

TravelLife

FALL 2024

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CONTRIBUTORS

Since this issue includes our annual *Mad for Mexico* special feature, we asked some of our contributors to tell us about an area of Mexico they have yet to visit but are eager to explore and why it piques their interest.



JIM BAMBOULIS

SUNNY FORT MYERS FOR THE WIN!,
PAGE 12

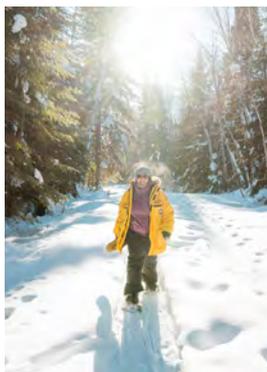
I've travelled pretty extensively throughout Mexico, but of course, one needs a lifetime to see it all. Getting into the interior and visiting places like Chihuahua, Creel and Copper Canyon are all Mexican destinations I've eagerly anticipated visiting. Surreal vistas and incredible outdoor adventures and culinary offerings, all mixed with passionate and hospitable locals? I'm in and happy to say I am headed there next week.



NICOLA BROWN

HOW TO TRAVEL TO EUROPE WITH A BABY,
PAGE 26

Can you believe I've never been to Mexico? For an embarrassingly well-overdue trip, I've got two versions of Mexico on my mind. The first: get swept up in the buzz of everyday culture and indulge in the world-class culinary scene in Mexico City. The second: leave all the details of outdoor adventure and relaxation to someone else at an all-inclusive in Riviera Maya. Two opposite and necessary ends of the spectrum to suit our new family of three.



SHEL ZOLKEWICH

THE MANY FLAVOURS OF SAINT MARTIN,
PAGE 10

I've spent a little bit of time in Puerto Escondido and it gave me a glimpse of the state of Oaxaca where there are 16 officially recognized Indigenous Peoples, including the Zapotecs and Mixtecs. I need to do a deep dive into this rugged and culturally diverse landscape. It feels like a truly authentic part of Mexico. Plus the markets are out of this world!

TravelLife



The Catrina serves as a prominent symbol of the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos), signifying the cycle of life and death. Adorned in her refined clothing and recognizable skull makeup, she represents the belief that death is a natural part of life, one to be recognized and celebrated. Día de los Muertos is celebrated across Mexico every year on November 1st and 2nd.

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“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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THE MAGIC OF FALL



There's something about autumn that creates a sense of both nostalgia and excitement. We're missing the laid-back days of summer, but also looking ahead to what comes next. This dual nature of the season, something I feel is often unique to fall, also speaks to my love of travel. Every place you visit can simultaneously be somewhere you long to return to and also serve as inspiration for your next adventure.

With that in mind we've curated this issue with stories that run the gamut from deeply personal travelogues to profiles of some of our favourite hotels and resorts. But to us, the magic of travel isn't just about experiencing new places—it's about seeing the world through a different lens. My recent adventure trip to Utah left a profound impact on me, as the raw beauty of its landscapes and the sense of peace found in its vast canyons and towering rock formations reshaped how I connect with nature and myself.

In addition to sharing my transformative experience in Utah, this issue is packed with a diverse array of destinations, and also features our annual *Mad for Mexico* section highlighting everything from well-known favourites to lesser-known spots just waiting to be discovered. It is a destination that is one of my personal favourites for its rich diversity, and now, as the country enters a new era with Claudia Sheinbaum recently sworn in as Mexico's first female president, there's even more to celebrate in this vibrant destination.

If you're craving a slice of the Caribbean, we have stories focusing on the amazing flavours you'll find in St. Martin (save room for multiple croissants), the tranquil beauty of laid-back Tobago and the many things to see and do in and around Nassau in The Bahamas.

Shifting to Europe, one writer gets the chance to reconnect with her roots in Hungary during an unforgettable river cruise, while another shares tips for travelling to southern France with a baby in tow (without losing your head). We also have a piece on how the iconic city of Paris was able to use its famous landmarks to frame the 2024 Olympics.

For some travel inspiration closer to home, you'll want to read our piece on the beauty of Newfoundland and how Canada's easternmost province delivers a vacation like no other. We also have a look at Québec City and Charlevoix, a scenic duo of destinations that make for a perfect fall getaway.

As we transition into a season of change, let this issue be your guide to embracing the wonders of travel. Whether you're planning your next trip or simply looking to escape through our pages, we hope this edition brings a fresh sense of excitement to your travel plans.

Happy travels and happy fall!

Tammy Cecco

TAMMY CECCO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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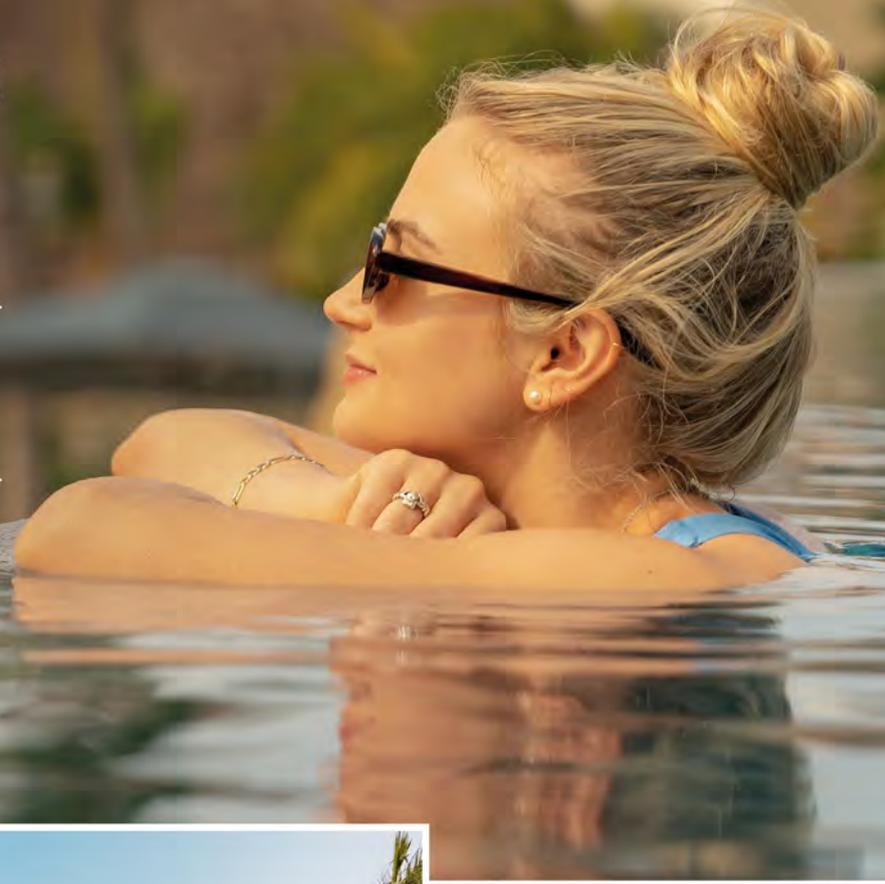


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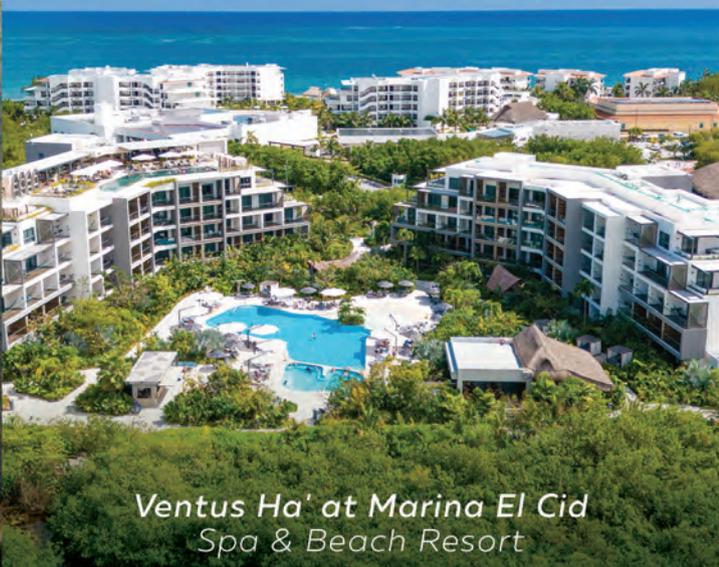


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Hotels, Reborn

Three unique properties offering so much more than a place to rest your head

BY MARTHA CHAPMAN



Sure, you can always stay at a big-name hotel. It will likely be pleasantly predictable. But why not settle yourself and your suitcase at a property with an intriguing past? The world is full of hotels that have been cleverly reinvented, and chances are, like the ones featured here, it will be brimming with personality and glimpses into a rich history. Read on for some standout suggestions for your next stay.



► Elora Mill Hotel & Spa, Elora, Ont.

A hotel since the 1970s, Elora Mill Hotel & Spa has just 30 elegant guest rooms, an inviting restaurant, wine cellar, bar and a bustling kitchen which guests are welcome to observe through plate glass windows. The staff, gracious and warm, number as many as 250, a testament to the Mill's position as a prestigious choice for special events including weddings (the hotel has its own chapel) and small corporate gatherings.

The spa alone is a treasure. Comprising eight treatment rooms (including two for couples), its pool terrace commands an impressive view over Grand River and the Elora Gorge—the perfect spot for sipping your favourite libation as you recover from all that relaxation. Throughout the property, artwork provided by local talents and curated by the Elora Centre for the Arts provides bold dashes of colour. All pieces are available for sale, another way the Inn supports the community.



Many guest rooms feature original wooden ceiling beams and most have woodburning fireplaces. Suites overlooking the gorge have terraces complete with gas fire pits. Clientele at the Mill hail mainly from the Greater Toronto Area, just over 100 kilometres away, but have included guests from as far away as the UK and

Japan (and one helicopter-borne celebrity whom the hotel discreetly declines to name).

Not surprisingly, the Elora Mill is a destination for special occasions, large and not-so-large, and sometimes just for two, such as when the staff help orchestrate marriage proposals. Along with the charms of the hotel itself, Elora village boasts Instagram-ready streets filled with boutiques and pubs. The Mill has bikes guests can borrow free of charge (including a bicycle-built-for-two). Nearby, there are hiking options along historic railway beds or rural farmland, and guests interested in local history can visit the Wellington County Museum just down the road.

Back at the hotel, the restaurant overlooking the gorge is serving lunch featuring pan roasted trout, tomato strozzapreti and grass-fed beef burgers. Nearby, three ladies from Toronto are enjoying a 50th birthday celebration. "We had to come here. It's just so special!" Eloramill.ca



► **Summum Hotel, Mallorca**

The Spanish island of Mallorca has been luring visitors for generations, and its pretty, harboured capital of Palma is a perfect base for exploring beaches, vineyards, meandering cobblestone streets and more. Tucked away on a quiet side street, the Summum serves up a Euro-chic vibe alongside a rich history. Originally built in 1570, the hotel, a member of the Meliá Collection, boasts just 18 guestrooms, a stylish bar/restaurant called Equus and a rooftop terrace for light meals. The historic building's stables have been transformed into a restaurant, while the former cistern now houses the wellness centre. Best of all, at the Summum you're a mere stroll from the many charming boutiques and eateries of Palma, one of the Mediterranean's great cities. Hotelsummum.com



► **Graycliff Hotel & Restaurant, Nassau**

A must-stay hotel in The Bahamas that's not on the beach? It might sound counterintuitive, but such a property does exist—and it's one you'll likely want to return to. Graycliff, in the heart of downtown Nassau, is beautiful inside and out and comes with a fascinating history. The mansion the hotel is housed in was built in 1740 by dastardly-sounding pirate, John Graysmith. Since then, the Graycliff has hosted the likes of Al Capone, Winston Churchill and Sean Connery, among many others. Today, the 16 guest rooms are cozy havens of unique decor and well-chosen antiques. The azure pool sparkles amidst lush gardens and the cellar cradles over 250,000 bottles of wine. And don't worry, you're only minutes from those iconic white sand beaches. Graycliff.com



The Many Flavours of Saint Martin

BY SHEL ZOLKEWICH

French cuisine and island roots make for a gastronomic win throughout this Caribbean culinary gem

Pinel Island

The intoxicating aroma of pain au chocolate and warm baguettes drifts from Chez Fernand on Boulevard de France Front de Mer in Marigot, Saint Martin's largest city. It's truly impossible not to stop for a closer look at the artistry in the pastry case. A true French-style bakery if there ever was one, right here on this Caribbean island, where those in search of gastronomic excellence will not be disappointed.

Saint Martin's impressive culinary scene is thanks to its history. The island measures only 87 square kilometres, divided into a French republic on the north side and governed by the Netherlands on the south. The French side

maintains strong influences from the motherland mixed with Creole roots. An abundance of fresh fruit and seafood adds a touch of the islands to traditional French cooking and has spawned more than 300 restaurants.

While extravagant meals are in no short supply, diner-like options are not to be missed. For big flavour, friendliness and authenticity, head to a lolo. These small, open-air diners have their roots in 17th century West Indies culture, where villages were born on former plantations and traditional fare was served alongside good conversation. In Marigot, a clutch of lolos sits at the seaside, each offering something a little different, but equally delicious.



Coco Beach



infused with wild guavaberry, cinnamon, vanilla and sugar to create a sweet tippie that's especially popular around the December holidays. Pop into the little rum hut in Marigot called Colombier Tradition for a detailed description of how it's made, plus tastings. The hut stocks plenty of variations of the guavaberry mix plus other liqueurs, including mamajuana, a spicy mix of rum, red wine, honey, tree bark and herbs.



Géraud Vallet, Le Comptoir des Fromages

If a craving for brie or farmhouse gouda hits, Géraud Vallet's love of cheese runs deep at his shop, Le Comptoir des Fromages in Marigot, where the comprehensive and varied wine and cheese-tasting experience is a must-do. The French banker-turned-cheesemonger sets out nine glorious examples—from the creamiest of goat cheeses to ultra-savoury chunks of blue-veined Roquefort—and a basket of yeasty baguette on the side—to start the show.

For a quintessential Saint Martin beach day, hop on the public ferry to Karibuni on Pinel Island and have a seat on the expansive deck overlooking the calm waters of Cul-de-Sac Nature Reserve. Dig your toes into the sand and order a ti-punch, an island cocktail made with lime, sugar cane syrup and rhum agricole (a variety of rum made with sugar cane). Start with the mini barbecue ribs appetizer, then look to the specials of the day which might include grilled mahi-mahi marinated in Creole sauce. Their poke bowls are colourful and elaborate creations worthy of any



Guavaberry liqueur at Sandy's

Instagram reel. Then pull up an oceanside lounge chair (€25 for two deckchairs and a parasol) to while away a relaxing afternoon

For a fancier lunch, head to Coco Beach Restaurant at Orient Beach where chef Laurent Saudeau, with a pair of Michelin stars under his belt, offers a lunch menu worthy of multiple visits. The standouts here include veal carpaccio with creamy tuna sauce, roast chicken with potato gnocchi and an unforgettable chocolate pie topped with hazelnuts—all served beachside at open-air tables.

Pizza is everywhere, but here in Saint Martin it gets elevated to new heights at Ristorante Del Arti, where the 4 Fromaggi pizza comes wood-fired on an irresistibly pillowy crust loaded with pecorino, gorgonzola, buffalo mozzarella and fior di latte. Start dinner with arancini and split the chef's risotto of the night with a friend. Enjoy the casual vibe of this open-air restaurant located in Anse Marcel, near the marina.



Le Cottage

Writer's Pick

It's in the running for my best meal of the year. Traditional French cuisine and Caribbean flavour meet at Le Cottage in the Grand Case neighbourhood of Saint Martin. Everything that's so appealing about French food is here, along with undeniable island hospitality, set streetside in a cozy bistro. The show starts when the lobster bisque comes out of the kitchen, topped with golden puff pastry. When it's time for an entrée, fresh seared scallops are topped with strips of crispy chorizo and on the side, shrimp with bacon emulsion, leeks and parsnip puree. And finally, there is simply nothing better than the best-selling caramel soufflé. It comes to the table with ice cream and a server who gently carves a crevice in the centre and pours in salted caramel sauce.

There's no doubt I'll be back to try much more of what this welcoming island has to offer.



