

You can find an iceberg in Florida

By BOB POMERANTZ
MIAMI, Fla. — About the last thing you'd expect to find here is an iceberg. But lo and behold, that she sits.

A seven-foot frozen slab, in the shape of a camel's hump. Go ahead: touch it, test its authenticity. Better still, try figuring out what business an oversized Popsicle has living in sun-baked Miami.

Give up? Well, the iceberg — Florida's only — and some 100 other curiosities are the business of Planet Ocean, a remarkable marine science museum, dedicated to exploring the mysteries of the world's oceans. It's truly worth forgoing an afternoon of tanning to experience the site's seemingly endless displays, films and multimedia presentations.

On entering the sprawling, \$6 million facility (which opened in Dec., 1975) visitors are

encouraged to view The Unlikely Planet, a sort of oceanographic orientation film. It illustrates, among other things, why Planet Ocean is a fitting title for our world, three-quarters of which is covered by water. Shown in a wrap-around multi-screened theatre, the movie is only one of many you'll see, as you make your way through the museum's various theme areas.

Why the ocean is blue, why does your hand melt ice, does electricity travel through water — these are just a sampling of the questions put forward and explained, as you listen, feel and push-button your way along the mostly electronic exhibits and learning panels.

Pick up a telephone and Herbert Von Duck — of the Evaporation Institute — will elucidate on the action of the dipping duck, spin a Zoetrope and see how the Gulf Stream

moves into the Gulf of Mexico, play question and answer with a giant globe, and set a pile of ping-pong balls in motion to learn about condensation and evaporation.

Colorful sea monsters beckon you over to the Ships up through the Ages display. TV screens offer adventurers diving for lost Caribbean treasure, and a Properties of Living Things panel notes — to

your chagrin — that lobsters, those delicious, overpriced creatures are in fact, 79 per cent water. If you've ever wondered what it's like to be hit by a hurricane, step right this way into the world's first indoor hurricane. Emergency weather warnings flash on while slides and radarscopes signal the hurricane's approach to Miami. Then enter a tunnel with reinforced plate glass windows and gaze out onto a horrific scene of palm trees being uprooted, window shutters flapping wildly — chaos being unleashed. Rain pelts the windows, winds sweep the chamber, the floor vibrates — it's quite a relief to step out of the havoc and into the "safety" of a theatre, where you learn how winds are set in motion and what man is doing to control the elements.

Having survived Hurricane Alma, how about a journey "through the eye of a microscope" (done nicely with the aid of fish-eye lenses) where a moving walk-way carries you into a weird world of giant plankton and other microscopic meannies.

Or encounter a man-made rainstorm as you move past a three-part exhibit extraordinaire: ponds come alive with eerie underwater activity, mists engulf you, and ultimately, clouds release rain upon mock-up mountains and rivers. Films accompany the live action, guiding you through the wonders of "nature."

Working with — and against — the elements, over the years man has been able to come up with



a few wonders of his own. Like the submarine. Climb inside one that set a deep-sea diving record in 1968.

Then look at prototypes of under- and over-sea vessels that will be used in future decades to explore new aquatic horizons.

Another marvel is the April Fool boat, the smallest ship on record to successfully complete a Trans-Atlantic voyage. This six-foot mini-craft logged 4,600 nautical miles before sailing into Casablanca, Morocco.

If you feel like getting in on the nautical action yourself, try docking a mini-hovercraft over a

tiny offshore oil field. Or practise sending out Morse code from a two-way communications booth.

Not all of man's attempts at conquering the elements, however, have proven fruitful. Leonardo Da Vinci, for instance, who talks to you at the underwater diving showcase, is the first to admit that his scuba gear designs were a flop, especially by today's standards.

Still where Leonardo fell short (he did well in other areas) the International Oceanographic Foundation, who operate the museum, have succeeded in making the mysteries of the deep come alive for the visitor.

Planet Ocean, a non-profit attraction, located at 3979 Rickenbacker Causeway, Miami, in the Key Biscayne area, is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6. Admission is \$3.50 for adults, \$1.75 for children under 12 — free to kids six and under. Phone 305-361-9455.



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TRAVELCHAT

By Anne Wanstall
Travel Editor

Travel agents report that only a few holidaymakers suggested cancelling Jamaica vacations after reports of political unrest on the island.

Knowing full well that if there was to be any inconvenience to travellers it would be minor (there were reports that buses were delayed on their route from airports to resorts), wholesalers refused to allow any more than the return of 50 per cent of the total cost of the cancelled vacations.

