

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

David Dower of ArtsEmerson on diversity in theater, fresh mango salsa, and making himself vulnerable everywhere he goes



As artistic director of ArtsEmerson, David Dower sees the current moment as a time for reevaluation in the theater community. While the organization, which presents and produces works out of the Office of the Arts at Emerson College, has cultivated diversity through its many productions at various Boston venues, he knows that more needs to be done. "When I arrived here in 2012 . . . we reorganized the institution as a civic asset focused on transformation in the city of Boston centered around race, equity, and social justice," said Dower, 61, who lives in Dorchester with his wife, Denice Stephenson, an archivist. The couple has a son, daughter-in-law, and a 5-year-old granddaughter. "In 2017 we created something called the Gaining Ground Fund to support artists who are working on stories of the African diaspora. We've already presented 11 projects [through the fund] and there are more on the way." He said that while everyone at ArtsEmerson remains committed to "providing opportunities for connections" online (ArtsEmerson.org) during the pandemic, they are "looking forward to seeing everybody in person when we can open the live theaters." In the meantime, Dower is quarantining in Santa Cruz, Calif., before heading to the California Sierras, his favorite vacation destination. We caught up with the Weekapaug, R.I., native to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination?

The California Sierras, specifically Ebbett's Pass in Alpine County. The hiking is dramatic, the air is crystal clear, and the vistas are forever. It's still largely undiscovered and undeveloped, so

it's also low-key. You can get far away from everything and everyone pretty quickly.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing?

Everything tastes better at 8,000 feet, but nothing tastes like vacation to me more than a fresh chopped mango salsa — with jalapeno, red onion, cilantro, and lime — at that altitude. Served with corn chips and a fresh lime margarita as the sun drops behind the ridge and you are out of cell range? *That's* vacation.

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

Alaska. It seems like it would have many of the same qualities as my Sierra spot, though on an even more dramatic scale.

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

If it's vacation, I'm traveling with a French press coffee pot and my own bag of freshly ground coffee. We make it cold-pressed style and either pour it over ice or heat it over a camp stove, depending on the temperature when we stumble out of the tent. If it's business travel, my universal adaptor. I spend a lot of time with my face in my phone on those trips.

Aisle or window?

Exit row, window. That way I can lean on the cabin wall to sleep. If I can't get the exit row, then an aisle. Why? I'm 6 feet 4 inches tall and the planes are made to torture me.

Favorite childhood travel memory?

Summers as a kid we'd backpack in the White Mountains, sleeping in the AMC [Appalachian Mountain Club] shelters. I dreamt of being a hut boy for the AMC. Despite the addiction I now have to the Sierras, the White Moun-

tains are in my DNA and I want some of my ashes scattered in the Pemigewasset Wilderness. I even liked the drives up there from Rhode Island, with an eight-track tape of Elton John's "Greatest Hits" or Carole King's "Tapestry" playing as loudly as the parents would allow. We alternated with my dad's Doc Severinsen and Henry Mancini eight-tracks . . .

Guilty pleasure when traveling?

I have two. Ice cream, for one. I make a study of the best ice cream and gelato in every place I go. And I've been [to many] places in this job, since ArtsEmerson is an international presenter and I have to scout all over the world. My second is a haircut and a shave. I make a point of finding a barber in every city I visit. I like to climb into the chair of a professional barber, lay my head back, and get a good shave. It affirms, for me, the essential benevolence of the world. Every place I go, I make myself vulnerable, trust the hands of a stranger holding the razor to my neck, and come away with the exhilarating feeling that good people are everywhere.

Best travel tip?

Walk everywhere, if you are able. You will know your surroundings so much better than if you zoom by in taxis, tour buses, or subways. If you can, make very few plans and follow your nose. You can always look at someone's pictures of the touristy high points you skipped later. But who else was going to find that perfect tamale vendor on the corner with the long line of locals waiting for theirs. Stay in that line. There's magic at the front of it. And make sure you get to Buenos Aires at some point.

JULIET PENNINGTON

TROUBLESHOOTER

Why is Candlewood Suites charging me a \$250 cleaning fee?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I've been a guest at the Candlewood Suites Hawthorne in Hawthorne, Calif., several times. After my most recent stay, the hotel charged my debit card an extra \$250. I was clueless as to why the hotel would be putting extra charges on my debit card.

Immediately I called the hotel to ask about it. The woman who answered the phone quietly listened to my concerns and then quickly transferred me to a number that rang busy, and then disconnected me. I called several times after that but got no answer.

I felt like something suspicious was going on, so I reported it to my bank and to Candlewood's parent company, InterContinental Hotels Group. An IHG representative promised there would be an investigation.

I waited a few days and called the hotel back. I spoke with the manager, who told me the \$250 was a smoking fee. I explained that I'm a nonsmoker and a traveling nurse. The hotel manager said they took a picture of tobacco in the trash can from my room, "So we have proof." She said when I checked in, I signed a smoking policy, and that I had disobeyed that policy.

I'm not a smoker. The manager said I could do whatever I wanted, I would not get the \$250 back. I've called IHG again and they promised to escalate my case, but so far I've heard nothing. Can you help?

ANNIKA PIGFORD, *Atlanta*

A. If you didn't smoke in your room, you shouldn't have to pay a \$250 cleaning fee.

But the Candlewood Suites Hawthorne says it has photographic evidence that someone used tobacco products in your room. If they have time-stamped pictures of your room with cigarette butts in the trash, then it would be difficult to fight

a \$250 cleaning fee.

I contacted Candlewood Suites to see if they could share the photos. I'll tell you what happened in just a moment.