Johnny cakes

Breakfast at Strictly Lokal Creole Restaurant starts with a gently spiced sorrel juice. Made with hibiscus flowers and bush tea, this lemongrass-scented herby hot drink is touted as a cure-all. Riding side-saddle to a heaping omelette is a johnny cake, Saint Martin's version of fried bread. Lunch at Sandy's opens with an accra appetizer, fritters made with salt fish and a taste of the island's own guavaberry liqueur. Then it's on to an assortment of island specialties like stewed oxtail, grilled conch and Sandy's curry shrimp. And speaking of guavaberry liqueur, the fruity spirit starts with rum then gets



SUNNY FORT MYERS FOR THE WIN!

The City of Palms sways to its own authentically Floridian heartbeat

By Jim Bamboulis

Fort Myers Beach

Fun fact: Fort Myers averages 270 sunny days per year, making it the sunniest city in the Sunshine State. That sounds perfect right about now, doesn't it? The City of Palms prides itself on flying under the radar, away from the spotlight, seen only by travellers who want to experience a truly authentic corner of Florida. But word's out. Stunning natural beauty blends with unrivaled island adventures. Warm Gulf breezes caress endlessly soft, sandy beaches. Add an eclectic culinary scene, a rich history and a dash of artsy vibes, and you have a city that's yearning to be enjoyed. So go ahead, trade boots for beaches and snowstorms for sunsets—you'll be glad you did.



Captiva Island

Blessed with rich, natural beauty, this southwest corner of Florida truly satiates every type of traveller, with no shortage of activities. For an incredible, relaxing day on the water, head to Captiva Island and embark on any number of Captiva Cruises, including the Dolphin and Wildlife Cruise, and Cabbage Key Lunch Cruise. Cabbage Key is home to an inn and restaurant built on a Calusa Indigenous shell mound, and believed to be the inspiration behind Jimmy Buffet's song, "Cheeseburger in Paradise." While steaks, seafood and desserts are available, a must is the cheeseburger, of course, best enjoyed in the Dollar Bill room, where you too can hang a paper bill, adding to the nearly \$70,000 filling every nook and cranny.



Infamous Dollar Bill Room, Cabbage Key Inn

With a plethora of state parks, aquatic and ecological preserves, not to mention protected wildlife and environmental areas, the citizens of Fort Myers are passionate about their pristine resources. Meander the lush two-kilometre boardwalk within Six Mile Cypress Slough, a 3,500 acre freshwater

wetland. The Slough itself is a 14 kilometre long, half-kilometre wide wildlife corridor, allowing gators, turtles and otters to safely navigate within the Fort Myers city limits. Further down the coast, Lovers Key State Park is a hub for everything from enchanting mangrove forests to unforgettable white sand beach days, shelling and scuba diving. Canoe/kayak and paddle along serene canals and lagoons, spotting manatee, shorebirds and even dolphins who are just as curious about you as you are about them.

Jimmy Buffet vibes emanate throughout Margaritaville Beach Resort Fort Myers Beach, which features 7.5 acres of beachfront chill. Opened in December '23, the 254 room, six restaurant property is a Gulf oasis and first new hotel to open here in over 20 years. Enjoy a welcome margarita upon check in



Margaritaville Beach Resort Fort Myers Beach

(of course) and settle into a plush, airy suite adorned with distinctly Floridian pastels. Spend the day on the beach or rent a poolside cabana and enjoy tropical cocktails at the Fins Up! Beach Club. Find serenity at the St. Somewhere Spa, savour seafood at JWB Grill or Lah De Dah Beach Bar and Grill, and give in to mesmerizing nightly sunsets. Over the bridge and on the mainland, Fort Myers blends young and vibrant energy with old Florida cool. Stroll the River District's brick paved streets and explore Art Deco masterpieces at every turn. Grab bites and drinks at Ford's Garage and The Firestone Grill Room and Skybar and immerse yourself in monthly Art and Music Walks that fill the air with soul, as local artists showcase their range of talents. Drawing tens of thousands annually is the increasingly popular Fort Myers Island Hopper Songwriter Fest, while Savor the Shore is a seven-week foodie fest throughout the region with restaurants featuring the diverse and delicious flavours of the region, including pink gold shrimp, a favourite in these parts caught fresh year-round.



Ford's Garage



Edison Estates

Down the river, a must visit is the Thomas Edison-Henry Ford Winter Estates, an expansive and impressive property that gives visitors of all ages a glimpse into the lives and minds of the famed inventors. Book a guided tour for a more in-depth educational experience, or explore the majestic homes, stunning botanic gardens and astonishing laboratory at leisure. Be sure to stop in the 15,000 square foot museum, prominently displaying exhibits and artifacts, including Edison's invention of electric lighting and Ford's automobile legacy.

Overlooking the Caloosahatchee River, the Luminary Hotel and Co, Autograph Collection is a four-star landmark, meticulously and beautifully designed and decorated to reflect the rich history of the area and pay homage to the city's pioneering luminaries, including the aforementioned Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Rent a bike and explore the River District, or enjoy it peacefully from above in the relaxing heated pool located outside on the hotel's 4th floor sundeck. Great grub includes a visit to the vintage, laid back Ella Mae's, a classic southern diner,

and for evening cocktails with unobstructed sunset and marina views, head to Beacon Social Drinkery on the eclectic 12th floor rooftop.

No matter where you go in Fort Myers, the city's vibrancy and welcoming nature are evident everywhere you turn.

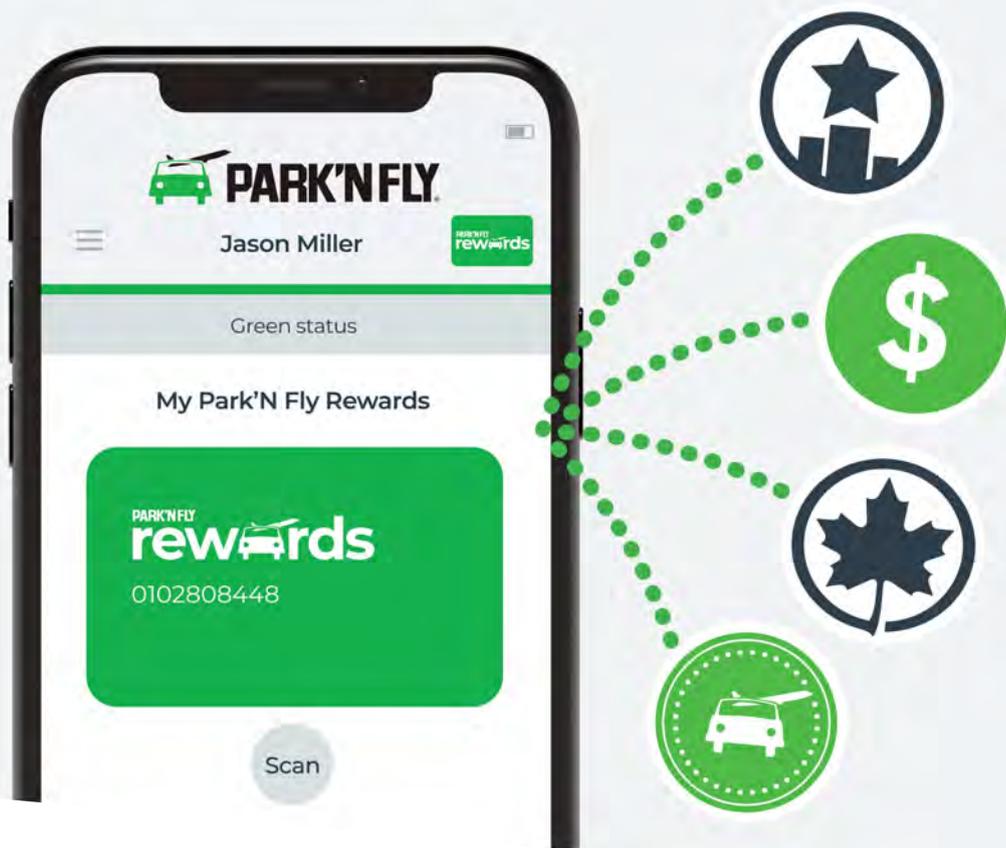


Luminary Hotel and Co, Autograph Collection



Red-bellied Woodpecker (Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve)

For more information on Fort Myers, Islands, Beaches & Neighborhoods: visitfortmyers.com



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Utah: A Place Like No Other

My already high expectations were surpassed and then some during a profound and transformative visit to this rugged and beautiful state

BY TAMMY CECCO

I had seen the incredible pictures and the fabulous Instagram posts. But witnessing the real thing was like walking onto a movie set. While in Utah, I was captivated by the ever-changing colours of the red rock formations, the jagged cliffs, hoodoos standing like ancient sentinels and sweeping vistas that stretched out before me like a masterpiece. From the moment I arrived, I knew this would be a trip unlike any other.

Making the experience even more special were my travelling companions: my husband and another couple—friends of over 25 years. This crew and the jam packed, adventure-filled itinerary made for plenty of laughs, adrenaline rushes and some profound life reflection.

After deciding on the destination, one member of our group insisted he be in the dark about the details. He longed for that child-like joy of surprise, something so rare as we get older. We took him up on the challenge and he awoke each morning without a clue what we would be doing that day.

Road Tripping Through the Red Rocks

Our ride of choice was a 25-foot RV from Cruise America (cruiseamerica.com) and although we didn't plan to camp every night, there were some areas we definitely wanted to get closer to. We had done our homework, mapping out routes that included some of Utah's most impressive scenic byways. Smithsonian Butte National Back Country Byway was the perfect choice heading south towards Zion National Park. As we made our way through Utah's mesmerizing landscape, we were like kids in a candy store, unable to resist stopping often to take it all in. Our introduction to Utah's towering red rocks and the unique buttes left us oohing and awing in amazement, eager to capture the magic through our camera lenses.



Zion White Bison Glamping & RV Resort (zionwhitebisonresort.com) was the basecamp for our first few adventures and ideally located just a few miles from the entrance to Zion National Park. Although they offer a great RV park, we couldn't resist upgrading to their unique glamping accommodations. You can choose to stay in a Covered Wagon, Luxury Teepee, or a Cliff Dwelling-style accommodation. My husband and I opted for a Cliff Dwelling while our friends chose a Teepee. Both were perfect options for feeling closer to the history that has shaped these lands and allowed us to enjoy the surroundings.

Once settled, we decided to explore the resort and river with e-bikes which was an excellent way to get our bearings. We checked out the rare white bison that call this resort home. White bison, also known as "spirit bison" or "ghost bison," are a rare and highly revered animal among many Native American tribes. According to traditional stories and beliefs, the appearance of a white bison is a sign of great spiritual significance and good luck. A portion of the proceeds of your resort stay go directly to supporting and caring for these beautiful creatures.



Starstruck

After our ride, we set out for our evening adventure. As darkness fell, it quickly became apparent we were in for an unforgettable night. Our guide greeted us and led us along a path illuminated by small model planets, hinting at the wonders of Utah's renowned Dark Skies that awaited us on this stargazing tour. Under the expert guidance of Zoie, we found ourselves marvelling at distant galaxies, star clusters and the mesmerizing Milky Way. We were given binoculars for viewing but soon realized it was much more enchanting to recline in our beanbag loungers while sipping hot chocolate and taking it all in with the naked eye. What made the night even more memorable was peering through high-powered telescopes that brought Saturn, the Moon and other celestial wonders into focus. It was both magical and humbling to grasp just how small and insignificant our world is in the grand scheme of the universe.

Stargazingzion.com



Up and Away!

The road led us to the Million Air building of the St. George airport where it was revealed that the morning adventure was a sunrise hot air balloon flight. A few in our group felt some initial nerves due to a fear of heights, but our pilot Dave and his crew quickly put us at ease with a thorough safety briefing and an explanation of how the hot air balloon experience works. Our excitement grew as the team worked at inflating the massive, colourful envelope with blasts of hot air, as the basket stood ready for us to board. On our ascent, we were greeted by the rising sun as we floated gently above

Southern Utah's awe-inspiring landscape, the vibrant reds and oranges of the desert glowing beneath. With remarkable skill, Dave navigated us gracefully over the river, allowing our basket to dip into the rushing water, which was exhilarating. We capped off our balloon flight with a sparkling cider toast. Zionballoons.com





Conquering Zion National Park

This iconic national park comes highly praised, and it certainly lived up to the expectations. I highly recommend renting e-bikes from znrentals.com, which lets you bypass the crowded shuttles between trailheads. We zipped along at speeds of up to 35km/h as we tackled the 12-kilometre climb to our highest point. We made a stop to explore the Virgin River Trail, a relatively easy hike that led us to the famous Narrows hike. I'd rate this hike as easy for the first three kilometres as you approach the Narrows, but once you step into the chilly water, the difficulty level quickly increases due to the rocky riverbed. If we had done more advance research, we would have rented water boots and walking sticks like many others we encountered, but we managed without them. Thankfully, the water only reached just above our waists briefly as we neared the Narrows, but despite the discomfort, it added to the experience. Be safe and check the water levels with park rangers before you hike.



“From the moment I arrived, I knew this would be a trip unlike any other.”

Camping Under The Desert Sky

We were excited for our first night of camping in the RV. Coral Pink Sands RV Park was a picturesque oasis and provided easy access to all the area activities. Surrounded by richly-hued red and pink sand dunes, the RV proved to be a comfortable and convenient place to lay our heads.

Just when we thought this trip couldn't get more fun, Coral Pink ATV Tours (coralpinkatvtours.com) checked another adrenaline box. And our friend who had requested a week full of surprises was thrilled to be behind the wheel as we traversed the dunes in an ATV at up to 40mph around tight corners and over steep hills. Our guides, husband and wife team Mindie and Gordon, shared their infectious passion for the area. Although the temperature had dropped a few degrees since our visit to Zion, we



couldn't resist dipping our bare toes into the soft pink sands. Once we acclimated, we put our skills to the test with sand sledding and sandboarding down the dunes—definitely more challenging than it appears, but absolutely worth the effort! Our epic dune adventure sadly came to a close but not before Gordon suggested Archie's food truck near Orderville, promising “food to die for.” We indulged in some mouthwatering bites and while there, received another gem of a recommendation: a relatively unknown slot canyon just 1.5 miles outside of town. Intrigued, we embarked on the short hike along Red Hollow Canyon Trail, the narrow canyon walls towered above us, curving and twisting in shades of red and orange. Free of other hikers, we felt like we had discovered a hidden treasure.



Embrace Your Inner Cowboy and Saddle Up

Zion Mountain Ranch (zmr.com) was our next stop where we were warmly welcomed to what would be our home for the next two nights. Our two-bedroom Preserve Cabin was inviting and cozy, featuring rustic-chic décor, luxurious king-sized beds, vintage claw tubs with jets and private patios with expansive views of the ranch and its surroundings. As we settled in with coffee and refreshments, we were treated to a delightful sight—a family of deer casually strolling through our backyard. It felt like just another beautiful moment in the pristine wilderness that surrounded us.

That evening added yet another memorable animal encounter as horses, Blackjack, Zippee, Spritz, and Delta led our sunset ride across the ranch. Our guide, Kyle, provided patient assistance as we mounted and taught us how to communicate with the horses. We rode through the ranch passing bison grazing against a striking backdrop of mountains and canyons. After satisfying our post-ride appetites at the on-site Cordwood restaurant featuring farm-to-table cuisine sourced from the ranch's organic gardens, we wandered over to the communal fire pit. There, a Native American gentleman was leading a drum circle and we were instantly enthralled. He spoke passionately about his people's deep respect for the land, the bison's crucial role in their survival and the belief that all people are equal. His words prompted us to pause and reflect, grounding us in the moment and reminding us of the insignificance of material possessions.



Drum circle





The sand dunes go on for miles

Oh What A Night! And an Unforgettable Trip

We spent our last night camping at an RV park in Snow Canyon and did some hiking in the area, enjoying the mix of bold red and white Navajo sandstone cliffs and black lava rock formations. The last of our trip reveals would come that evening and I couldn't wait for the special night we had planned.

As we arrived at Tuacahn Amphitheater (tuacahn.org), nestled within the red rock cliffs of Ivins, Utah, we handed our friends tickets to a production of *Jersey Boys*. Their surprise quickly turned to awe as we stepped into the spectacular outdoor venue. Known for hosting a range of performances—from Broadway-style musicals to concerts

and special events—we were in for a treat that night as we enjoyed the tale of Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons. With the canyon walls aglow in brilliant hues, we were completely captivated by the musical talent of this outstanding cast.

As we sat in the RV toasting the week's adventures and surprises, a warmth washed over me I hadn't felt from any travel experience in quite some time. Was it the epic itinerary? The otherworldly beauty of Utah? Or enjoying adventures with life-long friends? No need to overthink it. Oh, what a remarkable trip and one that will be forever etched in our hearts and minds.



