

Hideaways Life®

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Castaway Picnic at Parrot Cay, Turks and Caicos

INSIDE

4 Ambassador's Report: Alaska at Last

Join *Hideaways'* roving friend and ambassador Vance Stephenson and his wife as they immerse themselves in wild adventure with Alaskan Dream Cruises™.

7 Hideaways Update: Boston

Ready to exercise your freedom to vote? Why not get in the mood with a quick visit to this all-American city, where our freedoms began.

8 As You Like It: Villas with a Twist

Be amazed by some of the hidden treasures and unique features of these not-your-everyday vacation villas.

12 Members' Forum

Read what fellow members have to say about their travel experiences, good and bad.

14 Traveler's Journal: Stockholm

Tag along with *Hideaways* staffer Paul Hoogveen and his new wife as they visit this vibrant Swedish city on their honeymoon trip (we promise you won't blush).

The Guilt-Free Beach Vacation

BY HIDEAWAYS V.P. GAIL RICHARD

Close your eyes and think back to the last time you took a *real* unplugged vacation. I'm talking about at least a week of doing nothing more strenuous than strolling a beautiful white-sand beach, or maybe just relaxing in a comfy chaise with a cool drink and a good book nearby. Been awhile? Well then, as I recently discovered, the Turks and Caicos could be just the spot for you.

It had been awhile since we'd visited this string of islands—eight main ones plus dozens of tiny blips that spill down from the southeastern tip of the Bahamas. The Turks and Caicos have always been a member favorite, and a popular place for vacation home rentals and purchases (there are no income, capital gains, or property taxes). I'd personally never been, but I was intrigued. I wondered what I might compare this cluster of islands to. The Caymans? Anguilla? Then a good friend of mine passed along some

been-there, done-that advice. "The Turks and Caicos provide a lot of eye candy, believe me, and the water is electric blue—awesome in photos, but nothing compares to seeing it in person." So I took the bait, and decided I had to experience it for myself.

If you're curious about how the Turks and Caicos got their name (like I was), here's the scoop. The largest land masses belong to the Caicos, whose name is derived from the Spanish *cayos*, meaning islands. Their low-rolling topography is overgrown with dense shrubs. The Turks are a collection of significantly smaller islands, and supposedly are named for the prolific red flower of the Turks' Head cactus that grows on these arid isles. Most are inhabited by nothing more than palm trees, and the islands barely break the surface of the water.

My visit was to Providenciales, or "Provo" as it's known, gateway to the Turks and Caicos and the most populous of the islands. Its crowning jewel is the 12-mile stretch of Grace Bay Beach, considered one of the world's ten best for its powder-soft sand and stunning turquoise water.

continued on page 2

My excitement grew as I anticipated my first glimpse of the beach at Point Grace



GAIL RICHARD

The main attraction of Provo is literally crystal clear—scuba diving, deep-sea and bone fishing, and snorkeling in water that defies description. For pure relaxation, you could easily park yourself on the sand for days at a time and do nothing more than dip your toes in the sea every once in awhile.

If relaxing is not *your* idea of a beach vacation, you'll find plenty of activities to keep you busy: snuba, kayaking, parasailing, catamaran cruises, submarine excursions, and championship golf, to name a few. If you visit in February, March, or April, you may even catch a glimpse of the annual humpback whale migration.

Island hopping is made easy by means of charter boat or Caicos Express Airways. Though I didn't make the trip, I learned that the seven-square-mile island of Grand Turk has a new \$40 million cruise terminal that encompasses its own white-sand beach as part of the facility. Grand Turk also has some interesting historical sites and colonial-style buildings to see and explore.

On Provo, I took a half-day tour with Island Rythms and enjoyed a visit to Chalk Sound National Park and the Caicos Conch Farm, where I learned all about the life cycle of the Caribbean queen conch—truly one of the highlights of my trip. Later, we stopped in at Da Conch Shack for conch, grouper, and the best coleslaw I've ever had. While some people might have been turned off by the idea of eating conch after seeing what a live one looked like—think giant snail—I had no qualms at all about digging into my conch fritters.

Provo used to be described as "barefoot" and "the Caribbean the way it used to be." Well, perhaps not so much anymore. The island has seen a fair bit of development over the past decade. There are new shopping areas offering designer boutiques, restaurants, grocery stores, and discount liquor stores. However, there still is very little nightlife outside of the action at some of the resort bars. But if you *do* want entertainment until the wee hours, there's a tiny casino on the island that offers 12 gaming tables.

As I discovered, there's a distinct difference between Grace Bay, which is more developed and where all the tourists hang out, and the rest of the island, where nature abounds and there are residential pockets of tastefully

designed villas. Most of Provo's new development is on the hotel front, and Grace Bay now is lined with one hotel after the other. The benefit of this is that there's a lodging choice to meet the needs of every type of traveler—yes, that means those who are interested in barefoot casual, but also families, the stylish elite, the all-inclusive crowd, honeymooners, and sports enthusiasts as well.

Most accommodations in the Turks and Caicos are fully equipped condominiums with the benefit of some on-site hotel amenities. Since *Hideaways* Travel Services Manager Darcy Allen traveled to the Turks and Caicos with me, we thought it might be helpful to outline what property is best suited—in our opinion—to specific types of travelers.

Be sure to call Darcy (800-843-4433) if you have any questions or want to book an island escape. For even more in-depth reviews and additional condo-hotel choices, visit www.Hideaways.com/traveltoturkscaicos.

Best Boutique Hotel: Point Grace^{THC}

This is a charming and intimate hotel with just 28 one-, two-, and three-bedroom suites. One-bedroom Cottage Suites overlook the garden and pool (second floor units have vaulted ceilings and peek-a-boo ocean views). I especially liked the spacious ocean-

front suites, which have an exotic Caribbean vibe with their dark mahogany floors, teak furnishings, and granite countertops in the kitchen and bathroom (baths also have claw-footed tubs). Two whitewashed spa treatment cottages overlook a private stretch of white-sand beach. Evening cocktails and canapés are served poolside, and there are two on-site restaurants including Grace's Cottage, considered one of the island's finest gourmet experiences.

Point Grace would be ideal for couples and honeymooners who are looking for an intimate environment and relaxing hide-away. There are no programs or facilities for children, so I would only recommend it for families with older children. Your member-only perk when booking through *Hideaways* is an exclusive in-suite Signature Amenity—for example, a gourmet platter prepared by the head chef and personalized for your special occasion, diet, food preferences, etc.

Best for Golfers: Villa Renaissance

This is a true condominium property, small and quiet and with limited on-site services, yet convenient to The Salt Mill shopping area. Just 28 one-, two-, and three-bedroom suites are spread out in three buildings around a central pool area. Each condo is individu-

HIDEAWAYS LIFE - SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2012

Hideaways Life[®]

September/October 2012, Vol. 7, Number 5.

Hideaways Life is the bimonthly publication specifically for members of the *Hideaways Aficionado*[™] Club. It publishes six times each year: January, March, May, July, September, and November (ISSN 1930-2622).

Annual membership/subscription cost: \$195

President/Publisher: Michael F. Thiel

Associate Publisher: Gail D. Richard

Editor: Pat Chaudoin

Design: Blue Design, Portland, Maine

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Moving? If you notify us of your new address at least six weeks in advance, you won't miss a single *Hideaways Life*[®] issue.

Properties marked by a [™] are partners in The *Hideaways Collection*[™] and offer *Hideaways Aficionado*[™] Club members special discounts and/or perks when booked through *Hideaways Travel Services* or on line at www.Hideaways.com using the *Reservation Request* booking form.

ally owned and decorated to a very high standard, with granite countertops in the fully equipped kitchen, and with spacious bedrooms and living areas. Best yet, Villa Renaissance offers discounted golf at Provo Golf Club in high season and often, free golf in low season, making this the perfect getaway for a group of golf buddies or a golfing family.

Best for Families: The Sands at Grace Bay

Families with little ones will feel right at home here, since each of the 114 units—from studios to three-bedroom suites—has a beachy Caribbean theme and is casually and comfortably furnished. Many of the rooms also connect for larger family groups. The screened-in porch or balcony is another fantastic, family-friendly feature of the units, and there are several pools and a lazy river the kids will enjoy. On site is the popular Hemingway's Restaurant with a lovely outside deck for al fresco dining.

Most Exclusive: Parrot Cay

A hideaway for celebrities and the glitterati, Parrot Cay is a luxury resort in every way. Located on its own private island just 35 minutes by boat from Provo, Parrot Cay has ocean-view rooms and suites that surround the central pool complex, and exclusive villas with private pools and direct beachfront access that dot the island's shore. For the ultimate escape, you can book one of six private homes that open onto amazing water views and come complete with butler service.

