Put Some Passion Into Your Travels

Preparations are already underway for the next Passion Play in the tiny German hamlet of Oberammergau. The 2020 shows may seem distant, but excitement is already building for the next production. Demand for tickets is high and space on tours will be limited. Building on years of experience, the team at Member Choice Vacations is hard at work developing new tours that showcase must-see European destinations and the epic Passion Play that depicts the life and death of Jesus. Villagers perform the epic play every 10 years as an homage to God.

Passionate Beginnings

It began all the way back in 1633. Oberammergau was suffering from the bubonic plague. The surviving villagers appealed for divine intervention to save their families. They vowed that if God spared them, they would perform a Passion Play every 10 years. After their prayers, the number of plague cases slowly subsided.

Bavaria's Linderhof Palace was built for King Ludwig II in the late 19th century.

Continued on page 12

Car Care Corner

Handle the Snow Like a Boss

By Roberto X. Cruz

You need your car stuck in the snow like you need to listen to “Macarena” over and over again for three consecutive days. But if you find your vehicle caught in a snowy trap, don’t freak out. You read Your AAA, so you will know exactly what to do.

Don't Get Mad, Get Digging

It’s frustrating to find your vehicle buried up to its hood in snow, but anger won’t help you get to work or home any faster. If you have a shovel handy, dig out the drive wheels first. These are the front wheels in front-wheel-drive cars and the rear wheels in rear-wheel-drive, all-wheel-drive and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Before you start the car, make sure the tailpipe is not stuffed with snow.
The AAA Pioneer Valley website is the best source of information available to members about our wide variety of discounts, services and other benefits, right at your fingertips. Over the last year we have tested and created a totally new version of AAA.com, which is now live and ready for you to visit.

AAA Members were with us every step of the way during the redesign and rollout of the new site. We relied on focus-group information gathered over many months. During the testing phase, we stayed in touch with members to make sure the site met their needs, and made adjustments based on their feedback. Our ultimate goal was to have a new site built exclusively on service excellence that exceeded the expectations of members who come to AAA.com.

Here are some of the site’s features.
- Easy AAA Membership renewal in just a few clicks.
- Mobile-friendly features.
- Full access to your membership account.
- Real-time insurance quotes.
- Travel and other member discounts.

AAA.com also has resources on where to find automobile repair shops, current auto loan rates, a fuel calculator to help you estimate costs during your summer vacation, and how to give AAA gift memberships.

We know that members like to go online when planning their vacations. We’re right there with you in our Travel section. We can help you search through thousands of cruise options, show you exclusive member-only vacations, and navigate popular destinations. We can assist with what you need to know about foreign travel. And we don’t take a back seat to anyone when it comes to planning a vacation by car, providing you with directions, maps and places to stay.

Along with the AAA Mobile app and our network of branch offices, we strive to serve you through as many channels as possible. I invite you to visit AAA.com to see all we have to offer, and to let us know if the site meets your needs and expectations.

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Title of Publication: Your AAA
Publication Number: 0002-740
Number of Issues Published Annually: 10
Office of Publication: 150 Capital Drive, West Springfield, MA 01089

Your AAA is published by AAA Pioneer Valley, a not-for-profit membership organization under the laws of the State of Massachusetts. The Editor and Publisher of Your AAA is Mindy J. Ginley. During the previous year, an average of 116,882 copies of Your AAA were printed per issue, with 117,894 printed of the October issue. Your AAA has no dealers, carriers, or street vendors. It is distributed solely through the U.S. Postal Service and at AAA Branch offices. The average number mailed per issue in the past year was 71,298 In-County and 45,584 Outside-County for a total of 116,382; with 71,915 In-County and 45,979 Outside-County for a total of 117,394 of the October issue mailed. The annual subscription rate is 50 cents. The average copies not distributed per issue in the past year was 500, with 500 not distributed during October. The average total distribution per issue in the past year was 116,382 with 117,394 in October. The percent paid/requested circulation for the past year was 99 percent and for October was 99 percent.

Partner Spotlight

Ticket Monster

By Cassandra Raposo

Why not give the gift of an unforgettable experience this holiday season? Ticket Monster is offering a special deal to AAA Members Dec. 1-7. Saving on concert, theater or sporting event tickets can be both the ultimate gift for your loved ones and the gift that keeps on giving – to your wallet.

In addition to the everyday AAA Member discount, members can get $5 off orders over $100, $10 off orders over $200, $15 off orders over $300, and $25 off orders over $500. Just use promo code Holidays17 at checkout.

Enjoy these facts about Ticket Monster’s top-notch service.