Hiking the Hoodoos of Bryce Canyon

A Few More Tips Before You Go

■ You could spend a lot of time in Zion National Park, with its wide array of diverse trails, so I suggest planning your hikes in advance. Check out updated trail information: [nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/hiking-in-zion.htm](https://www.nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/hiking-in-zion.htm). Another great pre-trip resource offering insights, stories and inspiration can be found at [youtube.com/@ZionMade](https://www.youtube.com/@ZionMade).

■ Bryce Canyon is worth making some time for. Descending from the rim into the heart of the hoodoos is surreal. Popular trails like the Queen's Garden and Navajo Loop are a great place to start and allow you to get you up close to these geological wonders. [nps.gov/brca/](https://www.nps.gov/brca/)

Joie de Vivre Vacationing in Québec City and Charlevoix

This scenic duo of destinations make for an ideal fall getaway filled with history, excellent food and unique things to see and do

By Debra Smith



Fairmont Le Château Frontenac

It's fall and birch leaves are shimmering into gold, while maple leaves of burnt orange, crimson and purple are putting on their last spectacular show. Make the most of the season in Québec City and nearby Charlevoix with an exquisite stay paired with a unique experience.

In 1620, the governors of New France built a chateau at the promontory that overlooks the St. Lawrence River. Four hundred years later, the towers and turrets of the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac offer the same spectacular views from every picture-perfect room and suite. Stay in the rose-tinted Celine Dion suite, the black and white Art Deco Alfred Hitchcock suite, or be greeted by a hologram of the man himself in the Winston Churchill suite. Incomparable service awaits at Fairmont Gold and ultimate relaxation at Moment Spa. Let Marie-Pierre Lafitte from HQ Services Touristiques lead you down cobbled streets to hidden parks and artisanal cheese and chocolate shops while you learn the history of the earliest French settlement in North America.



A warm welcome in Old Quebec

Take the funicular down to the riverside Quartier Petit-Champlain to find Auberge Saint-Antoine, a Relais & Châteaux property, fittingly situated next to the Museum of Civilization. Each floor is themed to a century, and each suite takes its cue from an artifact excavated on the site. At this museum hotel, the culinary team is making modern history. Its bountiful farm on Île d'Orléans supplies fresh produce to the

hotel's two restaurants: wood beamed and stone built Chez Muffy and modern and cocktail-centric Bar Artefact.

Let Dany Labrecque introduce you to his friends, the 75 local producers of wine, artisanal cheese, fresh fruits and crisp vegetables on Île d'Orléans on a four-hour luxury SUV tour with Conciergerie du Terroir.

If these walls could talk, Auberge Place d'Armes would have a thousand stories. Owned by the same family since the 1600's, it was converted into a three-story hotel in 2003. It features an English side, with cozy plaid furnishings and brick lined walls, and a French side where delicate florals meet graceful, curved headboards. Each room is as unique as a fingerprint but all feature modern amenities. Note: there is no elevator.

If you like a little spice with your ghost stories, meet the lively wife of Québec City's

first executioner. She has some ghostly gossip that still rings true after several centuries. Crime and punishment, or phantom sightings—pick your poison with Les Promenades Fantômes walking tours.

High on the mountainside of Le Massif ski resort, surrounded by acres of sugar maples and birch, sits the new all-inclusive Club Med Québec Charlevoix. Take a guided hike through leaf covered paths along the 30 kilometres of trails, or start your day with yoga among the trees. Dine on local

specialities with a view of the St. Lawrence River valley at Restaurant Le Marché. It's a carefree way for the whole family to enjoy games, activities and the best of fall. For a colourful one-day excursion, catch the Charlevoix Train from Québec City. The train hugs the banks of the St. Lawrence River, rolling past red-roofed farmhouses into the countryside on a journey that's perfect for leaf-peeping.



Les Promenades Fantômes



Club Med Charlevoix



Quartier Petit-Champlain, Old Quebec



Gondola at Charlevoix Massif



Sharing plates and smiles at Le Bedeau restaurant

At Légende Restaurant Boréal, one of Canada's Best 100 Restaurants, fir trees hang from the ceiling, but the menu is firmly rooted in the land. Informed by Indigenous cuisine, foraged and hyper-local ingredients, the tasting menu is a deep dive into Québec cuisine. Vintages, curated by an accomplished sommelier add their own story.

Capture the panorama of Québec City on a dinner cruise with Croisières AML. The only cruise ship in Québec sails under the Québec bridge past

Montmorency Falls, 30 metres higher than Niagara's. Plan for a sailing when fireworks explode overhead in August and dance the night away to a DJ as the lights twinkle in Old Québec.

Spend a pleasant evening sampling the extensive wine list and small plates at Le Bedeau restaurant on bustling rue Saint-John. It's the perfect place for people watching while you relax and enjoy the true meaning of joie de vivre in Québec City.



Mise en Scène

How Paris used its famous landmarks to frame the 2024 Olympics

By Tara Nolan

From the moment an international flotilla of athletes and delegates drifted down the Seine for the opening ceremonies, the city of Paris was able to showcase postcard-worthy snapshots of its monuments and architecture for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

I was accredited as a single-sport journalist to cover all the cycling events. Having been to Paris on more than one occasion, including as a student one summer, it was a bit disorienting at first coming out of the metro and not being able to walk straight to where I was going for my first competition. But unlike my student days, I could use my phone to navigate any road closures or detours.

Everything from bleachers to security lines had to be created. But this is where the City of Light had an aesthetic advantage, because there were so many opportunities to effortlessly set the stage with its buildings, statues and bridges.

Certain existing venues—the Stade Roland-Garros, Bercy Arena—were no-brainers. Buildings, like Le Grand Palais (fencing and taekwondo), were restored specifically to play host. Other locations had to be created.



Women's road race past the Louvre



Athlete celebration room at Canada House



Beach Volleyball at the base of the Eiffel Tower

For example, the Pont Alexandre III, an ornate bridge across the Seine flanked by granite and bronze statues, marked the finish line for the cycling individual time trials (which I covered), the triathlon and marathon swimming, complete with a short-term grandstand. The medal ceremonies just happened to offer a glimpse of the Eiffel Tower in the background.

I have to say, seeing the Eiffel Tower never gets old—even when you just see a bit in the distance! With the Olympic rings affixed to the side, the tower provided both a deliberate and inadvertent backdrop for the Games. Near its base, the Champs de Mars was transformed into a temporary arena for beach volleyball and blind football. And a few metres away, Champions Park allowed the public to meet medal-winning athletes and watch screenings of each day's main events.

There were other smaller-scale viewing areas scattered throughout Paris. I happened upon a couple of them. Strolling back to the train through the town of Versailles one evening, my husband and I passed a park showing the France vs. Canada basketball game live. We decided to head in and watch. You could buy beer and food, chairs and benches were set up, children were playing as their parents watched. There was a magic just in being there on a warm summer evening. The organizing committee did a great job of creating these venues to bring together the general public and tourists who didn't have an opportunity to attend ticketed events.

Another place to watch competitions was at Canada House, the home of our Olympic broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada, as well as a venue to listen to live music and potentially meet Canadian athletes. It was located in the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie in Parc de la Villette, which served as a "Park of Nations" that hosted other countries' home bases as well. I had the opportunity to visit one day when I headed there to interview mountain biking siblings Gunnar and Isabella Holmgren for an article. Tennis star Bianca Andreescu also happened to be present that day, and all three athletes were interviewed by Mark Tewksbury, an Olympic swim champion when I was a kid. It was so nice to see the fans have the opportunity to ask questions and be a part of the excitement.

Besides traditional media footage of all these Parisian settings, if you were following

social media, you were privy to an extensive travelogue. Athletes and celebrities shared their experiences enjoying the food and culture. When they weren't competing, our Canadian athletes, in their Lululemon gear, could be seen delightfully checking off various touristy lists, from enjoying croissants to visiting museums. Paris almost has an unfair visual advantage that will be hard to beat in future Olympic Games. But what it also did well was uniting both tourists and residents in enjoying the spirit and excitement of all the sporting events.



Parc de la Villette



Time trial podium

Cheer Squad

The promise of Céline Dion may have prompted 1.6 million viewers to tune in to CBC/Radio-Canada for the opening ceremonies of the Paris Olympics, but the coverage of the events themselves in the weeks that followed also garnered interest. Twenty-seven million viewers (that's seven out of 10 Canadians) watched the Olympics on TV or online.

27
Canadian medal count

9
Gold medals won

50
Team Canada athletes who came home with medals

50:50
For the first time in Olympic history, there was gender parity

How to Travel to Europe with a **Baby**

Advance preparation, the right equipment and a willingness to go with the flow all play a role in ensuring a rewarding vacation for all

By *Nicola Brown*



Taking in the views from Les Jardins de Marqueyssac

*If the success of Pamela Druckerman's **Bringing Up Bébé** is any indication, parents the world over are drawn to the laissez-faire mystique of how the French raise their kids.*

Eager to find out first hand, I take my new family of three to the Dordogne, joining our old friends, a Canadian-French couple living in Paris, and their own new addition. We spend two sunny weeks at a 13th-century limestone cottage presiding over a valley of medieval castles, fortified cliffside towns and markets of unctuous cheeses, truffles and foie gras. We learn to live like French parents, with ease, indulgence and a renewed sense of self.



► **Getting there and back**

I was dreading this part the most. Visions of a screaming baby for eight hours at 35,000 feet surrounded by hundreds of angry passengers trying to sleep sounded like a circle of hell nobody should be subjected to. Yet despite my anxiety, our flight goes smoothly. I credit a few decisions for helping to make it so.

First, we buy our one-year-old her own seat to travel in, strapped into her car seat as she's used to doing in the car at home. For us, it's worth the extra cost (Air Canada offers a discount off the regular fare for infants travelling in their own seat). In the familiarity of her car seat, she falls asleep shortly after take-off. We enjoy dinner and a movie, and a sympathetic flight attendant brings me a sneaky glass of champagne from up front. The unanticipated me time on board feels

like a huge win and puts me in a positive mindset for the rest of the trip.

Second, we plan as far ahead as possible. We check in on the Air Canada app, choose our seats strategically—close to the front for a quick exit on landing, maximizing our aisle and bathroom access—and have our digital boarding passes ready to go the day before. We stock the diaper bag with mouth-occupying snacks and a toy she's never seen before to head off potential meltdowns with novelty.

The third key decision is going to the Maple Leaf lounge before departure. With a dedicated family check-in desk and priority security line, we sail through, leaving plenty of time for her afternoon snack and nap in a relatively quieter space than the main hall. Even when travelling alone I've rarely made it to my gate faster.



► **Adjusting to a new time zone**

A week or two before, start shifting your little one's bedtime and wake time later by half an hour every few days to bridge the difference before you leave. When you arrive, focus your effort on extending wake windows and not forcing naps. You may find, as we did, that new surroundings are enough to temper whiney moods and capture attention long enough to help them forget they're tired.

Be prepared for some tears with the adjustment. Just try not to burst in and offer comfort preemptively. If your baby is a decent sleeper at home and old enough to self-soothe, trust they have the skills to adjust their own sleep. Druckerman calls this key principle The Pause. Using this approach, our daughter takes just one night to adjust her sleep to French time. Don't forget to allow yourself a buffer day or two when you return to shift the schedule back again. In my experience, this was the longer transition (three to four days).

If all else fails, channel the French parenting approach: *laisse couler*, go with the flow. The transition won't always be smooth or linear. That's

► **Finding yourself again**

Our trip to France feels so much more rewarding and less stressful than I'd anticipated, in large part because we strike a healthy balance between our daughter's needs and our own. We visit our fair share of playgrounds and have plenty of simple meals at the cottage to respect nap times, but we also venture out to local markets, go wine tasting and take a river boat cruise. Many days we return totally exhausted, but our hearts and minds are full.

Over many glasses of Bergerac wine and generous spoonfuls of tarte tatin, my Canadian-Parisian friend discusses some of her cross-cultural parenting discoveries. "No one country gets all of it right, but one of the biggest differences I've noticed is that parents here don't let having kids stop them from living their own lives." She chalks it up to a combination of cultural and societal factors, from better financial support for child care and longer paid vacation time, to not getting so stressed about the little things.

"French kids grow up knowing the world doesn't revolve around them, and I think this sets them up well for later life," she says. It occurs to me that this trip is the first time I've allowed myself to be

OK. Keep calm and let your baby acclimatize at their own pace.

► **Dining out**

Perhaps the most recognizable trope of French parenting envy is the well-behaved toddler waiting patiently for their gourmet meal at a nice restaurant. I'm determined our little one practice this skill early and often, so we set ourselves a challenge. We make a reservation at the one-Michelin-starred Le Vieux Logis in Tremolat. They don't skip a beat when we announce we'd like to bring our baby. Not only do they happily accept our reservation, they have a high chair ready, too.

My nerves are a wreck as we prepare to embark on a two-hour chef's tasting menu with an 11-month-old. I picture having to leave halfway through in total shame as we unsuccessfully try to quash a tiny tornado of food, noise and destruction. Miraculously, the opposite happens. She sits through the two hours, excitedly nibbling little bites of every dish: grilled shrimp, stuffed zucchini flowers, poached fish with petit pois, guinea fowl with chanterelles, peach and elderflower tart. She spits nothing out and eagerly takes second and third spoonfuls. Towards the end we take turns

walking her around the adjacent gardens. By the time we order espresso she is fast asleep in her stroller, giving us a moment to soak up our storied surroundings.

If you plan to eat out with your baby, set yourself up for success by choosing lunch over dinner, patios over indoors, calling ahead to confirm the availability of high chairs, change tables, parking and any other logistics that can help smooth the experience. But most importantly, try to relax. The more you enjoy yourself the more your little one will, too.



Visiting Sarlat market

an equal priority to my daughter since she was born. For all the months we've spent struggling with breastfeeding, colic and sleeplessness, we've finally allowed ourselves to simply enjoy our time together. A serendipitous pause in our conversation invites us to take a break from mining each other for parenting advice, and we sit contentedly listening to the crickets in a warm evening lull.

Gear Recommendations



► **Uppababy Minu V2 travel stroller:** *This is the best compact, lightweight travel stroller I've come across. It can handle uneven European ground and easily opens and collapses in one smooth movement. It folds into a backpack with thick padded straps so you can carry it comfortably hands*

free. It's also gate checkable so you can drop and collect right at the airplane door.

► **Silver Cross Slumber travel crib:** *The best balance of good quality to lightweight travel crib I've tried. Very solid, it stands up to forceful tantrums. The zippable side was a must in my opinion for easy access (less bending over) and the slim footprint means it fits into tighter spaces.*



► **Hatch Rest Go sound machine:** *This portable sound machine was indispensable for improving naps and sleep on the go where disruptive background noise is unavoidable. Volume settings and a range of high-quality lifelike sounds make it adjustable to any setting and your baby's preferences.*



Budapest

A RETURN TO MY ROOTS:

Arriving by Ship in Hungary

This voyage was much more than a river cruise, it was a means for me to reconnect with my heritage in ways I'll never forget

Words and photos by Judi Cohen

“Standing in the places that had shaped my family’s history, I felt a profound sense of gratitude for the journey that had brought me here”



View of the Hungarian Parliament Building in Budapest from the Buda Castle

My journey in Hungary began not in the bustling city of Budapest, but in the charming town of Kalocsa, known for paprika and folk-art embroidery. This stop on our Viking Cruises “Passage to Eastern Europe” Danube river cruise held special significance for me. Paprika and the intricate Kalocsa embroidery have always been present in my home, reminders of my mother’s Hungarian roots. I still cherish the antique embroidered pieces she left behind, their vibrant patterns a testament to the timeless family tradition.

Paprika was more than just a spice in our household—it was a symbol of our heritage, its unmistakable aroma filling our kitchen during countless family meals. In Kalocsa, I felt an immediate connection to the land, as if I were walking through the pages of my own history.



My Mother's traditional Kalocsa embroidery and Herend Porcelain



Paprika Museum and Shop in Kalocsa, Hungary

Continuing my journey along the Danube, the anticipation of reaching Budapest grew. The majestic cityscape gradually unfolded with historical landmarks like the Buda Castle, the Chain Bridge and the Hungarian Parliament Building coming into view. For someone with deep ties to Hungary, the sight of Budapest's iconic skyline stirred a powerful mix of awe and nostalgia. It was a moment of homecoming, made even more poignant by the recent passing of my mother, whose love for this country had always been a guiding force in my life.