The major draw of Parrot Cay is its sense of serenity, which is only heightened by a visit to the Asian-inspired Shambala Spa, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Lotus Restaurant offers al fresco dining with a sophisticated menu, including Shambala spa cuisine.

Best for Nature Lovers: The Meridian Club

Now *this* is the Caribbean the way it used to be. Reached by a 15-minute boat ride (or private plane), Meridian Club has just 12 beachfront suites, the Sand Dollar Cottage, and a smattering of privately owned homes (some available for rent) on unspoiled, 800-acre Pine Cay. It's an unplugged sort of place—no cars, no phones, no TVs—and a haven for abundant bird life, unique cacti, and native orchids. The two-story clubhouse overlooks a shimmering pool and is the social gathering spot where guests and homeowners meet, dine, and just relax. Lazy days can be spent biking, shelling, snorkeling, or having an outdoor massage. To me, Meridian Club represents barefoot casual at its best.

Most Luxurious: Amanyara

This Indonesian-inspired resort is exotic, romantic, and surprisingly unpretentious. The pavilion-style accommodations are zen-like in decor and incredibly private. Larger two- to four-bedroom villas with private pools or oceanfront suites with exclusive access to rocky coves are other options. Thai cuisine, a circular bar, and the Nature Discovery Center for kids set this resort apart.



Jerry the conch, at the Caicos Conch Farm

GAIL RICHARD

Most Hip: Gansevoort

This is known to be where the cool people hang out. Many complexes on Provo have a British Colonial feel, but here it's young, fresh, and exciting. And no matter which of the 91 rooms and suites you book, you'll enjoy beautiful ocean views. For couples or honeymooners I'd recommend the luxury oceanfront terrace studio, which has a king-size bed, kitchenette, and stunning beach views. The Stelle Restaurant & Beach Bar is a popular hot spot for islanders and tourists alike.

Best Resort Bang for the Buck: Seven Stars^{THC}

This centrally located condo-style resort is the tallest on the island at seven stories, and has a sort of Miami Beach feel from the outside. Inside, each suite is spacious, airy, and decorated with a British colonial feel—four-poster beds, tile floors, breezy white drapes. Several pools are spread throughout the complex; three dining venues include gourmet fare at Sevens and more casual, island-inspired dining at The Deck, which overlooks the sea. Seven Stars is a really lovely choice for those looking for larger, upscale accommodations with hotel amenities—without the higher price tag. Your member-only perk when booking through *Hideaways* is a 30-minute couple's massage.

Always an Option: Villas

Hideaways is partnered with one of the best property management firms in the Turks and Caicos, which represents a small selection of the finest vacation homes being offered there. **H**

Remember, for additional condo-hotel choices and more in-depth property reviews, visit www.Hideaways.com/traveltoturkscaicos.



SEVEN STARS

FROM EVERY VANTAGE POINT at Seven Stars, there's another amazing view of that turquoise water and those dazzlingly white stretches of sand. And the living is certainly easy here, as you settle into your British-colonial-style suite for another day in paradise.

Alaska at Last

As much as my wife and I wanted to explore Alaska, we were a bit hesitant when *Hideaways* suggested a trip with **Alaskan Dream Cruises**™. Our idea of a great vacation is plenty of hiking and mixing with the locals to get a beyond-the-guidebooks taste of an area. We feared that might not be possible on a cruise, but we were confident *Hideaways* knew what floated our boat and signed on for an eight-day tour around Glacier Bay.

BY HIDEAWAYS AMBASSADOR VANCE STEPHENSON

The recommendation was brilliant, but I have to admit I still haven't experienced a "traditional" big-ship cruise. Alaskan Dream Cruises is quite different from the big lines. Their two ships, *Alaskan Dream* and *The Admiralty*, are diminutive by typical cruise standards, with a capacity of only 42 and 66 passengers, respectively. There's no pool, no playground, no formal dining. However, we found this proved the adage that "less is more," and Kim and I didn't miss anything on the luxury front. These nimble boats penetrate deeply into breathtakingly beautiful passages along the Alaskan panhandle, which are off limits to the big guys.

The two ladies serving as our official guides for the excursion, Emily and Larissa, were terrific and offered great insight into Alaska. Larissa is a native Alaskan who has worked as a deckhand on a commercial halibut boat. She displayed her knowledge of local flora during our first hike in Glacier Bay National Park. We got to sample fiddleheads and nibble on spruce tips, a surprising, limey-tasting treat that was a natural preventative of scurvy for native populations—just one of many interesting facts I would learn over the next week.

Although the crew heightened our appreciation of Alaska, the incredible display by Mother Nature really needs no assistance. For me, the highlight of our entire adventure was witnessing icebergs being calved in Glacier Bay. Parked in front of a massive glacier the second day out, we would brace at the telltale cracking noises every five or six minutes, then watch, amazed, as an enormous hunk of ice (on average the size of a house, but once, the size of an eight-story building!) tumbled into the waters beneath

the glacier's face. The crash was thunderous and sent up a magnificent plume of water, followed by a small tsunami that raised a litter of ice floes in front of the glacier. I was concerned the wave would rock our boat the first time, but watching the surge dissolve into ripples, I realized we were parked at a safe distance. These were still front-row seats, confirmed by looking over my shoulder to see the massive cruise ship a mile behind us, too big to snug up for the excellent view we enjoyed.

Sampling Native Culture

Kasaan (population 49) is a small village beyond the reach of behemoth ships, where we dropped in on a native craftsman who was hand-hewing a canoe from a tree trunk. Beyond enjoying his completed masterpieces, everyone was delighted to take a few whacks

Book Your Alaska Adventure Soon!

Now's the time to plan ahead for next summer's Inside Passage season with Alaskan Dream Cruises. Contact your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist to book your authentic Alaskan adventure; call 800-843-4433, or email ts@hideaways.com.

with an adze at his current project still in its raw state. From here, we hiked through the cool of a moss-covered forest and visited the only Haida tribal house remaining in the U.S. The Haida are one of eight Native American cultures living in Alaska. While the tribal house was Haida, totem poles from various other tribes had been relocated and preserved on this site, making it an impressive stop well off the beaten track.

Each day we were treated to one or two lectures while sailing, some given by tribal members joining our boat for the day. Several times we jumped aboard jet boats to explore places too ice-filled or shallow for even our small ship. Once we scooted up and down Sitka Sound, reveling in the sight of otters and humpback whales on the open seas, then squeezed into the mouth of a salmon stream to watch a momma bear graze with her two cubs. There was such a bounty of sights that we got back to the ship two hours late, demonstrating how Alaskan Dream Cruises stays flexible to capitalize on unforeseen opportunities.

All these activities were included in the package price, so there were no surcharges for the planned explorations. The best of these activities was a morning at Hobart Bay, an abandoned logging camp where Alaskan Dream Cruises has exclusive privileges. We had docked here the previous evening, so our adventures began at 7 a.m. when we launched kayaks for a paddle in the bay. I was impressed with a nifty chute attached to the dock, which allowed us to climb into



THE SERENITY OF THIS MAGICAL MORNING was only interrupted by the splash of our oars as they sliced through the water of Hobart Bay. We frequently experienced clouds and mist on this trip—in fact, Sitka stores often close for an hour or two when the sun comes out.

VANCE STEPHENSON

ONE AFTERNOON, we spent a full half-hour watching this momma bear and her two cubs cavort along a salmon stream. One of the things we loved about Alaskan Dream Cruises was the flexibility to linger for special experiences like this, and not feel rushed.



ALASKAN DREAM CRUISES

our kayaks and be launched into the water without having to get our feet wet. We appreciated this comfort, as Larissa informed us the water temp was all of 45 degrees!

The kayaking was followed by a fun jaunt through the hills of the logging camp on ATVs. Despite all the day's activity, we didn't do anything requiring phenomenal physical ability. I was happy to note that even the more sedentary members of our gang usually tagged along. Probably half the passenger list hailed from Australia, and we really enjoyed the Aussies, including Bill and Margerie, a couple from Adelaide. Bill was

71 and no poster boy for Nike, but he thoroughly enjoyed his first-ever kayak paddle and inspired us all with his enthusiasm.

Although there were plenty of planned activities, guests still had room to improvise. Several folks expressed a desire to go fishing, and the crew coordinated the expedition, arranging two chartered boats for the next morning. Instead of fishing, Kim and I joined Emily's guided hike up "Heartbreak Hill" after breakfast, enjoying some splendid views. However, an even better sight greeted us as we returned to the dock.

Standing there proudly was Jim, another passenger we had befriended, hoisting up a 30-pound trophy halibut for photographs and smiling ear-to-ear. Our impromptu fishing crew had reeled in eight halibut plus a salmon, and I was amazed to discover our captain filleting the catch in the cutting shed on the dock. More of that Alaskan spirit! That afternoon our chef, Brianna, a graduate of Johnson & Wales, transformed the fruits of the fishing expedition into a tasty array of treats, including halibut poke and ceviche—YUM!

On-Board Surprises

Our cabin was tight, but I was pleased by the expansive windows and the views they afforded. As a cruise rookie expecting port-holes, these views were a huge plus, especially because we were so near to sea level. Down so low and skirting lightly traveled passages, we could curl up under the comfy throws provided and watch for waterfalls and bears on the shore.

The dining room was similarly poised at water level, with wide windows. It was not unusual to be piercing your next mouthful and casually glance outside to catch sight of a humpback or two. The ultimate was looking up one lunchtime to glimpse an enormous Golden Eagle in a gliding descent, which suddenly ended as it touched the water and flexed talons to snatch its own lunch. I almost forgot to chew as the eagle began powerfully flapping its wings to fly away with a wriggling fish.

Our cruise adventure wrapped up in Ketchikan, where the captain granted shore leave until 11:30 p.m. But we had just learned of a 5K run called "Only Fools Run After Midnight," starting at the stroke of twelve. Not only did they run in the dark, but many of the competitors were decked out in whacky costumes. After several passengers expressed an interest in running the event, the captain quickly relented on the curfew, and ten of us (three crew, seven passengers) joined the fun. The captain even paid our registration fees, and we all grabbed life preservers to serve as costumes. It was a wonderful conclusion to our adventure, revealing the range of possibilities you have when touring the Inside Passage with Alaskan Dream Cruises. **H**

For Vance's complete report, including his one dining room pet peeve, visit www.Hideaways.com/sailalaskandream.

AT A GLANCE

Alaskan Dream Cruises™

Location: Based in Sitka and cruising Alaska's Inside Passage

Ships: *Admiralty Dream*, carrying up to 66 guests in 33 cabins, and *Alaskan Dream*, carrying up to 42 passengers in 23 cabins.

Amenities: High-powered binoculars and Alaska-crafted soaps and shampoos in each stateroom, gourmet cuisine, on-board scientific and cultural expedition leaders, observation lounge.

Activities: Kayaking, guided hikes, jet boat and ATV rides, cultural and educational tours, and other complimentary shore excursions.

Outstanding Feature: The flexibility of scheduling and the ability of crew members to accommodate passengers' whims and desires at a moment's notice.

Rates: Start at \$1,895/person, double, and include all meals, daily social hour with hors d'oeuvres and drinks, educational presentations, and all planned excursions. Call *Hideaways* Travel Services (800-843-4433) for special 2013 Early Bird rates on new bookings through October 31, 2012.

Aficionado Perk: \$100 shipboard credit per stateroom and a gift membership in the *Hideaways Aficionado Club* (\$195 value).

Further Info: www.Hideaways.com/alaskandream



Kim and I couldn't resist this photo op in front of Sawyer Glacier

VANCE STEPHENSON

Vroom Vroom!

Combine one of Sicily's most beautiful hotels with one of Italy's most iconic cars, and you have a recipe for foolproof fun. We recommend **Villa Sant'Andrea**^{THC}, an exquisite seaside estate on lovely Mazzaro Bay that will arrange, through its concierge, one of three Fiat 500 driving tours lasting up to 4½ hours each. You can choose to follow a tour leader car or simply guide yourself through the spectacular scenery of Taormina.

You'll enjoy the drive of your life in a classic Fiat 500—dating from the early 1960s to the late '70s, and available in a range of models and colors—as you throw open the sunroof, bask in the warmth of the Sicilian sunshine, and cruise your way along winding coastal roads. You can choose from the “Etna Wine Road” tour, “In *The Godfather's* Footsteps,” or the “Montalbano Tour,” named for the fictional Sicilian detective, Inspector Montalbano.

The classic—and classy-looking—Fiats also can be rented by the hour, day, or week, and are the perfect sporty vehicle for a wedding celebration or honeymoon trip. Or, if you prefer, you can rent a 4x4 off-road Jeep for an excursion up the famous volcano, Mt. Etna. By the way, your *Hideaways* member-only perk at Villa Sant'Andrea is lunch for two at the beach restaurant with a minimum 3-night stay.

Jamaica Celebrates a Big Birthday

Ready to “get together and feel alright?” Then head to Jamaica, because the rest of 2012 promises to be one big party on this Caribbean island as it marks 50 years of independence from Britain. There will be parades, fireworks, cultural heritage festivals, and a pro-am golf tournament. And believe us, Jamaica has plenty to celebrate this year including the success of its Olympic medal-winning athletes, led by sprinter Usain Bolt.

When you're ready to take things a little easier, hunker down at **Round Hill Hotel and Villas**^{THC} in Montego Bay, where celebrities like Noel Coward, Grace Kelly, and Ralph Lauren have escaped the limelight in decades past. This five-star resort is a haven of privacy, comfort, discreet service, and a touch of glamour, all served up in a convivial, club-like atmosphere. Your *Hideaways* member-only perk: Two 50-minute Tranquility Massages with a minimum 4-night stay.

Something to note: Jamaica just added a new US\$20 arrival tax August 1, 2012, in addition to a US\$20 arrival tax that took

effect last October and a departure tax of about US\$20—meaning visitors arriving by air are paying \$60 just to visit Jamaica! Good thing the island is well worth it for its hospitality and relaxation.

Have Your Own Olympic Moment

If you were glued to the telly like we were watching the Summer Olympics in London, we're betting you were intrigued by some of the more distinctive venues like Wimbledon, site of those riveting tennis matches, and London's Horse Guards Parade, where female athletes in bikinis played killer beach volleyball.

Hoping to cash in on post-Olympic curiosity, the website VisitBritain.com is proposing you spend some time in London walking in the footsteps of the athletes who competed in the Games, visiting various Olympic venues that now are open to the public year-round.

Some of those venues have significant historical and cultural value, like Greenwich Park, London's oldest Royal Park dating back

to 1433 and site of the Olympic equestrian events. And did you know that Horse Guards Arch at Horse Guards Parade is the official entrance to both St. James's and Buckingham Palaces, so there is a ceremonial changing of the guard there every morning?

At Wimbledon, you can check out the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, and at Hampton Court Palace, where the Olympic cycling time trials were held, you can tour the former digs of King Henry VIII, including the palace's famous trapezoid-shaped maze.

The best part is, you don't have to retire to the dormitory-style Olympic Village at the end of the day. Instead, we recommend the luxurious surroundings of **The Athenaeum**^{THC} or **Corinthia Hotel London**^{THC}; currently, the Corinthia is offering a terrific 30% discount on weekend stays (breakfast included).

News Briefs

Here are a few of the latest trends and news items from our partners in *The Hideaways Collection*TM.

- Talk about cute! Baby sea turtles are on the move in Costa Rica, and you can have a front-row seat when you book a Sea Turtle Watching Tour now through the month of November at **Hotel Punta Islita**^{THC}, on the Pacific's Guanacaste coast. You'll have the chance to witness the fascinating egg-laying ritual of endangered sea turtles, knowing you're also helping with local conservation measures. Cost for the nighttime expedition is \$45/person.
 - Feeling artsy? Then sign up for a pottery-making class at **Casa de Campo**^{THC}, a *Hideaways*-favorite getaway in the Dominican Republic. The beginners' class—available every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday through December 1, 2012, at the resort's cultural village of Altos de Chavon—will teach traditional island stoneware techniques, including hand-carving and wheel-spinning.
- You'll also get a tour of the workshops, and get to make a souvenir to take home! Cost for the one-hour class is \$45 for adults, \$30 for children.

Rediscover This Founding City

In this election year, it seems fitting we tout one of the cities that played an instrumental part in securing our freedoms. It also happens that Beantown is in *Hideaways'* own back yard, making it convenient for us to swing down for a quick visit. In fact, Boston is pretty easy to get to from just about anywhere on the Eastern Seaboard, for a long weekend getaway or an extended stay.

You'll find plenty to do here year-round, but we think fall, with its crisp sunny weather and vibrant foliage, is a perfect time to visit. You can walk in the footsteps of our forefathers along some of Boston's most historic streets, following The Freedom Trail, or view the city skyline from the water with Boston Harbor Cruises or the wacky Duck Tours. Then there's the Boston Sports Museum, the New England Aquarium, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, the shops and cafés of the North End, and the shopping, dining, and nightlife of Faneuil Hall. Whew!

When you're ready to rest your weary head, here are a few *Hideaways*-recommended Boston hotels. Look for more detailed reviews of each at www.Hideaways.com/traveltoboston.

The Fairmont Copley PlazaTM: From the moment you pass through its impressive entryway and are given a tail-wag greeting by the hotel's canine mascot, Catie Copley, you'll feel at home here. Yes, this is *the* "grand dame" of Boston hotels—the Copley Plaza celebrated its 100th anniversary this year—and yes, the surroundings are palatial, with a palette of rich golden hues, elaborate painted ceilings, and lavish furnishings. But the staff is friendly and efficient and not at all stuffy, and a recent \$20-million makeover has breathed new life into each of the hotel's 383 guest rooms and suites.

For a real treat, book a Signature Copley Square Room and admire the view out your window of Boston landmarks like Trinity Church and the Boston Public Library. Then wander down to the newly updated OAK Long Bar + Kitchen for a delicious meal from its new farm-to-table American menu. Warning: The place is usually packed on Friday nights. Your *Hideaways* member perk: Daily breakfast for two. *Rates start from \$319/night.*

The Liberty: There was a time when The Liberty was one of the last places you'd want to lay your head in Boston—when it was the Charles Street Jail. But its stunning "Boston Granite"-style architecture and Charles River views were too good to waste, so in 2007 the

building was repurposed into a luxury hotel and given the ironic name of The Liberty.

Designers stayed true to the building's roots in the conversion, preserving the jail's original features whenever possible. Perhaps the most impressive is the stunning 90-foot atrium lined with catwalks on which the guards patrolled. Other touches include original jail cells now used for cozy dining nooks in the trendy restaurant, Clink.

For those planning to spend a night in this former lockup, the hotel's 298 rooms are thoroughly modern, luxurious, and welcoming. Our only complaint? While offering great views of the river and Cambridge beyond, The Liberty is not in a great location for exploring Boston by foot. *Rates start from \$329/night.*

XV Beacon: It's described as being "where timeless discretion intersects with cutting-edge design"—a seemingly odd interpretation, but one we found truly apt. To begin with, the lobby is small (some might even say a bit cramped) and understated, not the type of place to wile away the hours. And the hallways, while certainly nice, aren't exactly inspiring with their splendor. But then we saw the guest rooms. Each of the 63 rooms offers ample space to spread out, with suites as large as 1,370 square feet. Decor is contemporary yet classic, and each room offers all the amenities you'd expect from a luxury hotel, plus some pleasant surprises like gas fireplaces.

The top floor holds a small, well-equipped gym basking in natural light, and above the gym is a rooftop terrace that we're told offers stunning views of Boston's 4th of July fireworks. And XV Beacon's location is in Beacon Hill, one of the city's most sought-after neighborhoods, with many of Boston's best attractions just a short walk away. *Rates start at \$315/night.*

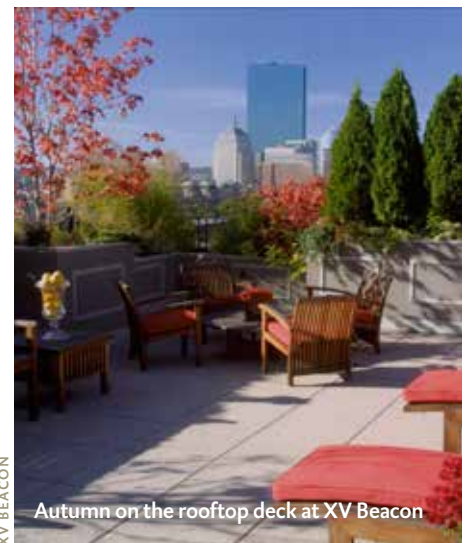
The Eliot: Set in the Back Bay, where bustling Kenmore Square gives way to a quiet neighborhood, The Eliot feels more like a large residence than a hotel. But while it may be small in stature (just 95 rooms and suites), it's definitely large on personality. Take, for example, its two restaurants: Clio, specializing in French cuisine, and Uni Sashimi Bar, serving East Asian-inspired creations. Both are so intimate they're borderline Lilliputian, seating only 60 and 23 respectively. Yet, like a good *amuse-bouche*, these small packages pack a big culinary punch thanks to their award-winning chef, Ken Oringer.

The Eliot's rooms also are somewhat petite, ranging in size from 200 to 250 square feet. There's nothing cramped about them, though. Thanks to their elegant decor and color palette of brown and off-white highlighted by rich blues, the rooms exude a light, airy sophistication. They're cozy for sure, but elegant and welcoming. *Rates start at \$195/night.* **H**



THE FAIRMONT COPLEY PLAZA

The Fairmont Copley Plaza



XV BEACON

Autumn on the rooftop deck at XV Beacon

Villas with a Twist

If you're one of those savvy *Hideaways* members who has rented a private vacation home, no doubt you remember the thrill of discovery when you first turned the key in the lock and opened that front door. Maybe it was a cozy stone fireplace that first met your eye, or a sparkling infinity pool, or an amazing ocean view through floor-to-ceiling windows. Whatever it was, we're betting it left an indelible impression.

VillaHotel Contenta, Miami Beach, Florida

THE VILLA: Located on prestigious Palm Island, this 11,000-square-foot Spanish colonial-style estate has enviable views across Biscayne Bay toward South Beach. It also has six bedrooms, a master closet the size of a New York apartment, a home theater, and a rooftop Jacuzzi®. **THE TWIST:** What a swimming pool! It's enormous at 130 feet in length, it has a swim-in grotto and waterfall at one end, and at the other end is a regulation beach volleyball court so you can make like Olympic greats Misty May Treanor and Kerri Walsh.

Casa Paraiso, Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica

THE VILLA: This magnificent 8,500-square-foot residence has 5 bedrooms, an aroma-steam-room shower in the master bath, multiple private balconies, and a 75-foot-long infinity pool that hovers near the hillside treetops and offers incredible ocean views. **THE TWIST:** How many homes are large enough to have an entire tropical

Kite House, Playa del Carmen, Mexico

THE VILLA: This sleek four-bedroom, state-of-the-art villa is just steps from the startlingly white sands of the Riviera Maya. Privacy is a given here, with the villa's lush garden setting and jungle surroundings. It also has armored and soundproof glass doors and windows and a unique "swim-against-the-current" system in its infinity pool. **THE TWIST:** From the second bedroom of this dramatically contemporary home, you can get up-close-and-personal with some Mayan ruins—enjoying modern style with ancient views!



The lush indoor gardens of Casa Paraiso

MEAD BROWN

Just for fun, we thought we'd elevate that thrill of discovery a notch or two with this handful of thoroughly unique vacation villas that have an extra-special added twist. It could be their size—small and cozy or vast and sprawling—their sense of history, their location, or simply their "Wow!" factor. Bottom line: These are vacation homes that are sure to fire up your imagination and have you eagerly planning your next getaway.

When that time comes, we're ready to help! Just call your *Hideaways* Travel Specialist at **800-843-4433** for very personal travel planning that will match you and your family or friends with the absolute perfect villa for your travel style and budget.

Here are just a few of our favorite "villas with a twist" that will start you dreaming—and could quite possibly knock your socks off!



MAYA LUXE

THEY DON'T COME MUCH MORE MODERN THAN THIS! Kite House is one of the newest and most contemporary vacation villas in the Playa del Carmen area—yet its second-bedroom views of Mayan ruins are paradoxically ancient!

garden—indoors? This one has extensive interior plantings that bring the outdoors right inside, including a towering palm tree!

Sandyline, St. Martin

THE VILLA: This home has it all, including luscious sea views, Philippe Starck contemporary interiors, six bedrooms with en suite baths, a home cinema system, two heated pools, a massive sun deck, a tennis court, a gourmet kitchen, and daily chef service. **THE TWIST:** The dramatic entryway showcases

DO SOME VILLA WINDOW-SHOPPING

If you don't care about having an aquarium in your entryway or living in the shadow of a lighthouse, we still have hundreds of other villa choices for you. We've partnered with some of the finest villa management companies in the world—so you'll have more vacation home options and a stress-free rental experience.

Browse through these villa selections by region. This is just the tip of the iceberg, so if you don't see exactly what you're looking for, call us at 800-843-4433 (or email ts@hideaways.com). Through our villa management partners, *Hideaways Travel Services* has access to thousands of villas around the world, one of which is bound to be just right for you.

