

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

PEACE & QUIET IN CANCUN

BY NECEE REGIS |
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

We needed an escape from the boisterous Carnival celebrations at our winter home on the Pacific coast of Mexico. (Think Mardi Gras on steroids. For the record: I am not a Mardi Gras kinda gal.) After considering many options, a friend suggested we check out the Grand Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Cancun Resort and Spa.

Cancun? Wouldn't that also be a crazy scene? Nope, she assured us, this resort would be an oasis of calm with a beautiful private beach, amazing spa, and a variety of places to dine and chill. A place that was more family-friendly than spring-break crazy. So we figured we'd try it — why not? I'm happy to report she was right on every count.

The hotel is located approximately a half hour drive from the international airport. We arrived in the late afternoon, hot and dusty from our travels, and were greeted with large smiles and cool washcloths. The lobby is heroic in scale, with a soaring atrium capped by a colorful stained glass dome. Opposite the entrance, the pool and the sparkling sea beckoned.

The hotel offers 602 all-suite accommodations, each with a private terrace and ocean views. Our room had all the amenities I love: fluffy towels, luxury cotton bedding, a plethora of pillows, quality bath products (L'Occitane), Nespresso machine, mini-bar, couch for lolling, voluminous bathrobes, and slippers for the sleek marble floors. After settling in, we lost no time in finding a poolside bar with sultry breezes and a view of the crystalline Caribbean. That's where we first sampled their signature Golden Cadillac Margarita (Herradura 1800 tequila, Grand Marnier, and fresh squeezed lime), our drink of choice during a three-night stay.

Lounge chairs are arranged around connected, lagoon-like pools that snake along the length of the property and include two swim-up bars, volleyball net, waterfall, and fountains. Some areas of the pools have wide stepped edges where lounges rest in several inches of water. If all this sounds like a setting for a party-pool, it surprisingly wasn't. Couples quietly sipped cocktails by the bar while families played in the shallow water.

One can also lounge on the white sand beach under



PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



heat-shielding umbrellas. Beverage service and a light-dining menu are available both pool and ocean-side. An expansive area is roped off for swimming, keeping recreational vehicles away from bathers and SUP-yoga classes.

The following day, my husband headed to the gym as I checked out the sleek, 40,000-square-foot Coral Beach Gem Spa's "Ten-Step Hydrotherapy Ritual." I admit I'm a skeptic when it comes to fancy-pants spa treatments (just give a me a deep tissue massage, please) but this series of water treatments won me over, starting with the aromatherapy steam room and continuing with a rain shower, sauna, ice room, bubbling whirlpool, and more (\$55 as part of a day pass; free when combined with additional spa treatment, such as a massage). I signed up for a classic massage, as fine as any I've experienced in my travels, that left me as relaxed and catatonic as a bowl of Jell-O (a good thing).

A variety of dining options include the beachy-casual Isla Contoy, serving fresh seafood and Mexican favorites under a grand palapa by the sea; Mexican-themed La Joya, a vibrant restaurant with tequila lounge and tasting bar, vintage cinematic projections, and occasional eight-piece mariachi band; and, my personal fave, Le Basilic, a AAA Five Diamond winner serving French Mediterranean cuisine in

a grand high-ceiling dining room, complete with soothing tunes played on a white baby grand. The property is not all-inclusive, and guests are welcomed to venture into the adjacent lively business district with a wide range of additional dining and entertainment offerings. (Hello, Hooters! Or, not.)

The hotel spent \$2 million creating the Coral KidZ Club, an enormous, state-of-the-art facility offering programs throughout the day geared specifically for various age groups. Highlights include Open Play Theater featuring a stage with digital backdrop, light-up dance floor, and dressing room with costumes and makeup; arts and crafts area; Mayan-themed outdoor sand and water-filled play zone; computer zone with Xbox and Wii play-systems; and an interactive game that teaches children about the ancient Mayan culture.

Concierge services offer guests a wide range of experiences outside the resort, including excursions to theme parks, Mayan villages, the Isla Contoy bird sanctuary, pyramids and cenotes, fishing and snorkeling tours, and the nearby Mayan Museum, exhibiting more than 400 artifacts from the peninsula. We opted to take the ferry to Islas Mujeres, the long and narrow island visible from our hotel that is celebrated for its Mayan heritage, rocky coast, and seafood restaurants. Alas, our plans were thwarted when the local ferry company deviated from its online schedule at not one, but two of its docks. After missing one ferry that left ahead of schedule, we taxied to another dock only to be informed that the 11 a.m. ferry was being rescheduled for 12:30.

"Oh, drat," we said. (Or perhaps something stronger.) And then, "Oh joy," as we realized we could simply return to the resort, to the lounge chairs, to the brilliant azure water, and relax with another Golden Cadillac.

GRAND FIESTA AMERICANA; CORAL BEACH CANCUN, Seasonal rates from \$350. Add \$200 per night for Grand Club perks including VIP lounge and private sundeck. Check online for resort promotions and deals. 888-830-9008, www.coralbeachcancunhotel.com

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Lagoon-like pools snake along the length of the Grand Fiesta Americana Coral Beach Cancun Resort and Spa.

A colorful stained glass dome caps the soaring atrium in the lobby.

