wait to try dango sweet rice dumplings, miso butter cookies, and dorayaki red bean pancakes in Japan. Matcha cream puffs from a vending machine are definitely on the list, and I may need to bring some Kit Kat bars home with me. I've heard that Japan has over 300 varieties to choose from.



DOUG WALLACE

KOOKIE KOOTENAYS, Page 52

Eating my way around places like Lyon, Quito, Chicago and Singapore has left me with a definite taste for international culinary travel. But this winter, I'm keeping it a little closer to home, excited to be making plans for a gastronomic adventure in Quebec. Being a meat-and-potatoes kind of guy at heart, I can't wait to dig into all the rich food, particularly the tourtière—protein and carbs all at once! I'll be a bit too early for sugar shack season, but I'll be back.

TravelLife



**Delicious Detours
and Let's Go Florida!**

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EDITOR'S LETTER



Endless dining options on the recent inauguration of Celebrity Ascent, including Eden Restaurant - such a culinary journey for the senses!

Some of my memorable food & drink moments this year

A feast of flavours in Tokyo



Infamous churros at El Moro, Mexico City



Learning the proper way to drink rum at Club Med Buccaneer's Creek

What's better than a rose truck? Fairmont Mayakoba



A Cosmo made by my daughter as bartender



Vikram Garg, a Hawaii-based restaurateur who—by a fascinating twist of fate—ended up cooking for those stranded in Newfoundland during 9/11. And since cooking is a way to connect with and learn about other destinations, we've got recipes galore, covering everything from creative cocktails to regional specialties spanning PEI to Barbados and beyond.

In addition, since we've officially entered Snowbird season, this issue features our annual Let's Go Florida! special feature, showcasing stories covering worthwhile stops in the Sunshine State. Even if you visit regularly, you might find one or two surprises about this Canadian favourite in our coverage of the natural beauty of Fort Myers, Hemingway's old stomping grounds of Key West, the dynamic duo

of Delray Beach and West Palm Beach, or the cultural, culinary and artistic mecca that is the diverse city of Miami.

When it comes to taking a deep dive into a totally new destination, I share my takeaways from a recent trip to Tokyo, which was my first time in Asia and served as an awakening to an exciting side of the world I will absolutely be revisiting as soon as I can. I also had the opportunity to see a side of the Caribbean that remains somewhat under the radar on a visit to Club Med Buccaneer's Creek in Martinique, which offered a different type of all-inclusive experience than I'm used to, but one that will stay with me thanks to the welcoming spirit of Club Med—and warm hearts of the locals.

Whether you're an avid foodie or a frequent traveller seeking new ways to experience a destination, this edition of *Travel Life* is an appetizing treat you won't want to miss!

Bon appétit and happy travels!

Tammy Cecco

TAMMY CECCO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

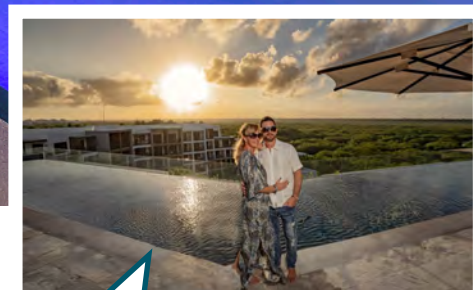


Celebrating with my hubby beachside with our favourite tamarind margarita

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Tammy Cecco, Travel Life's Editor In Chief

SAM CHAK

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ½ oz Diega Rosa gin
- ½ oz lemon juice
- ½ oz mashed fresh strawberries
- ¼ oz simple syrup
- 1 egg white

PREPARATION:

- Add all the ingredients to a shaker
- Shake for 15 seconds
- Add ice and shake again for 10 seconds before serving

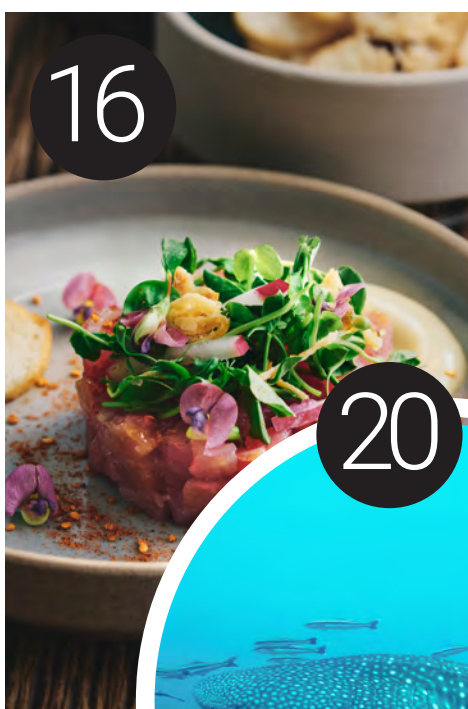
You'll love the Mayan-inspired mixology and panoramic views at Rūf, the rooftop bar at Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort. Take some of the experience home with you by making one of my favourite cocktails, the Sam Chak, which means "pink" in Mayan. The pretty beverage is a delicious mix of gin and strawberry with a hint of bitterness from rose petals and lavender. A perfect pairing for Rūf's spectacular sunsets.

VENTUS HA' 
AT MARINA EL CID

Spa & Beach Resort | Cancún Riviera Maya

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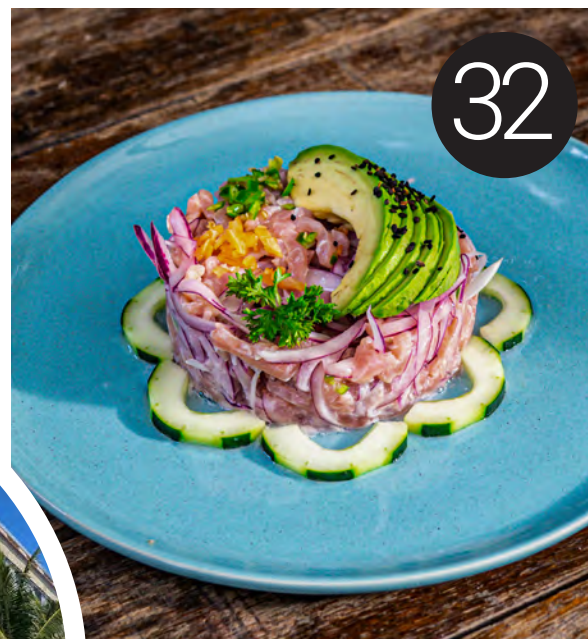
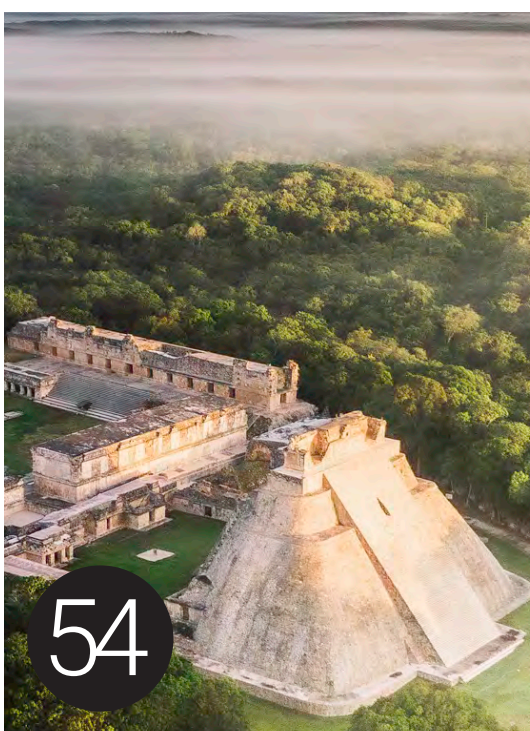


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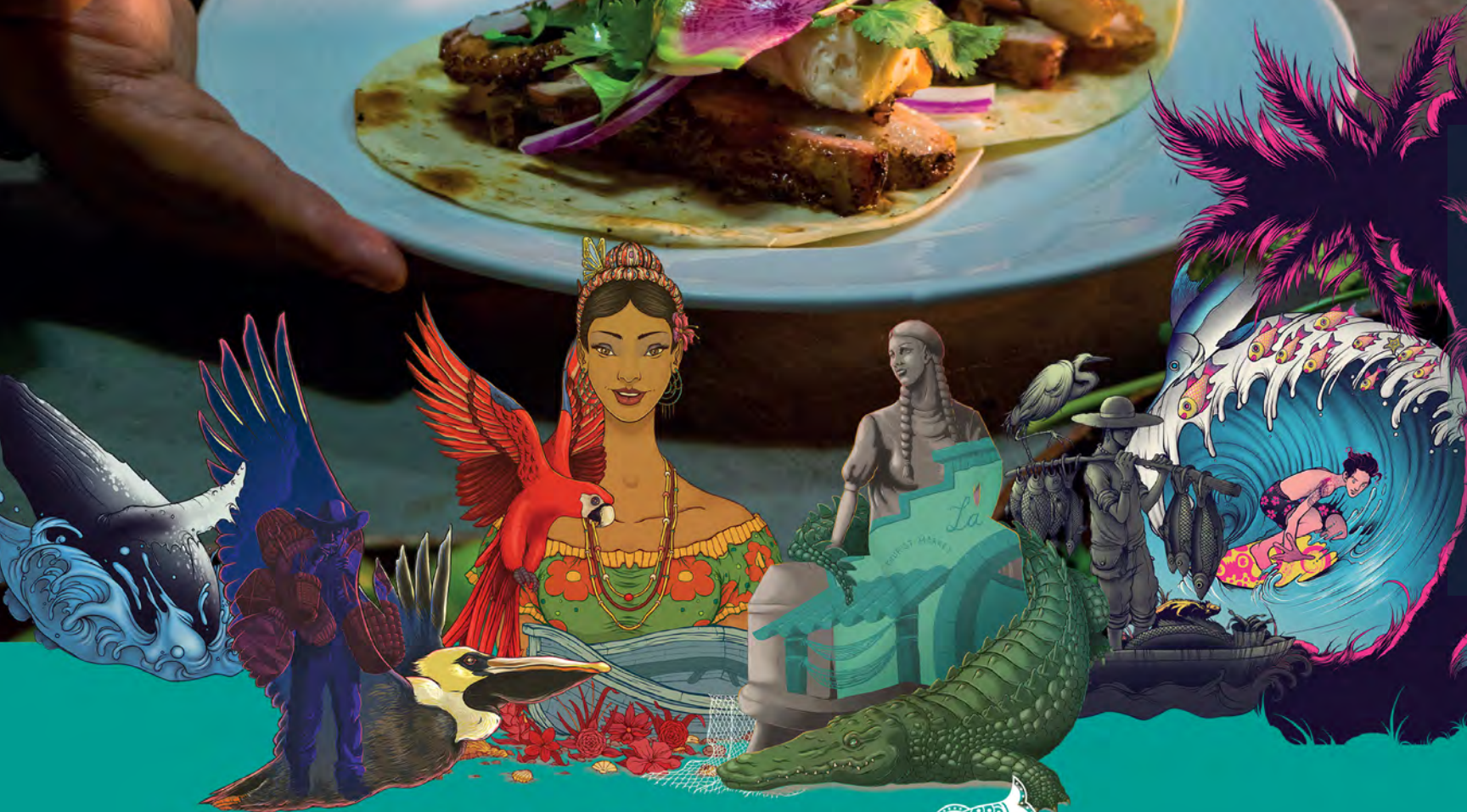
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MUST-HAVES

JOURNALS
STOCKING AND
TRAVEL MUST-HAVES

for Every Stocking and Carry-on

7 items that will easily—and effortlessly elevate your travel game—or someone else's

Whether you're packing for a trip or shopping for someone who always seems to have one planned, these items can go a long way towards elevating your experience—from the airport through to your destination.

HEALTHY, ON-THE-GO SNACKS

From protein-packed almonds to mouthwatering nut mixes, naturSource makes a great stocking stuffer for anyone on your list and they're also perfect for on-the-go snacking. Choose from a range of specialty nuts like maple praline and tamari almonds, or nut mixes in flavours like cinnamon crunch and hickory BBQ.

naturesource.com



COMPACT TRAVEL BAG

A genius foldable design makes the aptly named "foldie" the ultimate travel companion. The versatile bag offers ample storage when you need it (including an expandable bottom), but folds down when you don't. We suggest adding a matching crossbody bag. This one might not fit in your stocking but it is the perfect hold-all for every trip.

the-foldie.com

DELICIOUS GIFT CARD

With 69 locations and counting, Earl's gift cards are a useful stocking stuffer for loved ones coast to coast. We love that although it's one of the most successful family-owned independent restaurant groups, each location is unique. Be sure to check out the new Yorkville location where the décor includes walls filled with works by local artists. Elevate your dining experience with the decadent Northern Divine Caviar or one of the other upscale choices, and don't miss the Strawberry Smokeshow Margarita. Get a \$10 bonus card for every \$50 purchased. (bonus cards can be used Jan. 2- Feb 29th)

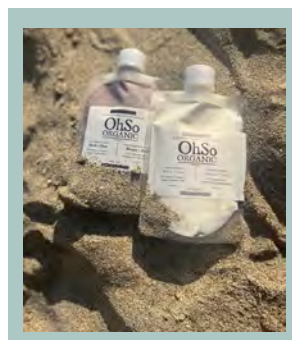
earls.ca



ANTI-AGING PILLOW

A good sleep is paramount whether you're at home or on the road, which requires a good pillow. The enVy Pillow does one better than that by boasting anti-aging properties thanks to advanced copper technology which kills germs while reducing wrinkles. The pillow also provides ergonomic neck and TMJ support. The best part is there's a travel version available that comes with a dreamy silk pillowcase.

envypillow.ca



MINERAL SUN BALM

Made from skin-soothing ingredients like organic olive and coconut oils, Tan on the Run's Block & Glow Mineral Sun Balm is a beach bag must-have. The balm boosts your glow while also protecting your skin from the sun. Choose from tinted or un-tinted.

tanontherun.com

STAY-SAFE DEVICE

Sisters Amy Ferber & Ali Peters founded She's A Birdie with safety top of mind. They work to create easy-to-use personal mobile safety alarms to help women stay safe no matter where they are. The birdie comes in a wide range of colours and easily fits in the palm of your hand. When activated the device emits a very loud noise and flashes like a strobe light to attract attention.

shesbirdie.com



KICKS THAT BREATHE

Having the right footwear can make or break a travel experience. The Geox Spherica sneaker is perfect for everything from running through any airport to marathon sightseeing sessions. Lightweight and easy to pack, these shoes have enhanced cushioning for optimal comfort and come in various colours and styles for men and women.

geox.com

LUGGAGE *FOR* EVERY TYPE *OF* TRAVELLER



► The fashion-forward flier

Fashionable fliers will love the SJP Capsule Collection, designed by none other than Sarah Jessica Parker. Each piece is chic and timeless—and sure to turn heads. The Convertible Shoeful Duffel can conveniently go from a classic duffel to a hands-free backpack, while the Carry-On Spinner and Large Expandable Spinner both feature SJP's signature scintillate sparkle detailing.



