

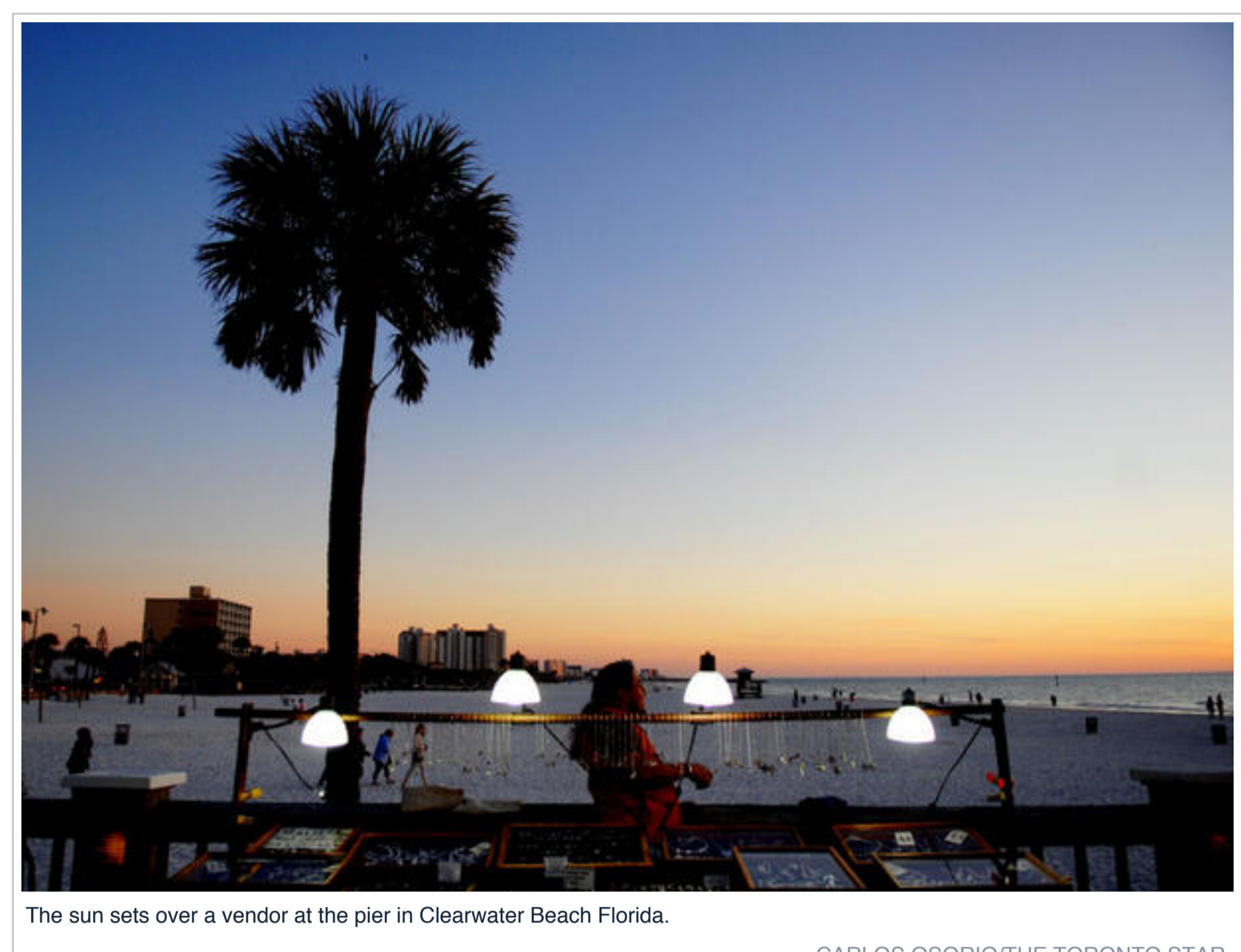
**Inside thestar.com**

- McGuinty warns cuts are coming
- Toronto Hydro needs rate increase
- Tuna fetches record \$736K
- Peter MacKay ties the knot
- Take a peek inside the Flatiron

## A new option for flights to Florida

**Article**

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The sun sets over a vendor at the pier in Clearwater Beach Florida. CARLOS OSORIO/THE TORONTO STAR

**Bert Archer**  
Special to the Star

Allegiant Airlines has started flying into St. Petersburg/Clearwater airport from Niagara Falls, New York for some absurdly low prices. They'll try to up-sell you hotels and rental cars before letting you buy their ticket, but the lowest price I found on their site this week – for a flight tomorrow – was \$47.99 one way. There are optional fees for this and that, but the tax and surcharges – the stuff you have to pay – is just over \$20 each way. You can find all this at [www.allegiantair.com](http://www.allegiantair.com).

### CARIBBEAN DESTINATIONS RANKED

A handy website called Price of Travel, started up last year by an avid American traveler named Roger Wade, has come out with a ranked price list of the Caribbean (islands and Mexico). There are 32 destinations listed from cheapest to most expensive. If you're not fussy about being on an island, it turns out Cancun in the cheapest place to go, according to Wade's own research, which consisted of a month of checking prices for 7 days at non-all-inclusives using Kayak's travel search engine. A cheap 3-star is \$36.50 a night (!), and the 7-night+flight index he uses (the prices are from New York) is \$955.50. The cheapest island spot is Negril, Jamaica, though No. 3, San Juan, Puerto Rico, with an index price of \$1,224.50, might be the better bet, with both beach and Old San Juan at your finger tips. Most expensive? St. Bart's, with an index price of \$7,338.75. You can check all 32 out at [www.priceoftravel.com](http://www.priceoftravel.com).

Before you use Kayak to research your own trip though, you may want to keep in mind that the company just pulled its advertising from TLC's reality show, All-American Muslim, after the Florida Family Association called for an advertising boycott of the show it says "profiles only Muslims that appear to be ordinary folks while excluding many Islamic believers whose agenda poses a clear and present danger to liberties and traditional values that the majority of Americans cherish."

### MORE THAN HAGGIS AND SCOTCH

There's one more reason to visit Edinburgh, now that the Edinburgh Zoo has secured a 10-year loan of two giant pandas from China. The pair will be a male and a female, and Edinburghers are hoping they might get the extra bonus of a baby panda at some point during the next decade. Tian Tian and Yang Guang arrived earlier this month, and have been put next to the penguin enclosure, and there are already reports of the zoo's previous black-and-white stars flipping their poo at panda-fans to get their attention.

### NEW YEAR'S IN VEGAS

Las Vegas could be the quintessential New Year's Eve destination. Just walking down the strip can feel like a celebration, and this year, trying to bolster flagging numbers, eight casinos have gotten together and are planning on activating more than 56,000 lighting effects (they're keeping the exact nature of them secret) as part of a nine-minute rock-themed show. If you want to get a good view, the launching pads for the effects will be the Tropicana Las Vegas, MGM Grand, Aria, Planet Hollywood, Caesar's Palace, Treasure Island, the Venetian and the Stratosphere.

### WORLDWIDE POUTINE PUSH

In the absence of any stronger contenders, it looks like poutine is now the official Canadian food as far as other countries are concerned. It's popping up all over the place, especially in winter, and I just saw it, for instance, offered at three separate booths at the Montreux Christmas market in Switzerland. There don't seem to be cheese curds in these foreign climes, though, so people will still have to fly to Montreal or Toronto for the real goods.

### WEST JET AND AIR JAPAN CLIMB INTO BED

Things are getting much better in Japan, which declared itself open for travel business as early as six months ago. Tourism revenues are, as you can imagine, down considerably since the triple disaster struck the northern part of the country in March, so if you'd care to lend a hand, and visit Tokyo, WestJet is making it pretty easy. They've signed what's called a code share deal with Japan Airlines, which means that you can book a ticket with WestJet from wherever you are in Canada to wherever Japan Airlines flies in Japan. You can check your bags all the way through, too. Bookings are through JAL – just hit the "international" tab on the English site and your options will come up.

### AND ANOTHER THING ...

An online survey of 3,756 business travellers has revealed that Houston is their least favourite city in America for attending a conference. Top pick? San Francisco... Banff has decided to close their scenic Highway 1A at night between March and June to cut down on the roadkill... Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen has decided to invest some of his multi-millions in a huge plane called the Stratolaunch to bring space tourism one step closer.... And if you're disabled or obese and have been charged extra by Air Canada, a judge has decided you now have the right to sue.

### TRAVEL APP OF THE WEEK

Apple has released its picks for the best travel apps of 2011. They include Airbnb, a way to find people with interesting accommodations to rent, and the Village Voice's Best Of..., an app that gives you info on 10,000 of the best things to do in 32 U.S. cities. Both are free, and only for Apple. You can see the rest of them at [www.itunes.com.itunesrewind](http://www.itunes.com.itunesrewind).

*Bert Archer writes weekly about travel news to use and amuse. You can reach him with tips, complaints and questions at [bertstravel@gmail.com](mailto:bertstravel@gmail.com), and follow him on Twitter @BertArcher.*

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**FACT:** **Wildfires burn over 4 million acres a year.**  
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