



PHOTO: COURTESY FOUR SEASONS BORA BORA

Under the Spell of Bora-Bora

It felt like God was winking at me. “You think this is the most beautiful place on earth? Watch this,” He seemed to be saying. It was barely after sunrise and I was sitting on the sundeck of my overwater bungalow at the Four Seasons Bora Bora, watching the mist rise over the gently lapping clear turquoise water, with the jagged peaks of Mount Otemanu and Mount Pahia in the background, when a perfect double rainbow appeared.

I just laughed. There really was no need to impress me further — I was firmly under Bora Bora’s spell. Although I’ve lived my entire life in the landlocked city of Atlanta, I’ve always been drawn to the water. And there’s no better way to feel connected to the water than having your own tree house on stilts, complete with a glass panel in the bathroom where you can peer down at schools of colorful tropical fish.

I spent plenty of time *in* the water as well, paddle boarding and kayaking around the lagoon, swimming right off the back of my sundeck and on a day-long snorkeling tour. Although our guide, Rainui, had been leading tours for 14 years, his enthusiasm for sharing the beauty of his island was undiminished. He entertained and educated us at three magnificent spots, swimming with sharks and holding up a gigantic stingray, laughing as he used the tail like a microphone. He even dove deep to bring out an eel for us to view, smirking as he showed us where he got bit. “Rainui, you even shed blood for us!” I said.

After the snorkeling, he brought us to his family’s private island where he cooked lunch for us, served on plates of woven coconut fronds. We dined in the island sunshine on grilled chicken, beef, rice with coconut milk, and coconut bread.

We enjoyed plenty of meals courtesy of the sea as well. For lunch on the beach one I day, I relished the *poisson cru* — red tuna with lime and coconut served in half of a coconut with a mound of rice. We shared a giant platter of fresh sushi with ginger sauce at Sunset Bar and savored the mahi mahi in coconut curry sauce at Aarii Moana, the resort’s fine dining restaurant.

The divine setting is incorporated into the soaring thatched-roof spa as well: One treatment room has windows on the floor for an ocean view while you undergo the Kahaia Haven Ritual, a skin-smoothing treatment with Tahitian black pearl powder and vanilla, followed by a hot stone massage.

Tahitian black pearls are the rarest in the world, only available in the South Pacific. What better item to take home with me as a souvenir than a unique gift from the sea? Although I passed over the impressive and flawless pearl valued at \$40,000, I did manage to bring home a beautiful necklace with one single lovely pearl, a wearable reminder of the gorgeousness of nature in Bora Bora.

—Jan Schroder

www.fourseasons.com/BoraBora



PHOTO: JANICE McDONALD

Eataly, NYC (Ciao! Chow)

The foodie who doesn’t have the time to visit Italy can do the next best thing by taking a trip down Fifth Avenue in New York City to Eataly. A full-scale Italian food emporium, Eataly features everything from fresh pastas, breads, pastries, meats and cheeses to fine wines, prosecco and gelato. The meals served at the cafés and counters in the center of the huge hall are alone worthy of a visit. Of course, tasting the food will inspire you to go shopping to create your own Italian dinner. This travelgirl loves nothing better than to grab a bottle of wine and pick out fresh bread, meats and cheeses for hotel room picnics!

—Janice McDonald

www.eataly.com

BABY THAT BOTTLE

Pack some of these clever creations and you’ll never worry about exploding wine bottles or broken souvenirs in your suitcase again. Vinnibags are reusable, inflatable bags that suspend your fragile items in a chambered air cushion. When you and your items arrive safely home, just deflate and roll the bag flat for storage. The Vinnibag is designed to hold a standard 750 ml wine bottle but can be used for smaller items as well.

