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Marta Barnes Illustration



TINA AND BRAM, SIMBA AND FRIENDS, JOYFULLY CELEBRATING OUR SUCCESS Staff biographies page 10, Barnes' story page 4.



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MYRTLE BEACH SAFARI



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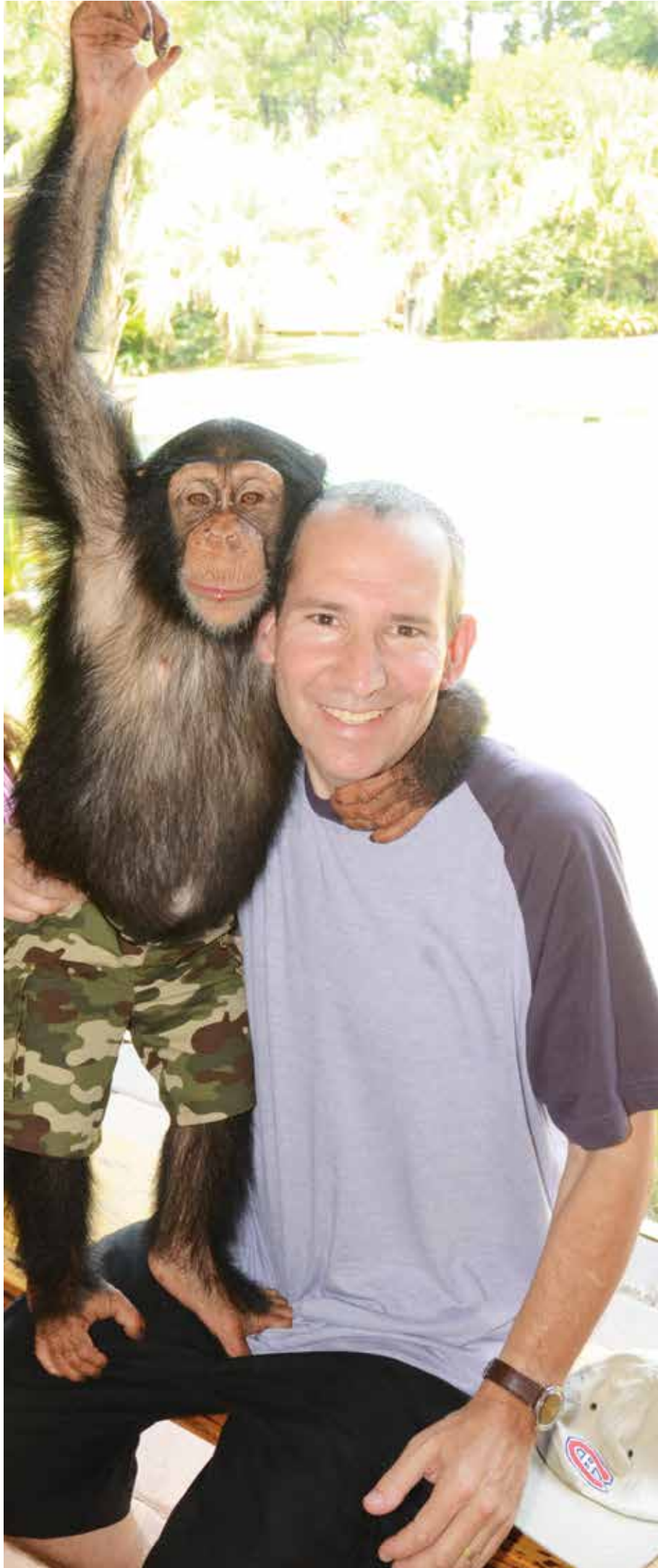
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MYRTLE BEACH SAFARI EXPERIENCE BRINGS YOU CLOSE TO ENDANGERED SPECIES

STORY BY MIKE COHEN  PRECIOUS PETS EXCLUSIVE



MYRTLE BEACH - When I began planning a family vacation to Myrtle Beach (www.visitMyrtleBeach.com), dubbed "the Jewel of South Carolina," I had visions of sandy beaches, exciting entertainment, family attractions and Southern hospitality. This, after all, is the reason why the area welcomes more than 16 million visitors per year. Getting up close and personal with tigers, wolves, chimpanzees and other endangered species was not something I realized was an option here.... until, that is, I heard about a unique safari experience.

As an animal lover, the moment I learned more about T.I.G.E.R.S. (The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species) I knew I wanted this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of our itinerary. We reserved our spots immediately and this was indeed a major highlight of our trip.

The man behind this operation is Dr. Bhagavan Antl, who started out training animals for movies and TV. They offer a guided safari-like experience through a 50-acre preserve, where many of the animals crawl right onto your lap. A percentage of the revenue from the T.I.G.E.R.S. experience goes to the Rare Species Fund, which provides funding for on-the-ground international conservation programs. Where is this located, exactly? Unfortunately, I cannot put that information in print. Those who sign up are given a rendezvous point, outlining where to show up. You will just have to experience it, to learn more about this part of the journey. In order to maximize the peace for the animals and the privacy for guests, this preserve cannot be found on-line, on sites like MapQuest. Any address you may find is the one to Preservation Station in Barefoot Landing - just over 24 km. (15 miles) south of the actual location.

