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Florida Travel Tips & Deals

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Check this list often as new tips, events and deals around Florida come in:

Fort Lauderdale resort rebirth The Westin Beach Resort in Fort Lauderdale has announced the completion of the second phase of its multi-million-dollar rejuvenation. The resort has added a Heavenly Spa by Westin, 24-hour WestinWORKOUT gym, oceanfront Starbucks Coffee and 433 guestrooms and suites with Heavenly Bed and Heavenly Bath. Visit www.westin.com/fortlauderdalebeach.

Job loss protection Miami-based Costa North America is offering a new Job Loss Protection Program as part of Costa Carefree, a program that also features the cruise line's Guest Protection Plan. The new job loss protection, which must be purchased separately, provides coverage for cruise guests who involuntarily lose their job. Job Loss Protection Plan prices range from \$19 to \$69 depending on the cruise itinerary and may be purchased up to the final cruise payment. The plan allows for reimbursement of cruise fare (and air fare if purchased through Costa) should an individual be involuntarily terminated from their job and has worked for their employer for three years or longer. Costa's Guest Protection Plan, administered by BerkelyCare, covers trip cancellations/interruptions, travel delays, emergency medical expenses, evacuations, baggage delays and loss, and emergency worldwide assistance among a variety of other benefits. Visit www.costacruises.com.

"PINKTOBER" celebration The Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando rocks out for a cure this fall, when the worldwide PINKTOBER campaign is celebrated at Velvet Sessions, the hotel's monthly rock 'n' roll cocktail party and lobby concert. The Bangles, one of the most popular all-female bands in American history, will perform in the lobby on Thursday, Sept. 24 to kick off the month-long initiative that raises awareness and money for breast cancer research. From late September through October, select rooms at Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando will be outfitted with pink sheets, pink pillow cases and pink duvet covers. Each night the room is rented during the campaign (guests should request a "pink sheets room" at check-in), the hotel will donate 25 percent of room revenues to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Also, nearby Universal's CityWalk will feature special PINKTOBER merchandise including pins, key chains, t-shirts, etc. and proceeds will benefit the Breast Cancer Research Foundation and other local breast cancer related charities. Visit www.loewshotels.com.

For youngsters Kids Can Press has launched the latest of its CitizenKid series, a collection of books that inform children about the world and inspire them to be better global citizens. The new book, How

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Food and wine fest Taste of the Beach -- Wine, Dine, Donate, a four-day culinary and cultural celebration benefiting children's charities, returns to Northwest Florida's Gulf Coast Nov. 5-8. The festival is comprised of seven events ranging from wine tastings and film screenings to winemaker dinners and a charity auction. Ticket prices vary. For details, event information, and to purchase tickets online, visit www.tasteofthebeachfla.com

Captivated on Captiva The South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island is offering an escape with rates starting at \$224 per night for two available now through Sept. 30. The Totally Captivated offer, including accommodations in Harbourside guestrooms, Gulf cottages or beach villas, also provides a \$50 resort dining credit and the use of a private cabana. Two-night minimum stay is required. Rates are subject to change and based on availability. Visit www.southseas.com.

Full speed ahead at Miami port Never mind the slow economy, the Port of Miami is going full speed ahead as its passenger numbers continue to grow. The port's latest figures indicate that cruise passenger traffic for the first five months of 2009 was 1,923,388 passengers, an increase of 0.6 percent over the same period last year. The growth is due in part to the arrival of new, larger vessels and the variety of cruises offered by the port.

Flavors of Africa in Orlando Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge at Walt Disney World has opened a new restaurant, Sanaa in the resort's new Kidani Village expansion. Meaning "artwork" in Swahili, the 150-seat family-oriented restaurant has interior inspired by African art and views of the resort's Sunset Savannah through nine-foot windows. The cuisine is a melting pot of tastes from the islands of the Indian Ocean that are all part of Africa: Zanzibar, the Seychelles, Comoro Islands, Mauritius and Madagascar. The restaurant's kitchen has two custom tandoor ovens for such treats as the Indian bread naan. Specialties include tandoori chicken, lamb and shrimp, braised short ribs and slow-cooked curries. Call 407-WDW-DINE (939-3463).

Fitness programs in Vero Beach Gloria and Emilio Estefan's Costa D'Este Beach Resort in Vero Beach has announced fitness retreats by celebrity fitness trainers Steve and Bonnie Pfiester. The three new, health-inspired About Face Boot Camps are designed for guests who wish to lose weight and get in shape. Steve Pfiester, who co-starred on ABC's summer weight-loss hit show, Fat March, is a trainer for the Country Music Television soon-to-air new weight-loss reality show, Bridal Bootcamp. Bonnie Pfiester is a fitness columnist, fitness model and lifestyle coach. About Face Boot Camps are planned for Sept. 11-13, Oct. 16-18 and Nov. 13-15 with prices starting at \$499 per person, double (from \$599 single). The three-day wellness weekends include two nights' accommodations in a Modern Studio; low-calorie, gourmet breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus protein smoothies; seminars on exercise, metabolism and weight loss, and diet and weight loss; boot camp on the beach, butt camp lower body workout, extreme abs and core training, kickboxing and stretching and injury prevention; cooking class with Chef David Rodriguez of Costa d'Este Beach Resort and other features. Visit www.costadeste.com.

South Beach special The Anglers Boutique Resort in Miami Beach is featuring "Come For Dinner, Stay The Night." The program offers a three-course prix fixe dinner for two and bottle of wine, continental breakfast for two and studio suite accommodations for \$275 a night. The package is available for stays through Sept. 30 and it is based on double occupancy. Rate and restrictions apply. It is subject to availability and for new bookings only. The Anglers Boutique Resort is located at 660 Washington Avenue. Visit www.theanglersresort.com.

St. Augustine package The Renaissance Resort at World Village in St. Augustine is featuring the