- Find a selection of luxury vacation villas on St. Martin, where *Hideaways* members save 5%, at www.Hideaways.com/villasstmartin.
- Enjoy a spicy Caribbean vacation in a St. Croix villa, where *Hideaways* members save 5%, at www.Hideaways.com/villasstcroix.
- Find some wonderful private villa choices on the lush Caribbean island of St. Lucia, at www.Hideaways.com/villasinstlucia.
- Choose a villa on the chic island of Anguilla, at www.Hideaways.com/villasinanguilla.
- Explore all the possibilities of a villa vacation in Jamaica; see just some of our collection at www.Hideaways.com/villasinjamaica.
- Check out the great selection of Paris apartments in charming neighborhoods, where *Hideaways* members save 5%, at www.Hideaways.com/parisapartments.
- Discover the delights of a vacation home in Italy, with hundreds of choices at www.Hideaways.com/villasinitaly.
- See all our private villa listings at www.Hideaways.com/villas.

IF YOU HAVE AN ISSUE WITH HEIGHTS, then Torre Saracena di Maiori definitely is *not* the place for you. Clinging to a precipitous cliff on Italy's Amalfi Coast, the villa has views that are to die for, but only if you have the stomach for them.



VILLAS IN ITALY

a mesmerizing tropical reef aquarium—you may never make it into the rest of the house! The property also has its own catfish pond and turtle stream.



VILLAS & MANIONS OF SANTORINI

A Basset Hound welcome to Stone House

Stone House, Santorini, Greece

THE VILLA: Tucked away in a quiet setting, this intimate one-bedroom villa has a private enclosed cobblestone courtyard with plunge pool and a kitchenette for basic cooking needs. **THE TWIST:** Part of the twist might be that adorable Basset Hound in the photo to keep you company, but mainly it's the fact that Stone House was originally a

“canava” where the sweet, nectar-like dessert wine, Vinsanto, was produced. In fact, two cylindrical troughs once used for distilling the wine have been repurposed into unique interior light fixtures.

Torre Saracena di Maiori, Amalfi Coast, Italy

THE VILLA: This is a magnificent and newly renovated home with six bedrooms, multiple brick terraces, a swimming pool, and those oh-so-amazing coastal views. **THE TWIST:** Originally an ancient lookout tower, the villa is perched about as close to the cliff's edge as possible without falling into the sea. Sleepwalkers and those with vertigo may want to look elsewhere!

Beacon Cottage, Devon, England

THE VILLA: This three-bedroom cottage perches precariously on a dramatic headland above Start Bay, in the shadow of Start Point Lighthouse. You can enjoy nearby sandy beaches and pulse-quicken walks along the cliff tops, then return home to cozy interiors and an outdoor dining deck overlooking the water. **THE TWIST:** Start Point is a fully operational lighthouse with an electric fog signal that operates automatically, so be warned—earplugs are provided in case conditions are “misty.”

View our entire “Villas with a Twist” slide show at www.Hideaways.com/villaswithatwist.

It's a First—Ride the Rails to Canada!

There's just something about the romance and intrigue of train travel that makes us want to pack our bags and head to the nearest observation car. One of our favorite luxury rail lines is Canadian-based **Rocky Mountaineer**, which for the first time ever is offering a U.S. departure in 2013, with a rail journey from Seattle to the Canadian Rockies.

The new Coastal Passage route will hug the scenic Pacific Northwest coastline as it winds its way to Vancouver, British Columbia, before heading into the Canadian Rockies, where guests switch from rail to motor coach and continue on to the resort towns of Banff or Jasper, overnighing in Fairmont hotels. Along the way, passengers will be treated to Rocky Mountaineer's famous GoldLeaf Service, which includes luxurious surroundings in a bi-level custom-designed dome coach with panoramic views, gourmet cuisine in a private dining room, and personalized service from on-board Rocky Mountaineer hosts.

The Coastal Passage route will be available August 24 and 25, 2013, both northbound and southbound; book a 2013 Coastal Passage journey of four nights or more with *Hideaways* Travel Services before November 30, 2012, and you'll receive an early-booking bonus of up to \$1,500 per couple to use on things like transfers, additional hotel nights, and special excursions. Call *Hideaways* (800-843-4433) to book your rail journey today!

Scents & Sensibility

Tired of the same old cooking classes? Well, here's an aromatic trend within the hospitality industry. As personalized spa experiences become more and more popular, so is the opportunity for guests to create their own personal fragrance. For instance, the **Hotel Matilda** in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, has an Apothecary Concierge on the spa staff who helps clients choose "scentsational" natural ingredients—anything from honey, vanilla, and cinnamon to rosemary and lavender grown right on the property—then guides them through creating their own aromatherapy skin and hair products.

Reid's Palace in Madeira, Portugal, takes things a step further by offering a "Scent & Senses Perfume Master Class" led by the expert Maître Parfumeur, Nicolas de Barry. The class is held for three half-days and includes visits to the famous gardens of Quintina das Ervas and the Blandy's Gardens, followed by sessions learning unique fragrance-composing techniques, how to blend essential oils, and how to

choose a good perfume. The class is capped off with a Gala Dinner, during which all participants receive a Master Class diploma. Private sessions also can be arranged throughout the year.

Is There a Ghost in the House?

Denver and its landmark **Brown Palace** hotel go together like a horse and carriage, and have ever since The Palace opened in 1892. We hope nothing changes with this venerable grand dame, now that it's become the newest member of Marriott's Autograph Collection of boutique hotels.

We especially hope the spirits of past guests like the change; if you stay there during the month of October, you can take one of the hotel's free "Ghost Tours" that focus on real stories of unexplained phenomena, as reported by visitors and associates over the years. During other months, The Brown Palace offers historic public tours for overnight guests based on the themes of Romance,

Architecture, Presidents, and Ladies of The Brown. Private behind-the-scenes tours also can be arranged for a small fee.

Hideaways News Briefs

Here are some of the latest travel trends and news items you need to know to be "in the know."

- When pigs fly? Yes, the U.S. Department of Transportation is considering a new regulation that would allow pot-bellied pigs, miniature horses, and even monkeys to board airplanes with their owners if they are being used as service animals or to provide emotional or psychiatric support. Add that to your "now-I've-heard-everything" list.
- Does it seem to you that domestic airplanes are a little more crowded this year? It's not your imagination. According to airline data company OAG, North American air traffic will be at its lowest level in a decade, with 2% fewer flights so far this year from last year at this time. That means airlines are trying to keep planes packed as they attempt to deal with high fuel prices in a troubled economy.
- We "like" this! Seabourne Airlines is beefing up its service to the BVI beginning October 1, 2012, launching two daily flights between San Juan and Beef Island. The St. Croix-based carrier also has plans to expand its fleet of 34-passenger Saab 340Bs in 2013.
- Harrods, the London department store, is an iconic brand name, and now its owners are hoping to cash in on that name recognition with a chain of luxury Harrod's hotels in cities like New York, Paris, and Kuala Lumpur. The hotel gift shop should be amazing!
- Money talks, and apparently visitors to Mexico who are willing to pony up a few extra pesos will be provided with "unique access" to some of the country's historical and cultural attractions, according to Mexico's Secretary of Tourism. That might include exclusive early hours at select museums and at historical sites like Chichen Itza, which is known for being a mob scene at certain times of the day. The money raised will be used to help maintain these significant sites.

Looking to Add Some “Zip” to Your Alaska Cruise?

Here’s a high-flying idea! Before or after you set sail along the Inside Passage, why not take to the trees for a zip-line tour through Alaska’s vast untouched rain forest? Several companies offer the thrilling rides, including Alaska Zipline Adventures in Juneau and Alaska Canopy Adventures, which operates three different zip-line tours in Juneau and Ketchikan. You’ll get an eagle’s-eye view of mountains, streams, and wildlife as you fly above the treetops at up to 60mph.

We highly recommend cruising the wilds of Alaska with perks like ship-board credits and a complimentary gift membership in the *Hideaways Afficionado*[®] Club. Our cruise partners in *The Hideaways Collection*[®]—**Oceania Cruises**^{THC}, **Silversea Cruises**^{THC}, **Regent Seven Seas**^{THC}, and **Alaskan Dream Cruises**^{THC}—offer different cruising styles, and one is sure to be the perfect match for you. For a taste of small-ship cruising in Glacier Bay with Alaskan Dream, see Vance Stephenson’s report, *Alaska at Last*, on page 4.

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry!

