

Catch some southern sun in four days



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Travel

Thomson News Service

Decisions, decisions: Visit Florida? The Bahamas? Take a cruise?

Or - do all three and more, possibly within a four-day span?

That's one possibility for Canadian vacationers this winter. In a minor miracle of miniaturization, Toronto-based Thomson Vacations has designed a Thursday-to-Sunday holiday package that offers an overnight visit to ritzy Palm Beach, Fla., followed by a sea voyage to and from Nassau, with a full day in the colorful Bahamian capital.

Including return flight from Toronto on Odyssey International, the three-night package is priced from \$479 to \$649 per person in a double cabin aboard Crown del Mar. Exact price depends upon the choice of cabin and dates.

The concept could serve as an initiation to winter holidaying for first-timers, or as a brief but varied break from winter weather for anyone suffering from cabin fever.

The same tour organizer is offer-

ing similar features on holiday packages of more conventional duration - a Sunday-to-Friday stay in Palm Beach combined with the Friday-to-Sunday Nassau cruise, and a Sunday-to-Friday cruise from Palm Beach to Key West (Fla.), Cancun and Cozumel (Mexico) followed by a Friday-to-Sunday sojourn at Palm Beach.

Package prices (starting at \$719) include the use of a rental car for the full seven days, so that passengers can make their own way between airport, hotel and pier. Senior citizens receive a flat \$25 discount on all of these packages.

CROWN DEL MAR

The 9,725-ton Crown del Mar, registered in Panama, entered cruise service earlier this year following a bow-to-stern conversion and rebuilding. She has 224 cabins (of which 138 are outer) accommodating a maximum of 486 passengers. All cabins have such amenities as bathroom, telephone, hairdryer and remote-controlled TV.

The dress code is much more relaxed than on some larger ships - no black ties at dinner, nor many ties of any other description. Breakfast and lunch are served at open sittings in the dining room, as well as beside the large, open-air swimming pool. Late-evening focal point in entertainment is a two-storey nightclub, with featured singers, dancers and orchestra.

As is customary on cruise ships, the fare covers everything except liquid refreshments, tips, gambling losses (if you take a fling) and,

of course, gift-shop purchases.

Passengers on Crown del Mar are a fairly even balance of Canadians and Americans. Thomson Vacations has exclusive rights for Canada to sell the two-night and five-night cruises, which seem to be especially popular with Americans living within driving distance of her berth at Palm Beach.

A JEWEL

Palm Beach itself is one of the most fashionable oceanside resorts on the Atlantic coast.

It reached that status in 1926, with the opening of three major hotels that are still highly regarded - The Breakers, a massive resort directly on the ocean, and the pastel-yellow, palm-shaded Brazilian Court, just off glitzy Worth Ave. (both in the city of Palm Beach); and the Boca Raton Resort and Club, on the coastline of Palm Beach County.

Palm Beach's renown as "the jewel of the American Riviera" (to quote The New York Times) rests partly on its being home to such zillionaires as Donald Trump and Estee Lauder, and partly on its gem-like array of museums and art galleries.

Whitehall, the opulent home of Henry Morrison Flagler between 1902 and 1913 and now a museum, gives some 100,000 visitors per year an intimate glimpse of the life of the super-wealthy of that era, and of the priceless collections that Flagler assembled.

For a taste of every-day, present-day life, visitors could watch (and wager on) Jai Alai

matches and greyhound racing (Palm Beach Kennel Club), go out into the Atlantic for drift-fishing (\$16 U.S. for a four-hour trip), or attend a play at the theatre named for native son Burt Reynolds.

A TASTE OF CRUISING

Sailing from Palm Beach at 5 p.m. on Fridays, passengers on Crown del Mar reach Nassau before 8 a.m. on Saturday, to spend the day in port in the capital city of the Bahamas - a group of more than 700 islands (of which only about 20 are inhabited) in an archipelago covering 100,000 square miles in the Atlantic Ocean (not, as often assumed, the Caribbean).

In Nassau, cruise ships tie up at piers that are two minutes' walk from Bay St. The city's main thoroughfare, it has several stores offering such luxury items as gems, jewelry, fine woollens and perfume at what are said to be bargain prices, free of duty and of sales tax.

Strollers on Bay St. are inevitably drawn into the jam-packed straw market, where they are expected to bargain over the prices of straw bags, hats, dolls, etc. (often mass-assembled in such countries as Korea and Taiwan).

A more rewarding experience might be to walk uphill on George St. to Parliament House where, every second Saturday at 10 a.m., the Royal Bahamian Defence Forces stage a colorful changing-of-the-guard ceremony, to the accompaniment of the Royal Bahamian Police Band playing (in march tempo) such calypso standards as Yellow Bird and Jamaica

Farewell.

Back at the cruise-ship pier, launches and taxis are waiting to take visitors (for \$2 per person) on the short journey to Paradise Island. One of the major attractions there is Merv Griffin's Paradise Island Resort and Casino, with what seems like acres of gambling tables and machines, as well as lavish Las Vegas-type shows.

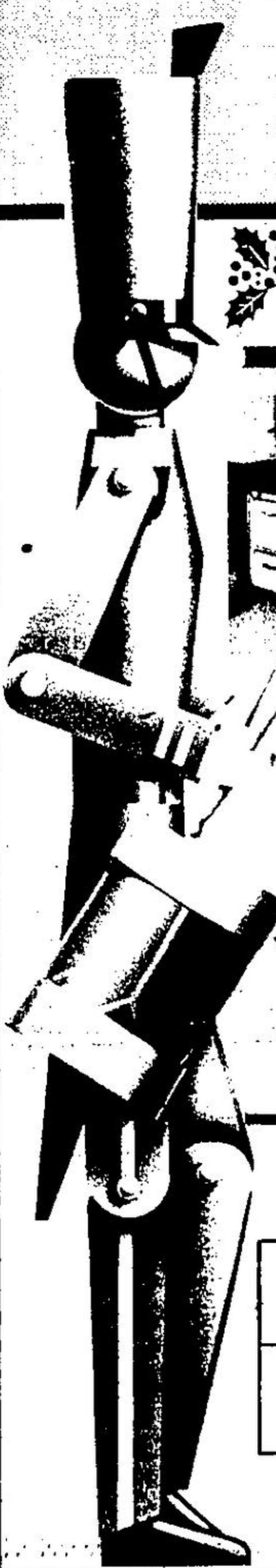
SAILING HOME

Unfortunately for Crown del Mar passengers, Saturday-night showgirl spectacles are out - their ship sails at 6 p.m. for the return cruise to Palm Beach. On Sunday, early birds can watch as the ship glides past ocean-front resorts and mansions then noses gently into her berth before 8 a.m.

Despite the requirement of clearing U.S. Immigration and Customs on board ship, passengers are all ashore and on their way shortly after 9 a.m. (Proof of citizenship - preferably a passport - must be shown to both Bahamian and U.S. authorities.)

Buses take Canadian passengers to the new Palm Beach International Airport terminal for a noon-hour departure to Canada on Odyssey International, which only last month took delivery of its new Boeing 737-300. Cabin-service standards are high, especially for a carrier that was formed as recently as 1988.

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