► The heavy packer

There are some people committed to carry-on only travel, while others prefer to pack as much as possible. For those in search of ample suitcase space, the Samsonite Freeform Spinner Large is a lightweight option, while the sleek and ultra-durable Outline Pro Spinner Large offers dual spinner wheels for extra smooth movement.



► Pet lovers

There's no need to leave your furry friend at home when you're on the go. Instead, your pet can travel in style with the help of the Lipault City Plume Pet Carrier. The lightweight bag offers enough space for a cat or small dog, three large mesh openings for ample airflow and when not in use, the bag folds flat for easy storage.



► Little Travellers

Make the packing process and trips through the airport more fun for little travellers with the help of Samsonite's Dream Rider Ride-on Suitcase, which allows kids to use the case as a fun ride-on toy. The cute yet practical case is available in four bright and cheerful animal-themed prints including tiger, leopard, puppy and cheetah.

Tasty TIDBITS

By Alison Kent

JOURNALS
TASTY TIDBITS

.....
Cooking tips, recipes and fun, foodie ideas for the festive season
.....



► CHRISTMAS SWEATER, OPTIONAL

Toronto's favourite holiday pop-up returns this season, running until December 22, courtesy of The Thirsty Elf in the Fairmont Royal York. Tucked within the iconic hotel, this Santa's North Pole-themed bar may be itty-bitty in size but delivers big on retro vibes, complete with reindeer mugs and kitschy décor. On the menu are seriously merry cocktails including the Christmoose S'more made with miso graham cracker syrup and toasted marshmallow.



► PARTY MIXERS

Brighten up your holiday table with an effervescent punch of ruby red that's as gorgeous as it is delicious. This adapted punch recipe features 1642 Tonic—the Quebec-based premium mixer featuring essences of spruce and lime with balanced notes of bitterness.

► WHEN IN...PARMA

Located in the historic city of Parma—Italy's renowned epicurean metropolis in Emilia-Romagna—Academia Barilla offers hands-on cooking classes for any type of food lover, from chef professionals to the culinarily curious. Learn tips for making your own fresh, stuffed pasta and techniques for creating authentic trofie pasta tossed with pesto.



► THIS PASTA, THAT SAUCE

And speaking of pasta, did you know that different sauces go best with different cuts?

- Heavy, cream-based sauces pair well with egg pasta, wide shapes and filled pasta
- Olive oil-based sauces pair well with long shapes and thin spaghetti
- Chunky sauces pair well with tube-shaped pasta
- Tomato-based sauces pair well with short and long pasta cuts



LE PETIT RENNE AU NEZ ROSE

(The Little Reindeer with the Pink Nose)

.....
Makes: About 16 servings
.....

750 mL (24 oz) hibiscus or rose-flavoured gin
4 dried hibiscus flowers
2 limes, thinly sliced into wheels
2 large sprigs rosemary
Juice of 1 lemon
1 cup cranberries
750 mL (3 cups) chilled 1642 Tonic
4 cups ice cubes

- Combine gin, flowers, rosemary, limes and lemon juice in a large punch bowl; let stand for 1 hour.
- When ready to serve, stir in the cranberries and ice. Pour in tonic.

TIPS:

Switch things up with another aromatic 1642 Tonic, such as Elderflower or Yuzu. You can also try using frozen cranberries to keep the punch colder for longer.

DELICIOUS DETOURS

Enjoy Delicious Detours, a collection of articles delving into the captivating world of culinary travel. We invite you to savour every recipe and story in the hopes that it will inspire you to embark on your own mouth-watering adventures. Food is an international language, after all, and has a way of uniting people and cultures like nothing else.



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Discover modern culinary art at Gaviotas, our Four Diamond by AAA Mexican restaurant where local and endemic ingredients are transformed with contemporary techniques.

Ensalada Floral

Gaviotas transforms local ingredients into masterpieces of Mexican cuisine, employing contemporary techniques that elevate each dish in new and exciting ways. An excellent example of this is the Floral Salad. Almost too pretty to eat, the dish features crisp lettuce along with refreshing watermelon, pineapple, papaya, and green apple dressed with a savoury olive oil and yogurt vinaigrette. Bursts of flavour from delicately prepared fruit caviar provide an unexpected twist, while the pièce de résistance lies in nitrogenated goat cheese, artfully presented to provide a sensory journey from the first to the last blissful bite.

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Paul's Creole Mussels in Smoky Cream *sauce*

Hands on time: 10 minutes

Total Time: 20 minutes

Makes: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tbsp salted butter
- 1 large shallot, minced
- 1 jalapeno, seeded and minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 2 tbsp quality tomato paste
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 1/2 tbsp cayenne pepper sauce (such as Franks)
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 4 lbs soaked and cleaned P.E.I. mussels
- 1 cup dry white wine (such as Sauvignon Blanc)
- 1 cup 35% whipping cream
- Chopped parsley
- Sliced green onion
- Fresh baguette, sliced

In large pot, over medium heat, melt butter. Add shallot, jalapeno, garlic, paprika, oregano, tomato paste, Worcestershire sauce, cayenne pepper sauce and salt. Cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add mussels; toss to coat. Add wine. Cover and steam for 4 minutes. Add cream, and continue to cook, uncovered, until mussels have opened and sauce has thickened enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes more. Discard any mussels that have not opened. Add parsley.

Serve along with sauce, topped with green onions and fresh bread for dipping.



CHEF PAUL LILLAKAS is the former food editor of Canadian Living magazine and a Chopped Canada champion. He's also a TV personality, private chef, writer and recipe developer. The Estonian-Canadian chef is a Cityline regular, offering tips, tricks and fun and unique recipes.

— Reconnecting with my — MARITIME ROOTS

DELICIOUS DETOURS
EVANGELINE INN

A recent trip to Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia was made even better with a visit to the newly renovated Evangeline Inn

BY TAMMY CECCO



Travelling back to my maritime roots this fall brought back a lot of great childhood memories. When I read about the Evangeline Inn recently going through renovations, I decided I had to visit. In grade school, I was part of a theatre production of *Evangeline*, a tale set against the backdrop of the expulsion of Acadians from Nova Scotia. The area of Grand Pré has always held special meaning for me.

Nestled in the heart of Nova Scotia's picturesque Annapolis Valley, the Evangeline Inn and its onsite restaurant Longfellow, offer a delightful retreat that marries modern comfort with the timeless charm of the Maritimes. As someone with a deep appreciation for the region, I really enjoyed the warm hospitality and exceptional culinary offerings of this hidden gem.

The next time I visit, I would opt to spend the night. The welcoming and cozy inn is the perfect balance between classic and contemporary and offers an ideal base for discovering the history of Grand Pré and the area's local attractions. Choose from five different room types in the main inn or if you are travelling with friends or family, The Owner's House is a

spacious five-bedroom unit ideal for girls' getaways, reunions, or family retreats. If you want to experience a bit more history, the accommodation provided in Borden House gives you a glimpse into the childhood home of the late Sir Robert Borden, former Prime Minister of Canada. Relics of the Borden-era home are blended with modern amenities throughout.

The highlight of my visit was lunch at Longfellow, the onsite restaurant. Offering a diverse menu that celebrates the region's bountiful seafood and produce, I found it difficult to make my selection and



couldn't resist sampling from the plates of my dining companions. The lobster tacos with generous portions of succulent lobster, queso fresco, salsa, guacamole and jalapeno crema nestled in warm, soft

tortillas were a fantastic appetizer. When combined with a salad or the decadent truffle dashi fries, it makes for a perfect meal. Portion sizes are ample but if you are really hungry, try the Smorgasbord Sandwich, an open-faced seafood feast of cold-water shrimp, cold-smoked salmon, fried oysters and avocado, drizzled with grapefruit aioli. Longfellow is renowned for their seafood chowder but that will have to wait until I plan my return visit! The dessert was no less impressive. Of course, being surrounded by orchards in the region, I had to have the apple pie



I really enjoyed the warm hospitality and exceptional culinary offerings of this hidden gem.

which was a delightful blend of sweet and tart topped with a scoop of homemade vanilla ice cream. This sweet treat, the attentive staff and the simple comfort of the location, all made for a memorable experience.

I always know I've made a good choice when I eat or stay somewhere the locals love—and this time was no exception. The Evangeline Inn and Longfellow Restaurant are definitely good reasons to visit the Annapolis Valley. ■

TheEvangeline.ca

Spa cuisine evolves beyond its

SALAD DAYS

by Chris Ryll



Thermea Spa

More than 30 years ago when I started visiting spas around the world, I eagerly anticipated the relaxing and rejuvenating spa treatments but dreaded spa menu offerings—often an unimaginative salad and water or tea. My taste buds were not impressed.

Cuisine was an afterthought for most spas. Salads and herbal teas ruled, but thankfully that's changed. People want a choice of palate-pleasing dishes as part of their spa experience.

Many spas are now social hubs for couples, families and friends to gather. Guests expect a range of cuisines, and yes even decadent desserts along with craft cocktails and beer gardens. Not everyone is looking to detox.

Wellness and delicious cuisine are a perfect mix at these leading resorts and day spas, from Sicily to Scottsdale.

ADLER Spa Resort Sicilia: *Siculiana, Sicily*

A healthy Mediterranean diet is easy at the luxurious ADLER Spa Resort located on Sicily's southwest coast. Indulge in Sicily's best taste sensations like traditional oven-baked pizza, pasta dishes and fresh seafood as you admire views of the Mediterranean Sea. The resort's own orto (vegetable garden) features heritage vegetables, aromatic herbs, edible flowers and Sicilian fruits. Local farms and the Torre Salsa Nature Reserve serve up your dose of meat. Start the day in your spa cabin with freshly squeezed orange juice from the orange groves at the resort. Sea air, pine forests, garden scents—this is a spa resort for the senses.


CIVANA: Scottsdale, Arizona

Choice rules at CIVANA. No frowns just smiles from staff if you choose a post-spa treatment margarita. No worries about going hungry here in the desert. CIVANA has your taste buds covered with



Adler Lodge Ritten

Healthy to adventurous, spas around the world have been raising the menu bar.



its two restaurants, Seed and Terras, reflecting the region's best cuisine. They offer everything from antioxidant bowls to Faroe Island seared salmon, zucchini enchiladas, elote corn ribs and avocado-infused Green Goddess smoothies to wash it down. Finish with a lemon olive oil cake. With more than 100 movement, personal growth and spiritual classes offered—from labyrinth walking to chakra meditation and desert hikes, the Sonoran Desert will calm you while you savour CIVANA's culinary delights.

Thermëa Spa Village: *Whitby, Ontario*

When Thermëa, just east of Toronto, opened in the Fall of 2022, chef Melissa Ross knew she would have to offer an eclectic menu that matched the area's ethnic diversity. Just as there are multiple saunas, thermal pools and steam rooms, there needed to be a plethora of food and beverage options. Mole chicken tacos, vegetable boards with red pepper hummus, steak tartare, pan-seared scallops and sumac Cornish hen are only a small sample of what this day spa tantalizes visitors with at three restaurants and a biergarten. Although located in an urban area, inside the spa

village is a calming oasis surrounded by trees, a pond and numerous relaxation areas. Have a sweet tooth? Try their flight of crème brûlée with lavender, lemon and cappuccino offerings. This spa hits all the sweet spots.

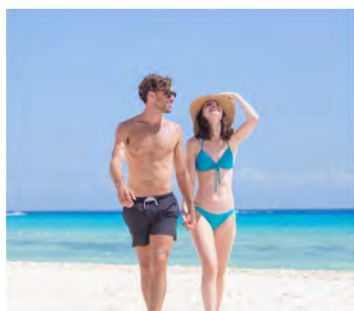
ADLER Lodge RITTEN: *Soprabolzano South Tyrol, Italy*

Mountain air and forest scents combine to make this a spectacular spa retreat in northern Italy with 20 private chalets and 20 suites. The South Tyrol area is renowned for its fresh and flavourful cuisine. Even Sigmund Freud was enchanted by this area. The lodge's farm produces its own organic grain which diners see transformed into homemade pasta and pastry dishes. The spa has several Thalasso treatments or try ADLER Spa's Hay Bath (featuring locally harvested medicinal herbs). Feast your eyes on the resort's relaxation areas overlooking the Dolomites then feast on the Wagyu and Chianina beef raised by local farmers at the resort restaurant. For lighter fare dine on the signature dish, parsley risotto with Schüttelbrot (flatbread with spices) served with a bottle of ADLER's homegrown wine. Raise a glass in a toast to this alpine spa.



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Experience some of the Mexican Caribbean at home by making this decadent, cheesy treat– then go ahead and book a trip to this diverse (and delicious) region.



Fried Cheese in a Molcajete

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1 ½ cups Italian seasoned bread crumbs
- Dash of salt added to ⅔ cup wheat flour
- 200g of gouda cheese
- 2 cups oil for frying, or as needed

METHOD:

Preheat the oil. Cut cheese into ½ inch triangles and dredge first in the flour mixture then the eggs and finally the bread crumbs. Use a pair of tongs to lower cheese triangles into the hot oil, making sure not to crowd the pan. Fry until golden brown, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat and drain on paper towels. Fry the remaining cheese triangles then serve in a molcajete with your favourite salsa verde and cilantro.

MOLCAJETE

This is a traditional Mexican version of a mortar and pestle made from volcanic rock. First used by Aztec people several thousand years ago, this ancient cookware is still a popular tool in Mexican kitchens and is now commonly used as a serving vessel.

Exploring the Many
Sides-and Tastes-of the

MEXICAN Caribbean

From beautiful beaches to ultra-fresh seafood, this region of Mexico is ripe with opportunities for fun and flavour

The Mexican Caribbean offers a diverse tapestry of experiences, appealing to a wide range of travellers. With over 900 kilometres of coastline, 19 archaeological sites, eight national parks and plenty of opportunities for wildlife viewing, birdwatching and island-hopping, this region has something for everyone. But don't sleep on the culinary scene here, which is reason enough to plan a visit.

CANCÚN: WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

Cancún serves as the gateway to the Mexican Caribbean, and will likely be your first stop. Known for its numerous beachfront hotels and resorts and beautiful stretches of sand, Cancun also offers plenty of variety when it comes to what to see and do, including several archeological sites and the Museo Maya de Cancún, housing one of the most significant archeological collections of Mayan culture in Mexico.

TRY THIS: Golfers of all skill levels can choose from seven beautifully manicured courses.

TASTE THAT: Dine overlooking the scenic Nichupte Lagoon at one of the many 4-5 diamond-rated restaurants in the region.



