

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Imagine that:

AN ENTIRE MUSEUM DEVOTED TO GLASS

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Is that glass? No way. That was our immediate response to the sculpture in front of us: a beautiful vessel, deeply colored and textured. It looked like a gourd, or perhaps a finely carved wood sculpture, maybe something ancient, discovered during an archaeological dig. It was glass, created by William Morris, an internationally renowned artist, known for his innovative and experimental techniques. It's one of more than 400 major glass pieces of art displayed at the newly opened Imagine Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Housed in a repurposed building in the burgeoning Grand Central Arts District, located just a few blocks away from the Morean Arts Center, which contains glass artist Dale Chihuly's permanent collection, the wildly colorful Imagine Museum showcases work from the studio glass movement superstars and contemporary emerging artists. From tiny dioramas to large chandeliers, the collection is stunning. If you haven't had much exposure to this artistic genre, be prepared to be amazed.

The museum, the vision of benefactor Trish Duggan, a glass artist and collector, shows a chronological history of studio glass making in the United States, an art that has risen from humble beginnings.

"Early on, glass making didn't get the respect that it was due," says Jane Buckman, deputy director of the museum. "It was considered more craft than art, functional rather than sculptural. It took a while."

The first two rooms are devoted to the beginnings of the studio art movement, during the 1960s and '70s, with works by early pioneers like Harvey Littleton, considered the founder of the studio art movement. There are also a handful of early, rather tame pieces by Chihuly, so much different than his well-known flamboyant, contemporary sculptures.

Chihuly taught at Rhode Island School of Design and founded the Pilchuck Glass School. Move into the next room and you'll see the works of some of his most successful students, including sculptures by Morris, Toots Zynsky, Dan Dailey, and Mary Shaffer.

"What you see is that his [Chihuly's] students were being taught to find their own voice," says Buckman.

We moved from room to room, taking in the highlights. There was the intricate, multicolored Crazy Quilted Teapot by Richard Marquis, a set of blown and hand sculpted glass horses by Shelley Muzylowski Allen, and the Krakonia Luminopod, a squid-like sculpture with flowing tentacles by artist Rik Allen. There was a large, bright blue chandelier by Martin Blank and a collection of Paul Stankard paperweights, housing tiny flower bouquets and lifelike honey bees. All made of glass.

What are contemporary studio glass artists creating? The last rooms in the museum display some of the finest works from emerging artists. "Their pieces are more figurative, harder-edged," Buckman says. "And we're seeing more personal statements rising above technique."

We stood a while in front of the Cubism Sphere by Brent Kee Young, a complex piece, with hundreds of swirly, interwoven rods of glass, and puzzled at Vitruvian Visions by artist Tim Tate, which "explores infinity and alternate dimensions," with the use of glass figures and mirrors.

One of our favorites, Michael by artist Oben Abright, a sculpture of a common working man, was so life-like, it was scary. There's no way that's made entirely of glass, we thought. But it is.

1901 Central Ave., 727-300-1700; www.imagemuseum.com. Admission: adults \$15, ages 7-17 and college students \$10.

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Lachezar Boyadjiev's "Birth Glass" at the Imagine Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla.

HERE

WINTER ATHLETICS IN VERMONT

Take advantage of the chilly temps to enjoy the fun series of competitive athletic events at the Kingdom Games. All activities take place on the ice and in the water of Lake Memphremagog in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. Games are designed for all ages and skill levels, and attract participants from the United States, Canada, Europe, and as far away as India. Upcoming events include the Memphremagog Winter Swim Festival (Feb. 24-25), and the Memphremagog Ice Skating Festival (March 3-4). If you don't want to compete, simply watch the games and cheer on your favorite participant. In addition to winter sports, Kingdom Games also offers running, cycling, and open-water swimming competitions during the warmer months. Lodging and dining options in the Newport area are linked on website. kingdomgames.co.