Leave your wallet in your stateroom on your next cruise with **Compagnie du Ponant**^{THC}—you won’t need it! The luxury line with its small, yacht-like ships has moved to all-inclusive pricing, with all meals, an open bar, well-stocked mini-bars in all staterooms and suites, 24-hour room service, many excursions, and all gratuities covered in the rates. In some cases, airfare also may be included in its pricing.

Ponant will be adding a third sister ship to its most recent jewels, *L’Austral* and *Le Boreal*, in the summer of 2013. The new 260-passenger ship, named *Le Soléal*, will celebrate its inaugural season sailing the “Secret Arctic” itinerary. For details or to book your cruise, call *Hideaways* Travel Services at **800-843-4433**.

Cruise with a Queen in 2014

We’re still thinking about our 2013 travel plans, but **Cunard** has already announced its world cruises for 2014. New this year will be a first-ever visit to Japan for the *Queen Elizabeth*, where it will make maiden calls on Kochi, Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki. Cunard’s *Queen Victoria* will make ten maiden

port calls, including Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and Moorea in French Polynesia. Its full world cruise encompasses 116 exciting days visiting 40 ports in 19 countries. And Cunard’s flagship, *Queen Mary 2*, will celebrate its 10th sailing season in high style, with overnight calls in Cape Town, South Africa, Hong Kong, and Dubai.

Those lucky ones who book full world voyages before February 28, 2013, will receive a \$3,000 on-board credit. Don’t want to be gone almost four months? Not to worry! You can book segments as short as 18 days on *Queen Mary 2* or 8 days on *Queen Elizabeth*. Call your *Hideaways* Cruise Specialist (**800-843-4433**) for details.

Kids On Board

Sometimes kids and luxury, small-ship cruising aren’t the best fit. But **Paul Gauguin Cruises**^{THC} hopes to change that with its Ambassadors of the Environment Youth Program, which provides hands-on, interactive learning experiences focused on the natural wonders of French Polynesia, where the line operates its sole ship, the 332-guest *Paul Gauguin*. The program was formed in cooperation with oceanographer and environmentalist Jean-Michel Cousteau, and is intended for guests ages 9 to 17 who want to experience

their own on-board activities and daily excursions—like exploring coral reefs and visiting ancient Polynesian temples—under the friendly guidance of expert naturalists.

The youth program is available on two 7-night “Tahiti & the Society Islands” holiday cruises departing December 22 and 29, 2012; the cost is \$299/child. If you’d rather see Cousteau in person, he’ll be sailing aboard four *Paul Gauguin* cruises in 2013, presenting a series of lectures and videos. Call *Hideaways* Travel Services (**800-843-4433**, or email ts@hideaways.com) for dates and pricing.

Cruise News Briefs

Here are some of the latest cruise trends and news items in a nutshell.

- Boy, it was a dry summer in parts of the U.S. “How dry was it?” you ask? Well, it was so dry that the 436-passenger *American Queen* couldn’t get from Memphis to Vicksburg, Mississippi, on a late-July cruise due to near record-low water levels on the Mississippi River. Guests were given the option of staying on in Memphis or being bused to Vicksburg.
- Talk about sweet sheets! **Silversea Cruises** is in the process of debuting luxurious, Italian-made Pratesi custom-made bed linens across its fleet throughout 2013. Combined with each stateroom’s down duvet and memory-foam pillow-top mattress, the seductive sheets will wrap you in heavenly dreams.
- If cruising the Nile is on your bucket list, here’s a chance to do it in style. For the first time since the 1980s, Egypt has reopened the 465-mile stretch of river between Cairo and Luxor to cruise ships, following lengthy irrigation projects to increase water levels. The move will allow access to dozens of ancient sites and eliminate the need to fly from Cairo to Luxor to begin a Nile cruise.
- After a successful 2012 season on the Amazon River, **SeaDream Cruises** has announced it will head back to South America with *SeaDream II*, sailing two 20-night voyages in February and March, from the Caribbean island of Barbados to Iquitos, Peru, and then in reverse. A naturalist on board will provide in-depth information about the riverside wilderness and the jungle’s exotic plants and animals.

MEMBERS' FORUM

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RESIDENZA D'EPOCA

FLORENCE, ITALY

RATING: 5.0

I can't say enough about how beautiful, friendly, and convenient this inn is. The location is unbeatable, and just around the corner from the Uffizi Gallery. This was my view (below) over the Piazza della Signoria. I stayed in the Michelangelo room, even though I am more of a Leonardo in temperament, but I may have to change, the room was so beautiful—a canopy bed with real frescoes on the ceiling, and a modern bathroom with robes, slippers, and exotic soaps and shampoos. They brought me a luscious cappuccino as I was getting settled into the room. The manager was very distressed that I had nobody to share this beautiful, romantic room with, but maybe next time . . .

I cannot tell you how impressed I was with Residenza d'Epoca, especially the staff—so friendly, I felt like a long-lost family member. It was the festival of S. Giovanni, patron saint of Florence, while I was there, and that night there were fireworks over the Arno River. They lasted more than 50 minutes! I walked down to watch them (along with most of the city), since it's not far from the inn, and it was amazing. As the crowd was leaving, the Euro Cup soccer game ended (Italy vs. England), and there was dancing and singing in the streets. They didn't have to do all that just because I was in town!



We're Not Your Ordinary Travel Agents!

We're Escape Artists! And we have a passion for what we do—researching, coordinating, and booking trips all around the world. Not only are we prepared to answer your questions about travel planning and give suggestions for top-notch hotels and cruise lines around the world, we're also ready, willing, and able to book those reservations for you as professional travel agents—**saving you time and money!** And we're not just talking about our vetted, preferred partners in *The Hideaways Collection*. We've experienced and are familiar with a wide range of hotels, cruise lines, and tour partners, and **we can book anything, anywhere in the world.**

So whether your travel-planning needs are great or small, complicated or simple, don't forget to plan—and book—with us, your Travel Specialists at *Hideaways*. Call us at **800-843-4433**, or email ts@hideaways.com.

The next morning I woke up thinking I was still in a dream. The only little blip was a transportation strike while I was there, but I think that is a regular occurrence and it didn't affect me at all. Every day I spent in Florence was more exciting than the one before. I took a behind-the-scenes tour of the Palazzo Vecchio and spent another day at the Uffizi. Those were the only two things I booked before leaving the U.S.—which I highly recommend to avoid the long lines—so I would have time to visit other places (like the leather market!).

Eventually it was on to Bologna, and it was just as my [*Hideaways*] Travel Specialist said it would be, a love fest—loved the people, loved the food, loved the hotel, and felt the love returned! The **Hotel Corono d'Oro** was so beautiful and convenient. Drinks were in the bar off the lobby each evening, and breakfast was smashing. The marble bathroom had all the amenities needed including a *real* hairdryer, a scale, and bathrobes and slippers. It was so beautiful, I felt guilty being there alone. The Bologna towers were so close—about a half block to the main street and take a left.

There were sales all over the city. I don't know if it was the season (mid-summer) or if they were trying to get people to come back after the earthquakes. So I did a little art sightseeing, but then did something I rarely do in Italy—shop! A lot! The stores in Bologna are fantastic, and the people are so nice. I tried my meager Italian with them and apologized for poor pronunciation, but they

were really kind and encouraging. A woman complimented me on my Italian name. Maybe my parents knew I would fall in love with Italy someday.

CARLA WHITE, NEW ORLEANS, LA

HOTEL ALBERGO CESARI

ROME, ITALY

RATING: 4.8

What a great trip! Having planned many trips abroad on my own, I have to admit that *Hideaways* took the stress out of the planning process for us. Your recommendations were right on the money, and our group of travelers with diverse tastes all enjoyed their holiday in Italy. Albergo Cesari was ideal for its central location and simplicity, and I am reminiscing right now about our breakfasts and afternoon cocktails on their rooftop terrace.

Our escape from the city was made complete by our stay at **Villa La Capitata** in the Tuscan hills. We awoke each morning to breathtaking views of the valley below, and this rustic villa was everything we had expected. Though we had a difficult time getting our kids out of the pool, they loved the farm experience and walked through the vineyards, gardens, and olive orchards with intense curiosity. We found it quite easy to get in and out of Florence, to tour the wonderful Chianti region daily. Most impressive was our host family, who went out of their way to ensure our comfort and demonstrated hospitality at the highest level. They prepared two traditional Tuscan meals for us, including homemade wine and

“I cannot tell you how impressed I was with Residenza d’Epoca . . . I felt like a long-lost family member.”