COZUMEL, HOLBOX AND ISLA MUJERES: ISLAND TIME

If it's a laid-back pace you're after, the islands of the Mexican Caribbean might be your answer. Cozumel is the largest island in the region and known as one of the best dive sites in the world. Holbox, located within the nature reserve of Yum Balam, is best explored on foot or by bicycle—no traffic here—just tranquility in nature. Isla Mujeres is an ideal spot to base yourself for fun both in and on the water, from sport fishing to windsurfing.

TRY THIS: Head to Holbox between May and September for the unforgettable chance to swim with whale sharks.

TASTE THAT: Traditional (and decadent) lobster pizza is one of the most representative dishes of Holbox and shouldn't be missed.



GRAND COSTA MAYA AND MAYA KA'AN: CULTURE AND NATURE UNITE

Grand Costa Maya and Maya Ka'an offer a unique blend of cultural richness and natural beauty. Chetumal is considered the gateway to Grand Costa Maya and home to scenic lagoon systems, calm water beaches and under-the-radar archeological sites. Maya Ka'an holds both sacred and ecological importance (the name means Origin of the Sky in the Mayan language) and is home to Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve—the largest protected area in the Mexican Caribbean and home to tropical forests, mangroves, and marshes.

TRY THIS: Spend some time in Bacalar, designated a Pueblo Magico ("magic town"). The Lagoon of Seven Colours is one of Bacalar's main draws; swim, snorkel, kayak, paddle, or go on a boat ride to admire its many shades of blue.

TASTE THAT: Maya Ka'an is an excellent place to sample traditional Mayan dishes, including the famous braised pork dish, cochinita pibil. Get ready to happily say *yuun botik* (ee-uun bohtic)—"thank you" in Maya after your first bite!



PLAYA DEL CARMEN AND COSTA MUJERES: LAID BACK LUXURY

Once a small fishing village, Playa del Carmen has evolved into a tourist favourite while also maintaining a balance between lively and laid back. Activities range from ATV tours through the jungle to the chance to visit cenotes and ancient archaeological sites. Costa Mujeres is the newest must-see spot in the Mexican Caribbean—one known for its luxury all-inclusive resorts (including overwater bungalows)—but also its lush mangroves, quiet vibe and white sand.

TRY THIS: The latest attraction on the Quinta is Estación México, a free walking tour through this famous avenue where you'll learn about the history, anecdotes and activities offered in Playa del Carmen.

TASTE THAT: Tacos made with the freshest seafood and local ingredients are a culinary claim to fame here, whether you're grabbing them from a street stand or a fine-dining establishment.



TULUM AND PUERTO MORELOS: BEACHSIDE BLISS

Tulum combines bohemian chic with ancient mystique, boasting coastal cliffs, turquoise water and the renowned Mayan archaeological site of the same name. The easy-going ambiance here often makes visitors want to stay longer than intended—or make return visits. Meanwhile, Puerto Morelos provides a tranquil escape in its own way, being an authentic fishing village with a stylish twist.

TRY THIS: Tulum boasts many world-renowned wellness

centers and spas designed to pamper mind, body and soul, which use Mayan healing techniques and indigenous ingredients.

TASTE THAT: In Puerto Morelos, watch fisherman bring in their daily catch—and then enjoy it on tonight's menu. If you're feeling adventurous you can catch your own and have it prepared at a local restaurant.

Whether you're looking for adventure, relaxation, culture, or nature, this diverse (and delicious) region provides a wide range of unforgettable experiences.



SEASONAL SEAFOOD IN HAWAII

By Kim Pemberton

Celebrity chef, Vikram Garg's flagship restaurant is a testament to the restaurateur's passion for creating innovative dining experiences

It's a busy Friday evening at UMI by Vikram Garg, located in the boutique hotel Halepuna Waikiki by Halekulani, where customers, some dressed for a fancy night out and some wearing Hawaiian floral shirts, happily indulge in what for many is a gourmand experience.

The mood is relaxed and unpretentious, which is exactly what Garg wanted for his first solo venture and independent flagship restaurant.

When asked what his main goal is for UMI by Vikram Garg, the celebrity chef is quick to respond. "The biggest thing is to create

memories in this place and enjoy the food," he says.

Helping create those memories through tasty dishes, masterfully executed and plated is Garg, who at one point in the evening moves from table to table chatting with diners who seem more like old friends than customers.

While Hawaiians have long appreciated Garg's culinary skills, many don't know his cooking skills were once put to the test on 9/11.

Garg was among the more than 6,000 airline passengers diverted to Gander, Newfoundland following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, when all flights were halted over the United States for five days.

Travelling that day from Frankfurt to New York, Garg soon found himself instead helping prepare meals for stranded passengers and crew, alongside volunteers from the small Newfoundland community.

"Life brings you a lot of tests, but when it comes down to it, it's about helping each other," he says.

Garg, who has a formidable resume that includes cooking stints on seven continents, is immortalized in the Broadway musical *Come from Away* as the character Ali, "a master chef with an international restaurant."





"I've been cooking around the globe for 37 years," says Garg, who has spent a large portion of those years as the executive chef at such notable hotels as the Halekulani (directly across the street from its sister hotel the Halepuna), the Metropolitan Palace Hotel in Dubai and IndeBleu in Washington, D.C. to name a few.

"When the Halepuna organization asked me about renting this space I looked at it and I loved the space. I worked for eight years as executive chef at Halekulani (between 2008 and 2016) and I've always loved the neighbourhood and the people. It was a good opportunity for me to come back," he says.

Garg has created a seafood-centric menu at UMI by Vikram Garg that offers both a la carte dishes and various tasting menus. The menu changes seasonally, according to what is fresh and available.

The Indian-born chef was trained in French-style cooking, and inspired by Japan truly bringing a global approach

to his dishes. The name UMI means ocean in Japanese and mother in Arabic, which seems fitting for dishes that often celebrate Hawaii.

"I wanted to feature the ocean because we live in the middle of the ocean and help to celebrate it. That's the vision, to have good seasonal seafood but, of course, we have meat items too," he says.

All of the dishes I tried at UMI by Vikram Garg were delicious but a few standouts include the tuna crudo, topped with a squid ink tuile, and the interesting combination of a popcorn soup with spiced lotus seeds.

But my favourite dish was the mushroom-crusted abalone with sea asparagus Ogo, which Garg says is a celebration of the Big Island since this is where the organic abalone is farm raised. Another favourite was the King Ora salmon, which was brought in from New Zealand.

"We focus on local first and if we can't get it we'll go outside and get sustainable and fresh." ■



O2 BEACH CLUB AND SPA'S BAJAN COCONUT *Cheesecake*

A decadent dessert that leans on tropical
flavours and laid-back island vibes

SERVES 10:

1 cup cream cheese
½ cup sour cream
41 oz sugar, divided
6 eggs
Coconut essence, to taste
Coconut compound (for marbling)
1 prepared graham cracker crust
¼ cup prepared berry sauce (optional, for
garnishing the plate)
10 raspberries (for garnish)
4 oz toasted coconut
2 tbsp baking powder
Coconut caramel popcorn (for garnish, recipe
follows)
2 tbsp oil
2 tbsp butter
Mint sprigs (for garnish)

METHOD:

- Beat the cream cheese and 40 oz of sugar in a mixing bowl, scraping the sides intermittently to avoid lumps.
- Slowly add the sour cream then slowly add the eggs and coconut essence, beating at low speed.
- Pour the mixture into a baking pan prepared with a graham cracker crust.
- Add coconut compound and marble it in along with 3.5 oz of the toasted coconut.
- Place the pan in the oven in a water bath and bake at 350 degrees for 60-90 minutes.
- Once baked, broil the cheesecake to give it a very light brown colour.
- Let the cheesecake cool completely before garnishing with desired additions.

FOR THE POPCORN:

Heat popcorn kernels with the oil until popped. Toss popcorn in butter and the rest of the toasted coconut. In a solid bottomed saucepan place 1oz sugar and gently melt on low heat until amber (keep stirring to avoid burning), then fold in baking powder to create air pockets. Pour mixture over popcorn and mix, and then let cool. Garnish the cheesecake with the popcorn and other chosen extras.



O2 Beach Club & Spa is part of Ocean Hotels Barbados (oceanhotelsbarbados.com), which offers three distinct hotel experiences on the south coast. In addition to the four-diamond O2 Beach Club & Spa, choose from the laid-back Sea Breeze Guest House and chic and boutique South Beach Hotel.



Boujie Roast BREADFRUIT & LOBSTER



Fire-roasted breadfruit with lobster, salt fish, tobiko and Bajan pepper aioli, courtesy of Cocktail Kitchen's Chef of the Year, Damian Leach



FOR THE BREADFRUIT:

Ingredients:

1 breadfruit
4 oz butter
1 red onion, diced
Thyme
Tobiko
Micro herbs

Method:

1. Cut an x into the top of the breadfruit
2. Place whole fruit directly on a grill
3. Turn every five minutes until completely charred and steam starts to come out of the x (about 25 minutes)
4. Remove fruit and cut into small pieces, reserving the charred skin
5. Sauté breadfruit with butter, onions and thyme

FOR THE SALT FISH & LOBSTER:

Ingredients:

½ lb. salt fish (cod or pollock)
2 lobster tails (crab works as well)
4 oz butter
1 red onion, chopped
½ cup chopped cilantro
1/4 tsp diced scotch bonnet

Method:

1. Boil salt fish twice to remove most of the salt
2. Shred the salt fish
3. Remove lobster from tail and cut into small pieces
3. Sauté lobster pieces in butter
4. Add diced red onion, salt fish, chopped cilantro and scotch bonnet

FOR THE AIOLI:

Ingredients:

2 cups mayonnaise
3 tbsp. pepper sauce (Bajan pepper sauce or other hot sauce)
Salt & pepper

Method:

Whisk everything together until well-blended

TO SERVE:

1. Place the sauteed breadfruit in the charred breadfruit skin
2. Add salt fish and lobster mixture
3. Drizzle with pepper sauce aioli
4. Finish with tobiko and micro herbs

DELICIOUS DETOURS

GIN FOR THE WIN



St. Ermin's hotel

GIN *for the* WIN

For fans of the spirit, England is rife with opportunities for tippling and tips to make cocktails like a pro

By Michele Sponagle



Ginstitute

The Brits love their gin. England is among the top five gin-adoring nations in the world. Though I may not be British, I share their passion. On a recent trip to London and the West Midlands, I did a deep dive into the many ways you can sip and savour, from cocktail master classes to a gin-soaked afternoon tea on a bus. Raise a glass and come along for the ride.

CLASS ACT »

Head to London's Portobello Road for a serious three-hour drinking, tasting and blending session at The Ginstitute. While drinking classic

cocktails, like a Tom Collins, my 'ginstructor' provided a brief history of the spirit, which dates to 1555 when the Dutch first distilled genever, an early forerunner of gin. Then—the best bit—I was guided through a tasting of 23 botanicals so I could choose the ones to be blended into a bottle to take home. My one-of-a-kind gin recipe is kept on file, so I can stock up again on my next visit.

GENERATING BUZZ »

The historic St. Ermin's Hotel in the heart of Westminster, not far from Big Ben, is always a hive of activity, especially in the rooftop hive where



◀ Brigitte's Bakery Gin Afternoon Tea Bus Tour

▼ Shakespeare Distillery Cocktail Masterclass

300,000 bees produce honey that goes into the property's own London dry gin. Sample it at the Caxton Bar on-site, which features inventive signature cocktails including the Vesper, the hotel's spin on a martini made with gin, vodka and Lillet Blanc.

PLAYTIME »

In Stratford-on-Avon, birthplace of William Shakespeare, a cocktail master class at the Shakespeare Distillery Gin School is the "stuff as dreams are made on," the famous bard might say. School means tasty homework—create your own cocktails with tips provided by a master mixologist over 90 minutes. I now know how to use a bar spoon like a pro. The distillery also has a one-hour, gin-themed cruise along the River Avon, with a sampling of three signature gins.

DOUBLE THE FUN »

Imagine traditional afternoon tea without the tea. Instead, it's all sipping variations of a G&T, paired

with gin-infused pastries and cakes while you take in views of London's biggest attractions from a vintage double-decker bus. It can be a raucous experience with passengers singing along to pop tunes and getting into a party mood. The newest version of this experience is a collaboration between Brigit's Bakery and Bombay Sapphire. The Gin Afternoon Tour Bus winds through the city for 90 minutes—plenty of time to nibble and say 'cheers!'

SPOILED FOR CHOICE »

The Gin Vault in Birmingham is a nightmare for indecisive types. It offers a well-curated menu of 350+ varieties of gin sourced worldwide, from Finland to Colombia. Thankfully the staff knows their gin and can make recommendations based on your preference and sense of adventure. On weekends, it has a bottomless brunch with G&Ts, gin cocktails and prosecco, served alongside tapas, like prawn and chorizo skewers and bao buns. ■

MIX IT UP: GINGER MULE

This is my go-to gin cocktail all year round. It's light and refreshing, thanks to its citrusy notes, making it ideal for summer. But it also has the warm spicy flavours of ginger, nice in colder weather.

1 ½ oz (45mL) gin
½ oz (15 mL) fresh lime juice
4 oz (120mL) Fever Tree ginger beer

Directions:

Fill a copper mug with ice. Add the gin, squeeze the juice from two wedges of lime and drop in. Top with ginger beer. Garnish with mint leaves, if desired.



Discover what's on the menu at some of The Mile High City's newly Michelin-recognized restaurants

BY JESSICA PADYKULA

If you've ever been to Denver you probably know the city takes its food and drink seriously. No matter what you're craving or the type of dining experience you're after—you can likely find it here. But there's another reason to put The Mile High City on your culinary bucket list—MICHELIN recently recognized 26 Denver restaurants in their inaugural Colorado-based Guide.

MICHELIN's Colorado guide will only be the eighth Michelin destination in North America and in addition to Denver, will also cover Boulder, Vail, Beaver Creek Resort, Aspen and Snowmass Village.

The MICHELIN Guide is a renowned resource for travellers in search of a memorable meal in more than 40 destinations worldwide and recognized restaurants in Denver cover cuisines ranging from Mexican and Chinese to Italian, French, Mediterranean and beyond.

The MICHELIN Guide Colorado gives out honours at several levels and Denver was the recipient of many, including three restaurants getting coveted MICHELIN Stars. MICHELIN Stars are based on five criteria including quality of products, mastery of cooking technique,

DENVER'S MICHELIN-STARRED CULINARY SCENE



Safta restaurant, one of Denver's 2023 Recommended Restaurants

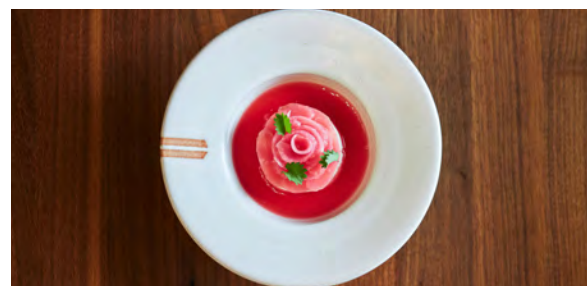
harmony and balance of flavours, the personality of the chef as expressed in the food and consistency.

