

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



PHOTOS BY THE STILL LIFE STYLE AGENCY FOR MUSA

Jason deCaires Taylor's "The Gardener of Hope" (above) and Elier Amado Gil's "Umbral" (below) are among the sculptures at the MUSA underwater park off the coast of Cancun.

A MUSEUM IN THE SEA

BY DIANE BAIR AND PAMELA WRIGHT | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Longing for a sequel to last year's Oscar winner for best picture, "The Shape of Water"? Here's the next best thing: A visit to the MUSA underwater park off the coast of Cancun. The figure in the sculpture "Resurrection" by Jason deCaires Taylor in Punta Nizuc looks a lot like the marine creature in the hit movie. This one even sports an extra layer of algae. Perhaps Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro got inspired here, or perhaps you'll be motivated to write some fan fiction? Or not. But it's still a very cool thing to see.

Eerie. Creepy. Odd. Mystical. Alluring. Provocative. These are the adjectives that divers and snorkelers use to describe the undersea world of more than 500 pieces of art that grace the seafloor here. Launched in 2009 by Roberto Diaz Abraham, a sculptor and former president of the Cancun Nautical Association, and Jaime Gonzalez Cano, former director of the Cancun-Isla Mujeres National Marine Park, MUSA (Museo Subacuatico de Art) occupies more than 2,000 square meters and its artwork weighs more than 200 tons. This astonishing museum-in-the-sea is the largest and most ambitious underwater art installation in the world.

Given that most of the sculpted figures are life-size (residents of nearby Puerto Morelos posed as models, along with "Today" show anchors and a Victoria's Secret model), but now sprout algae and coral polyps, you feel a bit like you've slipped into a forgotten, doomed city as you dive around pieces like "Silent Evolution," featuring 450 figures, and "The Banker" (people with their heads buried in the sand.) Each piece is designed to tell a story — some obvious, some open to interpretation. There's a VW Beetle sculpture,

built to scale, by Taylor (whose work is also featured in Grenada's Underwater Sculpture Park), and another piece called "Blessings" by Cuban artist Elier Amado Gil that features six giant-size hands. One we love: the "lobster city" that fishermen can't get their hooks into — it's a lobster nursery, according to artist Taylor. Besides Taylor and Gil, artists represented at MUSA include Karen Salinas Martinez, Diaz Abraham, Rodrigo Quinones Reyes, and Salvador Quiroz Ennis.

The sculptures are fixed to the seabed and spread among three locations: Salon Manchones, off the coast of Isla Mujeres, at eight meters deep (best viewed by diving at 28 feet); Punta Nizuc, located at the southern tip of Cancun's hotel zone (at four meters deep, these are viewable by snorkeling); and Punta Sam, 3.5 meters under the Caribbean Sea near the Punta Sam reef in Cancun. Scuba and snorkel outfitters offer trips to see the park; they even offer glass-bottom boat tours to see the shallow installations at Punta Nizuc, where 18 pieces are on display. Punta Sam offers nine; the rest are in the largest underwater gallery, Salon Manchones. Despite what the outfitters will tell you, it makes no sense to snorkel at Salon Manchones; you'll barely see anything except the tops of the heads of the figures, and it'll cost you around \$60 per person for the (frustrating) excursion. Better to see fewer pieces, closer up, at the other locales.

So why go to the trouble of installing 200-plus tons of artwork underwater? "We were solving a conservation issue with art," says Diaz Abraham, president/director of MUSA and one of its artists. The goal is to draw visitors away from the natural reef at Cancun-Isla Mujeres Marine Park. That marine area is one of the most-vis-

UNDERWATER, Page M7



HERE

COZY N.H. INN OFFERS WINTER ACTIVITIES

Stay in style at Pickering House, a former historic homestead nestled on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. Opened since July, this boutique luxury property in Wolfeboro is offering a series of winter activities — onsite and off — designed to lure guests on the two-hour journey north of Boston. Stay in one of the 10 guest rooms and suites, some adorned with gas fireplaces and stoves, and partake of activities that include cross-country skiing on groomed trails, ice skating (indoors and out), winter hiking, and downhill skiing. Or stay inside, curled up with your favorite book, a hot toddy, and freshly baked snacks near two marble fireplaces housed in the library and living room. Winter also ushers in belly-warming culinary activities, including Saturday evening demonstration cooking dinners helmed by in-house and visiting local chefs. Rates from \$285. 603-569-6948. www.pickeringhousewolfeboro.com.