Upon arriving in Budapest, I was eager to explore the city's rich cultural heritage. Following a bus tour and visit to the Castle District and its museums and galleries, I went to the Jewish Quarter, a vibrant area

steeped in history. Walking through the narrow streets, I couldn't help but reflect on the resilience of the Jewish community, which once faced unimaginable hardships in this very place. The brass plated Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) set into the pavement outside homes in the former Jewish ghetto serve as a sobering reminder of the lives lost during the Holocaust. Each Stolperstein is inscribed with the name, birthdate and date of death in the Nazi extermination camps of the resident. Yet, this neighbourhood is also a celebration of survival, with its bustling markets, thriving restaurants and bars, and the magnificent Dohány Street Great Synagogue, standing as symbols of renewal.

No visit to Budapest would be complete without indulging in its culinary delights. I relished the opportunity to savour the flavours that have long been a part of my life. The rich, hearty goulash soup and the chicken paprikash, seasoned with the very paprika that Kalocsa is famous for, was just as I remembered. Each bite was a tribute to my mother's cooking, evoking memories of family dinners and of my mother's Hungarian restaurant in Toronto, Strudel King.

In addition to exploring Budapest, I drove to Szendro, my mother's birthplace, and to Miskolc, where my parents were married. These visits were deeply personal, offering a chance to reconnect with my roots in a way that was both emotional and fulfilling. Standing in the places that had shaped my family's history, I felt a profound sense of gratitude for the journey that had brought me here.



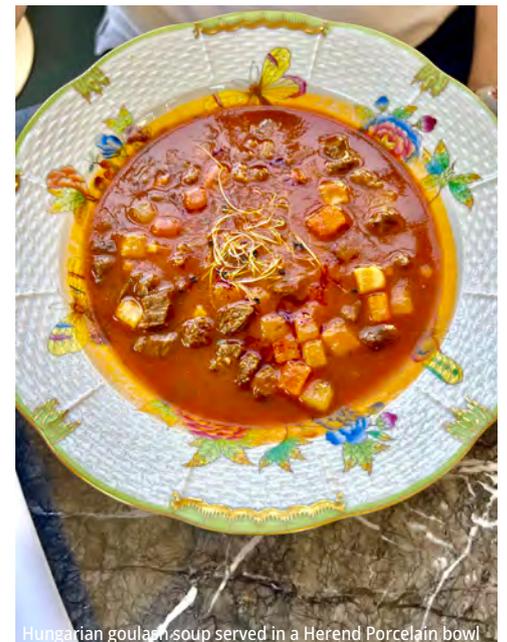
Hungarian National Gallery in the Castle District of Budapest

Cruising aboard the Viking Ullur was the perfect way to experience this journey. The itinerary, which spanned five countries and ended in Hungary, allowed me to see the beauty and diversity of this region through the lens of my own heritage. From the paprika and embroidery in Kalocsa to the bustling streets of Budapest, and in the tiny village of Szendro and town of Miskolc, each stop was a reminder of the lasting connections to my past.

Arriving in Hungary by ship was more than just a voyage on the Danube, it was a return to a place that holds profound personal significance. The sights, sounds and flavours of Hungary offered solace and joy, allowing me to celebrate my heritage and honour my parents. This trip was a poignant reminder of the enduring legacy of love and Hungarian tradition that continues with my children and grandchildren.



My mother in front of her restaurant

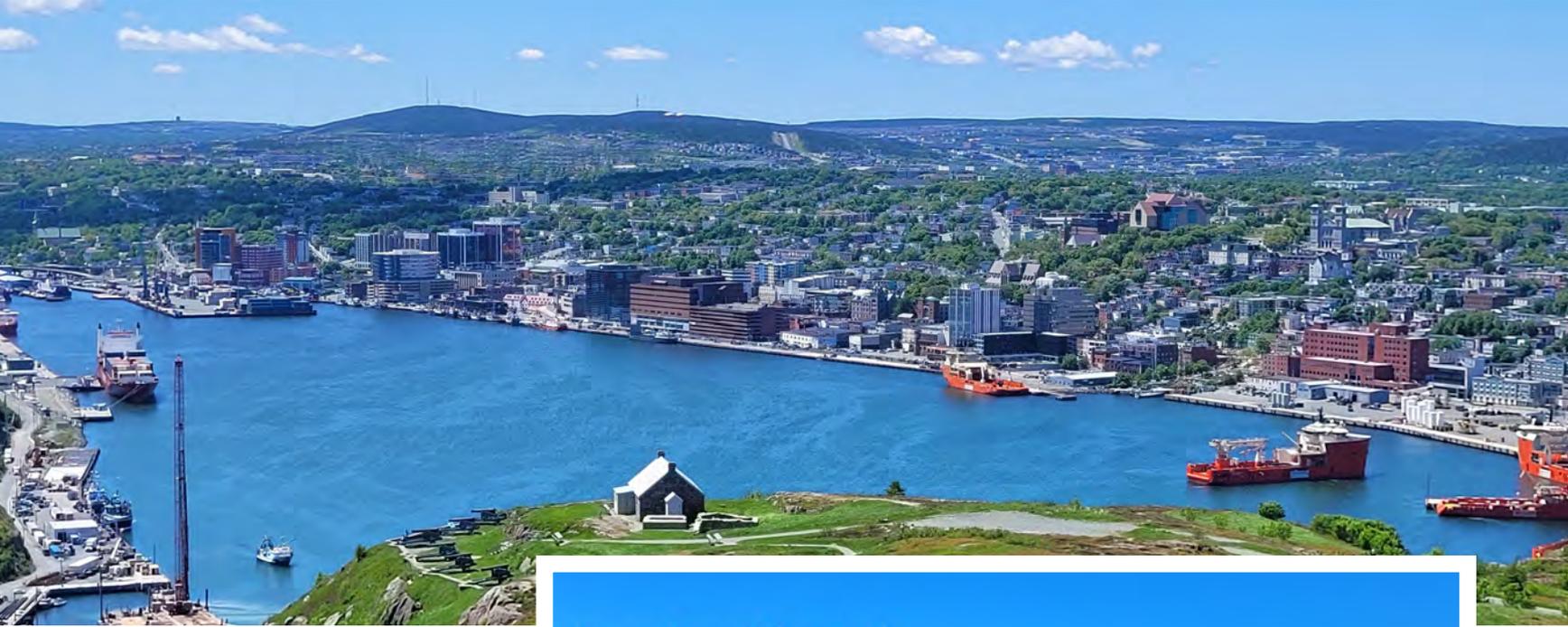


Hungarian goulash soup served in a Herend Porcelain bowl

A Love Letter to Newfoundland

Warm, witty and welcoming: Canada's easternmost province delivers a vacation like no other

Words and photos by Martha Chapman



The view of St. John's from Signal Hill

"Would you like a ride?"

The woman in the red jeep couldn't have timed it better. I was hiking up the steep road that leads from St. John's to Signal Hill, the iconic landmark overlooking the city. "That would be lovely," I gasped.

Just another memorable encounter in St. John's. As Andrew Hiscock of *Legendary Coasts* told me, Newfoundlanders are so kind because it's in their DNA. "Given our harsh climate and treacherous history, in the past your survival could count, quite literally, on the kindness of strangers."

The warm, welcoming nature of the locals (referred to here as "townies") and the compact and photogenic downtown area, make the city ideal for a solo traveller.



Quidi Vidi

Getting around on foot is no problem, though it helps if you like hills. Some sidewalks are so steep there are steps built into them. The reward is beautiful vistas of the famed "Jellybean Row," brightly coloured rows of houses in downtown St. John's, as well as excellent views of the harbour.

There are self-guided and hosted tours, which are the perfect way to get your bearings while soaking up a little of the city's history.

And everywhere you go, you'll hear that famous Newfoundland lilt, reflecting the province's historic connections with Ireland. There are entire books dedicated to language here: "Whaddya at?" (how are you?), "He's a hard ticket" (a trouble maker), and if something is excellent, it's "some shocking good."

If you're ambitious, you can put on your walking shoes and head to Quidi Vidi ("kiddy viddy"), a picture-perfect fishing village and artisan centre on the outskirts of town. Combine it with Signal Hill and you are sure to get your steps in.



Some of those famous jellybean houses

For my digs, I chose the Murray Premises. A national historic site, the hotel's resumé includes stints as a warehouse as well as machine shops. It's an easy walk to nearby Water Street with its stylish boutiques and the NONIA shop, featuring endearing garments hand knitted across the province. Then, to slake your thirst head to George Street. Famously home to over 20 bars, it's a mere 400 steps from end to end and boasts the liveliest nightlife in town.

Since some of the region's most famous residents are to be found outside of town, companies such as O'Briens Boat Tours offer half day tours to introduce you to whales and some of the 500,000 resident puffins, each one cuter than the last.



Visitors on a whalewatching cruise get to sample Screech, a Newfoundland type of rum

No matter when you travel, be sure to pack for a variety of weather including windy days. Bring layers, including waterproof pieces. As one smiling waiter told me, "There's no such thing as a good hair day here."

So, to the lady in the red jeep and all her fellow townies: thank you. You are the icing on the cake that is wonderful St. John's. Some shocking good indeed.

Come From Away: The musical miracle

For thousands of theatregoers around the world, their introduction to "The Rock" has been the blockbuster *Come From Away*. The musical is the tale of what happened on 9/11 when 38 airplanes were ordered to land in the town of Gander in central Newfoundland, depositing 6,500 frightened and disoriented people from around the world into a town of 10,000. In turns toe-tapping, touching and hilarious, the fascinating story is a tribute to the kindness this province is known for and to human nature.

Making the Most of Singapore

This steamy city-state is the perfect blend of old and new, offering stellar food, vibrant cultures, unique attractions and much more

By Jim Byers

By Jim Byers

There's plenty of flash in this island state at the southern tip of Malaysia; dazzling designer shops, Instagram-worthy architecture and the biggest names in luxury hotels.

But some of the things that struck me most on my recent visit with Air Canada were the old neighbourhoods and the food. My goodness, the food. I don't know that I've been to any destination that puts so much emphasis on recipes and finding the perfect restaurant. And not just the places looking for star ratings in fancy French tire company publications, but also Mom and Pop noodle joints and hawker centre stalls where people line up for an hour or more for the perfect chicken-rice dish.

Here's a look at great ways to enjoy an incredibly diverse Asian city.

THE FOOD SCENE

Our tour guide during our stay was the super engaging Anthony Ang, who seems to know the food scene in Singapore as well as a London cabbie knows the best way from Heathrow to Notting Hill. Ang told me that a common greeting in Singlish (a pidgin mix of Singaporean dialect and English) is "You makan already," which means "You eat already." This is definitely a food-obsessed destination. Anthony Bourdain was ridiculed by Singaporeans for once admitting that he hadn't tried their unofficial national dish of chicken-rice. He quickly made up for it by digging into several versions at local hawker centres, where tiny stalls turn out magnificent food for next-to-nothing. Chicken-rice usually features chicken that's poached in ginger, garlic and green onion broth, along with fragrant rice. The debate is endless over who has the best, but I sampled some that was quite tasty at Chinatown Complex Hawker Centre.



Another hawker centre specialty is carrot cake, which is not a dessert but instead a dish of delicious, chopped turnip that's fried with various spices. Candlenut is the first Michelin-starred restaurant on the planet that focuses on Peranakan dishes (a mixture of Chinese and Malaysian cuisine). The Four Seasons Hotel Singapore hosts a Nobu restaurant with out-of-this-world miso black cod. The hotel's Jiang-Nan Chun restaurant has a menu that includes tender, mesquite-roasted Peking duck. The latest list of the world's top 100 restaurants features several from Singapore, including Meta, Burnt Ends and Labyrinth.



THE GLAM SIDE

Singapore is famous for its luxury shopping scene, with a mix of big-name boutiques and malls where it's easy to max out your credit cards, including ION Orchard and Paragon Shopping Centre. Design Orchard is a casual spot that serves as an incubator for new, local businesses. You'll find lovely handbags, scarves, pretty jewelry and more. The Marina Bay Sands is probably the closest thing to Las Vegas in Singapore, a massive, three-tower hotel/food/shopping and casino complex that's famous for its rooftop infinity pool.



THE CASUAL SIDE

Kampong Glam is a vibrant area that's a centre for Singaporean Muslims and features a wide variety of engaging shops and restaurants. One of the highlights is colourful Haji Lane, which has pizza places, coffee shops and independent stores decorated with wild murals. Another top attraction is the handsome Sultan Mosque. Ang told us that the black circles below the mosque's gold dome are empty bottles of soy sauce donated by local people with no money to help erect the building. Little India is a bustling area with small stores that offer up rich spices like fiery orange turmeric, as well as glittering pink and lime-green dresses alongside mounds of fresh flowers. We visited a hawker centre and wet market with stalls selling biryani, mutton, coffee and fresh squid, as well as a place selling pakoras the size of baseballs. In Chinatown, the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple has beautiful gold interior walls and thousands of miniature Buddha statues. Stop in at Tea Chapter Trading Pte Ltd. to learn about the proper way to serve tea, and about different varieties. No less an authority than Queen Elizabeth once dropped in for a cuppa.



A PERFECT HOTEL

The Four Seasons Hotel Singapore is a quietly luxurious property with the kind of attentive service you'd expect, as well as lovely rooms with the choice of nearly a dozen types of pillows. There's a lap pool and

hot tub on the third floor and also a rooftop pool on the 20th floor that's great for families. The spa is gorgeous, and the gym looks like something out of a home decor magazine.

GETTING THERE

Air Canada began direct flights from Vancouver to Singapore in early April. They're the only direct flights between Singapore and Canada.



Getting Reacquainted with *Nassau*

A recent visit to The Bahamas reaffirmed my love for this island capital and everything it has to offer

By Jessica Padykula

*M*y first visit to Nassau was at two-years old, followed by another at four—my mother had long been drawn to The Bahamas, so much so that she ended up living there for three years while teaching at an international school in the enclave of Lyford Cay. I don't recall much about those early visits, but many subsequent trips have all left their mark. My mom's home while she was teaching was directly on Love Beach, a small but



Love Beach

gorgeous stretch of sand I happily walked end to end during every visit.

I recently had the chance to return to Nassau (including a peek at Love Beach) and the colourful capital of this chain of islands remains as vibrant and welcoming as ever, providing an ideal backdrop for a memorable vacation as well as the perfect base for exploring more of The Bahamas.

Where to *Stay*

If you're looking for a convenient, comfortable and welcoming place to stay, the historic British Colonial Nassau is an excellent option. The location, right downtown, makes it easy to explore the city on foot, putting you in close proximity to many attractions, including the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, John Watling's Distillery (well worth a tour and tasting), Pirates of Nassau Museum (small but fascinating), the iconic Straw Market (for any souvenir needs) and Junkanoo Beach. The property features two swimming pools, its own private beach, varied dining options and Woodes Rogers Tavern, the hotel's signature martini bar that's just as popular with visitors as it is with locals. There's live jazz here on weekends. My room was spacious and well-appointed, with great views of the nearby cruise port.



British Colonial Nassau

Exploring the *Exumas*

The Bahamas is comprised of close to 700 islands, around 30 of which are inhabited. This includes the Exumas, made up of its own chain of islands, and Powerboat Adventures offers an exciting half-day excursion to the region. We start with a one-hour speedboat ride to Allan's Cay to see (and feed) the resident group of protected Allen's Cay Rock Iguanas who scurry towards visitors offering grapes on wooden skewers.

Next up is an extra-speedy, seven-minute ride to Ship's Channel Cay, Powerboat Adventures' serene private island. This is where you can feed and swim with a happy group of paddling pigs who come out for carrots, running excitedly into the surf to nab the proffered veggies. If that wasn't enough, there's also the opportunity to feed and swim with stingrays, which gracefully glide around you, close enough to touch.



Pigs heading into the surf for a snack

Getting to Know *Junkanoo*

You can't visit The Bahamas without hearing about Junkanoo (well, you can, but that would be a shame). Junkanoo is the national cultural festival of The Bahamas and dates back to the 19th century when it was brought to the region by enslaved Africans looking for a way to recapture and celebrate their culture. A main fixture of the annual festival, which takes place on December 26 and January 1, are the colourful costumes, intricately and painstakingly made from cardboard and crepe paper, along with ribbons, glitter and other vibrant accessories. The Educulture Junkanoo Museum tells the story of how this national event came to be, something that represents the cultural roots of The Bahamas. The museum was once the home of historian Arlene Nash, who has been participating in Junkanoo since the age of four. Each room

teems with history, taking you from the festival's humble beginnings to its current status of unmissable event. Not to mention, Junkanoo has been inscribed on UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.

