FYI Travel: Radisson invites all divers to scuba in Aruba

by Tom_Roebuck

The Radisson Aruba Resort and Casino is catering to divers with its Scuba in Aruba packages. The Learn to Dive Program lasts seven nights and includes accommodations, diving and instruction, tanks, weight belts and a welcome martini at the open-air Mira Solo, starting at $2,899. The Unlimited Diving package also starts at $2,889 and includes accommodations for seven nights, unlimited dives and a welcome cocktail at the resort's popular martini bar. Both packages are based on double occupancy, and shorter packages of three and five nights are available.

REEF CRUISER - A dive boat from Unique Sports of Aruba waits for divers staying at the Radisson. Seven-night diving packages start at less than $3,000 at the Radisson. CNS Photo. In Dominica, another Caribbean island coveted by divers, the Castle Comfort Lodge offers the Seven Night Dive Adventure Package, with seven nights' accommodations, seven breakfasts, welcome drink, round-trip airport transfers, five days of two-tank morning boat dives, unlimited shore diving, use of sea kayaks, whale-watching trip, land adventure trip, taxes and service charges.

FYI: For more information on the Radisson Aruba, call 800-333-3333 or visit www.radisson.com/aruba. Guests booking these packages should call Unique Sports prior to arrival to schedule dives at 011-297-586-6555, ext. 6597, or e-mail unique@radissonaruba.com.

Castle Comfort's seven-night package is available Nov. 1-April 1 and starts as low as $1,150 per person, double occupancy. Call 767-448-2188 or visit www.castlecomfortdivelodge.com.

TRAVEL LIKE A BARON ON A BUTLER'S BUDGET

For those who watch their budget as carefully as they mind their luggage, there are many ways to indulge in luxury travel without draining your bank account. Traveling with a small group and splitting the expenses can make a five-star vacation within your reach.

While a luxury villa or private hotel may seem prohibitively expensive, it can actually be a surprisingly affordable alternative to top-end hotels when shared by family and friends. Consider VillaHotel Joya, a private hotel in Miami, from Villazzo. With three bedrooms and 6,500 square feet to go around, the classic, Andalucian-style VillaHotel offers more than enough room for three couples, as well as a tiled pool, Jacuzzi and terraces ideal for tanning; a full staff including housekeeping, butlers, bartenders and nannies; and an exclusive address in the heart of Coconut Grove. A week's stay at Joya? Just $12,600, or $600 per couple per day.

What does South Africa have going for it as an affordable luxury destination? Plenty, including special fares from the U.S. via South African Airways and favorable exchange rates that will get you more than seven rands per buck. For the ultimate in privacy and five-star luxury, you can rent Little Tuningi at Tuningi Safari Lodge. Here, six guests can wrap themselves in Colonial African chic amid the wonders of nature - including the Big Five - starting at $2,500 per night, or just $416 per person, including all meals and activities.

FYI: For more information on VillaHotel Joya, visit www.villazzo.com; for information about Tuningi Safari Lodge, visit cybercapetown.com/TuningiSafariLodge.

BECOME A GEOTOURIST

Cruise West offers casual, up-close cruising on small ships that carry just 78 to 138 passengers. Itineraries in Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, Mexico's Sea of Cortes, Panama, Costa Rica, Asia and the South Pacific give guests the opportunity for a wide range of culturally enriching journeys. Nature walks led by local guides, presentations by exploration leaders, tours of historical sites and exploration by inflatable kayaks encourage guests to get to know the cultures and natural environment of the regions they visit.

In Mexico, Cruise West visits the La Paz Children's Home, where in the past they have donated school supplies, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and food items left over from the cruise. In January 2008, Cruise West is offering a special volunteer party at the Children's Home for guests immediately following the Jan. 12 departure of the Whales and Wildlife itinerary in the Sea of Cortes. Guests will paint the dormitories that the children use and have a barbecue lunch with the kids to mark the occasion.

On Panama/Costa Rica cruises, Cruise West visits an Embera village in the Derien Jungle, where guests learn about the native culture and watch Cruise West crew members play a soccer game with the villagers. Guests on Panama/Costa Rica cruises can also enjoy a guided walking tour of Portobelo, discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1502, and one of the richest ports in the Spanish Main until it was plundered in 1668.

Photo CDs of the cruises are available onboard, and the profits are given to causes in the area of the cruise - for Columbia and Snake River cruises in the Pacific Northwest profits go to assist the children of migrant workers with their educational needs through the Union Gospel Mission; for Alaska cruises profits go to an intern program for whale research in Petersburg; and for South Pacific cruises medical and educational supplies are purchased and delivered to various islands such as Tikopia.

FYI: For more information, visit www.cruisewest.com.

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