

A STATE OF EMERGENCY

In a pandemic, 'home for the holidays' feels out of tune

►MUTHER
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Julita Mir, an internist and infectious disease specialist at the nonprofit Community Care Cooperative. "Put it into perspective. Weigh the value against the potential consequences. Even with the best of intentions, traveling to see mom or grandma could be the worst thing you could do. Maybe the best thing you could do is to come up with an alternative celebration."

AAA estimated that more than 55 million Americans traveled 50 miles or more for Thanksgiving in 2019. In previous years, travel surveys, polls, and estimates focused on the number of Americans who would be traveling, and not the size or nature of the gatherings themselves. But because of the unprecedented nature of COVID-19, even the travel surveys are different. Gone are worries of when the airports and highways will be most crowded. Instead, it's how many will see their loved ones and what will be the size of those gatherings be. Despite Dr. Anthony Fauci's warning to Americans that "you may have to bite the bullet and sacrifice that social gathering," a poll last month by the Morning Consult found that 53 percent of respondents plan to forge ahead with their holiday celebrations. The remainder said they have already canceled or changed their gatherings because of the virus. Another study from Bridgestone tires found that 51 percent planned to gather with extended family.

Dire predictions from scientists are not stopping patients from peppering their doctors with questions such as "What's the safest mode of travel?" "Should I quarantine before I travel?" "Should I get tested before I leave?" "Should I get tested when I get home?" "Can I get infected again if I've already had the virus?"

"I'm an epidemiologist at an organization with 7,000 employees, and every day I get almost every question you can think of related to COVID," said Shira Doron, an infectious disease doctor at Tufts Medical Center. "When it comes to travel, and pretty much everything else, everyone's degree of tolerance for risk is different, and there's no one-size-fits-all answer. What's clear in all of this is that a lot of people plan to travel."

Also bear in mind that travel is just one portion of the holiday celebration risk. Indoor parties, where people drop their mask after a drink or two and begin to talk closely and loudly, have become a common breeding ground for the virus.

"It's probably just not a good idea to have a sizable indoor gathering for Thanksgiving or Christmas this year," said Abraar Karan, an internal medicine physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. "It's unfortunate, but that's just how it goes for this season. All you need is one person at that kind of party to be infectious and you'll have multiple people infected. Then you have people traveling home, and continuing to spread in other parts of the country."

While airports, buses, and trains will be far emptier — and quieter — than in years past, the number of people traveling has been ticking up over the past two months, which creates opportunities for the virus to find hosts in airports, rest stops, and other places where people congregate. Last week, the TSA screened more than 1 million passengers in a single day, the most since March 16. That number will inevitably grow through Thanksgiving and Christmas, but will fall far short of the record 115 million Americans who traveled for the holidays in 2019.

The dozen epidemiologists and doctors interviewed for this story had no easy answers for those wishing to travel to see loved ones for the holidays. There are no zero-risk scenarios, unless you plan to hermetically seal yourself in your home and celebrate via Zoom or with your cat. When it comes to

modes of travel, there's no perfect option. According to Diego Hijano, an infectious disease specialist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, traveling in a car with people you live with is perhaps one of the safest ways to reach your destination.

"One thing that's helpful when you travel by car is to pack your own food before you go to minimize stops," Hijano said. "If you do have to stop to get gas or use the restroom, make sure you stick to the rules of wearing your mask, social distancing, and washing your hands."

The exception to the rule of driving is if your destination requires overnight hotel stops. In that case, Hijano said flying — nonstop if possible — is a safer alternative than driving and stopping at one or more hotels.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, many have sworn off air travel, worried that virus particles would be recirculated in a confined space (fresh air comes into the cabin several times a minute and is circulated through hospital-grade HEPA filters) or that they would pick up COVID-19 by touching surfaces. A study earlier this month by United Airlines and the Department of Defense claimed that the risk of COVID-19 exposure on planes was "virtually nonexistent" when all passengers were masked. The study did not take into account passengers re-



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

'Even with the best of intentions, traveling to see mom or grandma could be the worst thing you could do.'

JULITA MIR, internist and infectious disease specialist

moving their masks to either eat or talk. It also did not take into account possible passenger exposure to the virus while getting to the airport or waiting to board a plane.

The study outcome doesn't have all experts rushing to book seats.

"I think flying is very dangerous," said William Haseltine, a scientist, author, and philanthropist who is perhaps best known for his work researching HIV and AIDS. He has already written two books on coronavirus, "A Family Guide to COVID" and "A COVID Back to School Guide." "I tell people to only fly if they have to. I know there are people who would tell you it's not so dangerous, but there are

real, documented cases of people catching COVID on flights."

Haseltine said another danger with flying is traversing the airport, particularly the TSA checkpoint. In July, it was revealed that more than 1,000 TSA agents had tested positive for COVID-19.

"They're touching bags all day, they don't change their gloves very often, and they reach in and touch your personal belongings," he said. "The answer is to carry as little as possible and wipe down all of your personal belongings with gloves on."

Despite his wary view of flying, Haseltine said he would choose to take a plane over taking a long car ride with multiple hotel stops along the way.

While flying, Haseltine said he would wear an N95 mask, goggles, and gloves. He's also a proponent of plastic face shields, worn with a mask, both on a flight or in places where you'll be in close proximity to others.