There is no one better to tell you about Junkanoo than Percy 'Vola' Francis, known as the "King of Junkanoo" and whose portrait hangs in The Bahamas National Portrait Gallery. I had the pleasure of meeting this Junkanoo icon on my first night in Nassau and his passion for the festival is palpable. He also happens to head up the Shell



The King of Junkanoo himself



The Educulture Junkanoo Museum

Saxon Superstars, one of the oldest and most popular Junkanoo groups.



Colourful downtown Nassau

Goombay Summer *Festival*

If you want another taste of Bahamian culture, from food to music to dance (as well as a sneak peek of what you can expect from Junkanoo), the Goombay Summer Festival in July offers an immersive taste of everything that makes The Bahamas so special. Rake-and-scrape, the traditional music of the region, is known for its use of goat-skin drums and saws and creates a totally unique sound it's impossible not to move your hips to. Food stalls line Bay Street serving local dishes and drinks, while the main stage is the centre of the action. Locals come out in droves to celebrate their culture and share it with everyone who visits. Goombay Summer Festival happens all over the islands of The Bahamas.

Wine, Chocolate and Cigars, *Oh My*

During a walk through downtown Nassau, I had the chance to visit Graycliff Hotel and Restaurant and it is so much more than a stunning respite in the heart of Old Nassau. The 16-room property, also home to the Caribbean's first 5-star restaurant, is also where you'll find Graycliff Chocolatier, Graycliff Cigars and Bahama Barrels (the first winery in The Bahamas). I checked out all three and while I didn't sample any cigars, the expert rollers work quickly and efficiently to create the property's award-winning product. Chocolate fans will want to make a purchase from the jewel-like offerings, and the wine is lovely—prosecco and merlot being standouts. Wine fans will also want to tour Graycliff's cellar, boasting over 250,000 bottles, making it the third largest wine cellar in the world.

Come for the beautiful beaches, excellent food and diversity of things to see and do, but stay for a culture that grabs you, pulls you in and gives you so many reasons to come back again and again.



Preparing conch salad right on the beach

Conch Salad, Beachside

If you've been in Nassau or anywhere in The Bahamas, you've likely tried—or at least seen—dishes like conch fritters and conch salad. Whether you've sampled these local delicacies or not, the process of getting the meat out of the conch—a large edible marine mollusk (essentially a sea snail) is a unique one and something I saw up close during my excursion with Powerboat Adventures, where not only did our guides showcase the process, but also made conch salad right on the beach.

First, the crown, or very top of the conch shell is tapped with a small hammer hard enough to loosen it, which allows for the top to be cleanly broken off. At this point, a dull knife is used to gently coax the meat out of the shell. What gets pulled out resembles a small squid, with various parts used for different purposes. For example, white meat is used for conch salad, while the spine is known as an aphrodisiac. But no matter how it's served or used, conch is an integral part of culinary culture across The Bahamas.



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CONCORD, ON

TOBAGO TRANQUILITY

By Doug Wallace

Trinidad's quiet cousin is awash in scenic beauty, crystal waters and cultural charm

Castara, a serene fishing village surrounded by lush rainforest

WHILE MANY CARIBBEAN NATIONS PLAY UP THEIR UNTAMED NATURAL BEAUTY, IDYLIC BEACHES AND BIODIVERSE LANDSCAPE, FEW CAN DELIVER IN THE WAY THAT TOBAGO DOES. THIS LESSER-KNOWN HALF OF THE DUAL-ISLAND NATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HAS SEEMED RELATIVELY OFF THE RADAR, ALMOST HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT.

But now, it is beginning to emerge as a trending destination noted for its old-school hospitality and authentic island tranquility. Those seeking eco adventure won't have to go far, either. The island's efforts to protect its ecosystems and marine life, and to develop a sustainable tourism infrastructure, have resonated with the environmentally conscious. This is not just a trend here, but also a way of life.

Tourists have been heading into Tobago's rainforest with their binoculars for years, and when I step into the 4,000-hectare Main Ridge Forest Reserve—designated a protected rainforest way back in 1776—I soon see why. Naturalist guides lead the way through a variety of trails, revealing things I would have missed had I just been trudging along by myself—birds performing mating dances, hummingbirds perfectly camouflaged among the foliage, even the door to a spider den that's about the size of a quarter. Lessons about the flora are also little moments of discovery, fun facts on what is normally a rather dry subject. The forest is cooling, too, the high canopy lending a break from the island's tropical heat and humidity.



Blue chinned sapphire hummingbird



Castara Bay offers stunning sunset views over the Caribbean Sea

Learning about the origins of Tobago through its nature is like a breath of fresh air, but the real essence of the place lies in the local culture. The people are open and buoyant, happy to bring you into their small communities, to have you join in on the food, the customs and the fun.

In the fishing village of Castara, the beach is a lone paradise, a stretch of golden sand free of big hotels or promenades—just a couple of beach cafés, a few loungers to rent and a blanket of black fishing nets spread out ready for tomorrow. A young fisherman asks us to help push a boat into the water—we hop to it, happy to lend our backs to the process and be included in the routine. He waves to me later when I spot him playing cards on a picnic table with his friends. It's the kind of connection that tourists seldom make with locals, but it's really just simple cordiality.

Sharing food is a big part of the Tobago culture, too, much appreciated by my hollow leg. Breakfast is deliciously different. The lineup is filled with things like coconut bread, a salted fish concoction with tomatoes and onions, fried plantains and ultra-fresh fruit juice.

Curried chickpeas wrapped in two fried pancakes is known as doubles, a snack of Indian origin. I also take a shine to a sandwich called “bake and shark,” which I originally think is “bacon shark.” It is grilled shark on a light brioche-like bun (the “bake” part), slathered with garlic sauce and pepper sauce. Tobagonians are big on their condiments, which I make a point of dipping my way through. I am soon addicted.

I find bake and shark again among the food stalls at No Man's Land, a sandy spit stretching into the Bon Accord Lagoon. This is a little spot where the colourful wooden tour boats drop anchor, spilling their passengers onto the shore for a quick snack and a beer. The pitstop is often combined with a wallow in the famous Nylon Pool, a shallow, in-sea, coral pool, so named by Princess Margaret, who said the water was as sheer as her nylon stockings.

A night or two later, I'm back on the water—but also in it, on a nighttime kayak tour along the mangroves of Pigeon Point. The waters here are the perfect breeding ground for bioluminescent algae, which lights up with

each stroke of my paddle thanks to a chemical reaction within the tiny marine creatures. The tour leader lets us jump out of the kayak and swim, our movement creating great swaths of light, like cartoon magic. We splash around like kids.

Letting out the inner child is all part of a good vacation, though, and this natural wonder is just one more delightful little nugget that Tobago has up its sleeve.



Fresh seafood is a daily treat in Tobago



Castara Retreats is known for its laid-back vibe



The bay's clear waters make it ideal for snorkelling

When You Go

- Caribbean Airlines flies non-stop every day from Toronto to Port of Spain, Trinidad, in about 5 ½ hours. The airline also makes a dozen, daily 25-minute flights from Port of Spain to Tobago for about \$95 return. CARIBBEAN-AIRLINES.COM
- Castara Retreats is an eco-lodge haven of rustic-chic, partially open-air apartments in the village of Castara, complete with a year-round restaurant and hillside yoga pavilion. CASTARARETREATS.COM
- Mount Irvine Bay Resort delivers old-fashioned hospitality in what was once a sugar mill. It is close to Buccoo Beach pier, the meeting point for tour boats to the Nylon Pool and the beach food stalls of No Man's Land. MTIRVINE.COM
- Comfort Inn & Suites Tobago in the capital city of Scarborough is close to the island's ferry port. This sleek, new hotel sports a rooftop restaurant, an infinity pool with terrific views and a spa with the island's only sensory deprivation tank. COMFORTSUITESTOBAGO.COM
- Radical Sports Tobago at Pigeon Point Beach sets you up for an afternoon of kiteboarding, windsurfing, wing foiling, stand-up paddling or kayaking, or for a nighttime bioluminescence paddling tour through the nearby mangroves. RADICALSPORTSTOBAGO.COM

For more information, head to VISITTOBAGO.GOV.TT.

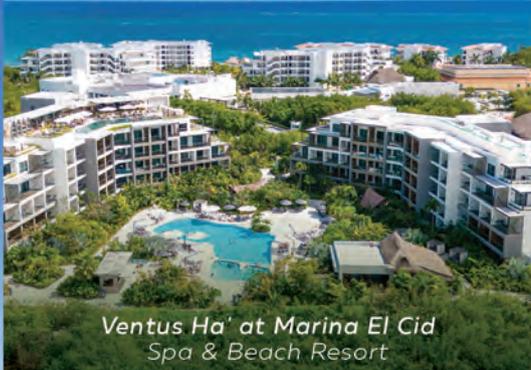


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MAD FOR MEXICO

Welcome to our *Mad For Mexico* spotlight, where vibrant culture meets unforgettable travel experiences. Join us as we explore the sun-soaked beaches and quaint towns of the Mexican Caribbean, visit some unique resorts and hotels in the region and get acquainted with some lesser-known but must-see destinations. Prepare to be inspired by the spirit and welcoming nature of this captivating country.

In this photo: Tulum is one of the most visited—and most scenic archaeological zones in Mexico, and it also happens to be the only Mayan city built on a coast, which means stunning turquoise ocean views.

It's Time to Get Acquainted With The Fives

One of The Fives all-inclusive resort properties in Mexico is sure to suit your vacation style

BY NICOLE SERVINIS

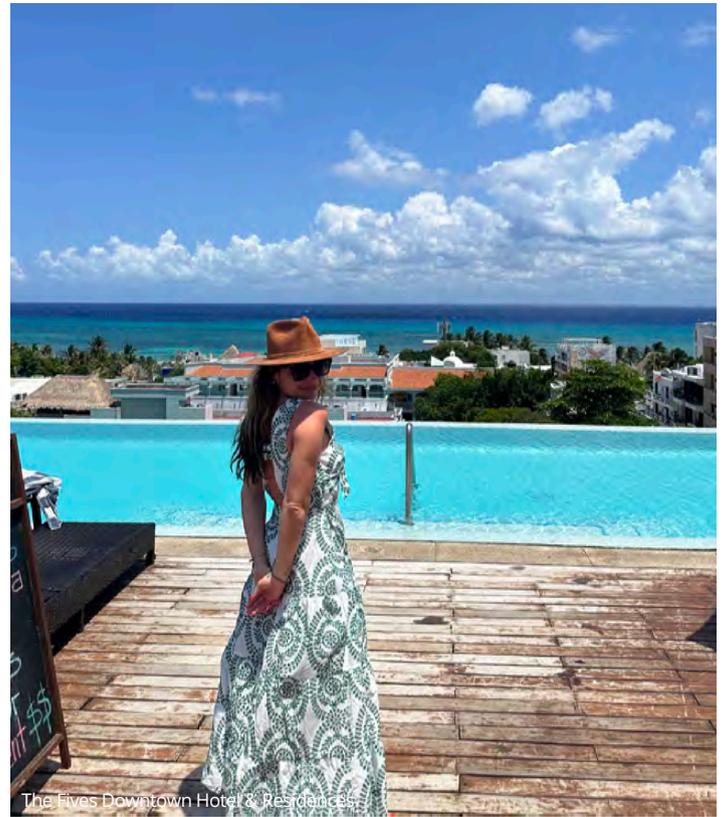
The Fives Oceanfront Puerto Morelos [BEACHFRONT AND BOUTIQUE](#)

Picture this: a boutique-style resort nestled along the powdery white sands of the Caribbean, just a stone's throw from Cancun airport. The Fives Oceanfront Puerto Morelos is where luxury meets intimacy in a dance of sheer indulgence. From the moment I stepped into my spacious suite with its modern amenities and sweeping ocean views, I knew I was in for something special. The private balcony became my sanctuary, offering front-row seats to Mother Nature's nightly spectacle—the sunset over turquoise waters. And let's not overlook the infinity pool, where I happily passed the hours in utter relaxation. A unique part of the hotel experience was RoMarley Beach House—a

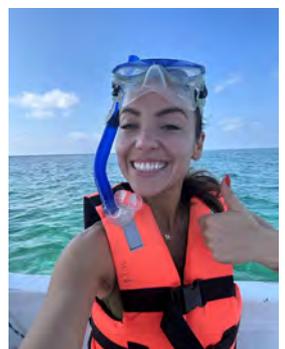
delightful surprise in Mexico. Opened by Rohan Marley, an entrepreneur and son of the legendary Bob Marley, this beachfront gem instantly transports you to the shores of Jamaica. With reggae tunes filling the air and a laid-back ambiance, it's a slice of Caribbean paradise right at your fingertips. The menu boasts an array of Jamaican dishes, so naturally I went for the jerk chicken and I was not disappointed.

But what truly set The Fives Oceanfront Puerto Morelos apart was its unwavering commitment to service excellence. Emir, our gracious server,

seemed to anticipate our every need before we even knew it ourselves. And the activities? Snorkelling the second largest coral reef in the world was an experience straight out of a dream; our guides Jerry and Jorge were fantastic. Up close and personal, we saw angelfish, rays, unicorn fish, barracuda and more.



The Fives Downtown Hotel & Residences





The Fives Downtown Hotel & Residences
NIGHTLIFE NIRVANA

The Fives Downtown Hotel & Residences is a modern hotel that caters to the night owls and business travellers among us. Situated just a short distance from The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences (a 20-30 minute taxi ride) this urban oasis boasts 133 spacious suites, each equipped with hidden kitchens for added convenience. But the real star of the show? The rooftop infinity pool, where the views of Playa del Carmen are nothing short of breathtaking. And when hunger strikes, Lola—an eclectic fusion of Mediterranean and Caribbean flavours—offers a culinary journey like no other, complete with live music and stunning vistas.



The Beachfront by The Fives Hotels
EXCLUSIVE AND SECLUDED

For those seeking an escape from the ordinary, look no further than The Beachfront by The Fives Hotels. A rather new addition to The Fives family, it is tucked away on the pristine shores of Xcalacoco Beach in the Riviera Maya. This adults-only paradise offers a sanctuary of serenity and seclusion. With just 43 rooms, guests can bask in the natural beauty of their surroundings, from the soft white sands to the crystal-clear Caribbean waters. The best part is that you have access to their larger sister resort, The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences where you can also enjoy their amenities, restaurants, activities and entertainment. They offer shuttle service daily (aka golf cart rides) from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m. for all guests at The Beachfront by The Fives Hotels. And for those craving a taste of culinary bliss, Santa Sirena—an exclusive beachfront restaurant and beach club—delivers a feast for the senses with its Mexican fusion cuisine and oceanfront ambiance.



Beachfront Swim Up Suite

MAD FOR MEXICO

THE FIVES

The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FUN

Families, rejoice! The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences is your ticket to an unforgettable vacation experience. With 662 residence-style suites spacious enough to accommodate even the largest of clans, this sprawling resort offers something for everyone.

During my stay, I witnessed the magic of love unfold as three weddings took place simultaneously—a testament to the resort's popularity as a dream wedding destination.



Against the backdrop of the gorgeous beachfront, each celebration was a spectacle of romance and elegance without interfering with one another as the resort is so big. The decor was nothing short of exquisite, with each party having their own dedicated area to revel in the joyous occasion—whether it was beneath the stars on the pier, on the rooftop with panoramic views, or nestled amidst the serene beauty of the surrounding trees.



From inviting pools and a lazy river to an abundance of restaurants and entertainment options, there's never a dull moment. Everything under the sun is at your fingertips: 24 hour room service, multiple bars and restaurants and so much more. The variety of beach bars was impressive and one of my favourite things about this property, featuring everything from fresh

angus burgers and veggies burgers to wood-fired pizza, tacos and fresh ceviche.

I highly recommend checking out the entertainment in the piazza at night—it was electrifying! I was fortunate to experience Cinco de Mayo festivities, where custom dances, vibrant outfits, and an outstanding live band had me dancing all night. The silent disco was also a memorable night. It's where everyone wears wireless headphones and dances to music only they can hear, usually while singing out loud. And while initially I was feeling a little weary, it turned out to be an absolute blast.

In addition, I treated myself to a blissful one-hour massage that whisked me away to a state of pure relaxation—so much so that I found myself drifting in and out of sleep. For the ultimate sensory experience, I highly recommend opting for an outdoor massage where the gentle rustle of leaves and salty air adds to the tranquil ambiance.