The Guide's Bib Gourmand selection highlights restaurants that offer great quality food at good prices and are judged by the same criteria used for the Star designation. The MICHELIN Green Star is awarded to restaurants that are leaders in sustainable gastronomy, while their Recommended distinction includes restaurants that are above average. Of notable mention are the recipients of One MICHELIN Star: Beckon (Contemporary cuisine), Bruto (Mexican/Contemporary cuisine), The Wolf's Tailor (Contemporary cuisine).

If you were looking for a reason to eat your way through Denver, MICHELIN putting its stamp of approval on the city's already-robust food scene is a good place to start. ■



Hop Alley, Bib Gourmand recipient



Bekon restaurant



Check out the full list of restaurants at denver.org/food-drink/restaurants/michelin-guide-denver.

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SEARING SUNSETS AND A TREAT FOR THE TASTEBUDS

Tofino

Local ingredients and chefs deeply rooted in their community combine to create unforgettable culinary offerings in Tofino.

By Sabrina Pirillo

On the west coast of British Columbia's Vancouver Island, there's a destination surrounded by natural beauty and a mild year-round climate.

Situated at the tip of the Esowista Peninsula within the traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations in the Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region, Tofino comprises about 400,000 hectares of land and marine inlets, all draining into a central marine catchment area. Tofino's beaches and old-growth rainforests captivate everyone from surfers and nature lovers to campers, whale watchers and fishermen.

Aside from its raw beauty, however, Tofino boasts a thriving local culinary scene, featuring innovative boat-to-table cuisine along with ultra-fresh ingredients.

PACIFIC SANDS BEACH RESORT

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this year as a Tofino resort landmark and pioneer, Pacific Sands Beach Resort is located just seven kilometers from the village of Tofino. This 41-plus acre property takes in more than 1,000 feet of beach and 1,500 feet of undeveloped coastline on the crescent-shaped Cox Bay. High on the hill above the resort is the aptly named Sunset House. This stunning home boasts 1,200 square feet of deck with a hot tub and offers 100-degree views of Cox Bay and Rosie Bay—your own private front-row seats to some of the most spectacular sunsets. Newly renovated, this home comes with four bedrooms plus a den and can accommodate up to 10 guests. The brand-new kitchen is optimal for cooking provisions purchased at guest services (well stocked with grocery basics) or picked up in town.



And when the designated chef wants a break, the culinary experts from Lux.Fino and Taste of Tofino will wine and dine you with their unique creations.

TASTE OF TOFINO

When the weather is a little too cool to dine outdoors, enjoy the view from the Sunset House dining room. The gorgeous wooden dining table sits at an ideal vantage point for enjoying the stunning surroundings. It's also where we sat to watch executive chef Raphael Ouellet from Taste of Tofino create a modern and playful feast. Using locally sourced ingredients from Vancouver Island and throughout the West Coast, Taste of Tofino comes with over 25 years of combined catering experience. Chef Ouellet is known for his attention to detail and eclectic taste, evident in his mushroom appetizer,



memorable courses featuring lobster and octopus, and the decadent steak, mash and broccolini plate. The night ended with a sampling of some Shelter Point Distillery single malt whiskey—a cozy way to cap off the evening.

LUX.FINO

Lux.Fino is Tofino's first-ever luxury pop-up picnic experience. Co-founded by Morgan Elliott and Andres Valderrama, the concept combines luxury and comfort into a unique custom experience highlighting local vendors. Their tablescapes resemble something out of a fairytale and are eco-friendly, locally sourced and inspired by the elements of the island. Our magnificent setup landed on the deck of Sunset House, while down below, chef Andres cooks sustainably caught crab from Naas Tofino. He takes us on an interactive cookout



Pacific Sands Beach Resort



Picnic by Lux.Fino

journey, explaining that the crab must be male (which can be determined based on the crab's tail and body size) leaving females in the water for reproduction purposes. While waiting for the water to boil on the fire pit, we indulge in a grazing board as far as the eye can see from Picnic Charcuterie, and enjoy a beverage from Tofino Kombucha. Dinner is served. With

bellies full and laughter everywhere, the sun begins to set. There's only one more thing that would make this night complete: sitting around the fire pit making s'mores and telling stories with a glass of wine, surrounded by good company. ■



Lux.Fino's Recipe for

Halibut Ceviche

We are fortunate to live here on the west coast so we love to show our guests the bountiful versatility that this land and ocean can bring us.

- Fresh caught halibut
- Leche de Tigre (Colombian recipe of equal parts orange juice and lemon juice with infused Thai chiles)
- Mango
- Cherry tomato
- Shallots
- Radishes
- Cucumber
- Cilantro

*For 2 people, do 2 cups of the halibut or protein and then 1/4 cup for each additional ingredient. Add a full cup of the leche de Tigre to make sure the protein is saturated. You can also squeeze out extra liquid before serving.

This recipe represents the flavours of the region, as well as its history and local bounty, and you're sure to taste Zihuatanejo in each bite. If you can't visit—this dish is the next best thing.

Tiritas de Pescado

Zihuatanejo Style

INGREDIENTS:

250g fresh fish
150g thinly sliced red onion
30g diced habanero pepper
100 ml lime juice
Sea salt (Zihua's salt works best)

METHOD:

1. Slice the fresh fish into thin strips, slicing across the grain of the flesh.
2. Slice the onion into thin strips and add to the prepared fish.
3. Marinate the fish with lime juice and sea salt and (if desired) dried oregano
4. Plate up and add some habanero pepper to taste.
5. You can use some avocado, cilantro and/or fresh cucumber for garnish.
6. Serve with tortilla chips or tostadas.

PRO TIP

Don't marinate for longer than 10 minutes to ensure you maintain the delicate texture of the fish.

This local fish dish is simple to prepare but represents the heart and soul of Ixtapa Zihuatanejo

Along the coast of the state of Guerrero, you'll find this charming duo of destinations. While it might be getting more well-known as a tourist destination, the fact that this region was once a small fishing village remains an integral part of its charm and something you can feel—and also taste.

Today we open a local cookbook to bring you a specialty that takes full advantage of the abundance of the sea: Tiritas de Pescado estilo Zihuatanejo (fish strips Zihuatanejo style), a ceviche-like dish that has represented Ixtapa Zihuatanejo, Guerrero around the globe. This signature recipe is just one of the reasons this destination was recently recognized as a Magical Town by the Mexican government.

Some people describe the dish as "Zihua's flavor," and for those who haven't had the pleasure, it can be described as tangy and citrusy and a bite that will transport you directly to Zihuatanejo.

The key to preparing the dish is to ensure you have the freshest fish possible. Sawfish, mahi mahi, or sailfish are the ideal fish to get the most out of this recipe—a perfect appetizer for two people.



MEAL TIME MADE *Easy*

Save time on dinner with the help of HelloFresh

Answering the age-old question, "What's for dinner?" can be frustrating and result in boring dishes and uninspired menus. This is where a meal subscription service like HelloFresh can make a huge (and very helpful) difference.

■ EASY & FLEXIBLE

The popular meal delivery service provides ultra-fresh ingredients and simple instructions that make getting a good meal on the table easy—without ever having to set foot in a grocery store. Straightforward recipes provide a clear path from ingredient to finished product—minus the hassle of second-guessing your cooking skills.

■ FAST & STRESS-FREE

Most HelloFresh recipes take less than 30 minutes to complete (some as little as 25) and many dietary concerns are covered, from vegetarian options to carb and calorie-conscious meals. In addition, there are quick-prep, family-friendly and one-pot dishes among the numerous choices available.

■ DELICIOUS VARIETY

HelloFresh delivers farm-fresh, seasonal ingredients right to your door so you can easily incorporate flavourful home-cooked meals into your life. Recipes rotate regularly, but run the gamut from Mexican-inspired pork stew and cheesy lentil nachos, to sriracha teriyaki salmon bowls—so you'll never be bored at mealtimes.

■ BALANCED & SUSTAINABLE

In addition to highlighting fresh, seasonal ingredients and simple, balanced recipes, HelloFresh prioritizes sustainability. You



get the exact amount of ingredients you need for each recipe, which goes a long way toward cutting back on food waste.

Whether you're feeding vegetarians, meat-lovers, or a family of picky eaters, HelloFresh offers an impressive range of recipe options. ■



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WHERE TO EAT IN LORETO

BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR



Delicious seafood at Baja Mar

This charming town in Mexico packs a big—and delicious punch when it comes to its culinary offerings

Words & photos by Debra Smith

For a town of 15,000 souls, walkable, friendly Loreto has a bounty of outstanding eateries, offering everything from casual bites to fine dining. A ten-minute drive from the airport (a minute longer if the single stop light isn't working) takes you past rolling green hills studded with lanky cardon cactus, copal bushes and prickly chain-link cholla plants right into the historic town square.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Begin your day at Café Ole where a dozen kinds of egg dishes, omelets, pancakes and refreshing fruit smoothies called licuados are on offer. Huevos divorciados comes with both red and green sauce facing off on the plate. Huevos nopalitos are scrambled eggs with grilled cactus, without thorns, of course. Give it a try. It looks and tastes a bit like a pickle. Before noon, steer clear of the table reserved for The Coffee Dudes, six Canadians who have been meeting here every morning for eight years.

Orlando's Cocina Mexicana, a two-minute walk from the square, offers traditional



Pull up a chair for the best cocktails in Loreto

Mexican breakfast specialties under a shady palapa, as well as huge platters of fluffy French toast dusted with icing sugar. The owner devotes one month a year to searching for new items to add to the menu. This year it's avocado toast with scrambled eggs, fresh vegetables and a homemade chili dipping sauce.

TAKE TO THE HILLS

Wine, goat cheese and mangoes are just a few of the edibles that the Jesuits bestowed on Baja California Sur after they arrived in 1697. They brought along a ranch foreman, a muleteer and a herder, and their descendants became the vaquero, the original western cowboys, raising cows and goats for milk, cheese, leather and protein. In the Canyon of the Vines that leads to the oldest original mission in the hills at San Javier, the Jesuits planted olive and orange trees, date palms, and grape vines from the Canary Islands to produce "missionary wine." These hardy vines moved northward as more missions were built and began the wine culture of Sonoma and Napa Valley.

On the way to visit Mission San Javier, stop in at Rancho Viejo to meet the owners Chary and Tista. Chary has been making



Chary demonstrates tortilla making technique

//

This charming town in Mexico packs a big-and delicious punch when it comes to its culinary offerings

flour tortillas for over fifty years and her technique is impeccable. She will teach you how to slap the tortillas from hand to hand with a gentle stretch and lay them on the wood-fired grill before she presses them with a hot iron plate. Try your hand at milking a goat, then taste their homemade goat cheese. Add some spicy beans and a cup of strong Talega coffee that's double-poured through a cloth filter, and you have the makings of a typical ranch breakfast.

SEA WHAT'S FOR LUNCH

Back in Loreto, take a stroll along the seawall called the malecon. Within a few blocks, you can find fishermen casting into the waves, bicyclists getting in a few laps and swimmers enjoying the miles of beachfront. You'll have a good view of it all at Baja Mar Restaurant. Their speciality is seafood, which is obvious from their aqua colour scheme and the giant octopus mural on the wall. The shrimp ceviche with avocados and jalapenos is a work of art. Add a sauce (from mild to make-me-cry) to the deep-fried seafood tacos with two kinds of fish and shrimp. They also offer gluten-free dishes and takeout. In Loreto, they say that tacos were the original paper plate.

UNA BELLA NOCHE

When night falls, head to the planned community of Nopolo. The ninth hole of the golf course overlooks the Sea of Cortez, there's a library, a wine bar and



golf carts are the ride of choice. Canadians and Americans who rent or own villas here can be found at Ocotillo Restaurant where the wall mural sports a maple leaf. Enjoy a cocktail created by mixologist Ceasar Gomez, two-time second-place winner overall out of 1,800 contestants in the international Made With Love mixology competition. Dishes here are wonderfully complex and beautifully presented. The pear and apple salad with cranberries, goat cheese and honey dressing is a refreshing standout on a warm evening, while the seafood pasta combines the best local shrimp, scallops and octopus in an herb-infused cream sauce. The dessert menu is worth a look if you fancy delicious layers of milk and dark chocolate mousse to end a beautiful night, una bella noche.

HOW TO GET THERE? >>

Take advantage of convenient, direct service with Westjet from Calgary to Loreto every Friday from November to April with connecting flights from across Canada.




THE COLONNADE
OUTLETS
AT SAWGRASS MILLS

VALENTINO
BURBERRY
MONCLER
ZIMMERMANN
CHRISTIAN
LOUBOUTIN

Let's Go Florida!

Journey through the vibrant mosaic of Florida's diverse landscape and myriad of cultures. Our curated collection of articles celebrates the essence of this sun-kissed state, from its pristine white sand beaches to its award-winning golf courses. Whether it's sun or fun you're looking for, each article unveils a different facet of Florida's allure.

Whether you're drawn to the exhilarating theme parks or yearn for the tranquility of off-the-beaten-path beaches, join us in exploring the kaleidoscope of adventures awaiting in Florida—a testament to its rich diversity and endless wonders.



A KISS FOR KISSIMMEE

By Nicole Servinis

A vacation in Kissimmee turns out to be surprising in the best ways possible



I think it's safe to say many Canadians visit Florida for the sunshine, travel convenience, adventure and of course, everyone's favourite mouse and/or princesses (at least for me). I've been fortunate to have experienced many different vacations in the Sunshine State, but my most recent trip to Florida took me to Kissimmee, which turned out to be a vacation like no other.

Known as the heart of Florida thanks to a prime location in the middle of the state, Kissimmee is only about 90 minutes from a beach (east or west) and is surrounded by sparkling lakes. It is also minutes away from world-famous theme parks, golf courses and outdoor adventure activities. It's also known as the Vacation Home Capital of the World with more than 30,000 homes to choose from.

I stayed at Magic Village Views, which is a Trademark Collection by Wyndham. I would highly recommend this property to any families, large groups, school teams, or even couples staying for an extended length of time. It's a gated community and consists of three and four-bedroom fully furnished private luxury villas. The homes are spacious and ideal for social gatherings, and the rooms are so comfortable they also make for the perfect place to rest and retreat (especially because every bedroom has its own bathroom). The property also has incredible amenities, including a restaurant and pool, as well as a tennis and volleyball court.

SPORT

Kissimmee is home to the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex, a 255-acre multipurpose sports complex located in Walt Disney World Resort. I was lucky enough to get a private tour of the nine venues and 17 multi-use fields that host numerous professional and amateur sporting events throughout the year. One of the fields I found particularly immaculate was for baseball—which makes sense since it's the spring training home for the Atlanta Braves. If you have an opportunity, check out a sporting event here—the grounds are top-notch.

