

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



CHECK-IN

South Seas family fun on Captiva Island

By Jaci Conry
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I've never been interested in resort destinations. My husband and I prefer to stay at a comfortable hotel and leave the premises during the day, with little plan but to meander along and happen upon the destination's hidden gems.

Then we had kids. Traveling with two small children, we learned, is a great deal of work. Exploring the unknown is not the least bit enticing with a 2- and 4-year-olds along for the ride. After a couple of harrowing trips, I saw the appeal of resort life, of having a slew of contained activi-

ties steps away from your hotel room. So, last winter, when my husband's parents invited us, along with his sister's family, to vacation with them at South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island, we happily accepted.

Though the resort is located 35 miles from Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers, traffic on to Captiva is heavy at peak times, making it a much longer trek. Such was the case when we arrived around 5 one afternoon last February.

Soon after we reached the property, however, I felt enveloped in a secluded, tranquil vibe. The resort village is a protected wildlife sanctuary that is a haven for hundreds of bird species,

dolphins, and manatees. Gulf waters lap three sides of the resort, and mangroves line the main road.

Opened in 1946 as a fishing resort by Clarence Chadwick as South Seas Plantation, the property has seen several incarnations over the years. Extensively rebuilt in 2006 following damage from Hurricane Charley, the 330-acre resort is now managed by Interstate Hotels & Resorts.

With 471 guest units, there are multiple options for accommodations. At the high end, expansive houses — some with up to six bedrooms and private pools — overlook the gulf; on the other side of the spectrum, hotel rooms and suites start at \$329.

Our family stayed in a two-level, three-bedroom Bayside Villa with a full kitchen. A small balcony overlooks Pine Island Sound. My in-laws stayed on the other end of the resort in a Marina Villa, which was priced slightly higher for the more coveted view of The Yacht Harbour and Marina, which offers 2,400 feet of berthing for boats of generous proportions. It was nice for us to have our own space and we were never more than a few minutes away, thanks to the property wide trolley service that transports guests through the resort. It's also possible to procure your own personal golf cart.

South Seas includes 2½ miles of white sand beaches that are perfect for shell seeking. Lounge chairs and towels (and beach toys, if you get there early in the day) are provided by an atten-

tive staff. Twenty pools are placed strategically throughout the property, and there's a waterslide complex with a smaller pool geared for toddlers.

The resort bills itself as a family resort, and we were happy to find that there are multiple offerings for children. Daily Turtle Tot programs focus on crafts for kids up to 4 years old. Older children can participate in more advanced projects like tie-dye T-shirts and painting coconuts. There's also an arcade, which can be a lifesaver on a dreary day.

While most of our days were spent between the pool and the beach, the resort has countless other ways to fill your time if you prefer to be more active. There are parasailing and paddleboard lessons and rentals and a top-notch sailing school for adults and kids. Kayak tours present the opportunity to view the island's wildlife up close. Fishing charters and motor and pontoon

rentals are available, too.

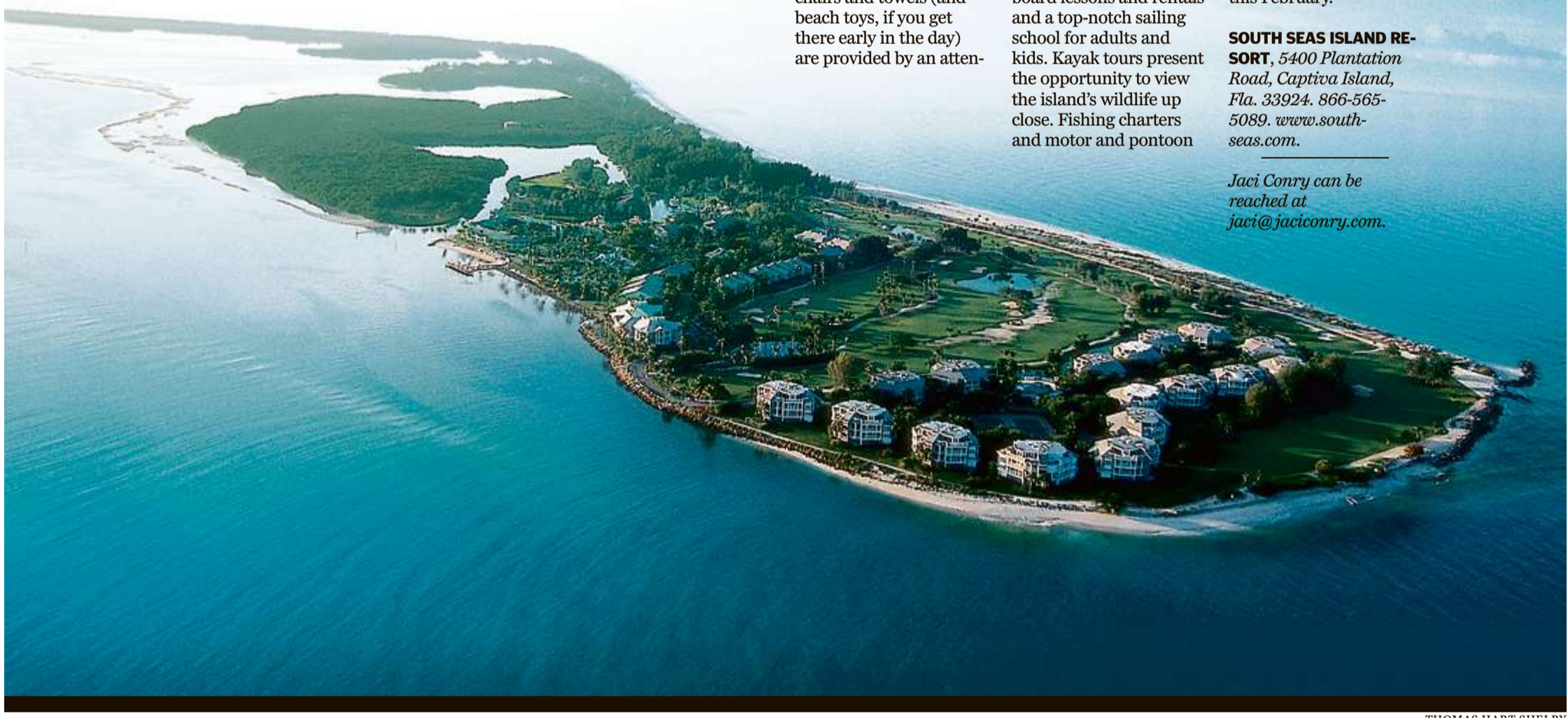
South Seas also has a nine-hole golf course and is home to the Blackwood Tennis Academy, which has clinics and lessons for players of all levels.

Six onsite restaurants offer different dining experiences. There's kid fare and ice cream at Scoops & Slices, where you dine at red booths; a more refined experience at Harbourside Bar and Grill; and at Doc Ford's Rum Bar and Grille there's a casual feel and Caribbean fare.

My husband and I have embraced the fact that our intrepid travel experiences are on hold for the foreseeable future. Our kids loved South Seas and we were happy that they were happy; we plan to return this February.

SOUTH SEAS ISLAND RESORT, 5400 Plantation Road, Captiva Island, Fla. 33924. 866-565-5089. www.southseas.com.

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THOMAS HART SHELBY

HERE

MEET WINEMAKERS DURING BOSTON FESTIVAL

Attend winemaker-hosted dinners, seminars, receptions, and brunches during the Boston Wine Festival through March 25 at the Boston Harbor Hotel. The 27th annual festival, founded and run by chef Daniel Bruce of the hotel's Meritage Restaurant and Wine Bar, includes intimate events held by some of the world's most renowned winemakers: Châteauneuf-du-Pape (Jan. 28), Truchard (Feb. 3), Robert Foley Vineyards (Feb. 24), Opus One (March 2), and Peter Michael

Winery (March 10). Learn from winemakers while enjoying multicourse menus perfectly paired to the highlighted wines. Don't miss the themed dinners, including Rising Stars on Jan. 27 and Mediterranean Reception on Feb. 26. Tickets: \$90-\$350. 617-439-7000, www.bostonwinefestival.net

CARNIVAL FEATURES ICE BOWLING AND MORE

Slide down a two-story-high snow hill, try your luck at ice bowling, and join a nighttime sledding party at the Old Orchard Beach Winter Carnival during school vacation week. The lively carnival includes

events for all ages: Bring your children to the Kids Carnival Feb. 18, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., at Lorange Middle School, where they can enjoy old-school carnival games such as tic-tac-toe and cornhole, watch "Frozen," and jump around bounce houses. Then go sliding down the middle of Old Orchard Street during a nighttime sledding party, Feb. 19, 4-9 p.m., and build snowmen, ride ponies, and go ice bowling, Feb. 20, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., followed by a Slippery Slope Pub Crawl at 7 p.m. 207-590-4201, www.oob365.com

THERE

LONDON PASS NOW INCLUDES TRANSPORTATION

Purchase a London Pass and get a free one-day ticket for the city's hop-on, hop-off sightseeing buses. Instead of navigating from one city attraction to the next by foot, taxi, or Tube, visitors can now travel on Golden Tours' open-top buses, which make 60 stops around the city on three different routes. Visit the Tower of London, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, Westminster Abbey, Tower Bridge, and more along these routes. Each bus has an English-speaking guide who provides lively

and informative commentary; audio guides are also available in French, German, Spanish, Italian, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Russian. Passes available for one, two, three, six, or 10 days; prices range from \$79/\$53 (one day) to \$222/\$146 (10 days) for adults/children, and include fast-track entry to several sites. www.londonpass.com

NEW TOUR HIGHLIGHTS SPACE RACE

Take a new walking tour of the National Air and Space Museum, and discover the highs and lows of the space race from a space policy expert. The three-hour tour, called "One Giant Leap: The Story of the Space Race," deals with the historical and political context of putting a person on the moon. It introduces the founders of rocketry, the pivotal events at the end of World War II, Soviet successes, and NASA's eventual achievement. The tour is run by Philadelphia-based Context Travel, a network of English-speaking scholars and professionals who lead local walking tours in 37 destinations worldwide. The tour runs daily. Cost: \$85 per person for up to six people, or \$360 for a private tour. 800-691-6036, www.contexttravel.com



EVERYWHERE

A BED FOR YOUR EARBUDS

Sometimes the simplest things can be the most useful. Digital Innovations' new earbud holder, called The Nest, keeps your earbuds untangled and ready to use, and serves as the protective, puck-shaped case that quickly secures the ear pieces in the center compartment and wind the cord around the outside. Then flip it back, right-side out, and it turns into a protective, puck-shaped case that you can toss in your pocket or bag. It can hold cords up to 48 inches long, and works with earbuds, Apple earphones, and more. \$9.99. 360-734-9090, www.digitalinnovations.com

PRINT IMAGES FROM YOUR SMARTPHONE INSTANTLY

Prynt's new on-the-go printer, called The Prynt Case, lets you create instant photos while traveling using your smart-

phone and the Prynt app. Use your Samsung smartphone or your iPhone to snap shots and then plug your phone into the case and instantly print 2-inch-by-3-inch photos (no ink required — it's built into the paper). The case also has a shutter button, so you can take shots with your smartphone attached. Then make those photos come to life: Each image is actually the first frame of a six-second video that's stored in the cloud. Use your phone to focus on the printed image and the image comes alive, replaying your six-second video from the still shot. E-mail, text, or post a copy of that photo and anyone you give permission to can view your video using the Prynt app. It's a great way to share experiences, or connect with people back home while traveling. The case prints 20 photos on one charge. \$149 for case, \$25 for 50 sheets of photo paper. www.pryntcases.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