1. Need those tickets shipped to your home? Ticket Monster pays for shipping so you don’t have to.

2. It may seem like a disaster if an event is cancelled or your tickets don’t get to you in time. No worries – with Ticket Monster you’ll receive a 100 percent refund, thanks to its “Iron Guarantee.”

3. Buying for a party of eight people or more? Ticket Monster’s concierge can help you plan the event and find the best possible amenities to ensure everything goes smoothly.

Find out more at AAA.com/TicketMonster.
Can’t stand shopping? Have a bunch of money? Want to give some of it away instead of buying gifts? There might be some tax implications to consider.

While tax issues are complicated, monetary gifts above a certain value are taxable. According to the IRS, a gift tax is a tax on a transfer of property (including money) by one person to another while receiving nothing – or less than full value – in return.

From 2013 through 2017, the IRS annual gift tax exclusion was $14,000 per recipient. That means that, in 2017, a parent could gift as much as $14,000 to each of his or her children without tax. The threshold for the gift tax will increase to $15,000 in 2018.

Donors may be eligible for exclusions if their gifts cover tuition or medical expenses or if they’re giving gifts to spouses. Before making a large gift, it can be beneficial to consult a tax expert, financial planner or both.

Cyber criminals want to be the Grinch in your Whoville this holiday season. These scammers, with hearts that are obviously two sizes too small, want to steal credit card information, Social Security numbers and more from the millions of Americans who plan to shop online this month.

1. Only shop on websites with “https” in the address field. The “s” in this acronym means the website is secure and communications on it are encrypted.
2. You can’t be held accountable for more than $50 in fraudulent credit card purchases, according to federal law. Debit cards do not offer the same level of protection, so you may want to shop with a credit card.
3. If a deal seems too good to be true, it might be. Think twice before you click an email offering an exorbitant discount, especially if you don’t recognize the sender.
4. Don’t shop on public Wi-Fi networks. These are more susceptible to identity thieves. Shop on your home network instead.
5. Make sure any apps you shop on are downloaded from a reputable source like the Apple App Store or Google Play.
6. Shop on websites that ask for the three-or four-digit Card Verification Value code on the back of your card. This is an extra line of defense for you and the business because it verifies you actually have the card in front of you.
7. Download software updates on your phone or computer when prompted. These often include important security patches.
8. Sign up for identity theft protection services. These programs will monitor activity on your credit reports and help you investigate and resolve fraud.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help keep your identity and other sensitive financial information safe from these crooks when you buy online. It won’t make any hearts grow, but this advice from the experts at Experian could prevent your bank accounts and credit scores from shrinking due to fraud.
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Bright Ideas for Holiday Decor

By Roberto X. Cruz

Who has the best holiday lights in your neighborhood?
You do.
Or at least you could with these helpful tips from industry experts.

Game Plan
A good plan helps you avoid surprises – and you certainly don’t want surprises on top of a ladder in the freezing cold. Measure the roofline, windows, trees and other areas where you plan to hang lights, and remember to buy extension cords that will reach the power outlets, too.

Light Right
Only use lights certified for outdoor use and follow the instructions so you don’t overload any circuits, said Denice Turcotte, insurance manager for AAA Pioneer Valley. LED lights use significantly less power than traditional incandescent bulbs, plus you can safely link more strands together in a series. Never use lights with frayed or damaged cords. Faulty wires could cause a fire. Holiday lights cause about 160 building fires annually, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Work Smart
Test the lights while you’re on the ground, and attach the light clips while you’re at it. Do not nail the cables to your house. That could damage the cords and possibly start a fire. Wrap all the connections in electrical tape to keep important pieces dry.

Ladder Luck
Never reach for anything from a ladder, said Greg Regan, owner of Long Island Holiday Lights Installations, based in Bay Shore, N.Y. If something is out of reach, get down and move the ladder. Only use a ladder tall enough for the job and can support the weight of you and your tools. Don’t stand on the top two rungs.

Do It Your Way
Your budget dictates how many lights you hang, but even the simplest design can generate oohs and aahs. Choose a focal point like your front door or columns and decorate them with C-9-sized bulbs, Regan said. Stick to one style, or spruce it up with a few different colors. But remember, what goes up must come down. Be extra cautious when removing lights on cold, icy days in January, and don’t be afraid to call in a professional if you don’t think you can install or remove lights on your own.

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Freeze Out Heat Costs

By Cassandra Raposo

Homeowners of the Northeast don’t just dread the winter months because of the bitter wind and snow. They also dread it for the hike in their energy costs, a result of the cold weather forcing them to turn up the heat, and that heat sometimes escaping against their will.