Another facility to catch a game or concert at is the Amway Centre. The facility hosts approximately 225 events annually. The arena is home to the Orlando Magic of the NBA, the Orlando Solar Bears of the ECHL and the Orlando Predators of the National Arena League. I caught a Magic game when I was in town and even though they lost I had an amazing time! The stadium has outdoor games, music and activities for fans—fun for kids, families and adults that really get everyone pumped up for the game.

Heads up to anyone attending any event: you're only allowed a small clutch (this was unique for me). Inside, the facility is spotless and has state-of-the-art technology. I've never seen a jumbotron so big





(it's 42ft) allowing for an up close and personal experience, no matter where you're sitting. It was Stuff, the team mascot's birthday, so they went all out with giveaways, fun music and entertainment!

One of my unexpected highlights in Kissimmee was attending the Arnold Palmer Invitational, especially since I'm not a golf fan. It's a beautiful afternoon in the sunshine with great food and drink (including Arnold Palmer iced tea) and everyone is cheering on their favourite athletes. This prestigious event, which is part of the PGA Tour, can trace its roots back to the inaugural 1966 Florida Citrus Open Invitational. In 1979 the tournament changed its name and made a permanent move to the Bay Hill Club and Lodge golf course, owned by legendary golfer Arnold Palmer, and it adopted his name in 2007.

After watching the Netflix documentary *Full Swing* I felt like I had a deeper understanding of the technicality of the game and general knowledge about some of the sport's most elite players. It was an incredible experience to witness Kurt Kitayama earning his first PGA Tour victory in this tournament.

ADVENTURE

Nature and outdoor lovers who enjoy a thrill should check out Revolution Adventures. They have a unique array of outdoor experiences to choose



from, but I highly recommend the ATV buggy tour. We went through swamps and trails that surrounded 230 acres of dry land and a lake including Alligator Alley. Don't worry, it's completely safe! The gators mind their business as long as you mind yours. The expert guides are also extremely experienced and provide a lesson in safety and riding prior to the adventure.

Kissimmee is near numerous theme parks, including Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld Parks & Resorts. They are considered world-famous for a reason, because you are truly getting to experience the best of the best, from water parks to roller coasters to dining and entertainment.

LEISURE

What I was also surprised to learn is that not too far from where we were staying in Kissimmee is the chance to do some outlet shopping at Orlando Vineland Premium Outlets. It has over 160 stores from the world's finest luxury designers and name brands including Prada, Bottega Veneta, Burberry, Gucci, Fifth Ave OFF 5th and more. I treated myself to a designer bag and even with the exchange, I saved a few hundred dollars!



Shopping always makes me hungry and one of my favourite meals was lunch at Portillo's. It's a casual dining experience with indoor and outdoor seating. They are known for Chicago-style hot dogs, Italian beef sandwiches, cheese fries and burgers.

I got a larger-than-life burger (literally larger

than my head), and managed to finish it all!

Another noteworthy dining spot was The Wilson. It's a quirky, coastal bistro located at Meliá Orlando Celebration. They too have indoor and outdoor seating, but I highly suggest eating outside. It's poolside seating and they have a colourful and artistic display of umbrellas that add charm to the decor and vibe of the restaurant. The menu features coastal cuisine with global influences and seasonal craft cocktails, beer and wine. I ordered an espresso martini, and I think it was one of the best I've ever had (a bold statement coming from me). Here too, the servings are massive so I suggest sharing a number of dishes so you get an opportunity to sample as many as possible. Speaking of indulgence, don't miss Voodoo Donuts. You'll need to order extra for takeaway.

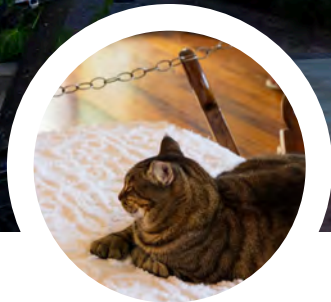
Overall, Kissimmee surprised me in the best way possible. The activities varied, but the fun remained the same throughout the entire vacation. Being outside in the sunshine was one of my initial reasons for travelling to Florida, but it won't be the only reason I return. ■



Hangin' with HEMINGWAY



Queen Anne-style mansion



Key West, Florida
offers more than a few
memorable ways to
connect with the spirit
of Ernest Hemingway

By Mark Stevens

It's midmorning in Old Town Key West, the crown jewel of an emerald necklace of islands called the Florida Keys.

I'm about to enter the coach-house studio where Ernest Hemingway penned several literary classics, the last stop on our tour of the Hemingway Home and Museum, a circa-1851 mansion graced by arched windows and surrounded by lush gardens.

I pause atop a black wrought iron staircase before entering to gaze about the room, taking in a mounted marlin decorating one wall, then the typewriter where Hemingway himself created several masterpieces during his eight-year sojourn here.

Literary genius, a man who lived life to its fullest, this iconic author is one of my heroes. And this house is the perfect venue for hanging with Hemingway.



THE SUN ALSO SETS

While one of his classics was *The Sun Also Rises*, I'm betting he experienced sunsets as appealing as the one we sampled last night.

After strolling streets graced by Victorian mansions and wooden buildings with a Bahamian flair, we participated in a Key West tradition: sunset from Mallory Square, a vibrant nightly celebration. We joined a throng of people, entertained by buskers, taking in a day's end spectacle with a palm-decorated island for the foreground, sharing enthusiastically in the subsequent round of applause.



IF YOU GO

For all things Florida Keys visit fla-keys.com.

As the crowd dispersed beneath blushing twilight clouds two things struck me. I'd already succumbed to the allure of Key West. And I wondered why Hemingway never wrote *The Sun Also Sets*.

I'm a sunset connoisseur and this was one of the best.

TO HAVE AND TO HAVE ANOTHER

During the Hemingway tour, I noticed in the garden a transplanted urinal that once graced Sloppy Joe's, Hemingway's favourite watering hole a few blocks from here. Nowadays it serves to hydrate the multitude of six-toed cats living onsite, descendants of an erstwhile Hemingway pet. Noting its presence and cognizant of his penchant for all things spiritous, I asked guide Sarah Perkins about Hemingway's favourite drink.

She answered with a grin. "What didn't he like? Sometimes we think he should have changed the title of, *To Have and Have Not* to *To Have and to Have Another*."

The next stop on our Hemingway pilgrimage is a no-brainer: Sloppy Joe's. Decorated by neon signs outside, the massive interior sports at least three old wooden bars beneath a ceiling festooned with national flags, a huge stage at one end and walls covered with Hemingway memorabilia.

Here at Sloppy Joe's, determined to channel Hemingway's spirit (or at least his favourite spirit) I ask the bartender for advice.

She points at the menu and I promptly order a Papa Dobles—Papa's Favourite and their take on a daiquiri.

I am nothing if not committed. I down it and signal the bartender. "I'll have another."

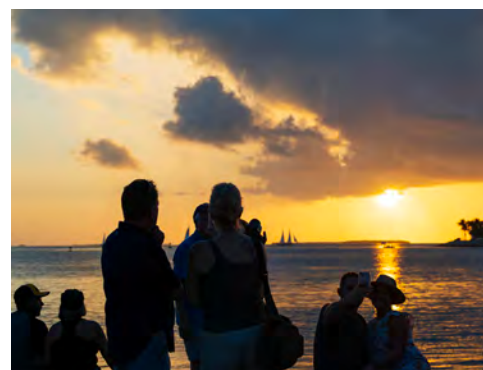
THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA (FOOD)

After visiting the museum we explore Key West's historic seaport, an explosion of docks populated by charter fishing boats, a place with a seafaring history spanning two centuries.

Lunch here, at Conch Republic Food Company housed in a former fish house and ice plant, sampling shrimp harvested from bespoke fishing boats, further convinces me of Key West's appeal for Hemingway. Dinner at Half Shell Raw Bar, the freshest lobster I've ever had, just reinforces my conviction.

Here I reflect on the myriad delights we've sampled during our Florida Keys pilgrimage—tarpon feeding, lounging in bathtub-warm waters on the Islamorada Sandbar, climbing aboard the sister ship of Hemingway's fishing boat, now ensconced in a Florida Keys sporting goods store—here I savour the experience of hanging with Hemingway, if only in spirit.

And now, over dessert—key lime pie, of course—I plan my own literary classic. I'll call it, *The Old Man and the Sea* (food). ■





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A CULTURAL, CULINARY AND ARTISTIC MECCA



► This eclectic and vibrant city offers everything from stunning architecture and street art to unforgettable food

Sun, surf and sand are all crave-worthy reasons to visit Miami, but beyond the coconut-scented sunscreen and sizzling sunburns is a city filled with a treasure trove of culinary, cultural and artistic experiences ready to be explored and savoured.

Culinary Adventures

In 2022, Michelin finally came knocking on Miami's door, and to date, 68 of the city's restaurants have been awarded international honours for their standard of excellence. It was considered to be long overdue for many considering the Magic City has been at the crossroads of rich culinary cultures for decades. While both casual and fine dining Michelin experiences are becoming ever more plentiful, a must-do is the immersive Little Havana Food and Cultural Walking Tour, an unforgettably filling experience that mixes mural hopping and cigar making with mojitos, empanadas and churros.

Visit Schnebly Redland's Winery & Brewery, the southernmost winery in the country, and try unique fruit wines in a stunning, tropical setting. Or book a Flavours of Miami culinary experience where options include working alongside local chefs to make Latin libations or Cuban classics. Every February, Loews Miami Beach Hotel plays host to the appetizing four-day South Beach Food and Wine Festival and offers affordable walk-around tastings and dinners hosted by internationally renowned chefs and TV personalities, including Bobby Flay and Guy Fieri.

Cultural Excursions

A walk through South Beach, with its famed red sidewalks and Art Deco masterpieces, is in and of itself, a quintessential Miami cultural experience. Delve deeper and you'll find more artistic havens scattered around the city, including the beautiful Phillip & Patricia Frost Museum of Science. Visitors are encouraged to purchase Explorer tickets which include access to museum exhibitions, the 500,000-gallon conical Gulf Stream Aquarium, live science demos and Frost Planetarium.

To the west, Wynwood is an eclectic neighbourhood where you'll find the Wynwood Arts District, home to nearly a dozen galleries, museums and collections, as well as the Wynwood Walls, one of the largest open-air street art museums featuring pieces from internationally celebrated artists. Equally eccentric, Art Basel Miami Beach, North America's largest contemporary art fair, is an annual four-day who's who of international artists and art lovers.

City Chic

While the aforementioned Art Deco may be synonymous with Miami, one can't forget about exceptionally iconic Mediterranean Revival and Miami Modern landmarks, including the famed Fontainebleau Hotel, Biltmore Hotel, Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, and of course the former Versace Mansion.

Current structures have transformed Miami into one of the most dynamic architectural cities on the planet. Naturally, even Canadian celebrity architect Frank Gehry has left his indelible mark, designing the New World Center concert hall in Miami Beach, while downtown, Brickell's notorious 'Wall Street' feel has evolved as well. The Mary Brickell Village is an open-air, casual mixed-use space that combines "wood, water, and green" to create a calming, Floridian-style, piazza-like



Wynwood



village. Nearby Brickell City Centre is a three-story shopping plaza with an architecturally unique and sustainably sound T-shaped, winding canopy called The Climate Ribbon, which not only collects rainwater and acts as a sunshade, but works off Florida's trade winds, creating seamless air circulation throughout, thus eliminating the need for air conditioning.

Plan your trip, pack your appetite and satiate your inner artist in Miami, a city where something exciting will always be a part of your own unique experience. ■



Little Havana

"My Fort Myers is exploring the barrier islands, collecting seashells and observing wildlife in its natural habitat."



Brian Holaway
Brian Holaway,
Nature and Photography Guide
at Captain Brian on the Water



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fort
MYERS
ISLANDS, BEACHES
& NEIGHBORHOODS

A treasure trove of natural beauty, dining and culture in

FORT MYERS

By Chris Ryall

LET'S GO FLORIDA!
FORT MYERS



Spending time in this laid-back Florida destination offers everything from stellar seafood to the chance to “stoop” for seashells

Breathe in the enticing nature and refreshing sea air that embrace Fort Myers and more than 100 barrier islands in the region's tropical paradise. Time slows down here and the welcome mat that has greeted visitors for decades has been brushed off after last year's hurricane. You can't keep a great destination down and Fort Myers is back again and ready to give visitors everything it has to offer.

WATER-BASED FUN

Do as the area's manatees do—frolic in the warm Southwest Florida waters and dine on the sea's tasty treats. Visit the manatees in their non-captive natural playground at Manatee Park (it's free). Numerous fishing, sailing and boat cruises are available for those seeking fun on the water. You can also rent a kayak or canoe and paddle along the scenic 190-mile Great Calusa Blueway, celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2024.

FOR THE BIRDS

Birdwatchers will delight at the chance to spot over 250 bird species, from great blue herons to reddish egrets, laughing gulls and white pelicans. The best place to view the region's huge migratory bird population is the world-famous J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. Walk, bike or drive the four-mile-long Wildlife Drive. Kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding and even a tram tour are available to check out the Bailey Homestead Preserve or the 98-foot Sanibel Lighthouse.

HAVE YOU DONE THE SANIBEL STOOP?

You can't visit Sanibel Island or Captiva Island (or the other islands in the area for that matter) without doing the Sanibel stoop. It's not unusual to see

legions of visitors bending over to retrieve seashells on these islands, hence the bent-at-the-waist moniker. These “Shell Islands” boast more than 400 species of shells where you'll find conchs, whelks, scallops, clam shells and many more to keep you stooping.

FORT MYERS TURNS ON THE CULTURE

There's plenty of nature around Fort Myers but history buffs and culture enthusiasts won't feel neglected. A must-see is the Edison and Ford Winter Estates. This National Register Historic Site features more than 20 acres of meticulously landscaped gardens and an 1886 winter retreat that belonged to Thomas Edison and his wife, Mina. You can see many of his 1,000-plus inventions in his laboratory, as well as some of the first Ford cars in the 15,000-square-foot Edison Ford Museum.

Culture lovers can also check out the stunning 1901 Georgian Revival Mansion at Burroughs Home & Gardens and enjoy live theatre at The Florida Rep or cultural events at Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center. The Fort Myers downtown district is home to many public artworks as well as street art and murals.

TIKI BARS, SEASIDE DINING & ROOFTOP COCKTAILS

Known for its “pink gold” Gulf shrimp and stone crab, Fort Myers serves up a cornucopia of tastes, styles and atmospheres. Tiki bars and seafood make a perfect pairing at the Yucatan Beach Stand, Phuzzys Boat Shack, Coconut Jack's Waterfront Grille and others. For something more refined, the Wisteria Tea Room in Fort Myers for tea and sweets is a perfect choice. Many restaurants are located on First Street downtown. For rooftop views and craft cocktails check out the scene at Beacon Social Drinkery atop the Luminary Hotel & Co.