\$28; \$25 each if you buy more than one
www.vinnibags.com



THE CHARMS OF CHOBE

The hungry, hungry hippos come out at night. They wallow up from the mud, near the source of the White Nile in Uganda, and graze the lawns of Chobe Safari Lodge. Which means I have to call for a golf cart lift to the main building for an elegant al fresco dinner. But the inconvenience seems slight, compared to the thrill of hearing Africa in stereo surround-sound, from hippos bellyaching at dusk to young bull elephants crushing undergrowth at dawn. And all from the comfort of this resort in the Murchison Falls National Park, which recently underwent a \$13 million investment.

Political instability has had a drastic impact on Uganda’s tourism industry. The country has suffered some setbacks — most notably dictator Idi Amin Dada (deposed in 1979) and war criminal Joseph Kony, who fled around six years ago — but just past the headlines lies one of Africa’s most heartfelt destinations: a country rich in charismatic animals, but not yet jaded about tourism. And at \$335 per night (all-inclusive for two people), the five-star Chobe Safari Lodge may be the most smooth and genteel introduction to this area, which is poised to boom.

—Amanda Castleman

www.chobelodgeuganda.com



PHOTO: AMANDA CASTLEMAN

PHOTO: COURTESY WINDSTAR CRUISES



Wind in My Hair

One trip aboard one of these vessels and you may kiss conventional large cruises goodbye forever! Windstar recently had the equivalent of a facelift to the tune of \$18 million, and its three all-but-brand-new sailing yachts with teak-lined decks, towering white sails and gourmet cuisine take luxury yachting to a new level. Only 148 to 310 guests sail — yes, you actually sail — on each adventure in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean or the Baltics.

It's a privileged way to discover a quieter, less-traveled Caribbean, with itineraries deliberately designed to whisk you to hidden bays and secluded coves off-the-beaten path of the larger ships.

For example, in Martinique, the yachts anchor outside a small town and marina on the southern end of the island, avoiding the dock of the largest city where the mega ships crowd along the cement piers. The exclusive feeling continues as you sail through the ports of St. Maarten, Pigeon Island, St. Lucia, Dominica, Iles des Saintes, and St. Kitts.

Warning: one cruise and you may get hooked on their "pampering without pretense" approach. The extraordinary and elite experience has guests returning again and again to savor different itineraries on trips throughout Europe, the Caribbean, the South Pacific and the Americas, and even on transatlantic crossings.

—Marybeth Bond

www.windstar.cruises.com

DRY OUT IN DRY DUDZ

I love the water but hate wearing a soggy suit in the car after kayaking or swimming. Packing a wet one in my suitcase isn't ideal either. The boardshorts, bikini tops and separates from Dry Dudz™ are made of quick-drying material that wicks moisture away from your skin. The shorts have a comfortable yoga-style waistband that you can roll down if you want more exposure while tanning. No surprise these were invented by a mom! They come in a variety of styles and colors, and boardshorts are available for men as well. \$25 to \$75.

—Jan Schroder

www.drydudz.com



My Bodyguard

We can't all travel around with a personal bodyguard, but this messenger bag with a built-in alarm is the next best thing. The inside has plenty of room with seven compartments and fits up to a 15.5" laptop. The exterior is a durable and lightweight nylon. But the best feature is the easily activated, extremely loud personal alarm with an undetectable activation switch built into the shoulder strap so you can travel safely, wherever you go. \$89.99

—Jan Schroder

www.isafebags.com



and women

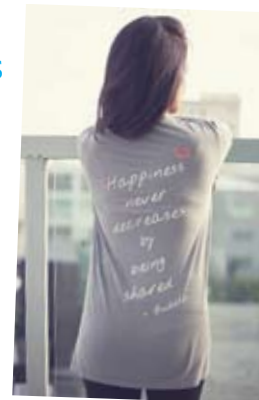
to the Happiness Movement that sponsors events and classes to "nudge the world to a happier place." It worked for me! —Jan Schroder

www.deliveringhappiness.com

Travelgirl Tip: Chattanooga's new visitors guide is out! Whether you're looking for arts and culture or how to plan your next corporate event in this exciting city on the Tennessee River, you'll want this excellent research tool. Go to www.chattanoogaofun.com and request your free copy — by mail or online.



"This piece has been proven to create happiness 100% of the time, as tested on roller coasters, fields of green and the DMV," read the tags on the Delivering Happiness clothing now available at Zappos. I know I felt very happy when I slipped into the super-soft three-button leggings (\$49) and the Breezy Teezy T-shirt (\$69) with the small winky face on the shoulder. I've found the perfect traveling outfit for long flights, plus the pieces can be used for sleepwear and layering year-round. A portion of the proceeds of the net profits from the 27-piece collection for men



SALT LAKE STANDOUT: Bambara

Reserve a table at this lively restaurant in downtown Salt Lake City and let the talents of Executive Chef Nathan Powers wow you. From a AAA Four Diamond Award to an Excellent Zagat rating as one of America's Top Restaurants, the accolades have piled up for Bambara. You'll add your name to the fan list after you try the exquisite cuisine — in a setting equally perfect for a romantic evening or a high-powered business lunch. Travelgirls staying at the adjacent Hotel Monaco (a Kimpton property) will find Bambara especially convenient. Somehow, this New American bistro manages to be elegant, historic and hip all at once. The décor coincides with the building's history as the Continental Bank, with signature elements such as a penny-clad host stand and decorative safety-deposit box art. The Vault bar scene is phenomenal, as is the black and white marble exhibition kitchen — lucky guests can observe from elevated tables nearby. If you're in need of a private room, the space formerly known as the bank chairman's office provides an exclusive and stately wood-paneled retreat from the rest of the eatery; it's an urban oasis with financial district views.

Chef Powers was named Best Utah Chef in 2010, and his time-honored technique includes a dedication to organic and sustainable ingredients. The menu changes by season and is guaranteed to include prime, aged meats, fresh seafood, game, artisan cheeses and out-of-this-world desserts. The wine list and cocktail options also are outstanding.

And despite the history and decorative theme, dining here won't break the bank.

—Stephanie Oswald



www.bambara-slc.com

PHOTO: COURTESY BAMBARA

A FEAST @ **FIREFLY**

I associate Panama City Beach more with seafood shacks and frosty drinks enjoyed at seaside picnic tables than I do with fine dining. What a delight to discover Firefly, where we enjoyed a meal fit for the President, who ate here with his family on their most recent visit.

While the beaches of this Florida Panhandle city are some of the prettiest in the world, I was happy to trade my flip-flops for heels when we dined at this gorgeous restaurant. We enjoyed the "courtyard," where the soaring oak tree, dark ceiling and arches lining the central area transported us to a courtyard you would find in the Mediterranean. Chef Paul Stellate, one of eight chefs chosen to take Gulf Coast seafood to the London 2012 Summer Olympics, serves up a seasonally based menu with the freshest-possible fish and meats cooked in an 1800-degree broiler. It's tough to choose an entrée, but every meal must start with a bowl of the restaurant's famous she-crab soup. The Firefly has two elegant bars, the 535 Library Lounge and the Firefly Bar, perfect for when you're ready to switch from margaritas to martinis.

—Jan Schroder

www.fireflypcb.com



PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS



Another Gershwin Win

Here's something to put on your next NYC itinerary: the musical comedy happening at Broadway's Imperial Theatre, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*. The music and lyrics are legendary Gershwin; the director/choreographer is Kathleen Marshall, and Matthew Broderick is the star. It's a can't miss combination playing nightly to packed crowds. Broderick shines in the role of millionaire playboy Jimmy Winter in this homage to the 1920's Jazz Age. Kelli O'Hara artfully plays Billie Bendix, bad girl bootlegger, who manages to fall in love with the currently engaged and many-times-already-married Jimmy. There's a bad guys storyline, plenty of comedic moments and a host of talented actors who engage you from the very first song. O'Hara has a magnificent voice and Broderick is ideally cast with his boyish charm. A procession of talented supporting players enhances the production: From Billie's sidekicks, Duke and Cookie, played to a tee by Chris Sullivan and Brad Oscar, to the incredibly talented, award-winning actress, Judy Kaye, who plays Estonia, this musical is a sure-fire hit. The magical work of the Gershwin brothers makes this a night to remember, and you'll be singing *S Wonderful* all night long.

