

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE CHARMS OF HISTORIC COCOA VILLAGE

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Oh, Florida. So many places to visit and fun things to do. But along large stretches of road in this elongated state, it may seem like the only entertaining options are the same old, same old large box stores, fast-food emporiums, and corporate chains found in Anywhere, USA.

This was my dilemma while searching for an unusual spot for a “sisters’ day” get-together between Ormond Beach (where she lives) and Stuart (where I was visiting) on the state’s Atlantic coast. That’s when I discovered Historic Cocoa Village. Located on the mainland along the “Space Coast” — about 10 miles from both Cocoa Beach and Port Canaveral — the village is a breath of fresh air from the usual I-95 corridor offerings.

Originally settled in the mid-1800s, the grid of tree-lined streets along the Indian River is home to mom-and-pop style restaurants, boutique shops, and (in the evening) live music and performance venues. The village is a family-friendly detour for travelers who want the feel of small-town Florida while visiting the area’s larger tourist destinations.

The vibe is casual and funky, an artsy throwback to times before the retail and dining worlds became homogenized. This means you never know what you’ll find in shops that sell everything from Turkish handicrafts (Anatolian Designs, 212 Brevard Ave.) to a leopard print dress and (fake) diamond-studded red cowboy boots (My Best Friend’s Secret, Luxury Consignment, 220 Brevard Ave.) to Asian vases and an eye-popping array of collectibles (Stone Street Apothecary & Antiques Marketplace, 17 Stone St.) to beachy-themed gifts, jewelry, and Mexican Talavera pottery (Village Beach House, 15 Oleander St.). Our hearts were stolen at a tiny shop with handmade jewelry and crafts that’s part of a larger project supporting at-risk mothers and fathers with full-time artisan jobs in Haiti (Papillon Marketplace, 311 Brevard Ave.).

Dining options are also unique and numerous. Some of our many choices included Thai and Japanese cuisine (Thai Thai Village, 100 Harrison St.); burgers, pizza, and pastas (Pub Americana, 401 Delannoy Ave.); pulled pork, mac and cheese, and wood-fired meats (Cryderman’s Barbecue, 401 Florida Ave.); and fried oysters, catfish nuggets, and gator bites (Norman’s Raw Bar & Grill, 3 Forrest Ave.). We opted for some lighter fare — salads and wood-fire roasted sandwiches — followed by coffee ice cream smoothies (Ossorio Bakery and Café, 316 Brevard Ave.). In the evening, additional restaurants open for upscale dining, including continental cuisine with white-tablecloth service (The Tulip Restaurant & Lounge, 207 Brevard Ave.), and classic French cuisine and steaks with indoor and al fresco patio seating (Café Margaux, 220 Brevard Ave.).

Of course, sometimes a detour can turn into an all-day affair, which is easy to do in Historic Cocoa Village. Somehow our “sisters’ day” visit flew by without us seeing all the area has to offer. Ah well, there’s always next year.

visitcocoavillage.com.

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PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



From top: Anatolian Designs sells Turkish handicrafts; tree-lined streets are home to restaurants, shops, and performance venues; Papillon Marketplace is a tiny store offering handmade jewelry and crafts.



Signs in the heart of Historic Cocoa Village.



KEN SAWYER/PEM

HERE

NEW WING TAKES FLIGHT

Fans of the Peabody Essex Museum will want to include Salem in their fall travel itinerary. On Sept. 28 the museum debuts its new wing — a 40,000-square-foot expansion project — with a ribbon cutting ceremony that is open to the public. Designed by Ennead Architects, New York, the expansion and renovations include 15,000 square feet of new gallery space, a light-filled atrium, a special entry for school and group tours, and a 5,000-square-foot garden designed by Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects. Look for fresh installations of the museum’s collections, including new galleries dedicated to Fashion & Design; Maritime Art; and Asian Export Art. Renovated galleries showcase interactive and immersive works by contemporary artists, and new exhibitions of photography, sculpture, and more. Those who want a sneak peek can attend PEM’s annual gala, or take advantage of member preview days. 866-745-1876, www.pem.org/