SWEET DREAMS

Take your pick of various types of accommodations here, from hotels and motels to bed & breakfasts, condos, cottages, RV parks and campgrounds. A welcome and most suitable addition to Fort Myers is the new Margaritaville Beach Resort, opening in December 2023.

Anyone who visits will fall in love with Fort Myers' islands, beaches and charming neighbourhoods. As Jimmy Buffett famously said, “It's a sweet life, living by the salty sea.” ■

GOOD TO KNOW

- Start planning your vacation at visitfortmyers.com.
- Post and share your stories and videos using #MyFortMyers.
- Ask about the Sun Saver Passport to save on accommodation, attractions, and more.

GETTING THERE

Fort Myers is easily accessible through the Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) with these airline partners:

- **Air Canada** - daily direct, year-round service from Toronto.
- **WestJet** - daily direct year-round from Toronto and seasonally from Ottawa.
- **Porter Airlines (NEW)** daily direct from Toronto.
- **Lynx Air (NEW)** direct, four times weekly from Toronto (starting Dec. 14/23)





By Nicole Servinis

Nestled along the sun-kissed shores of The Palm Beaches, Florida the dynamic duo of Delray Beach and West Palm Beach beckons travellers with a harmonious blend of arts, culture and history--far from what I expected, based on my previous travels to the Sunshine State. From the vibrant arts scene to unforgettable culinary offerings and luxurious accommodations, this destination was well worth discovering.



Ma Nong at Arts Warehouse



Kinsui: The Art of Healing by Claudia La Blanca

A TALE OF **TWO CITIES**

**DISCOVER THE DYNAMIC DUO OF
DELRAY BEACH AND WEST PALM
BEACH, FLORIDA**

DELIGHTFUL DELRAY BEACH

Where to Stay: The Ray

I recommend starting your stay in Delray Beach by checking into The Ray. This stylish boutique hotel is a haven of luxury, complete with a rooftop bar that provides panoramic views of the ocean. One of my favourite amenities here turned out to be their well-equipped gym, which includes state-of-the-art equipment, including Peloton bikes and offers lots of fun fitness classes.

The newly opened restaurant, Campi, offers a rustic and cozy dining experience, serving up excellent Italian food, including freshly made pasta, which you definitely shouldn't miss.

Art and Culture

What I appreciated the most about Delray Beach was the diverse arts scene. From murals on the side of buildings to sculptures in between light posts, there was a visible and intentional display of art around the city. The Cornell Museum of Art and Arts Warehouse were highlights for me. The former showcases a diverse collection of contemporary and traditional art, while the latter serves as a hub for local artists, fostering creativity and collaboration within the community.



The Ray

Culinary Adventures

Delray Beach is a destination foodies will love thanks to a wide variety of dining options. Some standouts for me were Akira Black, which offers a fusion of Japanese and Latin flavours; Elisabetta's Ristorante, a must for tasty Italian; and the award-winning Dada has definitely earned its culinary accolades. Meeting Dada's executive chef Daniel Dore was a highlight, whose passion for food you could taste in every bite.



Main lobster roll at Café Boulud



📍 THE ALLURE OF PALM BEACH

Where to Stay: The White Elephant

Crossing over to Palm Beach, The White Elephant stands as a beacon of luxury. From the moment I walked in I instantly felt relaxed. This iconic hotel (with another location in Nantucket) really impressed me with its prime location, unique amenities, chic décor and memorable food—all of which epitomize the elegance and sophistication that Palm Beach is renowned for. With the beach just steps away, this idyllic boutique retreat made for a great place to base myself.

Exploring Palm Beach's History

Palm Beach is steeped in history, and no visit would be complete without immersing yourself in its storied past. The Breakers Hotel, an iconic establishment dating back to the Gilded Age is a good place to start and while the price tag for a night here might run high, I would still suggest stopping by for a tour, or even a dining experience. The Flagler Museum, once the winter estate of Henry Flagler, provides a glimpse into the extravagant lifestyle of the early 20th century. Flagler was one of the country's great visionaries and was behind building most of the railroad

along Florida's eastern coast, which led to the development of what we know and love about the destination today. If you're looking for more history, explore the origins and character of Worth Avenue and its unique landmarks through a 75-minute walking tour full of colourful anecdotes and commentary with author and historical docent, Rick Rose.

Tasty Tours

Indulge in a culinary adventure with a food tour through West Palm Beach, exploring the diverse flavours and vibrant street art that grace the city's downtown. West Palm Beach Food Tours offers an array of options including the Downtown West Palm Beach tour, which I loved. From Bradley's Saloon (dating back to 1984)



to Kapow where you'll find some of the best pan-Asian cuisine in this part of the county, to Ganache Bakery for some standout key lime pie (a



highlight for me), the tour is a great way to immerse yourself in the area's food scene.

If a food tour isn't your thing, check out Cafe Boulud. The French-American style cuisine parallels that of Cafe Boulud New York with a touch of South Florida flavour. The Wild Maine Lobster Roll was mouthwatering!

A Museum to Remember

Step into a world where art and culture intertwine seamlessly at the Norton Museum, which houses everything from classical masterpieces to contemporary wonders. I highly recommend doing a guided tour to get a curated exploration of the museum's treasures. With each brushstroke and sculpture, the museum delivers an enriching experience making it an essential stop for anyone interested in art. From Edgar Degas to Yayoi Kusama, there is something for everyone.

Delray Beach and West Palm Beach, though distinct in character, together create a symphony of experiences offering an unparalleled journey through arts, culture, food and history. So, pack your bags and get ready to be enchanted by the allure of these two captivating cities.

For more information on The Palm Beaches: thepalmbeaches.com ■

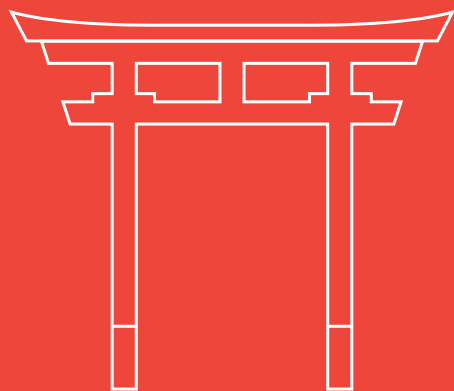


TOKYO

FOR THE FIRST TIMER

Even a short trip to this mesmerizing city made it evident that Tokyo is a must-visit offering enough to discover to justify many return flights

by Tammy Cecco



Tokyo, a vibrant blend of history and innovation, stands as a unique metropolis where the old harmonizes flawlessly with the new. As first-time travellers to Asia, we braced ourselves for sensory overload, yet Tokyo surpassed all expectations. Our time in the city was full of wonder and discovery despite our limited time. Here are some of the highlights along with some tips for first-time travellers.

Neon & Nightlife

With two teens in tow, we were not in Tokyo for the exciting nightlife, though we couldn't resist the temptation to get a glimpse of this aspect of the city. We had asked Keijii, our guide from ToursbyLocals for a private tour of Tokyo at night. As it was our first day, we thought it would also be a good way to get our bearings. Our first stop was Tokyo Tower to take in the skyline in all of its majestic beauty. It reminded me of Paris' Eiffel Tower in design and like the one in Paris, is one of the city's

most iconic landmarks. Standing 333 metres tall, the observation decks offer panoramic views of the city.

The next stop on our tour was Shibuya Crossing, commonly referred to as the world's busiest intersection. The organized chaos was mesmerizing. The best time to visit



With Keijii at the entrance to Memory Lane

As first-time travellers to Asia, we braced ourselves for sensory overload, yet Tokyo surpassed all expectations.



From there, we were on to Shinjuku's Kabukicho district where nightlife takes on a whole new meaning. The lively area is filled with bars, clubs, karaoke joints and restaurants. Don't miss the famous, Omoide Yokocho, also known as Memory Lane or Piss Alley. The latter may not be the most attractive reference, but this narrow lane is a must and is lined with tiny, traditional eateries and izakayas (Japanese pubs). The cozy and nostalgic atmosphere draws locals and tourists alike seeking an authentic taste of Tokyo's food culture.

Three hours later, Keijii bid us farewell with plenty of helpful tips for the best shopping and how to get around. The comprehensive yet well-paced tour with an exceptionally knowledgeable guide provided the perfect introduction to an amazing city.

is at dusk as you see the billboards come alive. We were greeted by dazzling neon signs and enormous screens. Keijii pointed out the popular meeting point of the Hackiko Statue, named after a loyal dog who after his owner's passing, returned to the same spot daily for nine years looking for him.



Temple-Hopping

It is estimated that there are about

100,000 Shinto shrines and 80,000 Buddhist temples throughout Japan. Sensoji Temple, also known as Asakusa Kannon Temple, is Tokyo's oldest and most significant Buddhist temple. Legend says that in the 7th century, two brothers fished a golden statue of Kannon, the goddess of mercy, out of the Sumida River, leading to the temple's founding. Kaminarimon, the temple's main gate features a massive red lantern. Walk through the gate and you will find, Nakamise-dori, a bustling street lined with shops selling traditional snacks and souvenirs. Once you pass through the second gate, you will find beautiful architecture and cultural artifacts. The atmosphere is perfect for peaceful prayer and contemplation. When you leave the temple, for a small fee you can get a prediction of your future on things like health, love, or career. Shake a container filled with sticks until one stick comes out. Each stick has a number corresponding to a drawer. Inside the drawer you will find your "omikuji," the small strip of paper with your prediction. If you receive a favourable one, you can take it home



as a souvenir, but if it is unfavourable (like the one I drew), superstition says if you tie it to one of the designated areas, you will leave your bad luck behind.

Fashion: Where the Past & Present Coexist

It is very common to see individuals dressed in traditional kimono or yukata alongside those in fashion-forward street styles. The city also hosts high-end fashion districts like Ginza and Omotesando where you can find luxury designer brands. I was most interested in introducing my teen daughters to Japanese traditions, so we booked a kimono experience. Upon seeing our itinerary they initially resisted, but ended up stating it was one of the most memorable parts of our visit. The kimono is a traditional Japanese garment known for its distinctive T-shaped form and elegant, intricate designs. It holds deep cultural significance and has

been worn in Japan for centuries. The process of wearing a kimono is complex as we soon learned at the kimono house as local women assisted us in choosing our kimono for the day (we had arranged a rental but they are also available for purchase) then after we put on the special undergarments, they expertly wrapped us in our kimono, securing it with a complimenting obi (sash) of our choosing. Our ensembles were complemented by a beautiful hairstyle adorned with kanzashi (decorative clips). While less commonly worn in daily life today, the kimono remains an important symbol of Japanese tradition and we gained a deep appreciation for the garment's craftsmanship and ties to Japan's history by getting a chance to wear one for the day.



Modern-Day Warriors: The Sport of Sumo

Sumo is more than just a sport in Japan; it embodies an ancient cultural heritage



that spans centuries. This competitive wrestling spectacle pits "rikishi," or wrestlers, against each other within a circular ring known as a "dohyo." Their objective is to push the opponent out of the ring or make them touch the ground with any body part other than their feet. Rooted in Shinto rituals and ceremonies, we gained firsthand insights into this revered tradition when graciously invited into a sumo stable—an arena where wrestlers not only train but live their disciplined lives. They must uphold strict customs, from their attire (the distinctive loincloth-like belts known as "mawashi") to their meticulously structured training, diets and lifestyle under the guidance of their stable master.

Kneeling respectfully on zabuton floor cushions, our guide facilitated conversations with Ajigawa master (real name Ryuji Suginomori, wrestling as Aminishiki), illuminating the intricate facets of this way of life. Within Japan, sumo wrestlers are hailed as modern-

day heroes. Ajigawa master, who retired from the sport in 2019 to establish his own stable, holds the third-highest record for appearances in the ring. His demeanor was both gentle in sharing his life journey and authoritative as he directed the rikishi during their rigorous training sessions.

Futuristic Art at TeamLab

There is no shortage of art galleries and museums in Tokyo, but when I heard about TeamLab I had to include it in our list of things to do. This immersive digital art museum offers visitors a unique and interactive experience merging art, technology and creativity. This is one experience you have to see to believe. Wading through water and traversing darkened spaces illuminated by breathtaking digital projections, I wondered where reality ends and art begins. The artwork is everchanging as it interacts with people and is never the same twice.



An Animated Indulgence

You could spend days exploring Tokyo with a list of famous streets as your guide. Our adventure took us back to Harajuku by day to take in the kaleidoscope of colours, sounds and styles of Takeshita Street where every step unveils a new facet of Japan's eclectic youth culture. It's a vibrant thoroughfare of quirky boutiques offering a fascinating mix of avant-garde fashion, whimsical accessories and character-themed merchandise. Self-expression reigns supreme here and tantalizing scents of sweet and

savory delights tempt the senses—ever heard of rainbow cheese? And yes, pet cafes are the real deal, where coffee comes with a side of furry friends, be it dogs, cats, or miniature pigs. Don't miss out on capturing photos of the vivid hues and eclectic scenes of this street. For Anime and Manga enthusiasts, a pilgrimage to Akihabara district promises endless stores dedicated to electronics, anime, and Manga.

Mata Kimasu

Tokyo is a city of endless exploration, where every street corner reveals a new facet of Japan's rich culture and history. Whether you're captivated by the neon lights of Shinjuku or the tradition of sumo, Tokyo will leave an indelible mark on your heart and the curious child inside you. One trip to Tokyo is never enough. Mata Kimasu means "I'll be back"—and I will. ■



HELPFUL TIPS & ADVICE FOR ANY TRIP TO TOKYO:

● ARRIVAL

Both Narita and Haneda International Airports are well-connected to the city centre by efficient transportation networks. Make sure you buy the Japan Rail pass. It can be used to take the train from the airport to the city as well as travelling throughout Japan.

● GETTING AROUND

Tokyo Metro and Toei Subway networks will be your primary modes of transportation within the city. Consider purchasing a PASMO Passport which can be used on trains, buses, and even for small purchases at convenience stores.

● LANGUAGE & ETIQUETTE

While many Tokyoites understand basic English, learning a few Japanese phrases can go a long way in enhancing your experience. Google Translate is a big help and as not all restaurants have English-speaking staff, you will be doing a lot of pointing to pictures on the menus provided. Remember to bow when appropriate and remove your shoes when entering traditional establishments.

It's also important to note that trash cans are few and far between. Citizens are responsible for their garbage and take it home with them. Carry a bag with you or look for a fast food restaurant where you can dispose of it.

● HIRE A LOCAL GUIDE- KEEP IT SIMPLE!

Although the city is friendly and safe, the sheer size and population can be overwhelming.

The amount of time saved by having an expert guide you is worth the money. As on many of my international trips, I consulted ToursByLocals.com to find the perfect match. In several years of using this company, it has always exceeded my expectations, providing excellent care, knowledge and most importantly catering a private tour that includes exactly what we are looking for. ToursbyLocals.com

● EXPLORE WITHIN EASY REACH

There are many places to visit within easy reach from Tokyo, especially when using the Shinkansen (bullet train) accessible with your Japan Rail Pass and one of my bucket list experiences.

We chose to make an unforgettable two-hour trip to Kyoto. Despite a tight timeline, Kojo, our guide arranged by ToursByLocals introduced us to this ancient city and did his best to get in all of the highlights. We walked over 20,000 steps seeing the sites, from the vibrant geisha district of Gion to the exquisite beauty of Kinkaku-ji's golden pavilion, then on to the Monkey Park, Bamboo Forest and the famous Fushimi Inari Shrine, where 10,000 closely

packed vermilion torii gates are dedicated to the patron deity of agriculture and commerce. Each step through the historic streets of Kyoto feels like a passage through time and was a truly unforgettable part of our trip.



Saying goodbye to Junko



Kojo at the Fushimi Inari Shrine

SPECIAL THANKS

A special thanks goes out to Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau for making many of my arrangements as well as providing a media coordinator/translator for our second day in Tokyo. Junko was invaluable to our trip. When we were on our own we found ourselves asking, "What would Junko do?"

Consult [GoTokyo.org](https://www.gotokyo.org) for lots of helpful information to plan your visit.

KOOKIE By Doug Wallace KOOTENAYS

RED Mountain is that under-the-radar yet top-level ski resort you didn't know about—but need to



An unofficial slogan—"a drinking town with a skiing problem"—could really apply to most ski resorts. But here at RED Mountain and the tiny community of Rossland, tucked away in the Kootenays in southeastern British Columbia, it's firmly tongue in cheek, befitting a quaint, almost hippie-era vibe. Digging deeper, I discover that this uncrowded, unpretentious town—which began life as a gold mining outpost—has a real reputation: Voted #1 Ski Town by USA Today for the past two years, Rossland is a hidden gem, just two-and-a-half hours north of Spokane, Washington, or four hours southeast of Kelowna.

Part of the Ikon Pass, RED Mountain Resort has been quietly wowing visitors since 1947. And now, even with cast-off chair lifts from several other Western Canada resorts, it is a treasured favourite, with 4,000 acres of terrain across four mountains and 300 inches of snow per year. The 119 runs run the gamut, and everybody has something to love—even the fussy ones: advanced skiers love this place, thanks to generous off-piste terrain and one of the largest cat-skiing operations in the world.

I check into the Autograph Collection-designated Josie Hotel and find a



Washington Street shops



The Josie



Rafters

WHEN YOU GO >>

Extra-curricular RED Mountain Resort activities set you up for off-mountain Rossland fun.

- **THE JOSIE HOTEL** is a ski-themed four-star haven at the base of the hill. The Velvet Restaurant and Lounge does a fun après-ski and an excellent dinner, and the ski concierge will keep your gear warm and dry until you're ready to boot up.
>> THEJOSIE.COM
- **ROSSLAND BEER COMPANY** is where you'll find locals and tourists alike gathering for a pint downtown, clustered on wooden benches around the beer vats, sipping on award-winning craft beer. A hyper-local, no-fuss experience.
>> ROSSLANDBEER.COM
- **GABRIELLA'S** is a town icon where chef Gabriella Pelli Lapointe and her team churn out large portions of Italian comfort food in a family-friendly setting. A burger and pizza menu draws hungry skiers to an adjacent lounge.
>> GABRIELLASPASTA.COM
- **THE ROSSLAND RANGE RECREATION SITES AND TRAILS** offers a network of winter hiking routes for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Little day-use cabins offer shelter and a wood stove—the perfect spot for a picnic.
>> ROSSLANDRANGE.ORG

chair at the Velvet Restaurant and Lounge while I wait for my room to be ready. The sun is shining low and après-ski is kicking off. To my left, the ski concierge is receiving the skis and boots of those who have called it a day. The place couldn't be more charming... oh, yes, it can—I've just spotted the outdoor saunas.

In addition to The Josie, RED has one of the country's few ski-in-only overnight stays, the eco-friendly, six-cabin Constella collection, nestled on the back of Granite Mountain, accessible via the chairlift. Sleep in and ski out.

I happen to visit on what was a complete powder day, the perfect snowfall, and practically the entire town took the day off. Who could pass this up? I revel in the fresh powder with my new best friend Vic, who is part of a volunteer snow-host group. Vic invites me to "No Shower Happy Hour" at Rafters, an après-ski attic where he and his band are part of the entertainment lineup. I hang up my jacket on a hook and pull up a pint. Perfect. ■

YUCATAN

STYLE

PLAY, EAT, STAY & DISCOVER

This welcoming region of Mexico offers many reasons to plan a trip—from beautiful beaches to amazing food

You might be familiar with the Yucatán Peninsula as a geographical region, but did you know it's actually home to three separate Mexican states, all of which offer something unique? The state of Yucatán, which lies between Campeche and Quintana Roo, packs a particularly robust vacation-worthy punch.

From UNESCO-listed Mayan archeological sites and cobblestone streets lined with brightly painted colonial haciendas to flocks of cheerful pink flamingos, Yucatan is a colourful area of Mexico made for return visits. Here are some of the best ways to play, eat, stay and discover—Yucatan style.

PLAY

Anyone who enjoys spending time in nature will have more than enough to keep them busy in Yucatan. There are lush jungles and mangroves to explore, biosphere reserves brimming with local wildlife, as well as some of the best diving and snorkeling in the

world. It's also well worth visiting a cenote. Unique to the region and filled with crystal-clear fresh water, these natural sinkholes are a sacred part of Mayan culture. Many tour companies will take you on cenote excursions where you'll have the chance to see (and swim in) several—some of which are deep underground. These may look intimidating, but the experience is truly magical.

EAT

Yucatecan cuisine is a culinary journey into the heart of this

region, and reason alone to visit. There is some seriously good food to be had here and you can find it everywhere—from taco stands in bustling markets to contemporary dishes at fine dining establishments. Rooted in ancient Mayan techniques and traditions and influenced by European and Caribbean flavours, Yucatecan dishes are a flavourful fusion that highlights a satisfying blend of flavours.

Don't leave without sampling cochinita pibil (a local take on pulled





STAY

The Yucatan epitomizes the idea of having something for everyone, especially when it comes to boutique accommodations. We suggest exploring the region's historic haciendas, some dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries (now transformed into charming guesthouses). These chic hideaways offer elegant rooms, fine dining, inviting swimming pools and scenic grounds—the perfect setting for an intimate and memorable getaway.

DISCOVER

This area is ripe with opportunities to experience the rich history and culture of the region which starts with the many Mayan archeological sites you'll find here. Chichen-Itza (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), Uxmal and Ek Balam are all worthwhile stops on your Yucatan itinerary. Visiting these sites really is like stepping back in time as you explore, feeling the history of the Mayans unfold with every step. In addition, the historical centre of Merida is filled with opportunities to experience local culture.

FLY

Depending on when you're travelling, it's easier than ever to reach the Yucatan. Westjet conveniently offers direct flights between Toronto and Merida on Tuesdays available between November and March, and the newly added Thursday flight (available as of Dec. 21st). Year-round options with connections via the U.S. are also available. ■

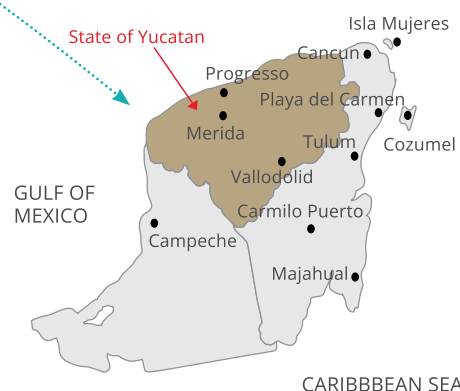
pork), sopa de lima (a comforting soup with a tangy twist), and papadzules (corn tortillas dipped in a rich pumpkin seed sauce and filled with hardboiled egg) for a taste of Yucatan's one-of-a-kind bites.



Plaza Grande, Merida



TORONTO





CLUB MED MARTINIQUE: BUCCANEER'S CREEK

BY TAMMY CECCO

A beautiful slice of French-Caribbean paradise that epitomizes a happy vacation

I tend to think of myself as somewhat of an authority when it comes to all-inclusive resorts but in over 30 years in the travel industry, I've never stayed at a Club Med. That's not to say I wasn't aware of the brand. In the early years of my career, all-inclusive resorts all seemed to emulate the pioneering concepts introduced by Club Med over 73 years ago. My curiosity finally led me to explore the recently revamped Buccaneer's Creek, nestled on the picturesque shores of Martinique.

Established in 1969, the property underwent a recent reopening, unveiling a contemporary transformation of much of the resort inspired by the vibrant hues of the island. This renovation was particularly anticipated by Club Med's devoted "Gentle Members," a designation bestowed upon guests, reflecting the resort's ethos of fostering a familial and communal spirit among visitors.

■ THE CLUB SPIRIT

Gérard Blitz's vision for the inaugural Club Med in Spain's Balearic Islands in 1950 aimed to establish a haven for people seeking respite from daily pressures, fostering happiness through diverse outdoor activities, entertainment and dining experiences. His enduring motto, "The purpose of life is to be happy. The time to be happy is now, and the place to be happy is here," remains the brand's guiding principle.

Something that really stood out during my visit was the sense of community among guests and resort staff. The brand employs Gentils

Organisateurs (G.O.s) and Gentils Employés (G.E.s) who act as ambassadors of this welcoming Club Med spirit.

In conversations with resort regulars, a recurring theme emerged—they were seasoned Club Med vacationers, often revisiting the same resort but also exploring multiple Club Med destinations. When asked about their loyalty, one member highlighted their predictably welcoming atmosphere, diverse activities, inclusive amenities and locally sourced culinary offerings. They also enjoyed encountering familiar faces, whether former G.O.s from other Club Meds or fellow guests from past travels. This sense of familiarity was palpable as G.O.s mingled with guests, sharing meals and socializing during my stay.

■ LIVELY AND VIBRANT

At various intervals during the day, gifted musicians and vocalists entertain guests at the main bar, The Madou, a great gathering place overlooking the pool and ocean. As night falls, the resort pulsates with life. Themed shows and live music create a vibrant atmosphere at the central stage, drawing guests together. A standout experience was the Rum Route, where enthusiastic G.O.s guided guests on a journey through rum stations spread across the resort, culminating in a beachside celebration.

■ ACTIVE ADVENTURE & WELLNESS

Club Med resorts are renowned for their diverse activities, surpassing typical offerings found

at other all-inclusive resorts. Fun options like windsurfing and waterskiing school elevate included options. Additionally, yoga and meditation are available throughout the day. Be sure to download the handy MyClubMed App to ensure you don't miss out on any of the fun. I enjoyed a fantastic tennis lesson, another elevated inclusion. Due to the upcoming expansion of the resort's new Zen Oasis slated for 2025/26, tennis courts will make way for 75 deluxe rooms and suites, along with an extra pool. Nevertheless, racquet sport enthusiasts can anticipate padel tennis, a popular European craze, to be introduced—an insight confirmed by my French tennis instructor.

■ A NEW LOOK

More than half of the resort's 291 rooms have been renovated as of the re-opening date this year with remaining rooms to be renovated by the end of this year. Rooms have ample





A lively start to the rum route



Fresh local ingredients at the buffet restaurant, The Pays Mèlés

A DAY OUT

Although the allure of Buccaneer's Creek makes it difficult to want to leave, the island of Martinique is worth exploring while there. Marius, a knowledgeable and entertaining guide from Top Tour Antilles was my gracious host as I discovered a lush, tropical paradise with warm and friendly people who welcome tourists with a distinct culture that's a blend of European, Creole, and West Indian flavour. Here are a few things not to miss.

RHUM: Rhum agricole is the French term for sugarcane juice rum, a style of rum originally distilled in the French Caribbean from freshly squeezed sugarcane juice rather than molasses like rum distilled in other areas of the world. Rhum Depaz distillery is a great example of how rums differ depending on where the sugar cane is grown. Set on the flanks of Mount Pelée, the fertile volcanic soil contributes to the present-day success of their production but holds the tragic tale of the eruption that took place in 1902.

FLORA & FAUNA: Just driving around, it's easy to see why Martinique is often referred to as the "Flower Island." It's equally evident why the entire island has been designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with its abundance of unspoiled beaches, volcanic peaks, waterfalls and other natural wonders. A great place to see indigenous flora and fauna is Balata Gardens—a three-hectare park boasting 300 species of palm trees. Get a spectacular aerial view from the suspended paths and bridges.

LOCAL DINING: Be sure to take advantage of a local restaurant when you are out and about. From beachside snack stands to family-owned treasures, there is a lot to be learned from the multiculturalism served on every plate. Try the tasty "sauce chien" as an accompaniment, a tasty combination of chives, parsley, fresh thyme, hot pepper, and garlic.



Saut Gendarme Waterfall



White Night, one of the many themed evenings



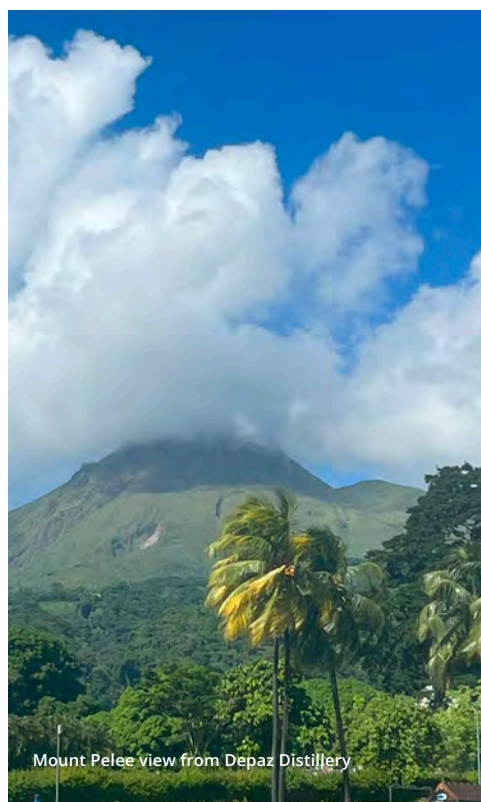
space and a bright colour palette featuring fun and floral patterns. They're also distributed throughout the resort in three different areas: Plantation Quarter (Quartier du Planteur), Creole Village and Harbor. Buildings all have memorable names—mine was called Pourquoi Pas? (Why Not), which became my mantra, inspiring me to try new activities and opening my mind to a different style of all-inclusive resort.

■ CULINARY DIVERSITY

The buffet at the main restaurant changes daily, featuring global flavours infused with the vibrant essence of Creole specialties crafted from locally sourced ingredients. Many options are cooked a la minute and several options include freshly-caught seafood. For a chic a la carte dining experience, try L'Ô beach lounge. Dine with the sounds of the ocean while you savour a curated

collection of authentic Creole dishes that embody the spirit of Martinique.