But first, I have a few thoughts on smoking in hotel rooms. When you light up in a hotel room, the stench of the smoke lingers for the next guest to inhale. I'm fine with you doing that kind of thing in your own home, but please don't subject future travelers to your carcinogens. In other words, I fully support the right of a hotel like the Candlewood Suites Hawthorne to charge their guests a \$250 cleaning fee for smoking in the room.

But there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. The hotel should have contacted you after your stay, presented you with the evidence, and offered you a way to appeal the smoking penalty. Adding a charge without explanation is the wrong way.

You needed to push this case up the chain of command in writing. It looks like you started with an e-mail but then called IHG's corporate headquarters. The problem with calling is that there's no documentation of your conversation, at least on your end. If you had sent a brief, polite e-mail to one of the executives at IHG, you might have resolved this long ago. I list the names, numbers, and addresses of all the relevant managers for InterContinental Hotels Group on my consumer advocacy site, elliott.org.

I never found out if Candlewood really had photos of your alleged tobacco products. After I contacted the hotel, a representative reached out to you for more information. The hotel refunded the \$250 cleaning fee.

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

HERE

OUTDOOR MUSIC CONCERTS

Enjoy live music in a healthy and safe environment in Cornish, N.H., as Opera North debuts its Summerfest 2020 season at their Blow-Me-Down Farm location. Produced in partnership with the National Park Service, the family-friendly, outdoor concerts are designed to entertain while protecting the company, artists, musicians, and the community. The musicians, spaced at least six feet apart, will perform from a large stage under a bandshell tent to an open-air audience who can sit on the lawn in "patron pods" or in their cars. "Bluegrass and Broadway" features pianist Evans Haile, two singers, and local bluegrass performers (Aug. 1); Mozart's "The Magic Flute," sung in English, will be in a concert format with a cast of 10 singers and 24-piece orchestra (Aug. 6 and 8). All performances start at 6 p.m. and last approximately 90 minutes with no intermission. Capacity will be limited to allow for maximum physical distancing. All patrons and staff will be asked to wear face coverings. Performers will wear face coverings when feasible. Reservations required. Free. operanorth.org

AI FRESCO DINING AT HISTORIC INN

Those heading to the Berkshires will be happy to learn that The Old Inn on the Green in New Marlborough is now open and accepting reservations for overnights in its 11 guest rooms, and dinner on its newly expanded — and fully tented — outdoor patio. The 1,200-square-foot "Big Top" will allow the inn to accommodate additional so-



cially distant tables while offering al fresco ambiance and fine-dining service along with full bar and vintage wine list. The three-course prix fixe menu (\$55) includes luxury add-ons like foie gras and caviar. (A la carte and chef's tasting menus are on hiatus.) Also new this year: an advance reservation system will allow contact tracing for the foreseeable future. Rooms \$285-\$395, includes breakfast. 413-229-7924, oldinn.com

VERMONT RESORT RESUMES OPERATIONS

Get out in the wide-open spaces of Vermont at Topnotch Resort, a luxury resort and spa tucked into 120 acres of woodland at the base of Mount Mansfield. The 68-room property recently resumed operations of its amenities, following health and safety protocols as directed by the CDC, the state of Vermont, and the American Hotel and Lodging Association. Guests have outdoor access to the pool, tennis facilities, on-property hiking trails, and direct access to

the Stowe recreation path. Indoors, guests in need of a post-lockdown haircut, massage, and other self-care services can visit The Spa at Topnotch (reservations required); and have access to another pool, fitness center, and food and beverage operations in The Roost Restaurant. The Vermont Resort Summer Getaway Package features three accommodation options to keep your family together but with extra space between neighboring guests. (Book by phone; from \$799/night.) Individual room rates, \$299 mid-week/ \$399 week-ends. 800-451-8686; www.topnotchresort.com



THERE

PLAN AHEAD FOR ALL-WOMEN TRAVELS IN 2021

AdventureWomen, a women-owned and women-run adventure travel company, has announced its itineraries for 2021. Spanning destinations around the world, some of its adrenaline-pumping tours allow guests to take in the great outdoors while naturally social distancing, such as downhill skiing in Montana, searching for the Northern Lights in Iceland, hiking in Italy's Dolomites, and a new summer trip to Yellowstone with horseback riding, fly fishing, and hiking. Additional new itineraries include a cultural tour through Poland, exploring culinary traditions, folk art and the lush countryside; a South Africa trip including Cape Town, nearby winelands, and wildlife safari; private luxury barge on the Rhone River canals of France in southwestern Provence; a deep exploration of the Silk Road in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, known as the world's tapestry of cultures and civilizations; and more. 800-804-8686, www.adventurewomen.com.

EVERYWHERE

SUMMER DISCOUNTS ON CARS AND HOTELS

Satisfy your wanderlust while taking advantage of deep discounts for car rentals and hotel stays with Priceline.com's recently launched Summer Sale. Priceline's data indicates road trips are on the rise,



based on a spike in one-way rentals for off-airport pickups of 168-percent compared to pre-COVID averages, suggesting people are renting cars and driving to destinations for extended stays with family or friends. In response to this need, Priceline's deals include up to 40-percent off major rental car brands, including Avis and Budget; \$20 off two-night Express Deal hotel stays nationwide; and high-lighted deep discounts across top travel destinations. For example, compared to the same time last year, 3-plus star hotels rates are significantly reduced in Hawaii (available at \$171 per night, down from an average of \$482); New York (\$125 per night, down from an average of \$253); and Orlando (\$99 per night, down from an average of \$167). Visit website for coupon codes and deal details. www.priceline.com/partner/summer-sale

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