Tours run three-to-five days a week, from mid-March to early October, and cost approximately \$300 per person. This is a fully-interactive activity. You will get to meet, pet and hold a large variety of the animals. After filling out the necessary forms and getting a pep talk from long-time animal ambassador/trainer Rob Johnson, our group was introduced to a "liger"- a hybrid weighing almost 408.25 kg. (900 lbs.) that mixes a male lion and

a female tiger. We first watched it march around through a glass window and then got to look at it from just 12 feet away, before they snapped our photo with the big cat in the background. Our group was then told to first sit as tightly as possible in a horseshoe configuration of benches and then put our hands out. Soon after that, a binturong walked across our laps, allowing everyone to pet her. A binto-what, you ask? This is a medium-sized carnivore, also known as an Asian Bearcat. Their fur is thick, coarse and black in colour and they have long, bushy tails.

The animals on each tour vary, depending upon the day and the time of year, but you will always get to spend time with the tiger babies, hang out with the monkeys or apes and meet exotic animals you've probably never even heard of before.

All of the animal "performers" can be seen up-close-and-uncaged, in close contact with their trainers. The trusted relationships they have with their handlers can actually be felt by the audience. This makes them perfect for live shows or personal appearances. Because Dr. Antle and his trainers have hand-raised these animals, they are cooperative and safe, which minimizes valuable production time and money. People often think it is dangerous to get so close to wild animals like these, but the handlers at T.I.G.E.R.S. have been with these creatures since they were babies and have developed a special friendship based on love and respect. In fact, Dr. Antle and his partner Kheira have actually delivered many of the cubs in the enclosure with the mothers because of their special relationships. T.I.G.E.R.S. has a proven method of training these animals. Rules include: Never treating them as pets; Giving them lots of tender loving care and; According them thousands of hours of one-on-one handling. Handlers, Johnson included, even live with the animals 24-hours-a-day. As he also told me, many of the staff are literally married to their jobs. Antle's son and daughter grew up here and are part of the team.

The tour itself lasted about three hours. Early on, we sat in a covered enclosure and they brought us baby tigers, lions, lynx and wolves



to touch and hold. They were all so gentle. During a refreshment break in a treetop location, we observed some members of the cat family let loose and allowed to bound upwards of 45 miles-per-hour, attempting to catch a snack on a rope. Johnson also introduced us to a very intelligent eagle, which followed all of his commands.

During the Myrtle Beach Safari tour, guests will have a very special opportunity to watch the trainers swim with the tigers. This is not

something that they can allow the public to do, however, so bathing suits are not required on the tour.

For more information, log on to <http://www.myrtlebeachsafari.com> and

<http://www.tigerfriends.com/RSF.html>.

Mike Cohen is a Montreal writer, the Côte Saint-Luc city councillor responsible for Animal Protection and a member of the Precious Pets Editorial Board.

ETC. ON MYRTLE BEACH

Pertaining to dogs on the beach:

Most public beaches in the Myrtle Beach area are pet-friendly during early morning hours or during late evenings year-round. From May 1 through Labour Day, dogs are allowed on the beach only before 10 a.m. and after 5 p.m. Dogs and bicycles are allowed on the boardwalk only between 5 - 10 a.m., from May 1 through Labour Day. From the day after Labour Day until April 30 each year, dogs are allowed on the beach at any time of day. At all times when dogs are allowed on the beach, they must be on a leash that is at least seven feet (2.14 meters) in length or shorter and dog owners must pick up and properly dispose of their pet's poop.

Irving the Talking Dog: Check out ventriloquist Todd Oliver and his talking dog Irving (a Boston Terrier) at Myrtle Beach's fabulous Alabama Theatre (www.alabama-theatre.com) and its ONE The Show through the end of October. At intermission, and also after the show, the very calm Irving

poses for photos with members of the audience. Purchase your tickets by calling 1-800-342-2262 or online.

Where to Stay: The Island Vista (www.islandvista.com), was built in 2006 as a luxury resort with a wonderful fine-dining restaurant called The Cypress Room. With 149 oceanfront condos, from one to four bedrooms, this is THE place to stay.

Dining out: Thoroughbreds at Chophouse (<http://thoroughbredsrestaurant.com>), located at 9706 N. Kings Hwy, serves the finest beef and ultra-fresh seafood. All of the entrees fall under categories which match the theme of the restaurant: The Starting Gate, Clubhouse Turn, The Belmont Steaks, Seabiscuit, the Preakness and the Home Stretch, which offers a terrific dessert selection including The Triple Crown of chocolate and the Kentucky Derby pie. For the appreciation of true aficionados, paintings of horses adorn the walls.



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