[CARLA WHITE RECALLS HER STAY IN FLORENCE]

olive oil which were out of this world. We’re still talking about it weeks later.

JASON SMITH, FERNANDINA BEACH, FL

PARIS APARTMENT

PARIS, FRANCE

RATING: 4.8

We thoroughly enjoyed our Paris apartment. Its ideal location in proximity to the Golden Dome, the Eiffel Tower, many other attractions, restaurants, a grocery, bakeries, street markets, and Metro stations was absolutely incredible. How could there be so many wonderful restaurants with outdoor seating so close by? We thoroughly enjoyed the nightly Eiffel Tower lighting ceremony. We never used our car while we were there, given that so many conveniences and the Metro were within a short walking distance.

Being on the seventh floor and a couple of blocks away from major streets made it quieter. We spent many hours on the balcony enjoying the view and the flowers. It was very easy to keep the apartment cool with cross ventilation, and all the appliances functioned well.

Our granddaughter really enjoyed having the added space in which to roam around, which gave her much more freedom than in the confines of a hotel room. The age of the building added extra charm to the environment, and all the residents were very friendly. One could really understand how it felt to actually live in Paris. Evenings on the balcony with a baguette, fromage chevre, and a bottle of haut medoc have made us resolve to return, and to ask for that apartment again. It was unbelievably perfect!

JIM AND HEATHER SHORT, ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

HOTEL GRANDE BRETAGNE™

ATHENS, GREECE

RATING: 4.6

The hotel has a nice spa with great freebies, and we enjoyed our member perk of afternoon High Tea. The front desk staff was very helpful—not as stuffy as most “grand” European hotels.

HIDEAWAYS MEMBER, SOLITUDE, UT

CALLING ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS!

Everyone loves taking vacation photos—and we want to spotlight yours in Members’ Forum! Just send your best digital photos to edit@hideaways.com. As space allows, we’ll run them with your comments in Members’ Forum.

SEABOURN CRUISES

EUROPE

RATING: 4.5

Seabourn does not disappoint! They have great ships, service, and food.

HIDEAWAYS MEMBER, CHARLOTTE, NC

ROSEDON HOTEL

BERMUDA

RATING: 4.9

We can’t say enough good things about our five-night vacation in Bermuda. The Rosedon Hotel was a perfect choice: great location, beautiful gardens/grounds/pool, comfortable room, impeccable service, etc., etc. Imagine having a scrumptious full breakfast served every day on Villeroy & Boch china at the time (between 7:30 and 10:30 a.m.) and location of your choice (table by the pool, table on the porch, table on the patio outside your room) by cheerful, professional waiters! Also, we were so comfortable with the other guests, an interesting, congenial, and polite bunch of people hailing from different places (Chicago, Toronto, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey). One guest, a journalist, comes to the Rosedon for a week every year from her home in the Cayman Islands—what a surprise!

We’re looking forward to planning another trip with *Hideaways*. Many, many thanks!

NORM AND DORIS PRICE, ANNAPOLIS, MD

BUDAPEST APARTMENT

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

RATING: 4.3

This apartment is about three blocks from the river and from one of the main metro and tram stations, all within easy walking

distance. Also nearby is a SPAR market with everything you would expect to find in a grocery, and there are several eating places in the square as well. My main point of operations was the Angelika Cafe (with free Wi-Fi), where I had breakfast every day and sometimes lunch or dinner. Service was excellent and friendly, and prices were quite reasonable. There are a number of small restaurants in the side streets and quite an elegant restaurant right next door to the apartments (very expensive, but good).

It was very hot and humid in Budapest during our stay, 90–100 degrees plus 80–90% humidity—with virtually no break after the sun went down. So a shady spot at the Angelika was a lifesaver. The apartment is on the seventh floor, counted American style, and the elevator was out of service several times . . . ough. I do not think these were planned outages, but maybe so? For example, it was out the whole day Wednesday from early morning on into the night. Fortunately, that was not a day when luggage had to be dealt with, just the heat.

The apartment itself was quiet, more or less 1960s vintage, with no air conditioner, but there was one ceiling fan and a portable fan that made staying there bearable. There was a fully equipped kitchen, plus bath/shower, clothes washer, one double bedroom, a small side bedroom, and a living/dining area with a small balcony. Evidently, we were the first people from the U.S. to stay there, which seemed to be a big deal to the property manager, Norbert, who was very nice and struck me as an honest man. Would I chose to stay there again? Probably not, simply due to the lack of any air conditioning and the unreliable elevator service.

MICHAELA LAUNE,
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

CORRECTION

Ed. Note: *In the July/August 2012 issue, we mistakenly identified the writer of “An Aussie Rendezvous” as Hideaways member Robert Barker when, in fact, his correct name is Robert Barkley. We sincerely apologize for our blunder.*

Stockholm: A “Swede” City for a Honeymoon

When my wife, Sarah, first learned that her play had been chosen for a reading at the 2012 Women Playwrights International Convention in Stockholm, we knew we had our answer to an important newlywed question: “Where do we want to honeymoon?”

BY HIDEAWAYS IT ASSOCIATE PAUL HOOGEVEEN

For me, the choice was also perfect for personal reasons. As a child, I was enthralled by my mother's tales of the time she had lived there after World War II, working as a nanny and skiing in the far north with a cousin of famed Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl. And I had another fascination; ever since I had first read about the *Vasa* as a boy, I had imagined seeing this ill-fated, 17th-century warship in person. It also helped that Stockholm, Scandinavia's largest city at a million residents, enjoys a reputation as a cultural destination, with its summer Culture Festival and the city's 84 museums—more than enough to keep us culture and history buffs happy.

Slightly jet-lagged, we took things slowly after our arrival, doing little more than settling into our hotel in the Bohemian district of Södermalm, just south of Gamla Stan (Old Town). This district stands on a small island—one of 14 that make up the city proper—between Stockholm's northern and southern halves. A decent meal at Bar 54 across the street was all we could muster the energy for, and we decided to get some rest and hit the streets running the next day.

And so we did—in the wrong direction, it turned out. We quickly realized we were approaching the popular Globen, a huge, globe-shaped structure with twin exterior lifts that hoist people up for panoramic views of the city. But we meant to be headed toward Old Town—exactly the opposite direction. By the time we about-faced, it was already time for Sarah to register for her conference at Södermalm's historic Södra Teatern, the oldest theater in Stockholm.

Mission accomplished, it was off to wander the intimate, medieval streets of island-bound Gamla Stan, where we were utterly charmed by its many busy squares,

outdoor cafés, street musicians, and maze of tiny cobblestone streets, including the narrowest in Stockholm, Mårten Trotzigs Gränd. We often returned here to walk, shop, and dine; we even gave in to the silly appeal of the Viking atmosphere at Aifur Restaurant, where we enjoyed “period” dishes of dwarf chicken and deer with lingonberries, washed down with a good quantity of mead.

As we criss-crossed the city, we found Stockholmers to be friendly and polite, if somewhat reserved. Better yet, virtually everyone speaks fluent English—no language barrier to worry about! And they love their traditions; in fact, we were in town just in time to witness one of their biggest events, participant-wise—Stockholm's annual Midnight Marathon, which happened to be routed past the front door of our hotel.

On days when Sarah was busy at her conference, I undertook the burden (poor me!) of scouting out places of interest. Ever the history junkie, I ended up visiting the small-but-significant Medieval

NEED TO KNOW

Getting To/From Arlanda Airport: The Arlanda Express high-speed train is the most convenient way to travel from Stockholm's airport to the city center. It's not the least-expensive way, but seasonal specials can make it a palatable choice. We opted to purchase a two-for-one ticket for about US\$40 for our early-morning return trip to the airport. A less costly option to get to T-Centralen is the Flygbussarna coach (about US\$15/person, one way).

Getting Around Town: From T-Centralen, you can grab a taxi, take a municipal bus, or use the tunnelbana (the subway, or “T-bana”) to get within walking distance of your destination. We found the T-bana system to be particularly efficient and easy to navigate. If you prefer taxi service, check the rates posted on taxi windows carefully; some are utter rip-offs. Bicycle rentals also are available (online at www.citybikes.se/en), but most of the time we preferred to walk and engage in people-watching.

Stockholm Card: This is an absolute must-have for getting around the city and getting into most of its attractions. Starting at about US\$30 per day, the card will give you free use of the T-bana and city buses, with discounts on some municipal water transport, as well as free admission to 80 of the city's attractions. Cards can be bought for one-, two-, three-, or five-day use. Plan carefully; the clock starts ticking the moment you start using your card.

