

News, Apps, Deals, and Gear from New England and Beyond

HERE

CHAIN REACTION AT MIT

Unleash your inner Rube Goldberg at the MIT Museum's Friday After Thanksgiving (F.A.T.) Chain Reaction, a one-of-a-kind creative engineering feat, 1-4 p.m., Nov. 23. Artist and inventor Arthur Ganson emcees this three-hour extravaganza that you can enjoy as a participant or spectator. Participating teams make fanciful contraptions with materials supplied on site. (They can also register to bring their own.) When all the machines are linked together — with help from Ganson and Massachusetts Institute of Technology students — the mini chain reactions form one mega event with a surprising finale. Adults \$15, ages 5-17 \$5, students (with ID), seniors, and children under 5 free. Includes parking and free same-day admission to MIT Museum. *Rockwell Cage Gymnasium, 120 Vassar St., 617-253-5927, www.web.mit.edu/museum/programs/fat.html*



THERE

BOND VILLAINS AT THE SPY MUSEUM

Sneak off to Washington, D.C., for "Exquisitely Evil: 50 Years of Bond Villains," opening Nov. 16 at the International Spy Museum. The exhibition features Bond's chief adversaries, their henchmen, lairs, and weapons. Over 100 artifacts will be on display including Zao's Jaguar XKR from "Die Another Day" and the satellite from "GoldenEye." In addition to comments from the intelligence community and psychological profiles of the villains, the exhibit offers immersive environments and interactive opportunities, plus classic film and audio clips. Adults \$19.95; seniors, military, law enforcement \$15.95; 7-17 \$14.95; 6 and under free. *800 F St., NW, 202-EYE-SPYU, www.spymuseum.org*

WOOFSTOCK IN TORONTO

For a special treat, tote Rover to Winter Woofstock in Toronto (Nov. 17-18), a two-day celebration of all things canine. Over 130 vendors will offer the latest in fashion, food, furnishings, practical services, toys, treats for dogs. Your four-footed friend can participate in activities and contests including a fashion show, stupid dog trick contest, best costume contest, holiday high tea, and more. The first 200 visitors each day enjoy breakfast and photo-op with Santa, or can pose with a menorah in the Hanukkah area. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Hall C, Direct Energy Centre, 100 Princes Blvd. One ticket valid for both days. \$10, seniors \$5, 12 and under free. *416-234-WOOF, www.winterwoofstock.com*

CANADIAN HOLIDAY PACKAGE

Skiing and snowboarding with Santa are only part of the Full Christmas Package (Dec. 15-26) at the family-friendly Big White Ski Resort. The holiday experience includes accommodations with your own decorated Christmas tree, Christmas stockings for the whole family, two-hour Mega SnowCoaster tubing passes, and a photo op with Santa. Christmas Eve features a torchlight parade, church service, and fireworks. Located in Okanagan Valley, British Columbia's second-largest resort boasts the most ski-in, ski-out accommodations in Canada. Quote "Christmas Add On Package" when booking by Dec. 1 deadline. Rates from \$369. *800-663-2772, www.bigwhite.com*



EVERYWHERE

HELP FOR JET LAG

Jet lag is a drag. If you have trouble sleeping during or after long trips, consider adding Glo to Sleep to your must-have travel accessories. This sleep therapy mask utilizes a light system (inside the mask) designed to slow brain activity, achieve an alpha wave brain state, and begin deep and restorative sleep. The mask works without wires or batteries; just expose it to any light source for 30 seconds, put it on, and hold your gaze on the Points of Glo while breathing deeply. The mask is fully adjustable and made from lightweight, non-toxic, hypoallergenic, breathable foam. Full money-back guaranteed. \$39.99. *www.sound-oasis.com*



APP FOR FINDING KID-FRIENDLY LOCALES

It is often a challenge to keep everyone in the family entertained while on the road. Need an indoor place to play on a rainy day in an unfamiliar city, or a playground near your hotel? Mom Maps, a new iOS- and Android-compatible app, makes it easy to locate the nearest museum, zoo, park, and other recreational activities using its extensive list of over 28,000 kid-friendly locations in 28 metro areas, and GPS feature. It also offers advice and reviews from parent bloggers and family travel specialists. Free or \$2.99 (premium). *www.mommaps.com*



NECEE REGIS



AN APP FOR EXPLORING THE REGION

Travelers in all six New England states can discover plenty of fun regional activities using a new app for iOS devices: New England At-Hand. This app provides access to nearly 2,000 destinations, hidden gems, and quirky sites, featuring content that has been curated and crafted by a team of writers and photographers. In addition to full location-based selective searches, you can easily assemble a personal itinerary and travel route, or simply follow editor-recommended itineraries. New destinations are added each week so there is always something new to explore. \$4.99 *www.athandapps.com*

Coveted seats moving to the chef's table

Cruise lines offering exquisite menus and personalized service

By Irene S. Levine
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

As long buffet lines give way to more individualized dining experiences in smaller, specialty restaurants on ships, a growing number of cruise lines are adding chef's tables as one more appetizing option.

