

FYI Travel: Former jail still welcomes visitors to stay the night

by Tom_Roebuck

Following an extensive five-year restoration, Boston's Charles Street Jail is now the Liberty Hotel, a \$150 million property that sits at the foot of Boston's posh Beacon Hill neighborhood overlooking the Charles River.

BEHIND BARS - Touches of the former Charles Street Jail in Boston remain in what is now the Liberty Hotel and its lobby-level restaurant, Clink. CNS Photo. LOFTY LOBBY - Exposed brick walls and four striking, wrought-iron chandeliers add visual interest to the lobby of Boston's Liberty Hotel, a former jail. CNS Photo. Completed in 1851, the jail's striking granite exterior and expansive, light-filled interiors remain largely unchanged. Soaring 90 feet, the jail's central rotunda, with its windows and catwalks, was preserved and forms the lobby and public spaces. Within the historic building, the Liberty offers 18 brick-walled rooms, as well as a restaurant, bar, meeting and event rooms. Across the courtyard garden (once the jail's exercise yard), a new 16-story tower houses 280 guest rooms.

FYI: For more information or reservations, call 866-507-5245, 617-224-4000 or visit www.libertyhotel.com.

XMAS IN NOLA

A getaway to New Orleans is easier than ever this holiday season as five Marriott and Renaissance Hotels offer jet-setters the chance to trade the traditional Santa Claus for the Big Easy's Papa Noel with rates starting at \$89 per night. The city's Papa Noel celebrations include street festivities, The Cathedral Christmas concerts, the renowned Celebration of the Oakes walking tour through a wonderland of lights and more.

Papa Noel rates are valid Dec. 1-30 and are offered at the Renaissance Pere Marquette, the New Orleans Marriott at the Convention Center, the New Orleans Marriott, the Renaissance Arts Hotel and JW Marriott New Orleans.

FYI: For more information or to book the Papa Noel rate, call 866-530-3763 and ask for rate code HDYA or visit www.neworleans.marriott.com.

SMALLER CAN BE BETTER

The five-star MS Deutschland is quite unlike any other ocean-going vessel. At a time when new ships are carrying thousands of passengers at once and corridors stretch endlessly from bow to stern, the intimate Deutschland captures the elegance and grace of a grand hotel of the Edwardian Age - richly paneled lounges, a chandeliered ballroom, the palm-filled winter garden, all luxuriously appointed with fine antiques and exquisite art. With only 520 guests, this intimate ocean liner offers elegant dining in three fine restaurants, onboard entertainment and spacious staterooms.

This winter, the MS Deutschland charts a course through the warm waters of the South China Sea, Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to some of the world's most exotic and enchanting ports of call that recall the maritime routes of seafaring Dutch, English and Portuguese traders of old.

The first voyage begins on Dec. 18 in Phuket and continues southeasterly through the Indonesian archipelago, visiting Singapore, Bali, Sulawesi and Borneo before sailing north to the Philippines and Hong Kong. This 20-day cruise is priced from \$7,111 per person.

Three other exotic cruises, from 14 to 19 days, also begin or end in Hong Kong. A 17-day voyage, starting at \$5,942, begins in Hong Kong Jan. 6 and ends in Singapore with ports of call that include Halong Bay and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and tiny Tioman Island off the coast of Malaysia. The last of these five winter voyages begins in Yangon on Jan. 22 and visits Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Cochin before arriving in Mumbai on March 7. This 15-day cruise is priced from \$5,382 per person.

FYI: AARP members get an \$800 discount per couple on all cruises. For bookings and information, call

800-221-2216 or visit www.generaltours.com/gtpages/AARPDeutschlandCruises.aspx.

WHALE WATCHING UP CLOSE

Idaho-based Sea Kayak Adventures Inc. is offering a trip package where participants go eyeball to eyeball with gray whales in Mexico's calving lagoons and paddle a kayak alongside dolphins and blue whales in the clear waters of the Sea of Cortez. Their 10-day Sea of Cortez and Gray Whale Watching Combo itinerary offers an opportunity to get close to friendly whales, explore uninhabited desert islands by stable sea kayak and snorkel along isolated coves in clear turquoise waters, all led by naturalist guides.

Clients fly from Los Angeles to Loreto, Mexico. From there they cross the Baja California peninsula to the Pacific coast into Magdalena Bay for three days to the beach base camp in the heart of gray whale activity to watch gray whales and their newly born calves at close range from the safety of motorized skiffs. Many whales are "friendlies," who swim up to the skiffs for a head rub.

Then the tour group heads back over to Loreto for five days of sea kayaking and camping in Mexico's newest national park, Parque Nacional Bahia de Loreto in the Sea of Cortez, which serves as sanctuary for blue-footed boobies, fin and blue whales, dolphins and sea lions. No prior kayaking experience is necessary just good health and an eagerness for new experiences.

Weekly departures are scheduled from Jan. 25 through March 9. The price, \$1,795 per person, double occupancy, includes three hotel nights in Loreto, meals cooked from scratch at camp, all camping, sleeping and kayaking equipment, skiff whale watching, airport transfers and ground transportation, instruction and guides, and park fees. Not included are airfare from Los Angeles, gratuities, meals in town and personal items.

FYI: For more information or reservations, contact Sea Kayak Adventures Inc. at 800-616-1943 or visit www.seakayadventures.com.

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