FLOWERS BLOOM IN WINTER

Spring may be months away, but don't despair. In Central Massachusetts, the 132-acre Tower Hill Botanic Garden is offering colorful relief from winter blahs with a series of weekend events — In Bloom — that's all about celebrating flowers. Escape from the cold into Tower Hill's lush conservatories where the sweet smells and bright colors of floral displays offer hope for warmer days. Each themed weekend offers opportunities to learn about floral design at demos and talks by experts: Earth Wind and Flower, inspired by the elements (Feb. 10-11); Steampunk, inspired by a literary and artistic genre that mixes elements of modern technology, fantastical fiction, and Victorian-era history and fashion (Feb. 17-18); and Camellia Show, featuring blossoms and trees from the New England Camellia Society, as well as Tower Hill's own collection (Feb. 24-25). The first two weekends include special activities for kids. All events included with price of admission. 508-869-6111, www.towerhill.org.

DOGSLED ADVENTURES IN VERMONT

If you've already tried skiing and snowshoeing, why not consider something completely different? On the Stoweflake Dogsled Adventure, an experienced musher will lead you and a team of Siberian Huskies on an exhilarating ride through more than three miles of snowy starlit trails at this mountain resort and spa nestled in the heart Stowe, Vt. The adventure includes resort or townhouse accommodations; daily afternoon tea, coffee and cookies; and full resort amenities including sports and wellness center, indoor pool, heated outdoor pool, and Jacuzzi. Available Thursday and Saturdays only in March. Rates from \$348 per couple. 800-253-2232, www.stoweflake.com/special_offers.aspx

THERE

COLLEGE GRAD PACKAGE IN COSTA RICA

Those looking for the perfect gift for graduating seniors should hop on this steal of a deal. The Pura Vida 2018 Graduation Package is a 7-night, 8-day beach and tropical forest adventure in Costa Rica priced at \$154 per night. Features a two-night stay (on arrival and departure nights) in the capital city of San Jose; two or three nights at Tabacon Thermal Resort & Spa (www.tabacon.com), a secluded rainforest private reserve near the Arenal Volcano with thermal hot springs, outdoor spa, zip-lining, horseback riding and whitewater rafting; and two or three nights at El Mangroove (el mangroove.net/), a Marriott Autograph Collection bou-



tique beach hotel in Papagayo, located 15 minutes from the artsy and bustling town of El Coco. Also includes unlimited entrance to the thermal experience, and 20-percent spa discount at Tabacon; daily breakfast in all hotels; and eight-day car rental with supplemental liability insurance and drop off fees included. \$1,075/person, double occupancy. Must book by April 15. Valid for travel from May 1 through June 20. Copy of valid school ID is required. Reservations 1-855-TABACON. Promo code: GRAD2018. Or e-mail sales@tabacon.com.

WINTER IN CANADA WINE COUNTRY

Like your wine extra-chilled? Pack your woolies and head north to Nova Scotia where local wines take center stage during the 10th annual Nova Scotia Icewine Festival (Feb.

24-25; March 3-4). Over these two winter weekends, travelers can enjoy the province's icewines made with grapes picked and pressed in temperatures of 17.6 degrees Fahrenheit, or below, along with additional wines from 10 local wineries including Domaine de Grand Pré, Lightfoot & Wolfville, Luckett Vineyards, and more. Events include four-course dinner with wines (\$81, opening night only); wine tastings paired with dishes from a local chef or restaurant (\$28); and Ghostwalk, a trek through the historical landscape with ghost stories and tragic tales (\$16). nsicewinefest.com

EVERYWHERE

GEAR ON THE GO

Creative travelers will enjoy the Air-stream Gear Bag by RAGGEDedge. This three-person company, based in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Floyd, Va., make all their products by hand in their 256-square foot, solar powered workshop. Their durable gear bags are made of carbon fiber sailcloth — to repel water and grime — and are lightweight (one pound, 10 ounces), comfortable to carry, and fit easily into most overhead airline compartments. Features include marine-grade zippers, grab strap on one end, easy-access wide mouth opening, and three exterior zip pockets. (\$375 includes free shipping.) They also craft wallets, toiletry kits, briefcases, folders, and passport holders with "design your own" options. (From \$30) www.raggededgegear.com

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