"There's good evidence that doctors and nurses who wear face shields in addition to masks reduced their chance of infection to close to zero," he said. "I don't think people understand exactly why, but there's some theories. One is that you don't touch your face as much. Another theory is that with a shield you're not going to get infected through your eyes. It's good for daily use, but very important to have when you travel."

More questions about holiday travel? The experts say there is no end. Are you immune if you've already had the virus? The short answer is probably not. Many have asked their doctors if they should get tested before visiting loved ones, thinking that if everyone is tested, then everyone is safe. Right?

Not true.

Karan said the test is a snapshot of the moment it's taken. Someone could be exposed to the virus, and if the exposure is a day or two before the test, they may still test negative. Haseltine recommends getting tested three days before departure, and then the day before departure.

Quarantining before departure may be helpful, though Doron said travelers could encounter the virus en route to their final destination. Hijano said you could arrive at a relative's house to quarantine before a holiday, but what are the chances you'll be able to stay in a room away from your brother or father for two weeks without hugging them? When you boil it all down, Fauci's advice to "sacrifice that social gathering" makes more and more sense. If trying to celebrate the holidays in the midst of COVID-19 sounds like a jumbled mess, it's because it is.

Perhaps the best advice for handling the holidays in 2020 comes from Lloyd Williamson, the head of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, where she is also a professor.

"We're all tired, but to get through the pandemic we have to persist," she said. "It's about delayed gratification, and as Americans, that's not a concept we like. We live in a society where we're used to things moving quickly and changing fast. But this is not something we can control in that way. We're just going to have to understand that. Like I said, delayed gratification saves lives."

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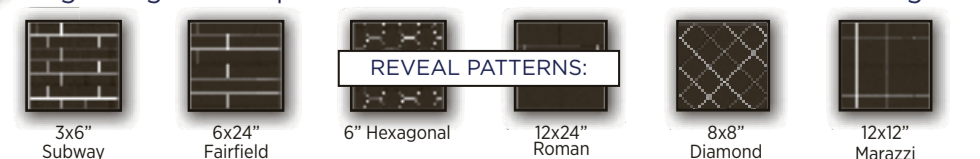
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Welcome back

ERIC RISBERG/AP

Travel destinations start strategizing how to get consumers to visit again

BY JON MARCUS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

With inspiring vistas and soft music, the new promotional video from the San Francisco Travel Association is an early sign of how destinations will try to get Americans to travel again.

There are lots of images of outdoor activities in sparsely populated cityscapes and people carefully wearing masks, while celebrities — Francis Ford Coppola, former San Francisco Giants outfielder Hunter Pence — appeal to visitors to come back.

Especially locals. Titled “Our Gate is Open,” the campaign is a recognition that when people venture out again, many will be going only as far as they can drive.

These are among the strategies the travel industry is starting to deploy as it begins the long slog to getting customers to return when the pandemic wanes.

They’re featuring images of visitors outside, with no crowds — even in cities — and offering flexible bookings and liberal cancellation policies with insurance included to cover not only cancellations but also emergency evacuations, medical expenses, and quarantine costs.

They’re giving deep discounts and pitching packages to celebrate missed anniversaries and honeymoons, and subscription deals for “workcations”

and other long stays under the watchful eyes of “guest guardians.”

They’re featuring remote locations with no crowds, touting high square-footage-to-guest ratios and zeroing in on families and friends who they expect will prefer to travel and stay together, using gift cards that never expire.

Even places likely to remain out of reach the longest are trying to stay connected with their customers through everything from e-mail updates to virtual tours, wine clubs, cooking destinations, and “wanderlists.”

“You will not rationally convince someone that it’s safe to go on vacation,” said Allen Adamson, managing partner of marketing strategy company Metaforce and author of the book *BrandSimple*, who has studied how the travel industry promotes itself. “You have to emotionally convince them.”

That’s what’s behind subtle images of wide open spaces and such things as free trips for travel agents to Universal Studios in Florida, which asked in return that they post photos of their visit on social media.

“The idea is that if people see that the travel agent thinks it’s safe, then they will think it’s safe,” said Jonathan de Araujo, owner of the travel agency the Vacationeer in Watertown, who took up the theme park on its offer.

Eighty percent of Americans say they are willing to pay more for privacy

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They’re doing everything from offering deep discounts to calling on celebrities to ‘emotionally convince’ visitors to return.

San Francisco has launched a campaign to woo visitors back called “Our Gates Are Open.”



ROBERT F. BUKATY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Doing the 'dacks — minus the hikes

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Headed west to the Adirondacks, we were getting into road-trippy mode, exclaiming at the vivid fall color and stopping for fat sandwiches at a cute, homespun-looking bakery. We treat ourselves to this trip every few years, to conquer new hiking territory amid the best display of crazy color we’ve ever witnessed. Sorry, northern New England, but the 'dacks are the ones to beat.

Then we noticed something peculiar —

cars lined up on State Road 73 near the trailheads, alongside signs that read: “Hiker Parking Limited,” in bright orange letters, flashing, “Seek Other Hikes.” Uh oh. This particular orange was *not* the fall color we expected.

The Adirondacks are no secret. Some 12.4 million visitors a year enter Adirondack Park, a 6-million-acre outdoor paradise. The big draw for many: the High Peaks, 46 of the state’s tallest mountains. These challenging hikes boast killer views, especially in gold-drenched autumn. But this year has been off the charts. “With

ADIRONDACKS, Page N14

For these roadside attractions, big things are happening

Muffler Men used to call attention to the businesses they towered over, but now they’re the draw

By Eliot Powers-Maniscalco
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Paul Bunyan stands outside of Valley Tree Service in Groveland. Well, he looks like Paul Bunyan, but his name tag says “Dave.” He watches over Salem Street, his bearded smile unchanging.

