



TRAVEL

edited by NIGEL THOMPSON

I'M ON A HOT DAY

Jacqui Thake rocks up on chic and lively Daytona Beach - and even gets to be Madonna



DISA-PIER
Watch the sun go down from Crabby Joe's

INTO THE GROOVE
Hard Rock Hotel

COASTING
Driving is allowed on the beach

DAY OF SPEED
You can ride in a NASCAR race!

Get there

- Norwegian flies Dreamliners from Gatwick to Orlando with one-way fares starting at £155. norwegian.com/uk 0330 828 0854
- Rooms at the Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach start at \$150 a night in summer, based on a week's stay. hardrockhotels.com/daytona-beach
- Tourist info: daytonabeach.com

The party invitation said come as a rock star. So I decided to go for someone close to my age – Madonna. Trouble was, I'd thrown out my conical bras years ago. But I dug deep into the wardrobe and pulled out a leather-look mini dress. And at the bash I accessorised with snakeskin, in the form of a huge LIVE python, briefly loaned by an 'Alice Cooper' guest. We were getting into the groove at the Hard Rock Hotel in Florida's Daytona Beach – a chic, noisy, lively hangout. Such is the theming that as well as rock-related pictures,

instruments and memorabilia adorning the walls, the kiddies' pool is guitar-shaped and even the pillow cases – on the exceptionally comfortable beds – are decorated with guitar motifs. I know it's not very rock 'n' roll, but it's worth getting up early to watch the sun rise over the ocean which plays its own wonderful soundtrack to the psychedelic new day. Then stroll along the sandy beach – there's 23 miles of it – watching for dolphins in the surf. And if you want to be as supple as they are, take a yoga session on the hotel terrace with marvellous Mindy. She taught us about chakras and oms and urged us how to "be kind – espe-

cially to our hips" which "swallow emotions". Who knew? Sadly, I'm so inflexible I even struggled with the child's pose. But I did know how to pose when it came to driving along the beach, one of the few places where the sand is packed so tightly this is allowed (for \$20 a day). I imagined Brit Sir Malcolm Campbell setting his speed record of 245mph here 88 years ago. But these days the limit is just 10mph, so to challenge Sir Malcolm, you have to whizz to nearby Daytona International Speedway, where you can ride shotgun in a NASCAR race car (daytonainternational.com, \$135). If a



slower pace is more your thing, enjoy an eco tour aboard a flat-bottom boat from New Smyrna Beach, cruising the Intercoastal Waterway (ponceinletwatersports.com, \$25).

Among the wildlife to look out for are more dolphins, stingrays, birds, manatees (when the water is warm) and sea turtles. Nearby is the Marine Science Center, where they care for injured sea turtles and birds – later releasing them back into the wild wherever possible.

Since its opening in 2004, the staff have treated more than 23,000 patients. You can see their work and learn about the area's artificial reef system.

I discovered a group of stingrays is called a fever and a gathering of jellyfish is a smack (marinesciencecenter.com, \$5 adults, \$2 children).

Another highlight of the area is the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse – the tallest in Florida. Get a good workout as you scale the 203 steps up 175ft to

the top (ponceinlet.org, \$6.95 adults, \$1.95 children). The magnificent views of “the world's most famous beach” and surrounding inland waterways are well worth the burn.

Equally as cool is a visit to the Museum of Arts & Sciences, which includes a fascinating collection of all things Coca-Cola (moas.org, \$12.95 adults, \$6.95 children).

Fizzing with excitement, we then moved on to downtown Daytona Beach to visit the Angell & Phelps Chocolate Factory, where I was like, sorry, a kid in a sweet shop.

Mind you, the chocolate-covered bacon wasn't quite to my taste – I preferred the chocolate-coated crisps. Here you can see how a wide range of exotic choc treats are created. (angelandphelps.com)

On the subject of appetite, among my breakfast favourites was Sessions

restaurant at the
Hard Rock Hotel
(which serves
made-to-order
y u m m i e s

including avocado toast with poached eggs) and Crabby Joe's, located at the end of Sunglow Pier, where you can watch surfers while you devour 'Sunrise favourites' including Fisherman's Special – fish, eggs, grits and toast (crabbyjoesdaytona.com).

For later in the day, I can recommend Rose Villa Southern Table (rosevilla restaurant.com) for its Signature Fried Chicken or an ocean-inspired menu at The Shores (shoresort.com).

Other visits to satisfy your cultural appetite include the Stetson Mansion, built for famed hat-maker John B Stetson in 1886 (stetsonmansion.com, \$25 adults, \$15 children).

The HUB on Canal – a combination

of art gallery and working studio – is also worth a look (thehuboncanal.org), as is the former home of millionaire John D Rockefeller, The Casements – now used as a community centre (thecasements.net).

There is, of course, much more to see and do in this interesting part of Florida, but our time was limited.

On our way back to the airport, we did manage to fit in breakfast at the Old Spanish Sugar Mill Restaurant – where tables are equipped with griddles for cooking your own pancakes (oldspanishsugarmill.com). And we killed some pre-flight time with a whirl around the Icon Orlando (a sort of London Eye, iconorlando.com, \$27.99).

That psyched us up for the journey home with Norwegian Air and I certainly returned feeling fully refreshed and – still in Madonna-mode – singing Holiday-tona Beach...



*Even the
kiddies'
pool is
guitar
shaped at
Hard Rock*