From everything this reporter has heard, the Jamaica storm in a teacup would cause about as much vacation disruption as a sharp shower in your rum punch.

Most of the trouble was in a district of Kingston — and who would cancel a shopping trip to downtown Toronto because of a mugging in Pickering?

The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Don Mills is offering ski club day trips on weekends to non-members. Fees are \$10. For information on events call Bev Ohashi at 751-8299 or Randy Sakauye at 278-4514.

You've heard of the travelling salesman? Now there's a travel salesman who will come to home or office to help plan your vacation.

Homestyle Travel Limited in Mississauga offers the service. There's no added cost to the vacationer.

VIA Rail has weekend ski packages to Holiday Inn Hidden Valley in Huntsville. The package includes round trip rail transportation and transfers, two nights accommodation and four meals, apres-ski dance, entertainment, and full use of tows and lifts by downhill skiers.

Cost is \$105 for downhill and \$90 for cross-country. Reservations are a must and can be made by calling 367-4300.

Here's the place for your escape

ISLA MUJERES — If you are seeking a casual resort on a tropical island to get away from it all, try this palm-covered isle. (The j is pronounced as an h.) This escapist's paradise offers beautiful, sandy beaches, extensive coral reefs, calm blue lagoons and sun.

Isla Mujeres, a tiny Caribbean island one mile wide and five miles long, is situated six miles off the coast of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. It is part of the duty-free state of Quintana Roo. About 4,000 people live and work on the island.

Three industries provide employment for the residents. Isla Mujeres is the largest commercial fishing centre in the state and one can always see fishing fleets anchored in the harbor or riding out to sea.

A large related industry is fish packing, which also employs many of the islanders. And tourism — that ever expanding industry — is growing by leaps and bounds and requiring more and more people to staff hotels, restaurants and related services.

A Mexican naval base is also situated on the protected leeward side of the island.

Three especially beautiful beaches offer everything that a beach person could desire.

El Garrafon beach, at the south end of Mujeres on the west side facing the mainland, has a narrow, white sand beach that gives way to a coral reef which is teeming with beautiful tropical fish.

The water is always crystal clear and some maintain no better place can be found in the world for skin diving.

Coco beach runs across the north end of Mujeres. This wide, sandy beach is lined with sheltering palms and its gentle slope and usual calm make it a perfect place for swimming, sunbathing or just building sand castles.

Pancholo beach is located on the Caribbean side of Mujeres. A rugged coast, a pounding surf and treacherous currents rule out swimming, but the sight of the sea in the sunlight and the sound of the surf as it slams into the shore creates a mood of romance — for lovers, poets, artists, or anyone who comes to see and hear.

Isla Mujeres was discovered in 1517 by Francisco de Cordoba, who named it Island of Women — perhaps because of many small statues of women he found on the island, or perhaps because of the small sanctuary of Ix-Chel, the Mayan goddess of fertility.

The ruins of this small Mayan building stand on a cliff at the southern tip of the island. It is believed that the structure was an observatory, because of its location and because of the tremendous interest of the Mayans in astronomy.

The building may also have been an adulatory for the Goddess of Fertility.

Because the Mayans were a practical people, it is believed that this multi-purpose structure was used as a lighthouse or warning signal to ships

approaching in the night, and it was probably a lookout against enemy ships planning an attack on the mainland.

Whatever it may have been used for, this one room edifice was most certainly dedicated to the gods as a temple and it is fun to speculate what may have taken place there 1000 years ago.

A small number of hotels offer varying degrees of comfort and price. Two excellent resort hotels at the north end of Mujeres go at general American rates. From there, there is a good range downward to budget priced accommodation.

Many hotels and restaurants offer plain food well prepared. Local seafood is outstanding. Visitors should take the opportunity to eat the fresh fruits of the sea when they are staying in a fishing port. Turtle is the island specialty.

Night life of the island is generally informal and frequently lasts until dawn. Night clubs and bars offer floor shows, live music and nightly dancing.

A flight to Cancun is the first leg of the journey to the island. The most pleasurable means of travelling to Isla Mujeres is by state-operated car ferry, which leaves regularly from the mainland port of Punta Sam, a few kilometers north of Cancun. The 45-minute trip by water is inexpensive and pleasant.

There is an airport in the centre of the island, which is serviced by Aero Mexico and Aerovias Caribe.

Fishing boats and equipment are available for hire at standard rates, as is scuba and skin-diving equipment.

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