HERE

NEWPORT HOTEL GETS HIGH DESIGN MAKEOVER

Lovers of historic Newport will want to check out The Cliffside Inn, the newest redesigned and modernized property in the Lark Hotels portfolio. Located steps away from the Cliffwalk and opulent Newport mansions, the 16-room boutique hotel's preserved historical elements harken back to the home's former identity as "Swann Villa," named by former Maryland governor Thomas Swann, who built the stately Victorian manor in 1876. Look for a palette of jewel tones, rich textures, and eclectic patterns in each of inn's 16 guest rooms and cottages that also offer whirlpool tubs and/or spa showers, gas fireplaces, and unique architectural details original to the building. Amenities include a small-plates breakfast with each stay, evening turndown service, outdoor fire pit, onsite library, and more. Rates from \$180 to \$650 for double occupancy depending on room and season. 401-847-1811. www.thecliffsideinn.com

BEER LOVERS JUST SAY WOOF

After a hard day at work, grab your pup and head to the dog-friendly Kimpton Marlowe hotel in Cambridge for Dogs & Drafts, taking place every third Tuesday evening from June through October. (5:30 to 7:30 p.m., weather permitting.) Sample a different craft beer each month from New England's finest micro-breweries — Harpoon Brewery, Night Shift Brewing, Notch Brewing, Bantam Cider, and Berkshire Brewing Company —



READ MCKENDREE

and tasty bites such as grilled gourmet hot dogs, hamburger sliders, thick cut fries, and vanilla and chocolate ice cream cones from Bambara Kitchen & Bar's executive chef, David Bazirgan. Pups can enjoy free, hand-crafted treats courtesy of Polka Dog Bakery. Each event includes fun raffle prizes for pets and their owners that benefit Last Hope K9, a nonprofit, all-breed dog rescue based in Massachusetts. New this year: a grand prize of an exclusive private Duck Tour for 16 guests and their dogs. Admission is free; beer and food available for purchase. 617-868-8000.

THERE

GET SHUCKED IN PEI

Have an oyster-licious farm-to-table experience with the Valley Pearl Oysters "Get Shucked" tour. Located in scenic Tyne Valley on Prince Edward Island, participants can practice tonging (the process of gathering oysters off the ocean floor with long rake-like

tools) with owners, farmers, and competitive oyster shuckers Jeff Noye and Damien Enman. After collecting the tasty bivalves, the group will return to the plant to learn about processing methods, practice shucking, and taste some premium PEI oysters. This experience is offered July 1 through Sept. 30, by appointment. From \$65 per person. Call 902-439-1716 or 902-954-0664. valleypearloysters.com/tour

FESTIVAL OF BEER, BBQ, AND BANDS

Celebrate all-things-summer at the Windy City Smokeout (July 12-14), Chicago's three-day extravaganza combining beer, barbecue, and bands, featuring both country music superstars and up-and-coming talent, including performances by Ashley McBryde, Old Dominion, Lanco, Chris Young, and more. Attendees can sample tasty ribs, brisket, smoked meats, and more prepared by 20 barbecue pit masters from all over the country, highlighting styles from Kentucky, Nashville, Missouri, and Chicago.

Quench your thirst with a glass of beer from top American breweries, including Chicago's own Moody Tongue, Local Option, Goose Island, Pipeworks, and Burnt City. Exclusive events throughout the weekend include a BBQ brunch, tasting experiences, "the biggest happy hour of summer," and more. Purchase single-day or weekend tickets before July 9 for reduced prices. \$40-\$110. Stay in style at the nearby Hoxton Hotel, a newly constructed building in the West Loop/Fulton Market neighborhood. Rates from \$229. 312-761-1700. thehoxton.com/illinois/chicago/hotels

EVERYWHERE

INTERNATIONAL CUISINE AT HOME

Travel introduces us to cultures and cuisine we may never experience at home. A new book by Moonstone Press, "Famous Dishes From Around the World: Healthy, Tasty and Affordable," gathers international recipes in one easy-to-use collection. Compiled by lovers of ethnic food who have lived in far-flung locales, it features 30 dishes identified with specific countries worldwide, such as Colombian sancocho, French ratatouille, Indian vegetable korma, Mexican fajitas, Moroccan tagine with chicken, Polish lentil stew, Spanish paella, and more. The bilingual text (English and Spanish) features both authentic recipes and healthy variations of original dishes, such as Greek moussaka made with ground turkey in place of lamb or beef. Also includes calorie and

nutrition breakdowns; background information about each dish; and budget-conscious meals. \$14.99.

PORTABLE SOLAR-POWERED COOKERS

Take advantage of the power of the sun on your next hiking, kayaking, or camping trip with the GoSun and GoSun Sport Pro Pack solar cookers. Perfect for when you want hot food on land or sea, in summer and winter months. These portable and durable solar ovens can cook a meal in as little as 20 minutes — reaching temperatures up to 550-degrees — and can also be used to boil water. The cookers absorb a broad spectrum of radiation, and work whenever you can see a defined shadow. Weighing only 2 pounds, GoSun, is better for solo camping trips. The Sport Pro Pack is more substantial, and is touted for family camping or beach trips. The latter includes an extra cooking tray and padded carrying case. \$139/\$359. www.gosun.co/products/portable-solar-cooker

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