GET ARTSY IN ALLSTON

As part of ongoing renovations and restorations, the art-themed Studio Allston Hotel has debuted five new suites. The fanciful suites are the latest addition to dramatic artwork found throughout the property, including in the lobby, bar, meeting rooms, and in every guest room. Directed by Boston-based Isenberg Projects, the snazzy suites were designed by local contemporary artists who played a leading role in the design process. For example, artist Jim Drain created a cosmo-



naut's wonderland in the Drink in the Cosmos Suite; in the Unplug & Play Suite, by Maria Molteni, the vibrantly patterned and colored room is complemented by a foosball table and numerous board games. Hungry? The hotel is home to the recently opened Casa Caña, a Latin kitchen and rum bar featuring innovative New Latin cuisine. Rates from \$199. 617-206-1848, www.hotelstudioallston.com.



THERE

LOBSTER-PALOOZA IN NOVA SCOTIA

If you think lobsters are a summertime-only treat, think again. For three weeks in February, lovers of these tasty crustaceans flock to Canada for Nova Scotia's South Shore Lobster Crawl, a celebration of lobster-themed experiences and tastings (Feb. 1-18). Visitors are encouraged to "crawl" along the

Atlantic coast from Barrington, said to be Canada's lobster capital, to picturesque Peggy's Cove to taste a variety of dishes from lobster thermidor to lobster mac 'n' cheese; sample dozens of variations of the traditional lobster roll; tour a lobster pound; sample lobster-infused ale beer; attend and participate in sporting events; discover the art, music, stories, and traditions shaped by the lobster industry; and more. Adventure seekers can ride the waves of the frosty Atlantic waters, where more than 40 percent of Canada's lobster are fished, with a winter surfing lesson at White Point Beach Resort. The two-hour lesson includes winter wetsuit, surfboard and professional instructors (Feb. 9, 14). 1-800-565-0000, <https://lobstercrawl.ca/>

GRAND CANYON CENTENNIAL TRIPS

In celebration of the official Grand Canyon National Park Centennial (Feb. 26), Austin Adventures is expanding its itineraries and adding special perks to its Grand Canyon excursions in 2019. Two additional departures have been added to the six-day Arizona: Grand Canyon National Park Vacation; of these, seven trip dates are family-focused and two are for adults only. (Departure dates in March, June, July, and September.) To mark the centennial, each trip will feature an educational element introduced by guides knowledgeable in the geology of the Grand Canyon, including a history of the 21 traditional tribes

calling the canyon home; logo day packs for kids 12 and under that include memorabilia, keepsakes, field guide, map, and activity book; a \$100 donation made per adult to the Grand Canyon Conservancy, the official, nonprofit partner of the park; and more. A new excursion this year: *Arizona/Utah: Grand Canyon to Bryce & Zion is an eight-day journey that weaves together visits to three national parks. (Departure dates in May.)* 800-575-1540, www.austinadventures.com

EVERYWHERE

HANDS-FREE TRAVEL ACCESSORY

Ready to say buh-bye to your overstuffed pockets, bulky purse, or — gasp! — visually offensive fanny pack? Savvy travelers are now using the new iBand Sling Adjustable, a lightweight carryall that keeps your belongings safe and your hands free for important tasks, from photo ops to biking to grabbing some food-truck tacos. Think of the ergonomically designed sling as a messenger bag — without the bag. Worn across the body, from shoulder to hip, the new adjustable-size iBand has pockets to hold your cash, credit cards, ID, pens, headphones, sunglasses, and more. Fits any smartphone with 5-inch screen or smaller. A hidden pocket can accommodate your passport and larger phones. Includes elastic bottle holder, carabineer for keys, and rear reflector for when worn at night. Made of 1000D high-density poly with foam core for comfort. Available in four colors. \$49. iband-sling.com

NECEE REGIS