

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

By Janet Mendelsohn

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Knitting, astronomy, cloud watching, painting. Hobbies like these are often solitary pursuits, which is part of their appeal. But sometimes it's good to get out there.

Knitting on deck

Pinky Rines and her husband, Glen, of Hollis, N.H., love to sail. She knits, he doesn't. This summer when they again board the historic schooner J. & E. Riggin, out of Rockland, Maine, it will be her sixth knitting cruise in island-dotted Penobscot Bay.

While he hangs out with the windjammer's captain, she'll spend four days learning how to dye her own yarn using seawater and design a project that's uniquely her own. A small group, beginners to serious knitters, will be taught by accomplished instructors. They'll learn from each other, too.

"Knitting and sailing just go together," said Rines. "They're both about the process. You enjoy them because you're willing to let it take a while to get where you're going."

"A lot of knitters come alone," she added. "Windjammers are like stepping back in time. It's a different world, with limited cell service. You get to enjoy your hobby and be on vacation in this beautiful place, on the water, with gourmet meals and time to relax." At night, they'll drop anchor in quiet harbors for music sessions and conversation. "Knitting is a solo activity but we're also a community with a shared interest. Get knitters talking and we don't stop."

Other weeks aboard the Riggin are set aside for quilters, storytellers and musicians, photographers, lighthouse lovers, and cooks, or for families with kids who learn the ropes.

Amateur astronomy

When Hannah diCicco was in fifth grade, she and her parents went on a Caribbean cruise to see a total solar eclipse.

"Beforehand I knew typical kid-level astronomy, but seeing the eclipse turned me onto it completely," said diCicco, 29. In college, she minored in the science but as the administrative manager of a research lab at Boston Children's Hospital, she now has little time for the stars.

"There's plenty of urban astronomy you can do but it's inconvenient without roof access for my city apartment building," said diCicco. Many amateur astronomers



ELIZABETH POISSON

HAVE HOBBY, WILL TRAVEL

Shared interests bring like-minded enthusiasts together

travel to dark-sky sites like Arizona, Hawaii, and Chile on trips associated with the Smithsonian or Sky & Telescope or Astronomy magazines. Some go on luxury cruises with NASA astronomers. Her travel budget is too slim.

But in July she'll travel to Vermont for her 25th consecutive year at Stellafane, an annual astronomy convention of camping under the stars. "It's a little bit hippy dippy," she said. Hundreds of people, all ages, from families with kids to "older geeks" who are like family to her now, will set up tents and telescopes, attend technical talks and demos, and teach each other about their shared interest. No commercial vendors are allowed. Founded in 1926 by the Springfield Telescope Makers club, Stellafane is among the oldest amateur astronomy gatherings in the country.

"You could learn a lot elsewhere, but Stellafane is unique because you can stroll over to someone who has set up their telescope and say 'tell me about it.' Once the sun goes down, it's fantastic," she said, "because everyone is observing and very eager to chat. You're surrounded by your kind of people."

Making art in Provence

When Laurie Triba of Sudbury



LAURIE TRIBA

Laurie Triba, of Sudbury, painting in the French fishing village of Villefranche Top (from left) Pinky Rines of Hollis, N.H., knitting instructor Bill Hamilton, and another knitter.

retired from teaching, she made time for art classes and daydreamed about trips listed in publications like American Artist and Pastel magazine. She had never been to Europe, never seen the light, colors, and scenes that captivated the Impressionist painters. So when her instructor, Jeanne Rosier Smith, a master pastel artist who teaches in Sudbury, announced she was leading a group to Provence, Triba jumped.

"Our group was mostly women in their 40s to 70s, beginners to advanced pastel artists, from all over the country," said Triba. "Everyone worked at their own level."

"I didn't have a lot of plein air experience, which is very different from painting in the studio. You have to deal with changing light and weather conditions. On the trip, I learned how to paint faster and appraise the situation beforehand, and how to set up a palette in a small box for travel with colors chosen for our destination." They brought multiple shades of lavender and stone for the fields and old villages they'd visit within hours of Roquefort-les-pines where they stayed at an old inn.

"Most people came alone but as part of a group, you always felt you had someone to be with," said Tri-

ba. "The scenery was breathtaking. The local people seemed to enjoy having us there, setting up in front of their shops. Tourists took pictures of us painting."

Her advice: Choose a well-planned trip and get enough information beforehand to know if it includes things that are important to you, such as accommodations and time to explore.

Cloudspotting

Linda Jones, a retired pastor in Morris, Ill., says, "One of the joys of living in prairie country is watching clouds and sunsets while driving among corn and soybean fields." Don Hatfield, an actuary in Dallas, told me pausing to watch clouds is important in our busy world, "a nice combination of science, art, and an exercise in imagination. It gives me time to stop and simply observe." New York artist Elyn Zimmerman photographs clouds and other natural phenomena for use in her drawings.

All three are members of the Cloud Appreciation Society who traveled to the Northwest Territories, near Yellowknife in Canada, in February to observe the aurora, or Northern Lights.

CAS is an online community of people around the world who simply enjoy looking at those puffs in the sky. It was founded in the United Kingdom by Gavin Pretor-Pinney after people attending a literary festival showed up for his "inaugural lecture" on the yet nonexistent society in 2004.

"Contemplating cloud shapes and the sky for a few minutes a day benefits the soul," said Pretor-Pinney. "It helps keep your feet on the ground."

