

Israeli tourism, Florida promotions and sunscreen safety

Travel Spotlight

MIKE COHEN



Hats off to the Israeli Government Tourism Office of Canada (www.goisrael.ca), which held a reception in Montreal recently as part of a promotional program with local travel agents and media. Based in Toronto, the Tourism Office always puts on a terrific presentation.

Ami Allon, the recently appointed head of Israeli Tourism in Canada, is most charming. He and his colleagues from national air carrier El Al Airlines and the country's biggest hotel chain Isrotel (www.isrotel.com) were so convincing I began pondering a trip to the Jewish State. I have been there seven times, but my last trip was almost 20 years ago. El Al (www.elal.co.il) now flies to Eilat (this translates into absolute paradise folks) out of Toronto three times a week. Westjet has an agreement with El Al, so they will take passengers to Toronto's Pearson International Airport from Montreal to make the connection. From Eilat, a lot of people go on to visit historic Petra in nearby Jordan.

The birth of the Isrotel hotel chain came via David Lewis, a Jewish businessman living in London. He fell in love in the early 1980s with the natural beauty of the city of Eilat and recognized the great potential for tourism in the area. The desert, the sea, the coral, the sun that shines all year long, the proximity to the tour-

ist centers of the Sinai Peninsula and Petra together with the relative proximity to Europe, all formed the basis of his vision to transform Eilat to a center of tourism and recreation. In 1984 Lewis succeeded in seeing his dream realized with the launch of the Isrotel King Solomon Hotel in Eilat, which re-defined the term "vacation in Eilat." I have stayed there and it defines paradise.

VISIT FLORIDA: In 1513, Ponce de León made his first visit to Florida. For 500 years since, visitors from around the world have been making history of their own! The organization VISIT FLORIDA® and partners recently held a networking luncheon in Montreal, highlighting many major Florida destinations. I enjoyed the opportunity to chat with representatives from such destinations as Greater Miami, Greater Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Kissimmee, the Space Coast the Florida Keys and Key West, Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches. These kind of events are generally organized every second year for local travel writ-



Ami Allon is the head of Israeli Tourism in Canada

ers. Good contacts are made and stories planted for us to bring you the readers. You can go to www.visitflorida.com.

Mike Cohen's email address is info@mikecohen.ca. Log on his travel advice column at www.sandboxworld.com/travel and follow him on Twitter @mikecohensl.

Gerda Rosner Remembered

She was 91 years of age, but when I heard the news that extraordinary travel guru Gerda Rosner had passed away in late June I was still taken aback. You see Gerda was hardly your typical senior. Until her final days she told all who would listen that she had no intention of retiring. Gerda was the subject of a previous column in The Montrealer, one that was greeted with an enthusiastic reaction from readers.

Gerda had been a worldwide health spa coordinator since 1965. She helped launch Weight Watchers in Montreal and opened her own company called the Happy Losers, which helped people lose pounds and feel good about themselves. The author of six cookbooks, she continued to organize winter trips to Florida and fall packages to Arizona and Massachusetts. Last winter she posted on her Facebook page: "Having a great time in Florida. I am sold out at Imperial Club and have a big waiting list. Hopefully people will book early next year so they won't be disappointed again. I hate to refuse anybody to have a good winter. Going to celebrate my husband David's 96th birthday. Hurrah!"



Cutline to fill space?

We have just gotten word from Gerda's daughter Lee White that the trips to Florida and elsewhere will continue under her guidance. Just send an email to lee@whiteinc.ca or call: 514-488-5111.

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