He’s 14 feet tall, more than twice as tall as Michael Jordan, and made of fiberglass. Among his brethren, he’s actually quite short; most are as tall as a giraffe.

Dave and his fellow fiberglass giants are known as Muffler Men. More than 250 Muffler Men remain across the United States and Canada, in front of restaurants or garages, and more turn up every year. Some, like Dave, still shine like it’s ‘69. Others fall into disrepair, losing arms, heads, and legs. They’ve gained a cult following as people realize that that huge, creepy wailer outside the ice cream shop in Normal, Ill., is one of a decades-old collection that still keeps

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Inside



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STATE OF MIND

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The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Deval Patrick on food, wine, the Berkshires, and that trip he's still hoping to take

Former Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick has launched a new podcast that centers around the notion of what it means to be an American in 2020 and beyond. "I'm still involved in politics on the side," said the two-term Democratic governor, who made a brief entrance into the 2020 presidential primary race, but withdrew in February. "But I'm excited about doing this podcast. It's about a conversation that keeps coming up in politics but we never really seem to quite have, about what is the common set of values that we share that can serve as both a foundation for policy choices and frankly as a bridge back to each other across so many of the divisions we are living with today." The podcast, "Being American," airs on Tuesdays and Fridays and features guests ranging from Ice Cube to James Taylor to Adair Ford Boroughs, a Democrat who is running against Republican US Representative Joe Wilson of South Carolina (who famously shouted out "you lie" at President Obama during a 2009 congressional hearing on health care) for Congress. "You'll see in this podcast people you know and people you ought to know — the famous and the not-yet famous," said Patrick, 64, a Chicago native who lives in Richmond, in the Berkshires, with his wife, Diane, and their black lab, Toby. When asked what, in addition to his political and professional experience (which includes being a partner at two Boston law firms and a senior executive at two Fortune 500 companies), he brings to his role as a podcast host, Patrick said he's a "good listener" and that people feel comfortable talking to him about what are oftentimes personal and/or sensitive topics. "That was one of the most beautiful things about being governor — especially the way we did, because we were out a lot and with people," he said. We caught up with Patrick, who has two adult daughters and two grandchildren, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

Well, this may sound corny, but I would say the Berkshires because it is the perfect combination of rural tranquility and sophistication. ... We love Tanglewood — we're 10 minutes from it; we love Jacob's Pillow, the dance festival, and Barrington Stage [Company] ... it's all so close. The Berkshires has terrific restaurants, too. There's a real farm-to-table scene here and, as a foodie, I love that.



ERIC HAYNES

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Whatever is local. I love sampling local food, especially the type of local food that once was called peasant food ... what families eat. And I love to try local wine — less so in the Berkshires. We actually have a winery at the end of the town line called Balderdash Cellars, which is pretty good.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't?

Patagonia. We were almost there. It was a trip that we planned and planned and planned for the day after I left office [in January 2015]. We flew to Buenos Aires with some of our best friends, then out to Mendoza, and after a couple of days, when we were on our way to Patagonia, we got word that Diane's father had passed away, so we came back and we haven't had a chance to make that trip yet.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling?

A good book. [He's reading Jill Lepore's "These Truths: A History of the United States" right now.]

Aisle or window?

It depends. If it's a short flight, I prefer the aisle. If it's a long flight, I prefer the window. The aisle is just easier if you have to go to the bathroom or what have you [and] you don't have to reach over someone if they ever start passing out things like drinks and food in the aisle again. But I like the window because it feels like you can kind of settle in. If it's a long trip, you can unpack, you can look out ... it doesn't feel quite as confined.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

We would go one weekend a month with my grandparents, with whom I grew up, back to their home, where

they grew up, in Louisville, Ky. This is before there were interstates and we always packed food in a shoebox and brought, I will say indelicately, a 'slop jar,' because it wasn't always comfortable to stop and there were not always bathrooms you could use. My great-grandfather was there and his second wife and various cousins. We went to the [Kentucky] Derby every year — always in the infield, because in those days, they didn't let Black people in the stands. It was mostly the trip, the going, that was fun. My sister and I would ride in the back of my grandfather's sedan — I'm sure it was in the days before seat belt requirements — and we'd roll all over the place and giggle and then argue ... we still laugh about that.

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

One — maybe two — Cuban cigars. For a long time you could only get them outside the United States. ... It just feels like a little indulgence.

Best travel tip?

Well, there's the practical things like stay hydrated [and] make sure you get enough sleep — not always easy, but I think it is important. Then when you're traveling, find a way to have a conversation with somebody who is of that place while you are there. I just think you get all kinds of insights about the place, about our own home — the United States — especially if you're traveling overseas. And even traveling here, you find out that people are so much more interesting than the cartoon version that gets peddled at people from other regions. It shouldn't surprise us, because every one of us knows we're more interesting than our cartoon version ... that there's more to us than that. But I find that it enriches your appreciation of the place.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Someone stole my American Airlines miles!

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Someone stole 50,000 miles from my American Airlines AAdvantage account. The points were redeemed for a flight.

I reported the theft to the Internet Crime Complaint Center and filed a police report, as requested by American Airlines. The airline provided the names of the two passengers who flew using my miles. I gave these names in my police report. But now, American says the suspects' names must show on the po-

lice report before it reinstates my miles.

This case is a cautionary tale about computer security.

lice report before it reinstates my miles.

The sheriff's department says the suspects' names must be redacted because there were no arrests. So I find myself caught in the middle with nowhere to go. Could you help me get my 50,000 miles back?

GAIL LOUIS,
Placerville, Calif.

A. I'm sorry someone stole your American Airlines miles. The airline is under no obligation to return the awards, if I'm reading its terms and conditions correctly. But a representative assured you in writing that you'd get the miles back, so the airline should do what it said. You kept a terrific paper trail. It shows that the American representative would not accept the police report you filed, because it redacted the names of the suspects. What a maddening bureaucratic problem.

I can't pass up the opportunity to say something about the value of participating in a loyalty program. According to American's terms, your miles

have "no cash value." How refreshingly honest! Many travelers are better off booking the best airline ticket for their money instead of playing the miles game. You may be among them. When you're caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22, you can sometimes request additional documentation from one of the parties. Maybe American would have accepted something in writing from the sheriff's department, verifying that it had recorded the names of the suspects but explaining why it couldn't list the names on its crime report. Bottom line: There might have been a way to negotiate a solution.

Finally, I think you could have appealed this to an American Airlines executive. I list the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the key managers on my consumer advocacy site www.elliott.org/company-contacts/american-airlines/.

Your case is a cautionary tale about computer security. Remember to change your passwords often and never share a password between accounts. Security breaches happen all the time. Passwords are compromised. And then you end up paying for a thief's vacation trip.

I contacted American on your behalf. It says it never received a separate form filed with the Internet Crime Complaint Center. Once you supplied American with that form, the airline returned your 50,000 miles.

If you need help with a coronavirus-related refund, please contact me. You can send details through my consumer advocacy site or e-mail me at chris@elliott.org.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

HERE

NEW MOBILE TOUR OF THE EMERALD NECKLACE

Enjoy Boston's fall colors and historic sites using the Emerald Necklace Conservancy's free mobile guide. Its new Emerald Necklace Foliage Tour takes you — either in person or from a cozy chair at home — on an adventure from the Fenway Victory Gardens in the Back Bay Fens to Schoolmaster Hill in Franklin Park, offering fascinating info along the way: Did you know the Emerald Necklace park system is home to more than 8,000 trees? Or that the Overlook Shelter Ruins in Franklin Park was the site of performances by Duke Ellington and the Billy Taylor Trio in the 1960s? The tour also takes you past historic ruins, along a bridge path, up Peters Hill with stunning views of the Boston skyline, and past rivers and ponds. The guide includes information, photos, and a map that helps you navigate to each notable site. Access the free guide through the browser on your mobile device or home computer (not available through app stores). www.emeraldnecklace.org

COMFORT FOOD IN QUINCY

Imagine pizza that's so crispy you can hear it being cut. Pizza that has a thin crust and a sprinkle of sea salt for a little kick. The Frattaroli family recently opened Boardwalk Pizza in Quincy's Marina Bay, offering boardwalk-style pizza that's designed to be enjoyed on the waterfront (meaning low- to no-flop crusts that result in minimum spillage). Chef Pino Maffeo creates handmade pizza seasoned with Italian



herbs from the Frattaroli garden, when available. Choose a cheese pizza (made with a secret Italian cheese blend that's highlighted by buffalo milk mozzarella); a North End special with sausage, peppers, and onions; a pie with local lobster, roasted garlic, and arugula; or a fresh clam pizza with garlic, chilis, and Romano cheese. Boardwalk offers oversize slices to go (each one-quarter of a 16-inch pizza) for \$3.50. Open daily. 617-315-4099, boardwalkpizzamb.com

THERE

SEE NIAGARA FALLS FROM AN ELECTRIC VESSEL

Tune in to the thunderous sound of Niagara Falls and the area's clean air when you visit this majestic landmark by electric ship. The Maid of the Mist, which runs boat tours to the iconic waterfall, has launched two new catamaran-style electric ships that produce zero carbon emissions and engine noise, meaning you can now listen to the seagulls and the sound of

3,160 tons of water flowing over the falls every second. The two ships, called the James V. Glynn and Nikola Tesla, are named after the company's chairman and CEO (Glynn) and an electrical energy pioneer (Tesla) who helped develop the Niagara region's hydroelectric industry. The ships will take passengers on a 30-minute narrated tour up to the base of the 200-foot waterfall, during which it also performs a new 360-degree turn (using bow thrusters) at Bridal Veil Falls. Tickets: \$13 ages 6-12, \$22.25 13 and older. www.maidofthemist.com



DETERMINE TRAIN CAPACITY BY APP

Use Amtrak's new mobile app to help you choose the least-crowded train before booking. The company's mobile app and website include a new feature that indicates how full a train is in real time, based on reservations. Look up a train and you'll see an icon and number indicating how full the train is by percentage. This will help you find trains with lower occupancy for the benefit of health and safety, especially as winter season approaches. Amtrak has limited the number of travelers on reserved trains to accommodate social distancing guidelines, and has incorporated contact-free travel, enabling you to book tickets, get train and track information, and board trains using the Amtrak mobile app. www.amtrak.com

EVERYWHERE

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erly, FogBlock should greatly minimize or eliminate fogging most of the time. It's worth the \$14.99. Keep the 1-ounce bottle handy and give your glasses a squirt once a day. www.getkeysmart.com/products/fogblock

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RMU's new Tailgate Locker 2.0 serves as the red carpet for your mountain bike adventures. The new truck pad blends utility, smart design, and bonus features. It's made with an 840-denier waterproof nylon that can handle the elements and a fleecy bottom that protects your truck's finish. Drape the pad over your tailgate and secure in place with four aluminum buckles. Then secure your bike to the pad using sturdy, wide Velcro straps. The well-thought-out Tailgate Locker 2.0 has two long, rectangular pockets on the inside, including one for stashing supplies — anything from spare clothes to a dog leash or portable shower — and for organizing bike tools in the four mesh sleeves, plus an insulated pocket for keeping a couple of post-ride beverages cool. Unzip a section on the back for access to your backup camera or tailgate handle. The truck pad comes in two sizes: The 54-by-18-inch one fits small to mid-size pickups, and the 61-by-20-inch pad works for larger trucks. Order at Indiegogo.com for \$159 through Nov. 28 or for \$239 thereafter. rmuoutdoors.com

KARI BODNARCHUK



PHOTOS BY DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

From its design elements to its history, Shelter Harbor Inn is full of surprises

By Diane Bair
and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

WESTERLY, R.I. — “A dentist walks into an inn” might sound like the beginning of a joke. Not in this case. Here, the Rhode Island dentist in question, Dennis Flanagan, bought the 23-room inn (how that happened is a long story) last October. With no experience in innkeeping, Flanagan enlisted his grown children to help. “Since we’re so small, it’s all hands on deck here,” says daughter Kellyn Rivero, who handles events and weddings. That means there’s complimentary candy in glass cases in the hallway, thanks to daughter and interior designer Blake Maroon, mother of three kids. Yep, there’s free candy in an inn owned by a dentist.

These days, the Shelter Harbor Inn has a lively, family-friendly vibe, as evidenced by the kids playing on a wooden swing while their parents finish lunch on the nearby patio. But that doesn’t mean vinyl tablecloths and kid-proof furnishings. That just wouldn’t do for a 220-year-old farmhouse-turned-inn that was once a hideaway

for opera singers en route to Boston from New York. To amp up the style, Maroon worked with Randolph Duke, an LA interior- and clothing designer who outfits the likes of actor Laura Linney and singer Mary J. Blige. Maroon added her own touches, and the result is a delightful mix of African art, contemporary fine-art photography by Rhode Islander Noelle Wolcin, and an eclectic mix of old and new furnishings, set amid the building’s 1800s architectural features — including a massive stone fireplace in the lobby. Guest rooms are located in the main inn, in the carriage house, and in a renovated barn on the three-acre property. Some guest rooms have decks, and some have gas fireplaces.

In a nod to the inn’s musical history, they’ve named guest rooms after composers, and host live music performances during dinner on occasional weekends. More events are forthcoming, including a Christmas cookie decorating (with an appearance by Santa) on Dec. 19. “I love events, and I love getting people out of the deep, dark hole of the pandemic,” Rivero says. These days, social events are limited to 50 people inside and 100 people out-



doors.

Speaking of which, COVID-19 has affected everyone in the hospitality business, and the Shelter Harbor Inn is no exception. Its Conservatory and dining room bars are closed, and 90

percent of its dining tables are situated outdoors, spaced at least 8 feet apart. No more than eight guests are permitted to sit at a single table, and of course the inn follows all the guidelines set by the Rhode Island Department of

The 220-year-old Shelter Harbor Inn was once a favorite stop of opera singers en route from New York to Boston. The inn’s blackened shrimp and grits (below) is a best seller.

Health. Menus are disposable.

All of this hasn’t stopped the inn from hosting small weddings (owner Dennis Flanagan is credentialed to officiate) and from attracting as many guests as it can handle since re-opening in late May (after closing during the winter because of the pandemic). Many of them are couples and families looking for a nearby escape from Boston and New York. This small, homey inn (with some adjoining rooms for families) ticks lots of boxes, with its open space (a large lawn and plantings, including an herb garden), the private Shelter Harbor beach (six minutes away), and local places to play, like Burlingame State Park, Ninigret Wildlife Refuge, and Misquamicut Beach. The inn offers complimentary use of bicycles, and there’s a small spa on site, offering massages and facials. The hot tub on the third floor deck probably won’t re-open, and that space will likely be reimagined — although the Flanagans don’t all agree on the fate of the hot tub.

What they do agree on: It’s been a wild ride so far — more work and more fun than they could’ve imagined. “My quality of life has gone up dramatically,” says Flanagan, who still works in the dental field while running the inn. He’s especially proud of the inn’s culinary side, helmed by executive chef Jason MacDonald. The inn serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, using local vendors as much as possible. Of course, it offers Narragansett Beer in the bar, and Westerly’s own Grey Sail brews. No johnnycakes on the menu, but it does make another Ocean State standard: stuffies. Served as a small plate, these cherrystone clams are stuffed with Andouille sausage, peppers, clam meat, and fresh herbs, finished with a lemon beurre blanc. Currently, you can get lobster salad and lobster rolls — the latter offered Rhode Island style (chilled meat) or Connecticut style (warm with butter). Flatbread pizza and seafood are among the top choices at lunchtime.

Surprisingly, though, the best seller on the dinner menu isn’t New England-influence at all. It’s blackened shrimp and grits, a gooey, spicy medley of creamy grits studded with succulent shrimp, pancetta, and cremini mushrooms (\$23). This dish is so good, “We have people come up from North Carolina, and they absolutely love our shrimp and grits,” Flanagan says.

And it sure pairs well with a ‘Gansett.

Shelter Harbor Inn, 10 Wagner Road, Westerly, R.I.; 401-322-8883. www.shelterharborinnri.com. Open year-round. Rooms from \$139 weekdays; from \$159 on weekends.

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Muffler Men are giants among roadside attractions

►MUFFLER MEN
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watch over the country. And they’ve become road-trip destinations in themselves.

International Fiberglass sent the very first Muffler Man from Venice, Calif., to Flagstaff, Ariz., in 1962. In an interview with the online guide “Roadside America,” International Fiberglass founder Steve Dashew recalled demand skyrocketing after the first Muffler Man was installed at a gas station in Las Vegas. “That was the start of the ‘invasion,’” said Dashew.

International Fiberglass stopped manufacturing the giants entirely around 1974. They lay dormant and unappreciated until the mid-’80s, when Doug Kirby and his college friends started the book series and website “Roadside America,” dedicated to the strangest roadside attractions in the country.

On their travels, the group saw the fiberglass giants, often holding mufflers in front of auto-body shops. So they started calling them Muffler Men. “Eventually, historians say ‘Hey! You guys are throwing off the trail here by giving it your own name!’” said Kirby. But the Muffler Man moniker stuck. Soon Kirby created an online map to track the locations of the statues using tips submitted by the site’s users. (The map can be found online at www.roadsideamerica.com/map/theme/86.)

For many current-day owners, the upkeep costs of a Muffler Man often outweigh the novelty. A recent restoration in Kentucky cost \$2,500. But there’s a growing group of fanatics who are willing to do anything to keep the Muffler Men around, and search them out. “There are some people who



ELIOT POWERS-MANISCALCO

love the Muffler Men so much that they just ... dream about them all the time,” said Kirby.

Perhaps the biggest fanatic, and the mastermind behind that \$2,500 restoration, is Joel Baker.

Dave, one of more than 250 fiberglass giants also known as Muffler Men who once could be found on the sides of America’s roadways, stands outside of Valley Tree Service in Groveland.

Baker’s Muffler Man story begins much like everyone else’s. As a child, he’d pass a giant headless brontosaurus statue in his hometown. A few years later he decided to do some research, and found Roadside America’s website. He found a Muffler Man just a few blocks away in Dade City, Fla. He’d caught the bug.

“It escalated very quickly from there,” said Baker. Two days later he made his first road trip specifically to see a Muffler Man. Baker’s work involved driving a television satellite truck all over the United States, and he soon planned his routes to integrate visits to Muffler Men into his work travels.

Since then, he’s visited more than 150 Muffler Men all across the country. He now uses his free time and money to take these road trips, rather than relying on the satellite truck. He documents his travels in a YouTube series called “American Giants,” where his enthusiasm shines through — in one episode, the owner of a Muffler Man gives him a T-shirt featuring his giant on the front. Baker is so excited about the shirt, he forgets to ask for extras for his road trip buddies.

As time has gone by, the giants have become harder to find. Some are well-known in their communities, like Chicken Boy in Los Angeles (whose owners replaced his head with that of a chicken to advertise their chicken restaurant) and the Gemini Giant in Wilmington, Ill., (dressed in a space-suit and holding a rocket to advertise a space-themed diner). Many others end up broken and chipped behind businesses that just don’t know what to do with them.

Dave in Groveland has siblings all

over New England, in Shirley and Hancock, in Cheshire and Norwich, Conn., and Rumford, Maine. The Muffler Men are still open for a road trip, even if some of the businesses over which they watch are closed.

Baker and the American Giants team have become Muffler Men restorers. After a photo was posted on Roadside America of a headless, armless, 14-foot Muffler Man in Morton’s Gap, Ky., in 2014, the team sprang into action. Baker started a Kickstarter campaign to restore it. He and his fellow enthusiasts dedicated two hours every day after working full-time jobs to learn how to work with fiberglass. They returned the statue to its owners with a new head, new arms, a new ax, and a new paint job. They’ve since restored Chief Bagnell in Lake Ozark, Miss., and a space cowboy named Buck Atom in Tulsa, Okla., among others. They’re doing their best to keep the giants around for as long as possible.

Baker says his obsession is not about how or when the giants were made. Each Muffler Man has a story, and the search for that story combines his loves of history, travel, and really big things, which he thinks are common interests. “I’m always blown away at how many people are making these giants part of their road trip,” said Baker.

For now, Dave continues to stand in Groveland, part of an army of Muffler Men across the continent. As the community of fanatics grows, hopefully so will the quality of care available to the ailing giants, and the drive to keep them looking and feeling their best.

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Travel destinations begin to unroll red carpet

► WELCOME

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and distancing, and nearly 60 percent that they're more likely than in the past to travel with close friends, according to a survey by the travel division of the public relations firm Ketchum, which found that cleanliness is also a deciding factor.

The people whose job it is to fill airplane seats, hotel rooms, restaurants, and package tours are paying unprecedented attention to findings like those.

"Travel marketers need to be much more nimble in understanding what's in their target audiences' minds right now," Adamson said.

That's why the guided vacation company Trafalgar is adding "well-being directors" to its trips and the Anantara hotels, resorts, and spas are hiring "guest guardians" to ensure that health protocols are being followed.

"People want to know that they can travel safely and that they can travel wisely, so we're communicating health and safety precautions," said Jessica Bradford, who handles public relations in the United States for the Bangkok-based luxury chain.

And while people once may have been drawn to destinations that were wildly popular, such as Amsterdam and Barcelona, now Anantara is expecting they'll prefer to stay at villas it operates deep in the Abu Dhabi desert or on its private islands in the Maldives and the Bahamas, where "you can easily socially distance from other guests."

Cities have a bigger challenge, densely populated as they are, and with recent histories as COVID-19 hotspots. That's one of the reasons San Francisco's new campaign is focusing on outside activities and reminding people of the rural and mountainous open spaces close by.

"Probably the thing we've tracked more than anything is how afraid people are to travel," said Howard Pickett, chief marketing officer at San Francisco Travel. "So our creative challenge was, how do we encourage them to come back?"

Viewers of the new "Still Atlanta" campaign could be forgiven if they come away thinking that the city is deserted except for the featured couples, who are shown exclusively outdoors and almost entirely alone.

Atlanta's convention and visitors' bureau walked a line between travelers concerned about their safety and others who bristle at restrictions, said



GENE PHILLIPS



JOHN RAOUX/AP/FILE



EXCLUSIVE RESORTS

chief marketing officer Andrew Wilson. "So we took the deliberate approach of striking that middle ground of showing few people, no crowd shots, almost all outside."

While the effort has already attracted some visitors, many still are cautious, he said, and the idea is to at least remind them that "we're still here, we haven't gone away."

Travel operators whose business hasn't yet resumed are striving to do the same thing.

"By definition, when you're out of sight, you're out of mind," Adamson said. "But if you can go on a virtual

Clockwise from top: The Beltline near Piedmont Park featuring the Midtown Atlanta Skyline, an infinity pool overlooking a forest at a rental villa in Costa Rica, visitors at Universal Studios in Orlando in June.

tour of Florence, it reminds you of what a great experience it is, and makes you consider traveling again."

Adios Adventure Travel is posting YouTube videos of its guides in Peru taking viewers on tours of historic

sites, and arranging for the guides to speak directly with "wishful travelers." Discover Puerto Rico's "It's Time to Plan" campaign is hosting virtual salsa and cocktail tutorials and online tours of Old San Juan. Experience Sicily has offered online pasta-making workshops and a virtual chocolate tasting.

"The key here is not to lose people's interest," said owner Allison Scola.

Tourissimo Travel, which also runs tours to Italy, has started an Italian wine club; proceeds go to its largely idled Italian staff and guides. "Our challenge right now is to stay engaged with our customers," said cofounder

Heather Dowd.

The Virtuoso network of travel agents who create custom trips and cruises is inviting customers to create "wanderlists" of future travel experiences, many of which are not available now.

"It keeps the thought alive until that moment comes when they feel comfortable traveling again," said Bettina Garibaldi, senior vice president who specializes in destination marketing at Ketchum.

"Having a vacation plan makes people happy — thinking about something positive in the future," Garibaldi said. "And there's a lot you can do as a marketer to inspire people."

And to reassure them.

Small-ship Atlas Ocean Voyages is adding emergency medical evacuation insurance for every guest. Etihad Airways is bundling COVID-19 insurance with each ticket, which covers medical expenses and quarantine costs.

Most major brands are waiving or reducing cancellation and change fees. Tahiti has taken that one step further, with a promise that reservations made through June at almost every property there can be canceled without charge if COVID-19 is to blame. Belmond hotels, trains, and river cruises are selling gift cards that never expire.

Marketers are also betting that more consumers will be opting for the security of traveling with long-separated family and friends. Marriott resorts in South America and the Caribbean are promoting packages to travelers who want to celebrate missed birthdays, anniversaries, or honeymoons.

Already, said Angela Rice, cofounder of Boutique Travel Advisors, "we're seeing a rise in private villa rentals where families are sharing homes or renting next to each other and planning activities together."

The US Travel Association projects that travel spending will be down 45 percent, this year, or by almost \$500 billion, and won't recover fully until after 2023.

"It is an unprecedented time that requires unprecedented marketing," Garibaldi said.

Still, said de Araujo, the travel agent in Watertown, all the marketing in the world won't bring that rebound any faster than one thing.

"A vaccine," he said. "That will be the real game-changer."

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You can go off trail for some fun in the 'dacks

► ADIRONDACKS

Continued from Page N11

everyone wanting to be outdoors, the popular High Peaks trailheads have been drawing record numbers [of hikers]," said Savannah Doviak of ROOST (Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism.) Add peak fall color to the mix, and buh-bye, trailside solitude. Certainly there are some obscure trails that savvy locals know about, but that's not us.

Time for a reboot — or, frankly, an un-boot! Were we keen to lace up our hiking boots and share the trail with hordes of hikers, including Croc-wearing newbies? No. We were not. But after five hours of driving, we weren't heading home. We'd immerse ourselves in the glories of the 'dacks that we've overlooked in the past — all the fun stuff that happens off trail.

No hiking? No problem

Happily, we were headed to the right place, Lake Placid. The former home of the Winter Olympics (1932 and 1980) has a rollicking Main Street that hugs Mirror Lake. It's the Adirondacks' answer to Bar Harbor, Maine. We counted a bookstore, two places that sold assorted types of jerky, a popcorn store, a chocolate shop, and three brewpubs. In short, it has all the necessities. And it has a mere 2,500 full-time residents. Plus, there's awesome fall color — at every elevation, as it turns out.

We checked into the Lake House at High Peaks Resort (www.highpeaksresort.com), and were cheered to discover it was a low-slung midcentury modern building with only 44 rooms, just across the street from Mirror Lake. The price was right — just \$149 per night — and the rate includes use of paddleboards, paddleboats, kayaks, and a rowboat. Throwing our bags into the room, we made a beeline for the kayaks. Let the games begin!



ROBERT F. BUKATY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the warm glow of an autumn afternoon, the lake was lovely — and busy. Ducks bobbed alongside a platoon of paddle-boarders, and even a few hardy late-season swimmers. One guy was riding a fat-tired water bike. Surrounding us were hillsides dappled in russet hues.

Dinner in Lake Placid is always a treat. The quality is fairly high, the dress code is casual, and the prices are moderate. There was only one problem on this particular Saturday night: crowds. People were queued up down Main Street to get into socially distanced dinner spots. For the second time that day, we muttered, "Uh oh."

Of course, overloaded trails mean that local businesses are slammed too. "We just came off our busiest summer ever — everyone wants to be here," said Steve Castelhana, a concierge at the Lake House. Hotels are full, but restaurants operate at reduced capacity, and outdoor seating is limited. That adds up to long waits for a table — two hours some nights, Castelhana said. Undaunted, we ordered take out at the resort's Dancing Bears restaurant, and

slipped inside the gate at the outdoor pool. Lakeside dining! After dinner, we took a walk around the lake, stopping to sniff the popcorn shop and feeling slightly superior to the folks who were still waiting for a table.

Day two: Brews and views

Sunday dawned sparkly and warm — a great day for hiking! But not for crowd-averse us. So we did the next best thing: We made a 43-minute trek to Big Slide Brewery (www.bigslidebrewery.com) for brunch. They're known for their elevated pub grub and tasty, seasonal beverages (maple pumpkin brown ale equals perfect for right now). We snagged an outdoor table, alongside a white tent with more seating; they also have indoor tables (spaced apart) and stools alongside shiny beer tanks. We didn't overdo it, though; we had a long walk back, and a day of fall-color outdoors immersion. There would be no boozy napping!

We decided to ride the Cloudsplitter Gondola (www.whiteface.com) up Little Whiteface Mountain in nearby Wilmington for an overview of Foliage

Central. In wintertime, this is a functioning skier-transporter for Whiteface Mountain; now it draws foliage fans, to ride up the peak with their own parties in the eight-person contraption. We walked right up, no waiting, and took the sky-high ride to the summit, transfixed by the views of distant mountains — even Lake Champlain — awash in scarlet and crimson. There were a few people at the top taking selfies, and a group of fleece-vested picnickers, but plenty of space to take in the (way colorful) scene.

Now in full-tourist mode, we decided to risk fall color overload with a trip up Whiteface Veterans' Memorial Highway. This twisty toll road up to 4,867-foot Whiteface Mountain is famous for scenic overlooks of valleys and mountains, currently adorned in Mom Nature's finest. There's a stone castle at the top (closed because of COVID-19), with an observation tower. Even here, there wasn't much traffic, because everyone else was scaling mountains on foot.

About 10,000 iPhone pics later, we were ready for lunch. We zipped into

Two visitors take pictures at the Indian Head vista overlooking Lower Ausable Lake in the Adirondacks.

Fratelli Pizza II (www.fratellipizza.com) for a prosciutto-arugula white pizza with a balsamic glaze drizzle — a happy marriage of pizza and salad. Its crunchy/crispy dough was perfection, because of a secret ingredient, according to owner Alma Domazet. The small restaurant has a take-out window (the interior is currently closed) and four outdoor tables. Pizza with a view of the mountains — not bad, Wilmington, N.Y.!

Heading back to Lake Placid, we couldn't resist one baby hike at High Falls Gorge (www.highfallsgorge.com). A half-mile loop with stairs and a bridge leads to waterfalls on the Ausable River. If you've got kids in your party, this is a must; how often can you hike to an actual waterfall with small fry?

The rest of the day went by in a happy blur of candy (from purveyor Adirondack Chocolates) and sunshine, followed by a late-ish dinner at Generations, at the Golden Arrow Resort (www.golden-arrow.com). It occurred to us, as we dug into our seared salmon, that this might be our last outdoor dining experience of the season. Would Generations keep the outdoor tables open awhile? "Not likely!" our server responded. "It was 20-something degrees overnight last week. We know what's coming!" There aren't enough space heaters in the world to make that bearable.

It was a major day for eating, not hiking, but we did manage to knock off 18,000 steps and see enough fall color to last us a year. And we still had a shot at those trails — the next day was Monday, so the weekend crowds would be gone. We fell asleep, dreaming of lofty peaks under a swirl of falling leaves.

Alas, the rain gods had other plans. But, all things considered, our hike-free hiking trip had been fun, colorful, and un-crowded. We'll give the High Peaks another go, next year. Until then, 46-footer-club!

For information on the Lake House at High Peaks Resort in Lake Placid, visit www.HighPeaksResort.com. For information about Lake Placid, visit www.LakePlacid.com.

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