More than 40,000 people have since joined. Via e-mail and social media, CAS frequently sends them amazing photos, mostly submitted by members, plus poems and other tidbits. The aurora Sky Holiday was the first trip ever organized for members. Pretor-Pinney said in early 2018 there will be another to view the aurora in Scandinavia, and a conference somewhere, too.

Hatfield and his wife made friends on the trip with whom they'll probably travel again. "What most surprised me was the diversity around Yellowknife," he said. "People had come from New Zealand, France, Slovakia, England, and Scotland, to name just a few."

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HERE

DON'T MISS THE LOWELL FOLK FEST



See a comedic magician, learn how to make scrimshaw, win tickets to New Hampshire's Canobie Lake Park, and see dozens of music performances at the Lowell Folk Festival, July 28-30. The free event features five stages of traditional music, crafts demonstrations, ethnic foods, and children's activities. Enjoy music from around the world, including performances by zydeco, gospel, Irish, and Appalachian groups. Learn how to do the National Dance Day Routine and make origami, and meet 18 artisans and craftspeople who will offer demonstrations on how to

make western saddles, ship's wheels, and more. Games for all ages include the ring toss, the muffin tin game, and box hockey, which was invented in Lowell. Help support the festival and the Lowell Summer Music Series by attending a fund-raiser June 15 at the Four Oaks Country Club in Dracut, 5-8 p.m. Suggested donation: \$50 per person, includes hors d'oeuvres, a cash bar, entertainment, a silent auction, and raffles. 978-970-5000, lowellfolkfestival.org.

FILM FEST SHOWCASES

THRILLING BIKE ADVENTURES Watch a 77-year-old Guinness World Record holder bike over a legendary pass in the Italian Alps on a bicycle with no handlebars or brakes. In the dark. Catch "48 Hairpin Bends by Night" at this year's 8th Annual Ciclismo Classico Bike Travel Film Festival, which comes to the Regent Theatre in Arlington May 31, the Academy of Music in Northampton June 15, and Danbury Palace in Danbury, Conn., June 16. The event includes seven cinematic tales of adventure in India, Norway, Kenya, and beyond. The Arlington festival starts with the famous Cookie Showcase, an all-cookie buffet highlighting the best bakeries around town. The Northampton festival features a VIP tasting event, with drink samples and/or snacks from Artisan Beverage Coop of Greenfield and Provisions in Northampton. \$15/\$20 advance/at the door for Danbury and Arlington; \$10 general admission, \$25 with tasting at Northamp-

ton event. Proceeds benefit the Adventure Cycling Association and Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition. 617-599-8509, www.ciclismo.classico.com/filmfest.

THERE

CAPTAIN YOUR OWN BOAT IN CANADA

You don't need your captain's license to drive a boat down Canada's historic Rideau Canal. Le Boat, a European-based operator of self-drive boating vacations, has launched its first North American destination on the Rideau Canal in Ontario, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You will get instructions and an orientation before renting a boat. Then steer your state-of-the-art Horizon cruiser down a chain of lakes, rivers, and canals as you make your way between Ottawa and Kingston. Le Boat has a fleet of 16 new boats, each with spacious state-rooms (complete with air-cooling and heating systems), fully equipped kitchens, showers, bathrooms, and roomy upper decks. Book a seven-day cruise on a two-cabin boat starting at \$1,775, not including fuel or marina fees. 800-734-5491, www.leboat.com.



ANDY ROUSE

SHOOT ANTARCTICA LIKE A PRO

Learn to see Antarctica through the eyes of a professional photographer. Canon-accredited wildlife photographer Andy Rouse leads a 14-day photographic expedition to Antarctica through travel outfitter Natural World Safaris. The adventure aboard the M/V Akademik Ioffe runs November 17-30, and includes seven full days on the continent and extra-long tundra landings to give passengers more time to shoot and explore. The trip runs during the Antarctic spring, when landscapes still glisten with snow, penguins and seals can be spotted on icebergs, Minke and other whales feed offshore, and the rose-colored light makes for stunning sunsets. Rouse offers guests specialized lectures, workshops, and in-the-field

training to help people learn how to best capture their experiences. Rates start at \$9,995 per person, not including international flights; book by June 30 and save \$1,000 (use code Antarctica1000). 866-357-6569, www.naturalworldsafaris.com.

EVERYWHERE

DIG INTO OTHER CULTURES THROUGH AIRBNBMAG

Get an insider's view of destinations worldwide thanks to a collaboration between Hearst Publications and global accommodations giant Airbnb. Airbnbmag, a new print magazine released last week, offers insights from the Airbnb community of hosts, locals, and experienced travelers who provide

honest takes on different cities, neighborhoods, and hot spots around the world. The publication includes four main features in each issue: "The Local" offers an insider's look at how to eat, play, and shop, "Stay" highlights Airbnb properties, "Roam" features destinations and stories aimed to inspire people to travel, and "Belong" showcases real-life adventures. The "Not Trending Yet" column profiles a location that has spiked in popularity but hasn't entered the mainstream travel circuit yet. Read about Austin, Australia, Bali, Cuba, and Seattle in the premiere issue, on newsstands now. \$15 for six issues; \$3.99 per issue at Barnes & Noble, supermarkets, newsstands, and airports. www.airbnbmag.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK