

TRAVEL TALES

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE JEWISH TRAVELLER

By MIKE COHEN

ST. PETERSBURG'S TOP PLACE TO STAY: St. Petersburg is Florida's fourth largest city, with 61 square miles. The St. Pete, Tampa and Clearwater areas have a combined Jewish population of about 60,000. My family and I recently enjoyed a wonderful first-time stay in the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area (<http://www.visitstpeteclearwater.com>)

We were very fortunate to obtain accommodations at the Beach House Suites by Don CeSar (<https://www.doncesar.com>). The hotel debuted its total room renovation in February 2016, introducing 70 brand-new all-suite accommodations. The resort,

located directly on St. Pete Beach and just one-half mile from the iconic and posh Don CeSar Hotel, is perfect for extended stays, smaller groups and families. Each suite includes a separate living room with sofa bed, washers and dryers and a kitchenette with mini-refrigerator, dishwasher, Keurig coffeemaker, microwave, toaster and induction stove top. Spectacular views of the Gulf of Mexico, private balconies and stellar Loews-style service complement the new suites. We felt very much at home, especially when a tray of Chanukah cookies was delivered to our room.

When we first booked our Beach House we were delighted to learn that we had full access to the Don CeSar. You can get their by walking, via the shuttle or in your own vehicle. I was even provided with a neat book upon checking in about the hotel's history. Guided tours are provided each day. We quickly discovered that lounging by the pool at the Beach House Suites was a solid option. For one thing, the pool area was never overly crowded. The pool attendants set up our chairs and umbrellas each day. We swam in the nicely heated pool and took advantage of the warm and soothing Jacuzzi. You can play a game of ping pong, shuffleboard or check out the giant chessboard. There

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is a full bar where you can get some great smoothies and food items – the latter delivered within a half hour from the Don CeSar.

We took advantage though of the full resort privileges at the Don CeSar, aka the Pink Palace. There are two beachfront heated pools. The Don CeSar Hotel partners with the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management to pamper guests during their day on the beautiful St. Pete Beach. Take a walk from the pool deck and have some fun on the Gulf of Mexico, seeing the beautiful pink castle from a different view while cruising on wave runners or exploring on ocean kayaks. We got to spend one day lounging in private day-

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beds and chilling out on a chaise for a luxurious take on fun in the sun at the Loews. Lunch and drinks were available right at our chairs via the Beachcomber. We also took advantage of the Jet Ski rentals.

MARITANA GRILLE:
It turned out that one of the more outstanding restaurants in St. Pete was right at the Don CeSar. The Maritana Grille exudes fine dining. There is a reason why the Grille made it as a *USA Today* 10 Best acclaimed restaurant. It features food sourced from local farms, dairies, and fishermen and includes traditional contemporary favourites prepared with a creative twist. The menu is accented with an extensive wine list, the service is first-

class, and the stunning setting is graced by dazzling salt water aquariums. Ask about the private Chef's Table, where your entire dinner experience is specially created and presented by the talented culinary team - the perfect setting for special occasions or whenever the mood strikes. In this case you are seated right in the kitchen.

Open for dinner daily at 5:30 pm, reservations are strongly recommended. Readers can call 727-360-1882, and log on to the full menu on the hotel website.

Mike Cohen can be reached at info@mikecohen.ca. Follow his travels at www.sandboxworld.com/travel and on Twitter and Instagram @mikecohencsl.

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