

LET'S GO! TRAVEL

Mental health week in Caribbean eases blahs

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

The winter of 1993-94 has left a lot of us traumatized for life. A week in the warm sun, warm beaches and warm waters of the Caribbean is now regarded more as a "mental health week" than a luxury.

"I'm not really a beach person myself," admitted Kaye Britton, owner of Kaye Britton Travel, Ltd. in Farmington Hills. "But a week in the Caribbean in February is a different matter. Seven days of sunshine and 80 degree temperatures help me get through the rest of our Michigan winter."

Britton, who seems to have been almost everywhere on earth, has made dozens of trips to the Caribbean, and her agency, which specializes in leisure travel, has sent thousands of vacationers on cruises to specific island destinations.

Take a look at a map of the Caribbean and you'll wonder how anybody decides which island is his or her particular paradise.

"There are so many islands," said Britton. "Many people become acquainted with the most popular destinations by taking a cruise, and some of these travelers like stopping at a different destination every day so that they never settle on just one favorite."

"Others, however, find their dream island and want to go back there and explore for their entire winter vacation. If a dream island is uninhabited, it's sometimes possible that a hotel will drop a couple off with a food hamper and pick them up later the same day."

One of the best known is the U.S. Virgin Islands. St. Thomas is both exotic and American and a wonderful introduction to the Caribbean. On one side of the island is a beautiful, peaceful bay, and the other side is a shoppers' paradise, where fine linens, gold jewelry and liquor are available at low prices.

Daytime temperatures January to March stay in the mid-80s and drop into the 70s at night. There are many sugar-white public beaches, golf, horse-back riding, scuba diving, windsurfing and many more activities that take advantage of the perfect climate.

As in most Caribbean resort areas, most hotels offer shows at night, often with reggae or other native-style entertainment.

Denise Schmalz, manager of Business & Pleasure Travel Service, in Livonia, said: "The person who wants to spend a day in the pristine surroundings of a lush natural landscape can just take a ferry from St. Thomas to St. John Island. Almost the whole island is a national park, and it's truly an island paradise, including a rain forest."

"St. John isn't all landscape, though. There's a lively night life and wonderful dining. The water is crystal clear, so it's a favorite place for snorkelers."

Schmalz is a beach person, so when she says that Grand Cayman is her favorite, it's a real tribute.

"It's clean and safe and very British," said Schmalz. And it has some of the most beautiful white-sand beaches anywhere.

Tips for a sunnier trip

- We go to the Caribbean because the warm sun and beach life make us feel better. Observing a few simple precautions will assure maximum enjoyment from the blue skies and white sand.
- Guard against the sun. The closer the equator, the more intense the sun's rays. Avoid the sun during peak hours, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Always use sunscreen with a sun protection factor of 15 or higher. Apply a thick coat an hour before going out and re-apply it regularly. Proper eye protection is essential. Wear sunglasses that filter out at least 65 percent of the visible light.
- There may be a good reason why that beautiful beach is deserted: Dangerous tides, underwater perils or harmful algae blooms. When in doubt, ask at the hotel.
- Drink the water prudently. You should drink large amounts of water to avoid dehydration. Generally, tap water is safe, but bottled water is much safer. Be careful of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially those sold in public markets.
- Insect bites aren't necessarily dangerous, but they can be awfully uncomfortable. The repellent containing not more than 30 percent DEET, and don't forget to cover your ankles.
- Before you go, call the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at (404)332-4559 for a health and safety update on your destination. For island-specific information, call the Bureau of Consular Affairs (202)647-5225. These lines are very busy, so give yourself plenty of time to get through.



Cruising: Royal Cruise Line's all-suite, 212-passenger Queen Odyssey, debuts in January 1995 on warm-weather itineraries featuring sideways in the Caribbean.

Wish you were here

OLD WOMAN BAY

On vacation: Fran Johnson of Farmington has a sense of humor. Her family snapped this photo of her while they were vacationing on Lake Superior. This photo was taken at Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada. "The weather was cold and rainy, but the boy was gorgeous!"

Great Escapes

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313)591-7273.

Warm get-aways

TRAVEL CHARTER

Weekly non-stop service from Detroit to Barbados. Saturdays starting Dec. 24 through April 22. Package price starts at \$599 per person, double occupancy. 1-800-221-9831

New Year's Eve

CITY OF SOUTHWILD TOURS IS OFFERING a New Year's trip to London, England. (810) 354-4561

Hotel specials

WILSON HOTEL

"Hitchhiker" Suite: Family weekend Dec. 10. Includes overnight accommodations, tickets to the "Hitchhiker" Ballet at the Fox Theatre, special activities at the Renaissance Center including face painting, cookie decorating and more. (313) 568-8200

HOTEL BARNHETTE

The Hotel Motel is offering a holiday shopping package Nov. 12-Dec. 24 for \$47 per person. It includes a "room service" breakfast. Don't compromise.

tary bars d'oeuvre and cocktails in the evening. There will wrap presents for guests while every shopper's own season or winter or whatever. (810)349-7800

Weekend Get-aways

MENDON COUNTRY INN

There's an Old Time Thanksgiving Week-end planned Nov. 24-29, which includes traditional dinner, four nights lodging and four breakfasts for \$359 per couple. A similar Country Christmas Weekend Dec. 10-12 is \$299 per couple. Mendon is located on M-60 south and east of Kalamazoo. (810)490-8132

DEERHURST RESORT

Muskegon Harvest Adventure through Nov. 20 at the resort in Hamlet, Ontario. Includes four course Harvest Dinner for two. Deerhurst staples offers horseback and trail rides. 1-800-461-4303

ONTARIO FARM VACATIONS

The Farm and Country Accommodations can locate charming country bed and breakfasts and farms for vacation stays. B and Bs are \$30-\$75 and farm stays start at \$150 per person per week. Including three squares. (519)845-9788, or P.O. Box AUT-110, Alton, Ontario, N0B 1A0

ROYAL YORK TICKETS

Toronto's Grand old Royal York Hotel, newly renovated, now offers an entertainment phone service for booking tickets for lodgers using the \$64 per night Royal Retreat Weekend. (800)663-7229.

Skiing

KILLINGTON, VERMONT

Killington's long-standing tradition of offering skiing as early as possible held true Monday, Oct. 3 when the central Vermont resort became the first eastern ski resort to open. (802) 422-3333

Cruise

"BEAUTY AND THE BEST"

America's foremost make-up artist Jeffrey Bruce will be hosting the first "Beauty and the Best" cruise to Bali and Australia on Jan. 7. Sponsored in conjunction with American Express Travel Service and Orient Cruise Lines, this is a 19 day cruise aboard the 600-passenger luxury liner Marco Polo with a four night hotel stay in Bali and three night stay in Sydney included. (810) 642-3350

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GRAND OPENING EVENTS:

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