

TRAVEL

O&E Monday, December 10, 1991

crossroads

Iris Jones

Kids take to flying trapeze with ease

Nine-year-old Julie is on the circus bar high above the ground, ready to try the trapeze. Young Adam climbs the ladder behind her, step by step up a straight vertical pole.

Circus Master Darwin Thompson checks Julie's safety belt, grasps her firmly around the waist, pulls the trapeze forward with a long hook and pushes it off again. They lean forward, Julie with her arms outstretched, ready to grasp the bar when it swings back.

Soon Julie is on the flying trapeze, hanging by her knees, swinging high, high above the ground. Reluctantly, she drops to the net and is helped to the ground by Chief of Circus Dennis Hudson.

Adam has reached the high bar now, and is ready to follow.

These are not kids who ran away to join the circus. They just ran downhill from the swimming pool at Club Med Eleuthera, to the Mini Club, an activity center for kids 4-12. Dad and Mom can swing through the air on the flying trapeze too, but at the moment it is not their turn.

If you haven't been to Club Med in recent years, you might not realize that the swinging singles of the '70s are now the parents of the '90s; Club Med grew up with them and now has 44 Mini Clubs and 14 Baby Clubs around the world.

Singles can still swing at Clubs like Martinique and Playa Blanca, and couples without kids still go to Club Meds worldwide, but there are now five Family Villages in North America and all five of them have circus workshops.

Family villages are in Ixtapa, Mexico; Punta Cana, Dominican Republic; St. Lucia, West Indies; Sandpiper, Fla.; and here in the center of the long, skinny island of Eleuthera, Bahamas. Copper Mountain, Colo., also offers a Family Village; it is a ski village and does not have a circus.

Family villages are based on a simple idea. Mom and Dad have fun without the kids. The kids have fun without the parents. The family can be together any time it wants to. Who says you can't have your cake and eat it too?

Two- and 3-year-olds hang their teeny, weeny bikinis on the clothes line at the Petit Club. Kids 4 to 6, and 7 through 11, come here to the Mini Club. They can swim, snorkel, water ski, boat, hike and go on picnics just like any other GM, as the Gentle Members of Club Med are called, but the main event of this playground is the circus.

Adam and Julie and all the other kids spend their time working toward Circus Eleuthera. A show of some kind is held nightly in the open air amphitheater; Circus Eleuthera is one of the highlights of the week.

If you are interested in a Family Club, call toll-free (800) CLUB-MED. Ask about the Kids Stay Free program that allows your children ages 2-5 to stay free April 25 to May 2, 1992, at St. Lucia and Punta Cana; ages 1-5 at Ixtapa, Mexico and ages 4 months through 5 years at Sandpiper, Fla., for those same dates.

Kids 2-5 stay free Jan. 4 through Feb. 8 and Feb. 22 through March 7 here at Eleuthera, Bahamas. You can take one kid free per paying adult.

Adults pay from \$1,500 to \$2,000 per person, depending on the dates, for a week at Eleuthera, St. Lucia, Punta Cana, Ixtapa. It's closer to \$1,000 a week at Sandpiper, but you provide your own air transportation. Ask about discounts when you call.

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

It's 7 a.m. The sun is up, lighting the Atlantic Ocean surf here on the Club Med side of Eleuthera and the calm Caribbean waters on the other side. This island is 110 miles long and a mile wide so the two oceans are only a mile apart.

There are 20 small settlements hidden in scrub trees along the road that travels the length of the island. Spanish Wells to the north, Rock Bay to the south, and the 17th century village of Governor's Harbor here in the center of the island near Club Med.

8 a.m. Singles and couples, many with children, follow the flowered paths of Club Med to the dining room for a buffet breakfast: fruit, cereal, breads, eggs, bacon, pancakes, French toast.

Food, including wine and beer at meals, and all activities, come with the price of your room at Club Med, so the beads we wear around our necks are for bar drinks and shop purchases, the only thing you can spend money on at Club Med.

9 a.m. The 2- and 3-year-olds in the Petit Club are led by their GOs (Gentle Organisations) to the beach or to one of the other activities on the schedule. The older kids in the Mini Club are learning to fly the trapeze or taking scuba lessons in the pool.

Parents say that the younger ones have to be dragged to the Mini Club on day one, but they don't care if they see their parents at all by day two.

10 a.m. Those who slept or swam through breakfast are being served a sitdown breakfast in the warm open air of La Terrace, beside the sea, out of sight of other activities. La Terrace is also open for dinner, but it only seats 30 — so reservations are hard to get.

By mid-morning the adults are around the pool, on the beach or across the island at the marina, busy with snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing, golf or just stretched out in the sun asleep or with a book.

A few swim in the surf, but there is no lifeguard and sometimes the surf is rough. Most of us enjoy the Atlantic breeze but swim either in the pool or in the calm green waters of the Caribbean a mile away at the Club Med Marina.

Noon. The water exercises and the pool games are over, the sun is high and we begin to gather at the terrace that joins the bar, dining room and pool and to drift in for lunch. They serve lunch high above the sea in the marina too, so the shuttles are busy.

Some children eat together at the early lunch set up for them, others join their parents here for lunch at the big round tables for eight.

2 p.m. The kids are in their groups taking scuba-diving lessons or otherwise enjoying the water. The adults are either asleep beside the pool or they are playing in or on the water too.

Anyone inclined to alightsee gets off the shuttle "at the light" and wanders the tiny settlement of Governor's Harbor, set around a scenic bay. You walk past the few shops, the pink stucco town hall and historic St. Patrick's Anglican Church and on to the original settlement buildings on Cupid's Cay.

Cupid's Cay is no restored village. The brightly colored houses of the Eleuthera Adventurers are still in use.

The Eleuthera Adventurers, the first Europeans to walk Bahamian shores after Columbus, shipwrecked on the north end of the island in 1648, spent the first winter in a cave and then settled here on this coral cay.

Eve Pinder, who grew up in Detroit, came to the Bahamas on vacation 25 years ago and is now a permanent resident here, says there was no free water on Cupid's Cay. "They had to walk back in the direction of what is now Club Med for their water."

4 p.m. People begin to gather on the terrace that connects the pool, dining hall and bar, to spend orange and yellow beads on pina colodas, kalki beer and fruit juices and to swap stories of the day. The few small shops, as well as the bank and tour office, open again, so

Club Med matures

Singles, couples, kids enjoy sun, surf, socializing



Parents and children can learn to scuba dive at a Club Med family village

Parents say that the younger ones have to be dragged to the Mini Club on day one, but they don't care if they see their parents at all by day two.



photo by IRIS SANDERSON JONES

It is also time to finish small chores.

6 p.m. People are already in line to make reservations for dinner at La Terrace, where dinner is served in a romantic outdoor setting. There are only 30 seats, so the reservations are filled by a few minutes after six.

7 p.m. We begin to drift up the stairs to the dining room for dinner, which is spread out buffet-style across the room. Hot foods, cold salads, cheese bar, dessert bar, wine and beer bar.

8 p.m. The evening entertainment begins. Tonight it is Circus Eleuthera. The kids who have practiced all week are the stars. I sat with the rest of the crowd in an open air theater and clapped with awe and delight as they did their stuff.

There was a part for everybody. The little kids were the lions, growling on upturned boxes while the comical lion tamer cracked his whip. Others performed on the trampoline. A few made it to the high wire. The star was a 12-year-old called Doreen who did the double trapeze with Darwin and brought the house down.

Adam and Julie were there, hanging by their knees from the flying trapeze, as proud as any stars in a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus.

For information, contact your travel agent or telephone toll-free (800) CLUB MED.

Med honeymooners

Craig and Bev Brass of Plymouth honeymooned at Club Med Eleuthera. The week's vacation was a surprise organized by Craig because "Bev wanted somewhere warm where we could relax on the beach. Bev loves kids, so the Family Village was OK," Craig said. "We weren't really prepared for the cafeteria-style buffet and the big tables at dinner, and the quality of the food was only moderate. We loved dining at La Terrace, but it is almost impossible to get in." Club Meds traditionally have lots of food and wine casually set out in buffet style. It's a place where people mix, so guests typically sit together at tables for eight. Club Med Eleuthera is one of the older villages, so the rooms are spartan. Newer Club Meds are more luxurious. Kids can stay with parents or you can pay a discounted rate for an adjoining room.

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