Making friends at The Fives Beach Hotel & Residences

And let's not forget the wildlife—monkeys, birds, and even the occasional iguana add a touch of jungle magic to the resort's already enchanting ambiance.

So, there you have it—four distinct experiences, each more extraordinary than the last. Whether you're a bougee boutique lover, a seeker of seclusion, a family in search of fun, or a nightlife enthusiast on the prowl, The Fives has something special in store for you. So, pack your bags, book your ticket and prepare for the adventure of a lifetime. The Fives awaits, and trust me—you won't be disappointed.

To find the resort that fits your vacation personality: [thefiveshotels.com](https://www.thefiveshotels.com)

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DISCOVER THE MANY CHARMS OF PLAYA DEL CARMEN AND PUERTO MORELOS

These unforgettable destinations showcase some of the best of the Mexican Caribbean

BY NICOLE SERVINIS

Playa del Carmen—a gem on Mexico’s Riviera Maya, blends dazzling natural beauty with vibrant culture, while nearby Puerto Morelos offers a similar sun-soaked experience, albeit with a more laid-back vibe.

If you find yourself in Playa del Carmen, you won’t have to look far for something memorable to see, do—or eat.

► Explore Fifth Avenue (Quinta Avenida)

This bustling pedestrian street is the heart of Playa del Carmen. Here, you’ll find everything from high-end boutiques to quirky shops. It’s the perfect place to pick up unique souvenirs and experience the energy of the city. Be sure to check out the burgeoning art scene while you wander. Local galleries and street art offer an excellent showcase of contemporary Mexican creativity.

► Shop Like a Local

Dive into local culture by exploring Playa del Carmen’s many outdoor markets. From artisanal crafts to fresh produce and spices, these markets are a feast for the senses. They provide a fantastic opportunity to interact with locals and find one-of-a-kind treasures.



► Take a Day Trip to Cozumel

Just a short ferry ride from Playa del Carmen is Cozumel, an island renowned for its crystal-clear waters and fantastic snorkelling spots. This adventure isn’t just about breathtaking sea views, but also about immersing yourself in the island’s rich marine life and indulging in some beachside relaxation.

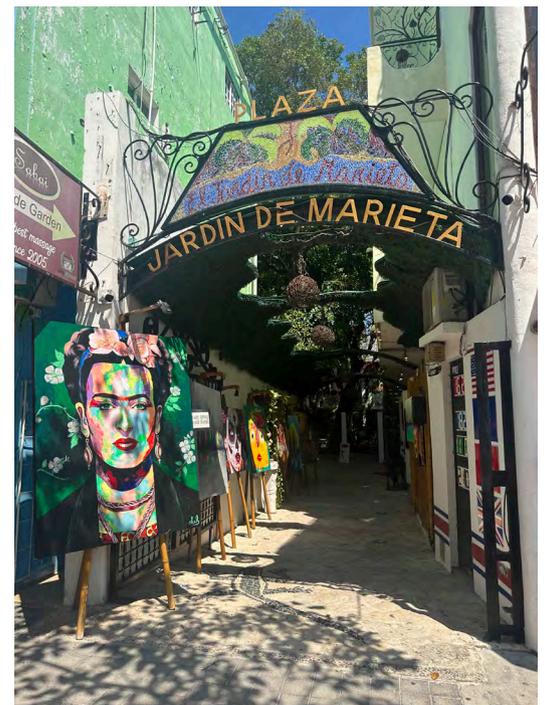




The Leaning Lighthouse, Puerto Morelos. Still standing despite its considerable slant, this tilted lighthouse has become a local symbol of resilience



Pretty Puerto Morelos



► **Savour Playa del Carmen's Many Flavours**

From street food stalls serving up mouthwatering tacos and tortas to high-end dining experiences offering gourmet Mexican cuisine, the city's robust food scene is as vibrant as its culture.

► **Enjoy the Beach Bars and Nightlife**

As the sun sets, Playa del Carmen transforms into a nightlife hotspot. Have a refreshing cocktail at one of the many beachfront bars or dance the night away in a lively club. The ambiance ranges from laid-back lounges to high-energy venues, catering to all tastes.

► **Put Puerto Morelos on Your Radar**

Thirty minutes north of Playa del Carmen is pretty Puerto Morelos, a small fishing village packed with plenty of local charm. Highlights here include the National Reef Park of Puerto Morelos, part of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef—the second-largest in the world, plus ample opportunities for jungle trekking, basking on beautiful beaches, mountain biking, exploring cenotes, wildlife viewing and simply soaking up the laid back local vibes.

Whether you're looking for adventure, relaxation, culture, or nature, this duo of destinations offers a wide range of unforgettable experiences.

JASHITA HOTEL TULUM: BOUTIQUE LUXURY WHERE THE SKY IS BORN



This standout property puts you in close proximity to some of the best that Tulum has to offer

BY DARCY RHYNO

Floating feet first in a strong current along a winding Mayan canal, I slip past red mangroves heavy with bromeliads that resemble pineapples and orchid plants that look like bunches of bananas. Flocks of egrets, spoonbills and herons lift off from the banks. This ancient waterway links two large lagoons at the heart of Sian Ka'an, one of Mexico's largest nature reserves on the Mayan Riviera near Tulum. The name in Mayan means "Origin of the Sky" and after my Mayan guides pick me up again in their boat and whisk me across the vast lagoon, I understand why—the blue heavens dotted with a few clouds are perfectly reflected in the mirror-flat waters as if this is where the sky is born.



Returning to Jashita Hotel, a boutique property on quiet Soliman Bay near Tulum, I'm eager for more wildlife encounters on the water. After dinner, I grab a stand-up paddleboard and slip across protected waters between beach and coral reef. The view back to Jashita is one of tranquil turquoise waters, a shimmering crescent of sand, the surrounding wilderness and the balcony of my suite—one of just 30—peaking through lush vegetation. Just beyond Jashita's Pandano Restaurant, a waiter is serving drinks to a few guests on the beach. A couple gazes over the ocean from the rooftop pool just four

floors up. A guest in a bathrobe is walking into the Caoba Spa. Beneath me, a dark shape catches my eye. I watch in wonder as a large, gentle ray effortlessly glides by as if flying under water.



Tulum Ruins

The next morning, I catch a bus to Tulum Ruins, the remains of a Mayan city that reached its pinnacle between 600 and 800 years ago. With its stone walls perched on a low cliff bookended by beaches and overlooking turquoise waters, this is one of the most popular archaeological sites in Mexico. Iguanas and visitors pose for photos on the warm stones with the main temple in the background. It's a sacred place to learn about Mayan culture, religion and everyday life, including an economy that thrived on trading across Central America.

By midday, I need some lunch so I catch a ride into the town of Tulum, a busy tourist destination that has remained relatively small. Strolling the streets, I poke about the shops before grabbing a few tacos at a little family-run restaurant. Refueled, I head out on my next adventure. A guide drives me

seven kilometers inland through the jungle to a place with an ominous but misleading name—the Pet Cemetery Cenote. This part of Mexico hides a labyrinth of underground rivers and caves. Sometimes, a natural sinkhole or cenote develops, providing access to crystalline waters. Mayans believed cenotes have healing powers. Inside this 82-kilometre system, archaeologists discovered animal bones, some from long extinct creatures, hence the name. Gazing up through a vertical wild garden that's grown around and down into this recently discovered cenote, a guide leads my group on a swim to see its captivating features—stalactites, blind fish and colonies of tiny glow-in-the-dark silky worms on the ceiling.

Returning to Jashita for the evening, I find a table with a beach view at Pandano, its Mexican-Italian fusion restaurant where a



Spoonbill in Sian Ka'an

dish of handmade fettuccine is as likely to be served with Caribbean lobster as it is with creamy Italian cheese and zucchini. I start with a tapas dish, a twist on carpaccio, this one of Mexican prawns in lemon, capers, mint and black pepper. For the main, I'm tempted by the catch of the day, but opt for a true Mexican choice, tuna tostada—corn tortillas topped with tuna, avocado, cabbage and onion. A glass of wine arrives with my prawn tapas, and as the light fades, I raise a glass to Jashita, a little piece of heaven where the sky is born.



Sian Ka'an Reserve

A NEW WAY TO ARRIVE

Until now, the most efficient way to access Tulum and the rest of the Riviera Maya was by flying into the Cancun airport. But did you know, there's an alternative option? Aeropuerto Internacional Felipe Carrillo Puerto (TQO) opened in Tulum on December 1st, 2023 and as of this year, several flights are now available out of Canada, including via WestJet, Air Canada Rouge, Air Transat and Sunwing Airlines. It's now a lot easier to get to this sunny paradise in Mexico.

Sustainable Fashion Handmade by Artisans in *Oaxaca*

The Bani Artesanal brand is renewing authentic Mexican traditions using recycled materials to create one-of-a-kind and sustainable products woven on pedal looms.



Every piece celebrates Oaxaca's artisanal heritage and the passion and dedication of Oaxaca artisans through a tradition that has been passed on for generations. Through different techniques, these artisans create an innovative type of texture and design that reflects a blend of history and modern personality with their high-quality handcrafted work.



handbags

Handbags are made of recycled materials and the inside is made out of cotton canvas. The most popular, the "Poka" comes in four sizes: large, medium, small and mini.





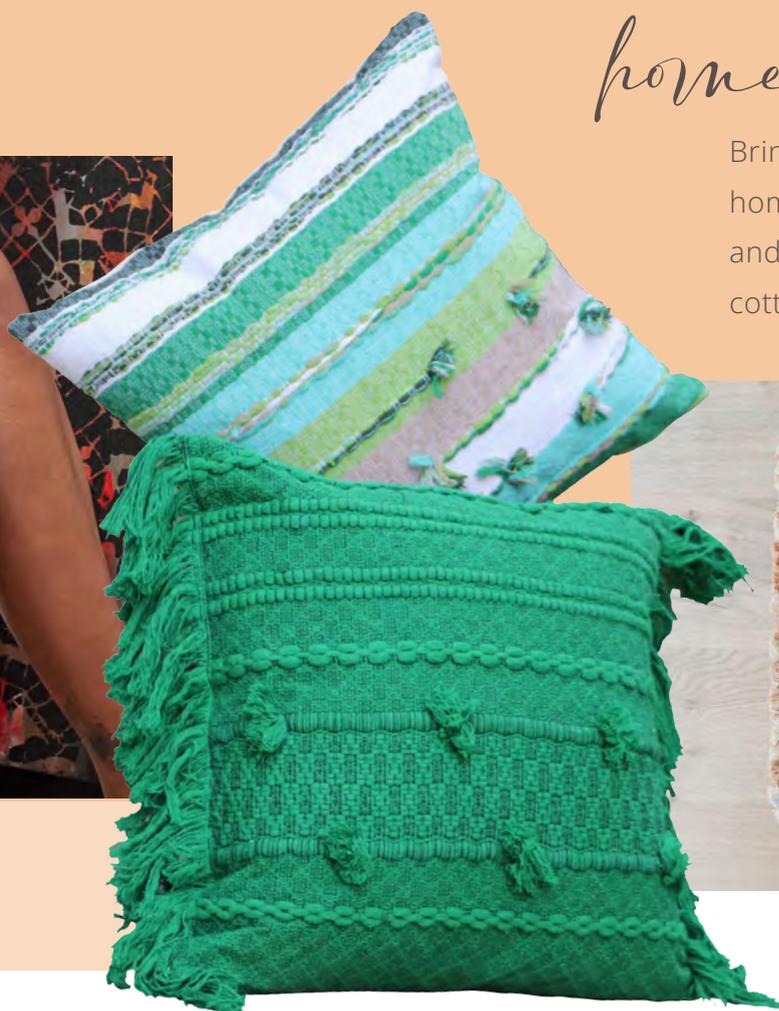
- ✓ **100% Recycled Materials**
Recycled threads on all textiles.
- ✓ **Artisanal Process**
All products are handmade in different types of looms by Mexican artisans.
- ✓ **Support Local**
Made by artisans around Mexico innovating designs with their original weaving traditions.

clothing

The Bani clothing line seeks to empower not only the women who wear the pieces, but also the women that create them.

home

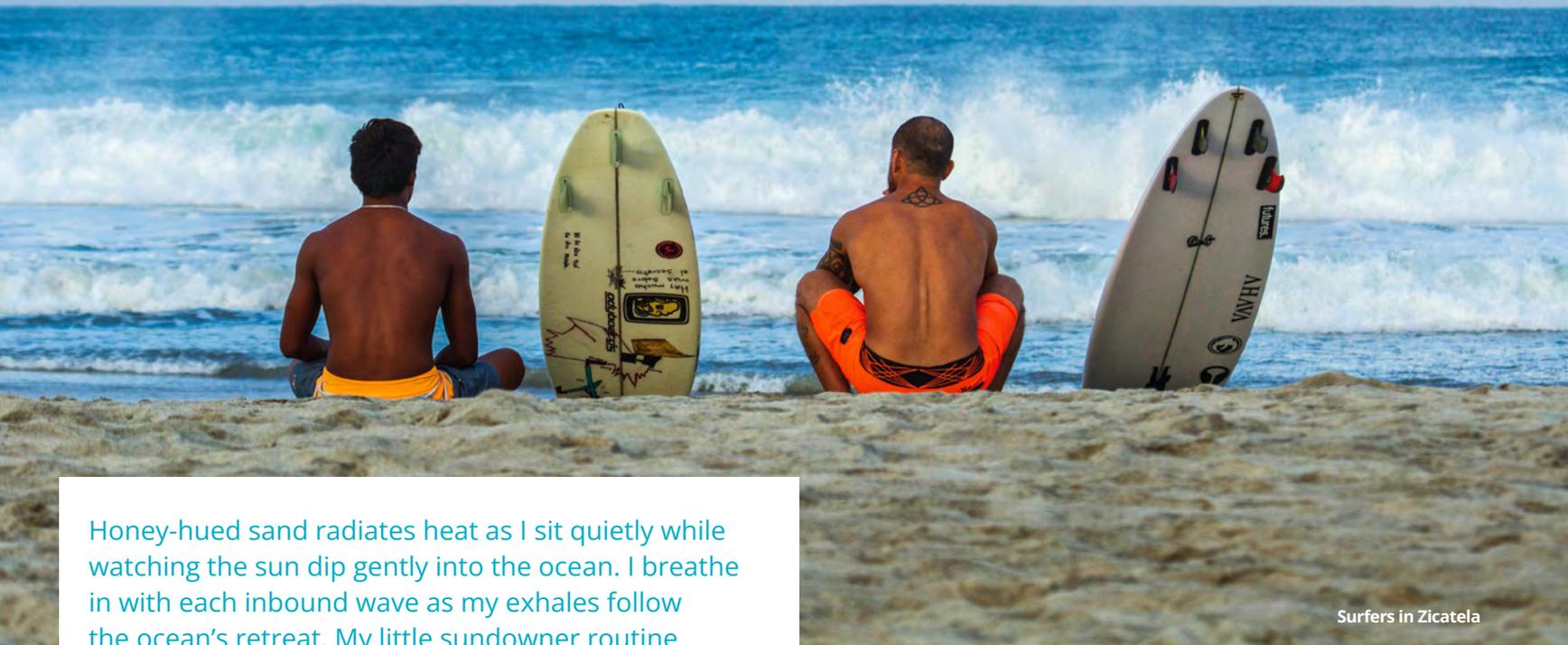
Bring a little Mexican style into your home with unique throw pillows and placemats made from recycled cotton.



Living My Best Life in **Puerto Escondido**

This laid back Mexican port town turned out to be just what I needed to recharge—body, mind and spirit

BY CHARMAINE NORONHA



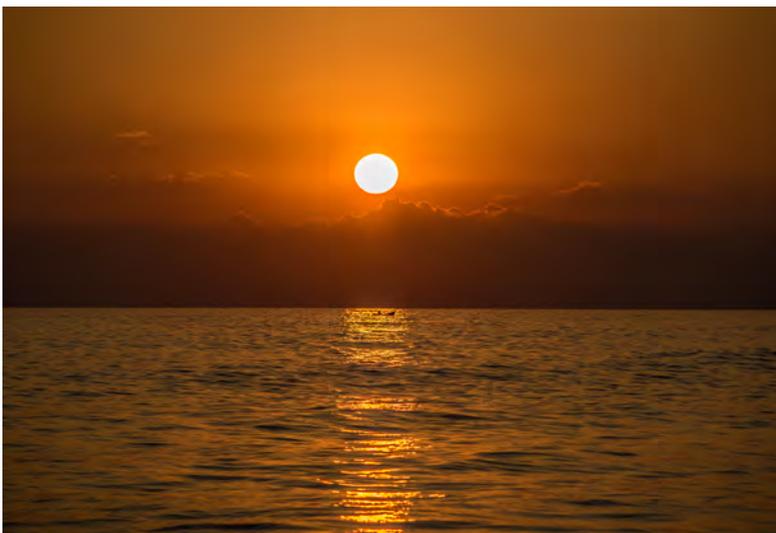
Surfers in Zicatela

Honey-hued sand radiates heat as I sit quietly while watching the sun dip gently into the ocean. I breathe in with each inbound wave as my exhales follow the ocean's retreat. My little sundowner routine has become a regular fixture during this getaway to scorching Puerto Escondido, Mexico, where I decided to escape Canada's annual deep freeze.

