

Postcards from Naples

by PAMELA SLEIGHTHOLM

Well, this is it - the venue for the BSA conference 2010, the Naples Grande Beach Resort. I just checked out the meeting rooms and restaurants, and everything looks very comfortable and accommodating. Plus there are 15 tennis courts and three pools, and even a spa with outdoor meditation lounges - so there should be plenty to do between sessions!



Courtesy Naples Grande Beach Resort

Just got back from a perfect day at the beach at Clam Pass County Park, where a boardwalk surrounded by mangrove trees leads to an amazing white sand beach. First, I rented some windsurfing equipment and got out on the water in the Gulf of Mexico, then I trekked to the top of the observation tower and got some great photos of the sun going down over the Gulf. At the end of it I was wiped out - maybe when we're here in May I'll just sunbathe after the sessions.



Checked out some amazing animals at the Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens - lions, kangaroos, Gila monsters and even panthers. The animals live surrounded by stunning botanical gardens filled with lychee nut trees, birds of paradise, Swiss cheese plants and monkey puzzle trees, to name a few. There was even a short cruise on a catamaran to see monkeys, lemurs and apes that live on islands dotting Lake Victoria.



There's no shortage of places to shop in this town! Today I hit up some of the galleries and high-end shops on Third Street and Fifth Avenue before I ventured into Tin City at The Old Marine Marketplace. There, I found some great nautical-themed handiworks and picked up a bottle of delicious local fruit wine. My favourite, though, was the Dockside Boardwalk, crammed with tiny waterfront shops where I did plenty of souvenir shopping.



This is the Florida of my wildest imagination - gliding over swamps in the Everglades on an airboat and searching for alligators! After the airboat tour, we went on a cruise to see manatees, dolphins and beautiful local birdlife, then sat down for lunch - starting with a plate of gator nuggets!



This place is a golfer's dream come true! Today I played at the Naples Grande Golf Club, designed by Rees Jones. It has a 30-acre lake on its signature hole with the green sitting 20 feet above the water. And I'm told there are great courses like this all over the county. A lot of them are private, but we still have plenty of options for our downtime during the conference. If we get the South Florida PGA GolfPass, we have access to dozens of private courses near Naples between May and October. Can't wait to get on the fairway again!



This morning I went out on a deep-sea fishing charter over the reefs and wrecks of the Gulf, and I reeled in my best catch yet: a 20-pound snapper. I was going to release it when my guide told me about a restaurant that would cook it up for me, and it turned out to be the best snapper I've ever eaten! When we're here for the conference we should do the same, or maybe book a backcountry trip and fish for tarpon or trout - they're trophy-sized here!