—Renee Werbin

niceworkonbroadway.com

LONDON LUXURY

Packing for my next trip will be easier with the new Women's Traveller 2013 kit from Molton Brown. Each kit comes with six luscious Molton Brown products in travel size so I know my hair and skin will look and feel fabulous while I'm away. \$55

—Jan Schroder

www.moltonbrown.com



PHOTO: JANSCHRODER



Nature in Norfolk

I've never had a passion for gardening. I do, however, love to stroll through acres of gorgeous gardens that *other* people are taking care of. So when I had a few hours to spare during a weekend trip to Norfolk, Virginia, I headed for the spectacular Norfolk Botanical Gardens. Its 155 acres can be explored either by foot on 12 miles of paved road, by tram tour or by boat tour. The Japanese Garden was one of my favorites of the 40 themed gardens on display — some focus on a single plant, such as azaleas or hydrangeas, while others highlight a particular region of the world.

Green thumbed visitors can get ideas for their own home at the Hummingbird, Sensory, Colonial Herb and Perennial Gardens. Two acres are devoted to the Butterfly Garden and three acres are for the delightful children's garden, World of Wonders, which includes a Dirt Factory and Plant Safari.

Celebrating their 75th anniversary in 2013, this Norfolk highlight has events planned all year, including a Bridal Show in March, a lecture by Maya Angelou in April and an Annual Plant Sale in May.

—Jan Schroder

norfolkbotanicalgarden.org

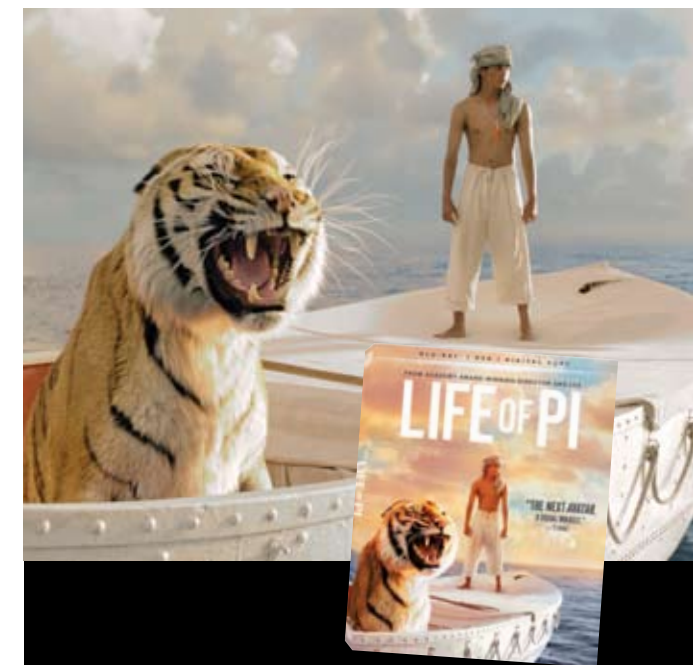


MAKE MINE MAUI

I'd been wearing a series of cheap, disposable sunglasses until I discovered Maui Jim shades. They fit me perfectly, come in fabulous styles, and cut out 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays to keep my eyes healthy. Their newest line, Kanani, features lightweight frames in three colors. The name Kanani means "the beautiful one" in Hawaiian, which is how you'll feel when you slide a pair of these on.

—Jan Schroder

\$199 ■ www.mauijim.com



FROM OSCAR® WINNING DIRECTOR ANG LEE COMES THE INSPIRATIONAL, EPIC JOURNEY, *LIFE OF PI*.

ON BLU-RAY COMBO PACK & DVD MARCH 12