The term "chef's table" suggests exclusivity — the ingredients, menu, setting, and intimacy of small group dining — as well as the expectation of dotting attention from the chef and servers.

Chefs were once relegated to cooking in basements, having virtually no contact with their patrons, says Beth Forrest, an associate professor of gastronomy and history at the Culinary Institute of American in Hyde Park, N.Y. Fernand Point of La Pyramide in Vienne, France, was one of the first famous chefs to leave the kitchen on his own initiative to talk to guests

in the dining room, she says. "Now diners crave personal interaction with chefs," she adds.

Chef's tables made their way to this country from Europe in the 1980s. "This coincided with the recognition of chefs as celebrities and cooking as a form of entertainment," she says. "Increased air travel, mass media, and the surging popularity of the Food Network all coalesced to bring this about."

At sea, meals are held either in the ship's galley or an assigned room nearby. One advantage of eating in a galley is that passengers get a unique perspective into the wide-ranging dining operations of a ship, says Aly Bello, a spokeswoman for Carnival Cruise Lines.

The chef takes center stage at these gastronomic extravaganzas that usually seat eight to 24 passengers. The relaxed, lei-

surely setting allows the chef to explain each course and interact with guests. The meals typically showcase special ingredients, sophisticated preparation methods, creative menus, eye-catching presentations, and attentive service. Fees vary between \$10 and \$1,000 or more, per person; some include pairings of champagne and fine wines.

Depending on the cruise line, ship, and length of the voyage, there may be a few chef's tables over the course of a sailing or one every evening. Most offer fixed menus chosen by the chef. On some ships guests consult with the chef on a more personalized menu.

Princess Cruises, one of the pioneers in bringing the chef's table to sea, still offers them across its fleet for up to 10 passengers per dinner on select

nights. Guests are able to tour the galley at dinner, its busiest time. After cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, they meet with the executive chef, who explains the menu before they move to the dining room for the main course.

On Silversea Cruises' Silver Spirit, up to 24 guests pay \$30 per person for a nine-course degustation (tasting) dinner available each evening at Seishin, the ship's Asian fusion restaurant. Each table placed around the perimeter of the room offers guests a perfect vantage point to watch the chef prepare fresh sushi or sashimi at the large, circular table in the center. Non-alcoholic drinks and house wines are complimentary.

For wine aficionados, Crystal Cruises offers its Ultimate Vintage Room dinner on Crystal Symphony or Crystal Sereni-

ty once or twice each year. These unique dinners, collaborations between celebrity chefs and winemakers, feature some of the hardest-to-find wines in the world. In 2007, the former chef-owner of the world-famous Lutèce prepared one of these eight-course events. Depending on the wines featured, the lavish dinners cost about \$1,000 per person.

On Oceania Cruises' Marina and Riviera, guests reserve a meal at Privée, a private dining room. For a flat fee of \$250 (not including alcohol) for a party up to 10 people, guests choose selections from two of the ship's specialty restaurants, Polo Grill or Toscana, and meet with the chef.

You don't necessarily need to be on a premium or luxury cruise to experience such a meal. On Disney Cruise Line's

Fantasy and Dream, at Chez Gusteau, there is a private dining room (within the adult-only Remy restaurant) inspired by the fictional restaurant in the Disney-Pixar film, "Ratatouille." Tables are set with Frette linens, Riedel glassware, Christofle silverware, and Bernadaud porcelain. A French-inspired menu costs \$75 per person with additional charges for wine and liquor.

Earlier this year, Norwegian Cruise Line expanded chef's tables across its fleet. Once per cruise, as many as 12 diners take a galley tour, then mingle with the executive chef to discuss the details that have gone into the preparation of their nine-course meal. Wines paired with each course and gratuities are included in the price (\$75 per person).

On Cunard's Queen Mary 2, for \$10 per person (drinks are additional), 24 to 30 guests attend a chef's galley dinner held each evening in a dedicated dining room with a demo kitchen. The chef explains the preparation of each course before it is served and the themed menus vary nightly.

On all Carnival ships, for \$75 per person, on a number of evenings during each cruise, 12 to 14 guests tour the galley and enjoy a champagne reception and seven-course gourmet dinner with wines complementing the dishes.

To ensure a seat at the table, find out whether reservations need to be made in advance, or if and when they can be made onboard. Not all lines offer them, some lines have them only on certain ships, and some are limited to one seating per cruise. Ask about the price and what it includes.

Check your calendar and seaboard itinerary to allow sufficient time for the meal, which can take up to four hours depending on the number of courses served.

"Cruise ships are about entertainment — and food is definitely entertaining," says Forrest. "Getting a seat at a chef's table at sea is like getting a backstage VIP pass at a concert."

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