Stockholm's Districts: We found that each part of the city has its own flavor, from quintessential Old World to modern chic. Södermalm and Norrmalm both have a vibrant nightlife that will appeal to a younger crowd; older adults and families with children might appreciate the more sedate mood of Djurgården and, to a lesser extent, Gamla Stan.

Dining: Eating in Stockholm can be pricey; we averaged about \$75 per dinner, with our most expensive meal topping \$150. A common practice among tourists and locals alike is to take advantage of the lunch specials at most restaurants, which run about US\$16 per person on average.

Museum, as well as two of Stockholm's oldest churches, both dating back to the 1200s: Storkyrkan, in the middle of Gamla Stan; and



THE STREETS OF STOCKHOLM are alive during the day with pedestrians, bicyclists, and mothers pushing baby carriages. This square across from the National Museum is presided over by a statue of Gustaf III, King of Sweden from 1771 to 1792.

A VISIT TO SKANSEN, one of Stockholm's most famous (and family-friendly) museums, proved to be an authentic slice of history, showcasing period buildings from around Sweden that were brought to the site—including the small thatched cottage in the background, called Lamb Cottage, where farm animals could seek shelter in winter.



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Ridderholmskyrkan, on the neighboring tiny island of Ridderholmen. Storkyrkan stands in a distinguished location right next to the Royal Palace, and though it boasts more famous works of art, including a fantastic 14th-century statue depicting St. George and the Dragon, I found Ridderholmskyrkan—unmistakable with its unique 19th-century wrought-iron spire—to be the more historically interesting of the two, with its royal mausoleum and numerous sepulchers.

By our fourth day in the city, Sarah's conference was over and we decided to make a trip to nearby Djurgården, formerly the royal hunting park and now home to two of Stockholm's most famous attractions: Skansen, one of the world's first cultural parks, and the Vasa Museum. We stopped first at the Vasa, where my anticipation of

40 years was finally satisfied. I was completely overwhelmed by the scale and majesty of the almost completely intact warship, which sank in 1628 mere minutes into its maiden voyage, and was raised in remarkable condition from the seabed in 1961. The museum also held countless artifacts—including the remains of several sailors—found in and around the vessel, all described in detail.

Later that day at Skansen, which showcases actual period buildings transported from all over Sweden, we immersed ourselves in another era as we experienced a nomadic Sami camp (complete with reindeer), woodland lodges, watermills, and period farm homesteads. Unfortunately, our visit was cut short by a torrential downpour—something to be prepared for in Stockholm.

Our final day found us fretting over what,



A Stockholm taxi driver—note rates in window

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The city's narrowest cobblestone street

PAUL HOOGEVEEN

of the many choices left to us, we wanted to squeeze in. The weather was iffy, so we decided against an archipelago cruise and instead took a 50-minute boat ride to the island of Drottningholm—home to a massive royal palace and, more specifically, the Drottningholms Slottsteater, a 300-year-old opera house and the oldest fully functioning Baroque theater in Europe. The brief tour gave us a good taste of the building's construction (largely in original condition), as well as its backstage mechanical workings, including trapdoors and the machines used to mimic wind and thunder.

We returned to Gamla Stan in time to walk to the wharf on the west side of Ridderholmen and take in a perfect sunset over Lake Mälaren. We would be leaving Stockholm early the next morning, culturally and historically sated—yet leaving behind far too many things left undone. **H**

HIDING AWAY IN STOCKHOLM

Hideaways Travel Services (800-843-4433) recommends the following hotels when visiting the vibrant city of Stockholm. For more hotel reviews and need-to-know info, visit www.Hideaways.com/traveltostockholm.

Ett Hem: Formerly a private residence, this townhouse hotel is located in a tranquil section of the city and is filled with Scandinavian antiques and furnishings. Its 12 guest rooms are light and airy, with home-like armchairs and writing desks; some even feature an open fireplace or tiled stove. Guests can curl up with a book in the library, visit the gym and sauna, or have a delicious meal served informally at the kitchen's farm table or in the Glasshouse overlooking the hotel's garden. Rates start at about US\$575/night.

Grand Hotel Stockholm: This five-star hotel is "grand" in all the usual ways—excellent waterfront location, superb service, renowned Michelin-star dining, and a home away from home for visiting celebrities and dignitaries. It also has 330 individually designed rooms and suites ranging from comfortably elegant to downright palatial. The chic Nordic Spa and the two restaurants of chef Mathias Dahlgren—Matbaren and Matsalen—round out its offerings. Rates start at about US\$460/night.

The Lydmar Hotel: Located city-center and within walking distance of the Royal Palace and National Museum, this thoroughly modern luxury hotel is hidden within a classic-looking waterfront façade and offers 46 guest rooms in four categories: Classic, Medium, Large, and X Large. No two are alike, and each offers Italian linens, a comfy sitting area, and complimentary breakfast in bed. There's also a casual restaurant serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Rates start at about US\$477/night.

Follow the Music to Europe's Highest Mountains

The hills were alive with singing for the von Trapp family, and you'll be equally enamored of the stunning Alps and Dolomites as you embark on an alpine journey through five European countries—Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein—with **Tauk World Discovery™**. Tauk is famous for tucking little surprises and exclusive excursions into its all-inclusive tours, and "The Ultimate Alps and Dolomites" is no exception. This 11-night trip begins and ends in Munich and includes unique adventures that only guests of Tauk have the privilege to experience—like a private behind-the-scenes tour of the modern Liechtenstein Parliament building, with its edgy and innovative design by architect Hansjörg Göritz, followed by a wine-tasting in the Prince's private cellars.

Visits to towns and cities like Austria's Salzburg and Innsbruck—where you'll tour the vast Hoffkirche (Court Church) of Gothic royalty—and Bolzano, Italy, known as the "Gateway to the Dolomites," will be balanced with days spent meandering through the scenic countryside, immersed in breathtaking views of snow-capped peaks and glacial lakes. Each day will introduce some new cultural experience: a horse-drawn carriage ride to a rustic Tyrolean mountain hut for an evening

of Austrian music and dining; mountaintop visits to Neuschwanstein and Linderhof castles, as well as Germany's highest *biergarten* (at 9,000-plus feet in elevation, you'll want to watch how many beers you swig!); a spa stay in Bavaria's Bad Wörishofen, a lovely town known for its therapeutic thermal waters; and a private dinner in the underground world of Germany's Berchtesgaden Salt Mine.

You'll also have a chance to roll up your sleeves and dig into some of the local traditions, trying your hand—and applying your mouth—to one of those bizarre Swiss alphorns that look like a skinny overgrown pipe dragging on the ground. Then there's a day planned for learning all about alpine cheese making (and tasting, of course) and another set aside for that all-important German tradition of beer brewing, as you learn—among other things—why mountain streams are such an important ingredient for the best flavor.

Along the way, the beauty of some of the world's most breathtaking scenery will open up to you from a few adventurous modes of transportation, including a cogwheel train and a mountainside cable car. Most of the time, however, you'll sit back and relax in a comfortable mountain coach as you climb to Europe's famous alpine heights.

This all-inclusive, 11-night "Ultimate Alps and Dolomites" tour is available June through October, and includes airport transfers, all specified meals and hotels, all planned excursions—like a tour and wine-tasting event at Austria's Tratzberg Castle, a visit to Hitler's infamous mountaintop Eagle's Nest, and much more—the services of professional guides and local experts along the way, most gratuities, land transportation, luggage handling, and more.

Rates for Tauk's alpine journey start from \$5,290 per person, based on double occupancy. For complete details and an in-depth itinerary, visit www.Hideaways.com/UltimateAlps, or call Hideaways Travel Services at 800-843-4433 (or email ts@hideaways.com).

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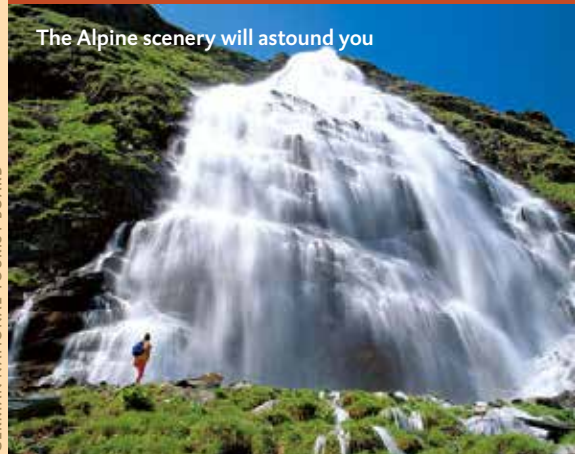
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