■ A Much-Needed Escape

A port town on Mexico's Pacific coast in the state of Oaxaca, Puerto Escondido is known for beautiful beaches, surf culture and buzzing nightlife. The town's central Playa Principal is lined with palm trees and thatch-roofed bars. Playa Zicatela brims with locals and nomads lounging on the sand or wandering the abundance of street stalls and boutiques, while Playa Carrizalillo is set in a cove backed by steep cliffs. It's a laid-back town where Mexicans, expats and digital remote workers intermingle against a backdrop of endless sunsets.

After a difficult health journey recovering from a traumatic brain injury, I was ready for the beaches, buzzing nightlife and endless sunsets this area had to offer, but mostly, the slow, sun-soaked lifestyle. As a freelance journalist, I could work from anywhere in the world so why would I choose to stay in dreary Toronto?



Amazing gastronomy in Oaxaca

As I relaunched my life, I was seeking joy, connection and community. Enter a co-living nomad retreat, which seemed to offer a slice of this. A few weeks of researching led me to AVNEA, a nomad retreat organization whose humble beginnings started in Puerto Escondido two years ago.

I arrived in Mexico last winter a bit nervous about living with five strangers for six weeks. My fears were slightly alleviated when I arrived at our shared living quarters in a rental home in Bacocho, a quiet, residential neighbourhood in Puerto Escondido filled with tree-lined streets and beautiful, sprawling homes. It's much quieter than Zicatela, where the majority of expats and nomads reside.

Here, my sunlit Bacocho mornings started with centering yoga and meditation. Then after a seven-hour work day, my evening ritual usually included a long walk to one of the many surrounding beaches to watch the sunset or take a quick dip.

Along with my slow yoga mornings and evening sunset meditations, I found myself delightfully dancing my way into my first salsa classes. Every Wednesday and Friday at PM Restaurante, I felt like I was entering my Latin *Dirty Dancing* era as I took my place in a line behind a scantily clad instructor as she counted out steps while I attempted not to bump into my fellow dancers.

In Honour of Slow Travel and Side Trips

Staying abroad for a longer time period (beyond the typical one-week vacation), also referred to as slow travel, enables you to really get to know a place and immerse yourself in your surroundings, falling into intentional and rewarding routines such as daily morning yoga and evening salsa classes. Feeling like you're living in (versus just visiting) a place allows you to get to know your neighbours and local vendors, single out your go-to breakfast spots and develop friendships.

Slow travel also allows you to leisurely explore your surroundings on jaunty weekend getaways, this time with the added bonus of having new compadres to explore with. Our first group getaway saw us jumping on a chicken bus—public transportation that sees you riding with locals and their fowled friends—to head to Mazunte. An hour or so away, this small town on the Pacific coast is renowned for its strong surf and hippie vibes. Our day here started with wandering an open-air market filled with local vendors hawking everything from sustainable beauty products to handmade jewellery and more. We stopped by Restaurant Tadeo for a plate of terrific tacos before heading

to Playa Mazunte for a Sunday filled with plenty of beach-based fun.

Having enjoyed this visit so much, we headed to Oaxaca City the following weekend. Named the best city in the world by *Travel & Leisure* in 2023, a new "superhighway" connecting Oaxaca City to Puerto Escondido opened up last winter, meaning that the previously six-plus-hour road trip has been whittled down to 2.5 hours.

Falling in Love With Oaxaca

Oaxaca de Juárez, or simply Oaxaca, is the capital



and largest city in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. This vibrantly electric city brimming with renowned churches and refined plazas has deservedly earned UNESCO World Heritage status.

After dropping our luggage at the beautifully designed Selina Hostel, a chain of slightly upscale hostels scattered throughout the world, we went

exploring. First to the zocalo, which translates to public square, to learn a bit more about the city's history, admire some of its oldest architecture and get some good people-watching in. We stopped into Mercado 20 de Noviembre, perhaps most famous for its "pasillo de humo," which translates to "hall of smoke." The name refers to a seemingly endless aisle of carne asada (smoked meat) within the market. It's an overwhelming experience for all of the senses!

To cap off a fun-filled weekend in this delightful city, we happened upon a wedding, which in this part of the world is basically an exuberant street parade. Calendas, aka wedding parades, date back to the 16th century. I was encouraged to join the parade by a guest and I promptly obliged.

Dancing through these blissfully bustling, colourful streets reaffirmed why I came to Mexico: to live my best Mexican life! After four difficult years of traumatic brain injury recovery, in this moment I was grateful for the chance to explore this welcoming region's diverse, fascinating cities and most importantly, find moments of joy once again.

Explore the Many Sides of Mexico with El Cid Resorts

BY JESSICA PADYKULA

Eight distinct properties spread across three beach destinations ensures the opportunity for an authentic and unforgettable vacation



View from El Cid El Moro Beach Hotel, Mazatlán

Like many people, when I make travel plans I often have a few criteria in mind before booking a room depending on the destination and what I plan to do. These criteria range from great food and proximity to beaches I'll want to linger on, to accommodations that provide both comfort and a warm welcome. El Cid Resorts ticks each of these boxes and then some, making this family-owned group of all-inclusive properties an ideal option when you visit Mexico, in particular, Mazatlán, Riviera Maya and Cozumel.

The Best of Two Worlds: *Mazatlán*

Mazatlán is Mexico's only colonial city on the beach, making it a truly unique destination. Here you'll find nearly 26 kilometres of golden sand beaches, excellent seafood and a vibrant historic centre complete with pretty plazas, colourful buildings and plenty of cafes, shops and restaurants. Don't miss the malecón, the city's scenic oceanside promenade that stretches for over 20 kilometres. Nicknamed the "Pearl of the Pacific," Mazatlán was made for both relaxation *and* exploration.

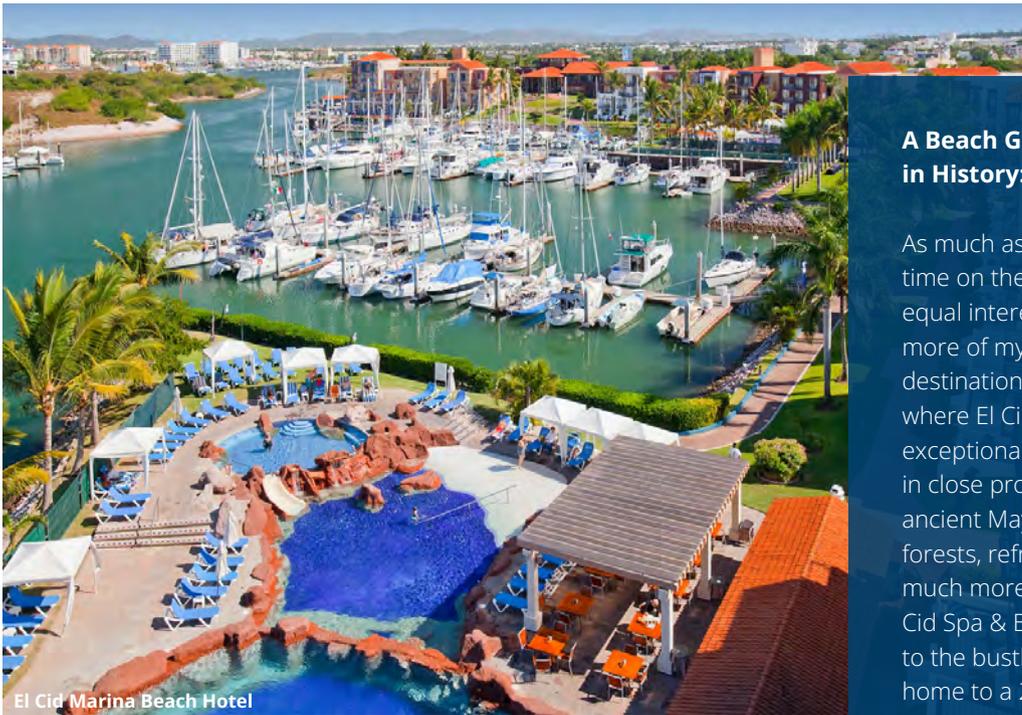
Each of the four El Cid Resorts properties here are well worth a stay. This includes the inviting El Cid Granada Hotel, with its own 27-hole golf course, as well as the charming El Cid Castilla Beach Hotel and El Cid El Moro Beach Hotel, both nestled within the energetic Golden Zone. El Cid Marina Beach Hotel boasts a private beach, world-class marina and Mediterranean-style design.



El Cid Castilla Beach Hotel



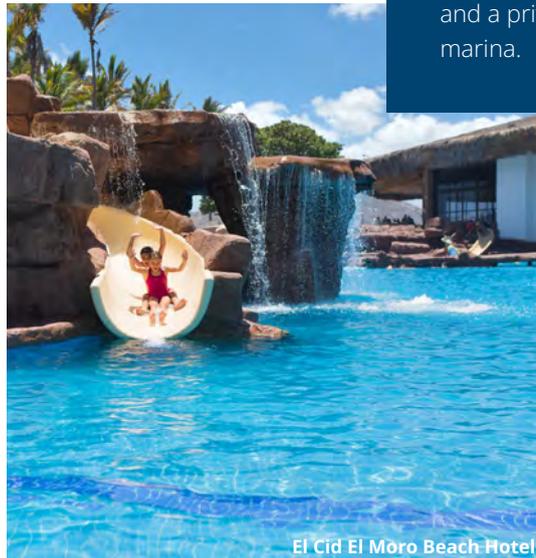
Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort



A Beach Getaway Steeped in History: Riviera Maya

As much as I love spending time on the sand, I have an equal interest in experiencing more of my chosen destination. Riviera Maya, where El Cid Resorts has three exceptional hotels, puts you in close proximity to several ancient Mayan sites, tropical forests, refreshing cenotes and much more. Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort, close to the bustling tourist zone, is home to a 22,000 square-foot pool, sprawling spa featuring traditional Mayan treatments and a private full-service marina.

Connected to Hotel Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort are Ventus at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort and Ventus Ha' at Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort. Nearby Puerto Morelos National Reef Park, known for its abundant and varied marine life, is the perfect playground for snorkellers and divers. It's also worth taking advantage of El Cid Resorts' Exchange Privilege program to experience the amenities and services across all three Riviera Maya resorts no matter which one you're staying at. Make sure to grab a sunset drink at rüf, the adults-only rooftop pool bar at Ventus Ha' At Marina El Cid Spa & Beach Resort.



The Ultimate Island Paradise: Cozumel

The vibrant island of Cozumel is a paradise for divers and snorkellers thanks to its prime location on the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef (the second-largest coral reef system in the world). El Cid La Ceiba Beach Hotel is a secluded boutique hideaway on the beach with its own dedicated dive centre, an

abundance of activities for all ages and breezy, well-appointed rooms.

Mexico is brimming with things to see, do and discover—and El Cid Resorts makes it easy to experience some of the best this multifaceted destination has to offer, while also ensuring you're comfortable and well taken care of.



Why Canadian Snowbirds Are Flocking to Loreto

From a fascinating history to exceptional natural sites, Loreto offers a unique and welcoming respite from the cold

By Jessica Padykula



For many Canadians, the desire to escape the extreme chill of winter is a common one. And for those in the know, Loreto, a well-kept secret tucked between the soaring Sierra de la Giganta mountains and Sea of Cortez on the east coast of the Baja California peninsula, is a true sanctuary. This historic town, with roots dating back to 1697, offers a special kind of winter retreat, where a rich cultural heritage and an incredibly welcoming community provide the backdrop for an unforgettable experience. In fact, Loreto was awarded the prestigious Magical Town certification in 2012 to recognize many of these qualities, as well as its stunning natural surroundings.

An authentically warm welcome

It's not every day that you get to a destination and feel immediately welcomed, but the moment you arrive in Loreto, there is a palpable sense of warmth and hospitality that can be hard to find elsewhere. The locals have a reputation for being incredibly friendly and embracing of tourists, especially the Canadians who have made this place their winter escape. It's not uncommon to see visitors and locals sharing stories over a cup of coffee, or just exchanging friendly greetings and smiles in passing. This sense of community is what truly makes Loreto feel like a second home for those who spend time here.



Markets and local festivals make it easy to mingle with the locals





Great golf

Anyone who wants to while away the winter on a golf course will have no problem doing so in Loreto. The town is home to two scenic courses that offer a unique blend of challenges and fantastic views. Danzante Bay Golf Course, designed by Rees Jones, is known for its championship layout and ocean vistas. And for a more relaxed but equally memorable experience, Loreto Bay Golf Course provides a beautiful backdrop of both the Sea of Cortez and the Sierra de la Giganta mountains. Just don't let the views distract you from your game.

Varied accommodation

When it comes to accommodation, Loreto has something for everyone. Whether you're looking for a resort-style stay, a cozy boutique hotel, or a long-term vacation rental, the options are diverse and cater to different budgets. Many accommodation options here offer monthly rates, making it an affordable and convenient choice for Canadians looking to spend an extended period enjoying everything the area has to offer.



Posada de los Flores

Excellent weather

The weather in Loreto is a major draw for anyone looking to bypass the cold and snow of winter in Canada. From November to April, the town experiences warm, sunny days with temperatures averaging around 25°C. This time of year in Loreto also means you can enjoy a plethora of outdoor activities without the worry of rain. It's also worth noting that sea temperatures hover between 21° and 25°C, which is ideal for water activities.

Nature at its best

Loreto isn't just a place to relax and unwind; there is so much to see and experience here—especially when it comes to active pursuits. Don't miss the UNESCO-listed Loreto Bay National Park, which is the ideal area to do everything from diving and snorkelling to kayaking, paddle boarding, wildlife viewing, sportfishing and exploring the park's five islands. In addition, the surrounding mountains provide the perfect backdrop for hiking and biking, offering panoramic views of the Gulf of California.

Winter in Loreto offers the best of both worlds: a chance to relax and immerse yourself in a rich culture among welcoming locals, as well as the opportunity to explore and engage in a variety of outdoor activities. It's no wonder more and more Canadians are choosing Loreto as their go-to winter retreat.



Westjet offers weekly direct flights to Loreto from Calgary with connections across Canada making it easy to enjoy this snowbird paradise. For more information on Loreto: loreto.visitbajasur.travel



Journey to Wellness at Fairmont Mayakoba

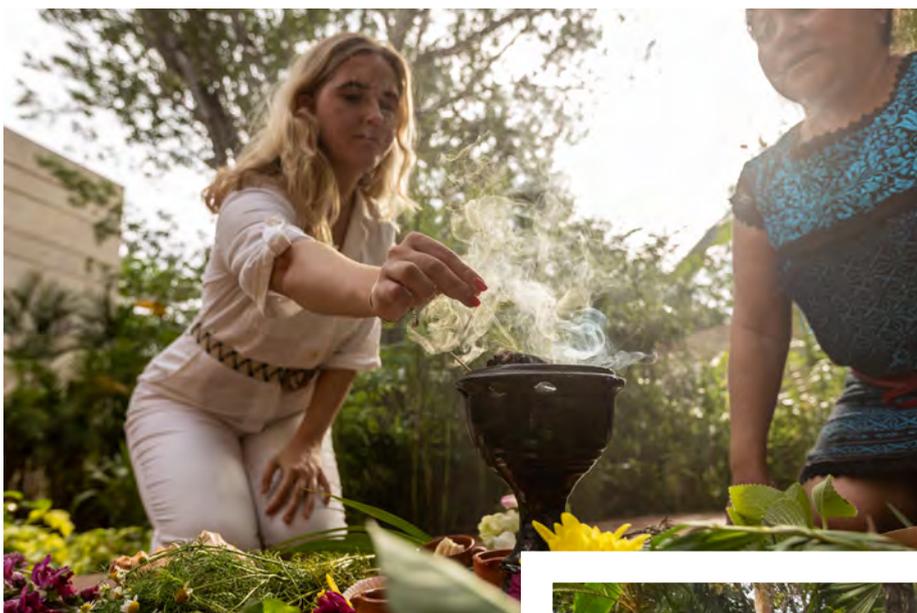
Discover this renowned property's new temazcal, an ancient pathway to holistic wellness and rejuvenation

By Jessica Padykula

Visiting a temazcal is unlike any other wellness experience you'll have. As transformative as it is relaxing, the temazcal—an ancient healing ritual designed to cleanse and rejuvenate—feels like a total emotional and physical re-set in the best ways possible.