UNITY, MAINE, HOSTS ORGANIC COUNTRY FAIR

Celebrate Maine’s rural and agricultural traditions at the Common Ground Country Fair (Sept. 20-22). Affiliated with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, it’s no surprise that the fair focuses on organic farming techniques and living. Activities include a draft horse show, donkey and mule show, sheep dog demonstrations, manure pitch contest, demos of spinning and carding wool, stonework, tree identification, and workshops on raising animals. In addition, a juried craft show promotes the work of Maine artisans. Children’s activities include haystack jumping, mural painting, messy art, face painting, and more. More than 60,000 visitors attend the fair each year, held outdoors and in a tent and barn. Comfortable shoes recommended. Website offers links to local camping and accommodations. 207-568-4141, www.mofga.org/The-Fair

CULTURAL DEALS IN CITY AND COUNTRY

Two iconic New England hotels — The Charles Hotel and Blantyre Country Resort and Estate — have teamed up to offer a joint Town to Country Experience. Designed as a cultural journey from Cambridge to the Berkshires, the package includes visiting world-renowned museums and local attractions, participating in outdoor recreational activities, and sampling the tastes of the season in both popular destinations, including onsite dining at each luxury hotel. No car? No problem. Self-drive car hire is available via the Charles Hotel’s on-site Avis car rental office, and car transfer service between the properties can also be arranged through the concierge team. Valid through Aug. 30, 2020; based upon double occupancy. Rates from \$660 at the Charles Hotel, 800-882-1818, www.charleshotel.com; from \$755 at Blantyre, 844-881-0104, www.blantyre.com.

THERE

LUXURY LODGE OPENS IN BOLIVIA’S SALT FLATS

Adventure awaits at the newly opened Kachi Lodge, a series of luxury geodesic domes located on the remote Uyuni Salt Flats of Bolivia. The lodge’s space station-like minimalist look is designed to complement the stark landscape, and wide-open starry nighttime skies unsullied by light pollution. An onsite camp leader can arrange experiences such as downhill mountain biking on the edge of the Tunupa Volcano, trekking to the volca-

no’s crater, and hiking to the peak of Kachi Island. From December to March, guests can paddleboard across the Salar, enjoying the natural mirror that the flooding creates. The individual pods offer guests the comfort of a hotel room with a private bathroom, plush bedding, and stylish decoration. Rates from \$1,980 per person, double occupancy; includes a two-night minimum stay, airport transfers (the closest airport is 60 miles away), activities, and full board by award-winning Gustu Restaurant. www.kachilodge.com

GREEK CHIC

Lovers of 5-star luxury who may have experienced Nikki Beach resorts in Miami Beach, Saint Barth, Saint Tropez, Dubai, Ibiza, and other destinations will be happy to hear the brand has debuted its second location in Greece. Nikki Beach Resort & Spa Santorini, located on Greece’s famed volcanic island, offers 62 luxe rooms and suites, stylish beach club, rooftop bar with creative cocktails, and international restaurants including Escape,

where Greek cuisine and Peruvian-style recipes fuse in an al fresco setting. The beachfront resort features spectacular views over the Aegean Sea, and offers easy access to ancient Thera, Oia, Fira, and the airport. There are nine room options with either a sea or pool and garden view, with top-line amenities and décor inspired by nature. Guests can elevate their experience with a suite featuring a private Jacuzzi or pool. Rates from \$672. santorini.nikkibeach.com/

EVERYWHERE

CUSTOMIZED TRAVEL PILLOW

Leery of hotel pillows when you’re traveling? With the Headleveler Travel Pillow you can take a piece of home on the road. Measuring 19 inches by 14 inches, and available in seven thicknesses, these hypoallergenic and machine washable portable pillows are crafted for each individual consumer based on body sizes and sleep positions. Simply visit the website and answer a brief series of questions about your sleep patterns, and the company will suggest the best customized pillow for you. Additional options include four stylish pillowcases and a travel tote that folds into a compact size when not in use. \$90. headleveler.com/product-category/travel-pillow-headleveler/



AMAZING ESCAPES

NECEE REGIS