To learn what to do about keeping costs down this winter, we spoke to Brian Kearney, director of residential services at RISE Engineering, an energy solution provider based in Providence, R.I.

Some quick fixes include adorning windows with heavy curtains and blinds, placing stoppers at windows and doors, turning kitchen and bathroom ventilation fans off when they’re not needed, and buying smart showerheads and Wi-Fi enabled thermostats.

The long-term solutions – installing insulation, air sealing your home, improving ventilation and more – take some more consideration.

The first step is to call your local utility service or use an online energy efficiency calculator, such as the one at www.masssave.com, to find out what problem areas may exist.

Many utility companies also offer free energy audits. During the no-cost assessments, a specialist will come to your home, perform some tests and then give you a proposal of how to lower your energy bill based on the results.

Another tip: Many states have programs and initiatives that support energy-saving home improvements, Kearney said.

“Increasing energy efficiency is a benefit for all of us,” he said. “These programs exist; it’s best to take advantage of them.”

Make sure to consult a professional before making energy improvements in your home.
Food for All

Merry Mocktails

By Cassandra Raposo

New Year’s Eve is often celebrated by indulging in – ahem – adult beverages. Those of us who don’t partake don’t have to feel left out. Mocktails, or nonalcoholic cocktails, let us enjoy the taste of typical cocktails without feeling the usual effects the next morning. Here are some mocktail recipes to toast to the coming year.

A Drink Cooler Than Being Cool

Commemorate the new year and the cold weather with the aptly named frost bite mocktail from www.thelittlekitchen.net. This drink uses a lemon-lime soda, like Sprite or Mist Twist, and combines it with pineapple juice, lime juice, white grape juice, mint leaves and blueberries for a delicious concoction. Garnish the drink with blueberries to give it the finishing touch of a professional mixologist.

Minty-Fresh Refreshment

Have one too many leftover candy canes? Use them in this recipe for Kleinworth & Co.’s (www.kleinworthco.com) pink peppermint Russian mocktail. Combine milk, peppermint extract and pieces of a white chocolate and peppermint candy bar in a saucepan. When the chocolate has melted and the mixture has cooled, pour it over ice and garnish with crushed bits of candy cane. The result is a festive drink anyone can enjoy.

Punch up Your Taste Buds

Sangria is a popular fruity drink at any time of the year. The cranberry in Town & Country’s (www.townandcountrymag.com) recipe for mock winter sangria makes it more suitable for the season. Combine diced pear pieces, orange slices, cranberries, raspberries, pineapple juice and cranberry juice in a pitcher. Let sit for one to four hours, and then add ginger ale to satisfy your guests’ taste buds.

An American Drink Posing As a Russian

Grab your stylish copper mug for this mock Moscow mule from themerrymotthought.com. Fill a stainless steel-lined mug with crushed ice, then pour ginger beer (nonalcoholic, of course), lime juice and club soda over it. Stir the mixture together and garnish with a lime wedge to complete this tangy-sweet concoction.

Drink Your Dessert

For a mocktail that the whole family can enjoy, try this recipe for berries and cream sparklers from recipe website butterwithasideofbread.com. Start by adding fresh strawberries, raspberries or blackberries to the bottom of your glass. Then fill half the glass with berry-flavored sparkling water and the other half with berry juice. Top with a scoop of berry ice cream or sherbet and a bit of whipped cream. Garnish with a few berries of your choice, and voilà! Dessert – and drinks – are served.

Fast, Fresh Easy Meals

By Cassandra Raposo

For many, the holiday season evokes the spirit of giving. This year, give back to your community and those less fortunate, in addition to your friends and family, by donating to your local food pantry.

Food pantries typically ask for nonperishable goods such as canned fruits and vegetables, dry pasta, oatmeal, peanut butter and evaporated milk. Read on to discover how you can create easy and affordable meals with these pantry staples.

Applesauce

It’s a long-held secret of vegans that applesauce can be used as a substitute for eggs or butter when baking. Just replace half of the butter in a recipe with applesauce, and each egg with ¼ cup of applesauce. You can also use it to add a sweet touch to a yogurt parfait, stir it into oatmeal with a pinch of cinnamon and tuck some into a recipe for homemade waffles. The possibilities are endless!

Black Beans

Canned or bagged beans are another versatile food pantry staple. For a light, protein-filled lunch, www.chatelaine.com recommends topping a slice of bread with melted cheddar cheese with black beans, chili powder and cumin. You can also sneak in mashed black beans to add vitamins and protein to a simple batch of brownies.