Club Med Buccaneer's Creek in Martinique is an excellent spot for couples, families and solo travellers who are looking for an unforgettable tropical escape that combines adventure and relaxation in equal measure. It all comes down to "L'Esprit Libre," a brand slogan that aptly embodies the embrace of life that Club Med is famous for and something we can all learn a little from.



Mount Pelée view from Depaz Distillery



Renovated superior room with seaview

HOW TO GET THERE

Convenient Direct Flights

To Fort de France with Air Canada

■ **Montreal:** 3 times weekly

■ **Toronto: *NEW*** Every Saturday
Dec. 16th/23-Mar. 31st/24

DISCOVER DENVER'S BURGEONING STREET ART SCENE by Kim Pemberton



The Mile High City is making a name for itself when it comes to must-see public art

These days you can see street art almost anywhere, and it's becoming a major tourist attraction for many cities that are painting their towns red (and other shades on the colour spectrum).

While New York is considered the birthplace of street art, when graffiti started showing up on the sides of walls and trains in the 1920s, and Philadelphia is known as the "Mural Capital of the World" with more than 4,400 murals, there's one surprising U.S. city also making a name for itself as a major street art capital—Denver, Colorado.

“

The city's Urban Arts Fund, created in 2009, has helped with the creation of nearly 330 new murals and the protection of more than 500,000 sq. ft. of walls from vandalism.

”



“Although street art started in New York City and Philadelphia, Denver was the first city to really embrace street art as public art,” says Denver Graffiti tour co-owner Jana Novak. The company, which started in 2018, conducts tours to help explain the Mile High City’s ever-expanding and changing street art scene.

Novak says the city once frowned upon street art, viewing it as illegal incidents of graffiti that needed to be scrubbed clean but eventually saw how to work with street artists to help create legitimate public art.

“Part of the logic was if we embrace it we would get less of the destructive defacing of public art and buildings,” Novak says.

The city’s Urban Arts Fund, created in 2009, has helped with the creation of nearly 330 new murals and the protection of more than 500,000 sq. ft. of walls from vandalism.

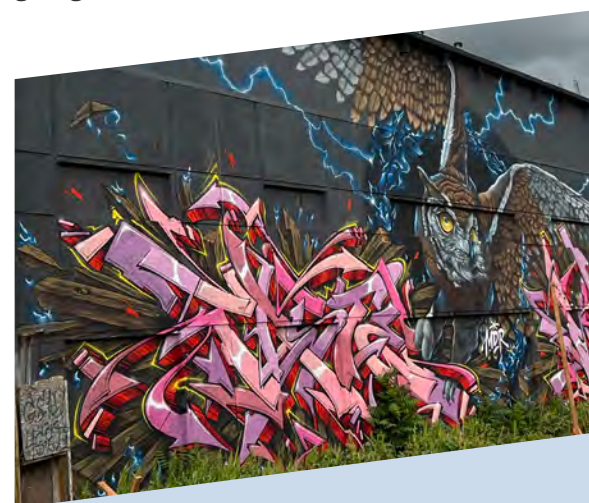
One Denver neighbourhood that has really taken to street art is River North, known to locals as RiNo, which was re-energized, in part, after a mural festival began there in 2010, called CRUSH Wall Festival that took place every September until it ended in 2020. In its last year, 80 murals were created by both local and international artists during the week-long festival. In 2023 a new festival debuted called the Denver Walls, part of the World Wide Walls Festival, and took place from September 22 to October 3.

Novak pointed out the life of a street artist can be much tougher than a typical artist working in a studio.

“In studio art they can work in a climate-controlled space, have air conditioning and be sitting down comfortably. For a street artist, they have to work outside. It might be 100 degrees, cold, or raining on them. If they are working during a festival

they have to complete their piece in that week no matter what the climate is,” she explains, adding that their canvas is the wall. “Unlike an artist working in a studio, they can’t throw away 100 canvasses until they find the right one. It’s just here’s the wall, make it work.”

Novak says while some murals have been around for many years in Denver, the average length of time they stay up is two years. “Street art by definition is ephemeral. It’s not going to live forever.” ■





FAIRMONT MAYAKOBA

has never been better

This beachfront resort's recent multimillion-dollar renovations elevate an already exceptional vacation experience

BY TAMMY CECCO

Fairmont Mayakoba holds a special place in our family's heart since our initial discovery a few years ago. The natural setting, unpretentious yet elegant amenities and access to a myriad of activities within the Mayakoba complex have continually delighted us. The impeccable service and heartfelt hospitality greet us with every visit, weaving an ever-growing tapestry of cherished family memories.

A resort that consistently exceeds expectations is a rare gem so when news of their multimillion-dollar renovation surfaced in February 2021 I

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wondered, "Can perfection be enhanced?" Astonishingly, the transformation was a harmonious blend of revitalization and new additions, elevating the property to unparalleled heights thanks to Luis Yunta, interior design director for Room 1804, the company behind Fairmont Mayakoba's new look.

According to Yunta, the intent was to infuse the beauty of the natural surroundings into the design, which isn't hard when your inspiration is pristine sand, turquoise water and tropical vegetation. The pairing of local woods and natural fibers by Riviera Maya craftsmen not only creates a calming atmosphere but also gives visibility to the talented local artisans.

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

› Rooms and suites were redesigned in a neutral colour palette with pops of blue to reflect the ocean setting. My favourite suites are those that can be combined with a casita to create a home away from home with ample living space complete with your own private pool. And while I've always been partial to the beachfront suites, I recently stayed in a suite on the lagoon nestled within lush mangroves which afforded ample privacy. The Great Blue Heron spotting and the sounds of nature were a real highlight. I'm happy to report that the hotel still sells all rooms with their elevated all-inclusive package which Canadians love!



Beachfront—mere steps till your toes are in the sand

- › New restaurants added to Fairmont Mayakoba's already impressive culinary repertoire include La Laguna, a vibrant ode to Mexican heritage, surrounded by the resort's canals. Bassano is a fresh Italian venue that crafts excellent pizzas and pasta, but my favourite by far was the recently debuted Tauro, a stylish steakhouse that boasts its own in-house dry-aging program.
- › Hix lobby bar has had a chic new makeover, featuring an expansive terrace overlooking the canals. It showcases new light installations, bespoke artwork and fabulous cocktails and small bites.

A BEACH CLUB THAT WOWS

The newly unveiled Maykana Beach Club stands out as a crown jewel, boasting one of Riviera Maya's largest and most impressive setups oceanside. It features five distinctive dining venues and an infinity pool flanked by five lavish cabanas. A standout gem within the club is Cielo, an adults-only rooftop bar perched above the Caribbean sea, complete with sunken fire pits and lounge seating. This thoughtful design pays homage to elemental influences, echoing the natural cenotes that grace the Yucatan peninsula.

On a clear night, the ambience is enchanting, complemented by soft lighting and the soothing melody of ocean waves—or the more upbeat tunes spun by the DJ.

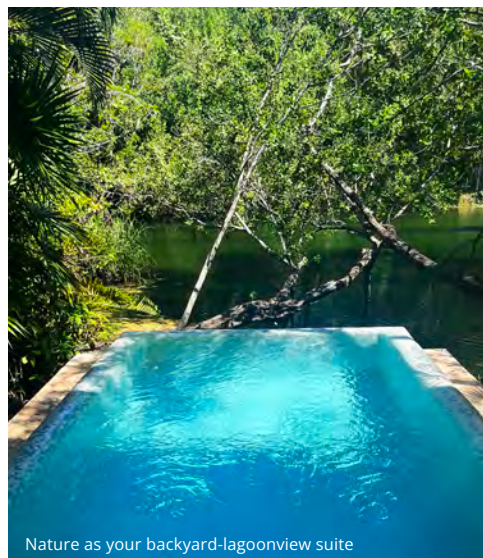
For an extraordinary twist, indulge in the bacon fat-washed bourbon cocktail—a creation from Cielo's talented bartenders. Bacon fat and bourbon? Trust me, the unexpected fusion is a true testament to the inventive offerings found at this resort.

ENDLESS BIKE PATHS

Being surrounded by lagoons and tropical forest means there's always something to see. I like to borrow a bike (available at the hotel) and take a ride throughout the Mayakoba complex, stopping at El Pueblito, a replica of a small Mexican town with a beautiful church, shops and excellent photo opportunities. You are sure to see some local wildlife on your ride.

ALWAYS A REASON TO RETURN

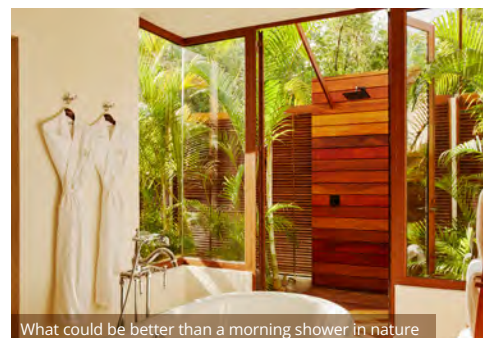
Aside from everything that always brings me back to Fairmont Mayakoba, the resort also offers an exciting calendar of things to



Nature as your backyard—lagoonview suite



Impeccable service



What could be better than a morning shower in nature



Bacon and bourbon?



Explore the jungle pathways

see and do. From A List concerts to unique events like gourmet dinners accompanied by a symphony in a cenote, there are plenty of activities to include in your next trip. Not to mention visiting their new spa, which is undergoing its own round of renovations.

I can't wait for my next visit! ■



FROM THE SEA OF CORTEZ STRAIGHT TO YOUR PLATE

Pair your clams with the Hotel Oasis' famous mustard sauce

Due to its prime location on the Sea of Cortez, Loreto is a great place to indulge in seafood of all kinds-especially chocolata clams, a regional specialty. Harvested in abundance here, the succulent treats are served fresh on your plate-straight from the sea. If you can't make it to Mexico, recreate some of the local flavours at home. Get some clams and make the famous mustard sauce from Hotel Oasis in Loreto, which pairs beautifully with shellfish.

MUSTARD SAUCE

INGREDIENTS

- 60 grams mayonnaise
- 200 ml mustard
- 50 grams canned jalapeño
- Jalapeño juice
- 10 grams of salt
- 2 grams of ground black pepper

In the blender add all the ingredients together and blend until the jalapeño pepper is mixed completely. Done!

*If you like more spice add more jalapeño peppers and juice.





LINGER LONGER IN LORETO

By Debra Smith

WHERE TO SHOP, SPA, STAY AND EXPLORE IN THIS
CHARMING TOWN IN BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR



Whether your favourite pastime is shopping, sailing, or spa time, Loreto, Baja California Sur has you covered. Love history, hiking, or horseback riding? You can find your kind of fun just outside of town, on your own, or with a top-notch local guide.

WHERE TO SHOP

The main historic walking street in Loreto is Juan Maria de Salvatierra. A stroll along the shaded street from the town square to Calle Independencia takes about five minutes if you aren't shopping. If you are, it can take a lot longer. Stop by pretty pink Plaza Julieta for glass ornaments, shirts and sunhats. Make sure to walk to the back, through the shady atrium to find all the shops. Further along Salvatierra you'll find a wide range of souvenir shops selling everything from leather goods to luchador wrestler masks. For quality hand-painted ceramics, 3D tin artwork and magical wooden creatures from Oaxaca called alebrije

head to the modern Plaza Mision Loreto near Calle Independencia.

SIESTA AT THE SPA

Las Flores Spa & Boutique could not be more central, or more lovely. Located directly across from the butter-hued City Hall building in the square, Las Flores Spa offers facials, massages (including couple's massages) and body treatments made from cactus, aloe vera and prickly pear. Their signature organic products are made in Iztapalapa. The boutique carries high-quality contemporary Mexican clothing for men and women. My massage was so relaxing I was tempted to drift into dreamland.



Plaza Julieta



“

The main historic walking street in Loreto is Juan Maria de Salvatierra and great for shopping.

DON'T MISS THE MISSIONS

When the Jesuits arrived in 1697 one of their tasks was to build a Camino Real, a Royal Road for Charles II of Spain—without a budget. Luckily, they had soldiers to do the work, at first. Unluckily for the local Indigenous tribes, they were the ones eventually conscripted to build roads, aqueducts and stone churches. Many missions fell into disrepair but the ones that remain are both austere and evocative. Most of their treasures were carried away to missions along the camino that ends in San Francisco, but the remaining missions are each unique in their own way.

The original mission, Our Lady of Loreto, can be easily visited in town at most times of the day. Services are held regularly and there is a museum attached dedicated to its Jesuit founders. The most well-preserved is Mission San Francisco Javier Vigge-Biaundo, about 50 minutes southwest of Loreto. The paved road follows the original camino through rolling





hills with spectacular views of the Gulf of California. The mission has an impressive gold leaf altarpiece, and the original aqueduct still brings water to the date palms, oranges and a gigantic three-hundred-year-old olive tree on the grounds.

Mission Santa Rosalie de Mulege is almost a two-hour drive from Loreto, so you might want to stay overnight in colourful Mulege, for three reasons. First to see the mission and its impressive vaulted ceiling, an incredible feat of Jesuit engineering. Secondly, the nearby overlook has stunning sunset views of the only river in Baja California Sur. It's the nesting grounds of thousands of turkey vultures who swirl over the palm forest like black snowflakes before settling in for the night. Last, but not least, you can explore a prison without doors, now the Mulege Museum, and learn about its unique history.

PLACES AND ACTION!

Put on your hiking boots and join Juve Orozco from Sea and Land Tours on a half-day hike up, down, over and through a rocky canyon (arroyo). Your reward is an expert lesson on the pictographs and petroglyphs made by the nomadic Indigenous tribes of Baja thousands of years ago. There

are several such sites around Loreto, some of them UNESCO-protected, but the Pinguica paintings are the closest. Others require several days of mountain trekking and overnight camping. The cave paintings are still bright, preserved by the dry air of the Sierra Madre mountains.

Fancy a ride along the beach? Mario Perez and his family have been leading horseback rides in Ligui for years. Saddle up a gentle horse or mule for a ride along the sand at Ligui and learn about local flora and fauna and the sea turtle protection program on the shore. Mario will pick you up from your hotel for the 30-minute drive from Loreto. **Call +52 613 105 8935.**



A BOUTIQUE RETREAT

Posada Del Cortes is a charming three-story boutique hotel in the classic Spanish style with tile floors and hand-plastered walls. Vine-covered walls wrap around a cobblestone courtyard where a light breakfast is served under the palm trees. Each room is unique. Second floor rooms have delicate wrought iron balconies, and the breezy third floor terrace is open to all. The comfy beds are piled with pillows, and there is cable TV and air conditioning. Best of all, the hotel is only a two-minute walk to the town square, but far enough away from the church bells to ensure a good night's sleep. ■



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