The Fairmont Spa & Wellness Center at Fairmont Mayakoba, nestled between the turquoise waters and vibrant jungle of the Riviera Maya, recently introduced a newly built temazcal as a way to weave local culture into their already robust wellness program. Seamlessly blending ancestral techniques

with modern spa practices, Fairmont Mayakoba's temazcal journey reflects a deep respect for cultural traditions. The ritual itself—which I've had the opportunity to experience on a few occasions in different areas of Mexico—typically involves intense sweating (similar to a vigorous steam bath), something meant to encourage the release of physical, emotional and spiritual impurities. This deep detoxification process can help alleviate stress and foster a sense of wellbeing. In my case, I've left the ceremony feeling relaxed and much more in tune with the present moment, something I often struggle with on a day-to-day basis.

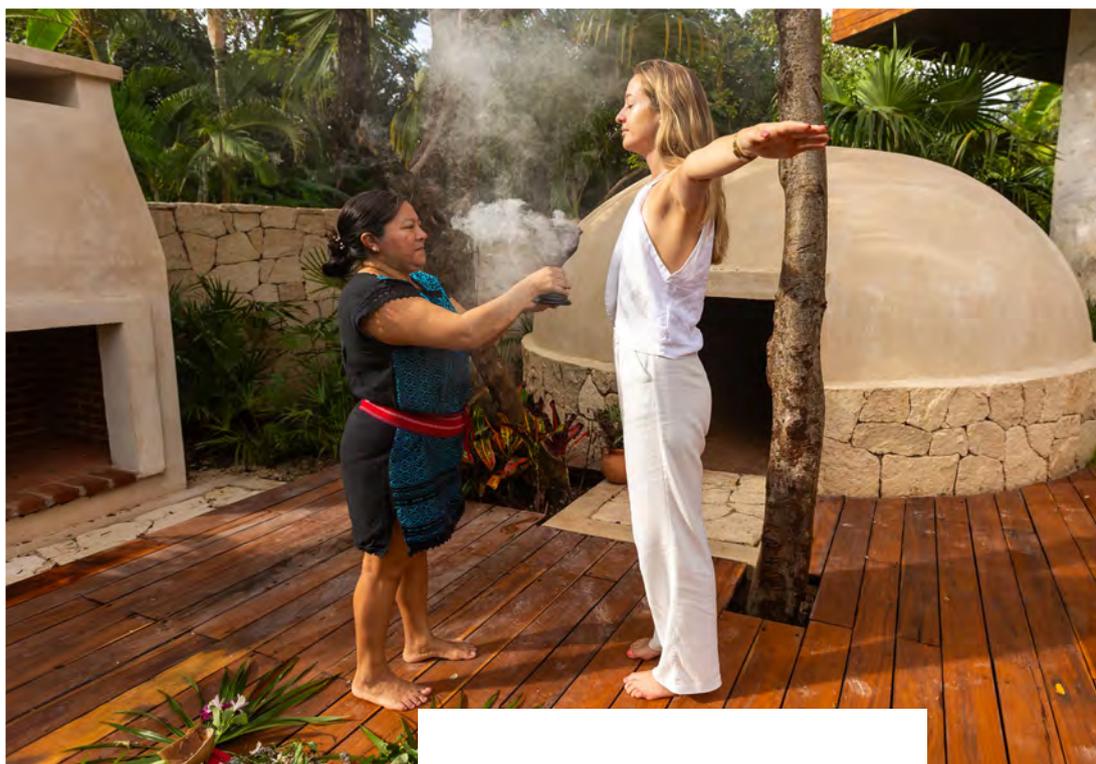


Historically, the temazcal has been integral to important milestones, such as cultural rites of passage, lunar cycles, New Year celebrations and childbirth ceremonies.

Along with its new temazcal, the spa at Fairmont Mayakoba has undergone an extensive renovation, one which builds on what was already a tranquil and inviting space. Many treatments here tap into Mayan healing practices and utilize local ingredients, making for a truly immersive and unique experience.

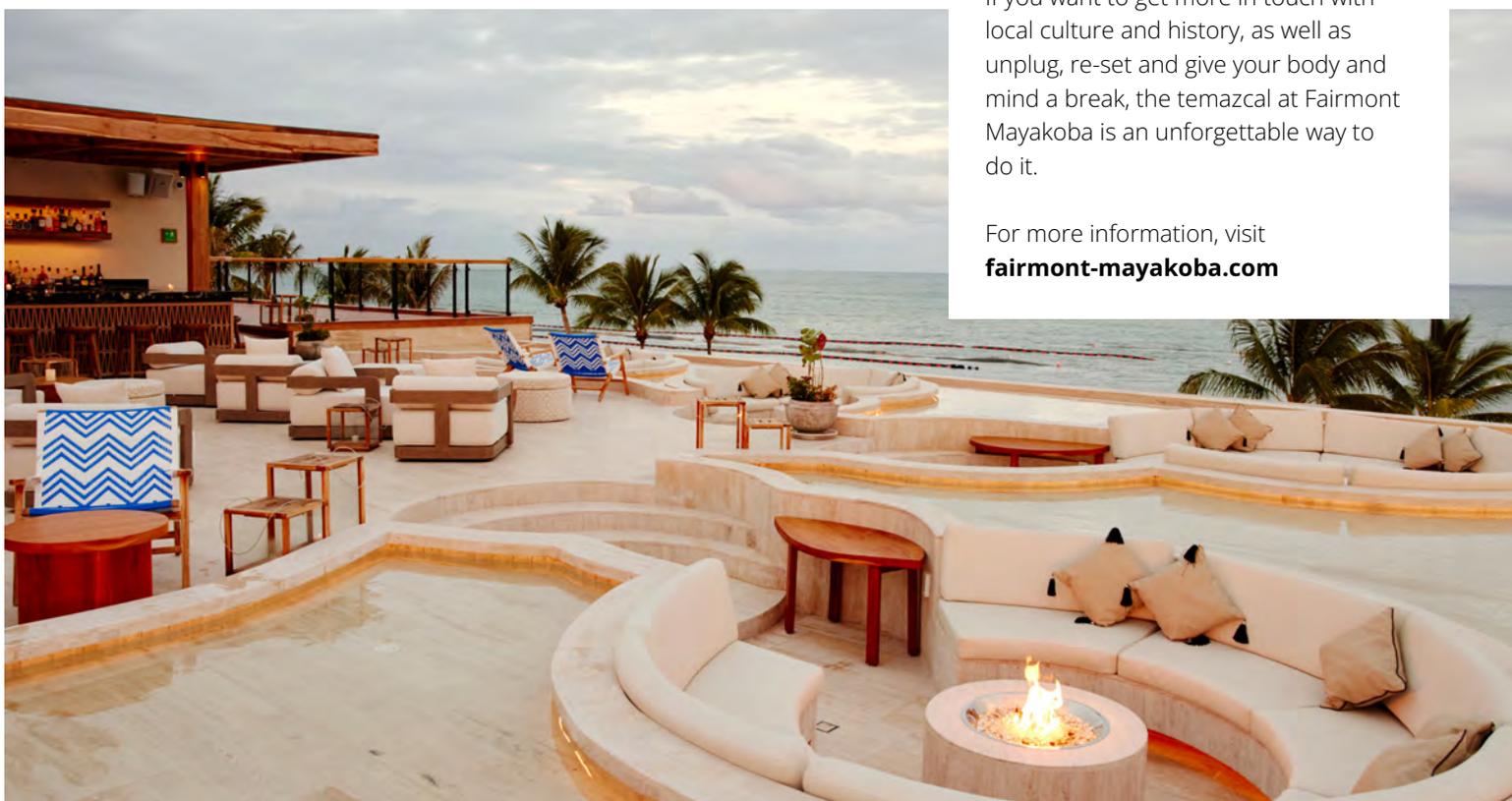
During Fairmont Mayakoba's temazcal experience, a skilled guide, one who has undergone years of training to lead these ceremonies (ensuring both comfort and safety), takes you through the process. Herbal infusions of rosemary, rue, mint and chamomile are poured over hot volcanic stones, creating a purifying steam that envelops you and feels deeply comforting. As more stones are added, the intensity of the steam and heat increases. The stones themselves symbolize the wisdom passed down through generations.

Rooted in the rich heritage of pre-Hispanic Mexico and Central America, the temazcal is a sacred space symbolizing the womb of Mother Earth. The rounded shape, similar to an igloo, is meant to serve as an important connection point with the universe.



If you want to get more in touch with local culture and history, as well as unplug, re-set and give your body and mind a break, the temazcal at Fairmont Mayakoba is an unforgettable way to do it.

For more information, visit
[fairmont-mayakoba.com](https://www.fairmont-mayakoba.com)



Discovering Some of the Most Authentic stays in Mexico

By Jessica Padykula

If you look beyond the many fantastic all-inclusive resorts in the region, you can find so many smaller and beautiful bespoke hotels that speak to the true nature of Mexico

For me, the deciding factor on hotel choice often comes down to whether or not a property will help me better connect with where I'm going. Having spent a lot of time in Mexico, I know there are a wide range of accommodations that tap into local culture, creating an experience like no other.

Nestled within Mexico's stunning landscapes, these hotels each offer a special type of escape, blending the country's rich traditions with hospitality and natural beauty.



Las Alamandas



Las Alamandas offers unmatched seclusion on the Pacific Coast, with just 18 suites spread across 2,000-acres of nature reserve. Guests can enjoy four beautiful beaches (where private picnics can be set up) and where the only sounds are the waves and ocean breezes rusting through palm trees. This boutique eco-retreat is an ideal escape for those seeking serenity, complete with personalized service and an immersive connection to nature. The property also runs a sea turtle protection program which guests are encouraged to participate in.

Hacienda Xcanatun, Angsana Heritage Collection



This historic Yucatán estate merges traditional charm with modern amenities. The property's lush gardens, grand architecture and serene atmosphere offer a perfect backdrop for relaxation. Its spa, surrounded by nature, combines ancient wellness techniques with contemporary treatments, providing a calming and restorative experience, while the hacienda's two restaurants focus on dishes that use fresh, local ingredients, delivering an authentic taste of the region.





Chablé Hotels

Founded in 2003, Chablé Hotels has stunning retreats in Maroma, Yucatán and the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These eco-luxury resorts focus on wellness and mindfulness, inviting guests to disconnect and focus on the present while also enjoying five-star accommodations. Chablé properties provide the ultimate escape, blending comfort with a deep connection to the local environment. An exciting new location in La Paz on the Sea of Cortez is opening soon. (Photos: Chablé Yucatan)



Villa Sol de Oriente

Costa Careyes

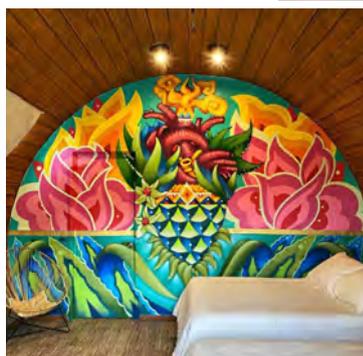
This enclave of gorgeous villas, casitas and bungalows is a sanctuary where guests can relax, explore and experience an unparalleled connection to both the surrounding nature and the area's growing creative community. When you're not entranced by the amazing architecture there are 12 kilometres of coastline to enjoy and the property features its own art gallery and biodynamic garden, as well as multiple restaurants and many opportunities for water or beach-based activities.

Matices Hotel Barricas

For those who may like to imbibe or learn more about what they're sipping, Matices Hotel Barricas, set in the heart of tequila country, offers an immersive experience where tequila takes centre stage.

Guests stay in barrel-shaped rooms (each uniquely designed and tequila-themed) and can enjoy guided distillery tours, tastings and tequila-making workshops. The hotel does a great job of celebrating Mexico's iconic spirit with activities designed to explore tequila's history.

A positive travel experience doesn't always come down to where you stay, but often, choosing a hotel or resort that makes it easy to fall in love with a destination can make all the difference.



Mexico Beyond the Beach

If all you've visited in Mexico are its beaches, you're missing out on these great attractions

By Mark Stachiew



Zacatecas

The charming town of Zacatecas is filled with beautifully preserved architecture and historic churches that give visitors a glimpse into Mexico's colonial past. One of the top tourist attractions near the town is Mina El Eden, a former silver mine that offers tours, a museum and even a nightclub inside the tunnels. After learning about the area's mining history, visitors can enjoy views of the city from the cable car that connects the mine with Cerro de la Bufa, a nearby mountain that offers not only a panoramic vista, but access to several historical monuments at the top.

Canadians visited Mexico in record numbers last year, 4.2 million to be exact, but it's safe to say that many of them never ventured further than the beach which is a shame because the country's interior is blessed with an abundance of culturally fascinating and naturally beautiful attractions. To give you an idea of what they've been missing, here are some highlights of what awaits visitors to some of Mexico's 31 states.



Guanajuato

Guanajuato has some spectacular natural scenery like the majestic Sierra Madre del Sur mountains that offer fantastic views and plenty of

outdoor pursuits like hiking and bird-watching. The state is working hard to promote these activities beyond the one morbid thing for which it is most famous, which are the mummies of Guanajuato. These aren't ancient pre-Hispanic mummies, but bodies of

people who died during a 19th-century cholera outbreak and were naturally mummified. Visitors flock to Museo de las Momias de Guanajuato (Mummies Museum) to see the collection of mummified human remains.

Michoacán



One of the most awe-inspiring tourist attractions in Michoacán, and maybe all of Mexico, is the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a natural sanctuary that hosts millions of monarch butterflies that migrate from Canada and the United States every winter. The reserve covers more than 56,000 hectares and includes forests and mountains where millions of butterflies congregate. Visitors can witness this amazing natural spectacle between November and March by hiking or horseback riding to the butterfly colonies that cover the trees and sky with their orange and black wings.



Morelos



Morelos is a small state filled with hidden delights like the Tepozteco Pyramid with its temple dedicated to Tepoztēcatl, the Aztec god of the alcoholic beverage pulque, a forerunner of Mezcal. It's perched high atop a mountain and offers beautiful views of the surrounding countryside. The hike up to the pyramid is challenging, but well worth the effort as you'll be rewarded with a fascinating glimpse into Mexico's rich pre-colonial history. The nearby town of Tepoztlán also offers a colourful local market and delicious traditional cuisine.



Chihuahua



This northern state is home to Copper Canyon, a vast and rugged natural wonder that is actually a system of six distinct canyons which are collectively larger and deeper than the Grand Canyon in the United States. It's a popular destination for hikers and nature lovers, but the big draw is a ride through the canyon on the El Chepe train. Visitors also come to explore local villages and learn about the Indigenous Tarahumara culture.



Sinaloa



The only part of Sinaloa that most visitors bother to see is the beach at Mazatlán, but if you venture inland, you'd discover El Fuerte, a spectacular colonial-era town that has been designated a Pueblo Mágico (Magical Town), a special honour reserved for only the most culturally significant destinations in Mexico. Enjoy its charming architecture, colourful plaza, historic church, underground tunnels and the fortress that gives the town its name. It's also known as the birthplace of the fictional character Zorro and has statues and murals dedicated to him.



Nayarit



A truly spectacular tourist attraction in Nayarit are the Marietas Islands, a group of small uninhabited islands that are part of a national park and a UNESCO biosphere reserve. The islands are famous for abundant wildlife, such as dolphins, whales, sea turtles, manta rays and seabirds, especially the blue-footed booby. One of its islands is also home to one of the world's most unique beaches: the Hidden Beach, also known as Playa del Amor or Lover's Beach. This beach is a circular hole in one of the islands, created by volcanic activity and bomb testing in the past. The beach can only be accessed by swimming or kayaking through a tunnel during low tide.

Create endless memories

Explore a rich array of unique experiences that blend cultural discoveries, breathtaking nature explorations, transformative wellness pursuits, and exquisite culinary delights.

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