Canned Tuna

This low-calorie, high-protein option can be used several different ways. It makes an easy salad topping for those nights when you don’t want to cook. Or you could mix a can with some prepared noodles for an easy-peasy tuna casserole. Or top some bread slices with tuna salad, melted cheese and tomatoes and finish them in the broiler for a toasty treat.

Macaroni and Cheese

One of the beauties of boxed macaroni and cheese is that you can dress it up with your favorite ingredients. Need more veggies in your diet? Add in a cup of steamed broccoli. Craving some crunch? Top with bacon bits and breadcrumbs. Feeling spicy? Add in some salsa and hot sauce for a fiery kick.

Dried Fruit

Dried fruit (with no added sugar) can provide almost the same nutrition as a serving of fresh fruit. Stir some cranberries into a cookie recipe, add some chopped apricots to pancakes, or top a salad with a mix of golden raisins and sunflower seeds. You can even blend some dates into a smoothie for just a touch of sweetness. Delicious!
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Great 8 | Play With Your Food

By Phantom Gourmet

We all know the Phantom loves food and fun. Here are eight places where you can get a little bit of both.

Beat Brasserie
13 Brattle St., Cambridge, Mass.

Come here for live jazz served with deliciously different dishes like crispy tuna spring rolls and tasty spareribs slathered in a smoky chipotle barbecue sauce. And if you like burgers, you’ll love its version topped with cheddar cheese, port wine aioli and crispy fried onions.

Brass Union
70 Union Square, Somerville, Mass.

You can play while you wait for your food at Brass Union, with an oversized Jenga set, board games and even a 14-foot-long shuffleboard table. The menu features items like an Argentinean-style hot dog topped with chimichurri and a burger topped with Cabot cheddar, onion marmalade and an herb aioli.

Chiaviti
285 Cabot St., Beverly, Mass.

Traditional Italian dishes like frutti di mare and pasta Bolognese mingle with creative offerings like zucchini, twirly zucchini ribbons that stand in for standard pasta. It’s all served by chef Richard Marino, who also takes the stage to play live jazz for customers.

Double Chin
86 Harrison Ave., Boston

Named for sister owners Gloria and Emily Chin, this restaurant serves Asian-American fusion-fun, including dishes like crab Rangoon with sweet-ened cranberries and waffle fry poutine topped with cheese and kimchi. For dessert, try cube toast – a block of hollowed-out brioche stuffed with ice cream, candy and fruit.

Kings
Boston, Burlington, Dedham, and Lynnfield, Mass.

Kings takes food and fun to a whole new level with high-definition TVs, high-tech bowling alleys and action-packed bars. The menu offers all the things you love to eat when you’re knocking down some pins, like chicken wings slathered in Buffalo, barbecue or sesame-ginger sauce and nachos piled with melted queso, jalapenos, sour cream and guacamole.

Quarters
8 Railroad St., Hadley, Mass.

This casual spot popular with local college students features 20 vintage arcade games that range from the late ’70s to the early ’90s. So, while you’re chomping away on pulled pork sliders and sweet potato fries, you can help Pac-Man chomp on some dots and ghosts.

Pinz
Milford and Kingston, Mass.

Pinz is the perfect spot to knock down some pins, shoot some hoops and play all the arcade games you love. After you’ve worked up an appetite, feast on dishes like delicious burgers, addictive wings, plate-tipping nachos and munchable tacos.

Showcase SuperLux
Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Diners here can combine dinner and a movie all under one roof. This state-of-the-art theater sports comfortable seating, table service and a sophisticated menu offering up crispy calamari and piping hot steak-and-cheese spring rolls.

AAA Trainer

Everyday Calorie Burners

By Cassandra Raposo

As we’re enjoying our holiday festivities by indulging in delicious dinners, desserts, candy and what have you, there’s always that thought lingering in the back of our minds: How much weight am I going to gain by the end of this holiday season?

It’s the question that plagues us every year from November to January. Some people resolve to begin new diets and exercise regimens. But if you’re not thrilled by the thought of hitting the gym, here’s some good news – you’re burning calories just by completing your daily to-do list.

The following calorie counts, courtesy of www.caloriebistro.com, are based on a 150-pound person.

Food Shopping
Who knew shopping for groceries could be good for your health? Pushing a shopping cart around the supermarket for 30 minutes can burn about 130 calories.

Vacuuming
If the house needs a good vacuuming, let this be your motivation to get the job done: Vacuuming for an hour can burn about 170 calories!

Cleaning the Gutters
Winter doesn’t take too kindly to snow and rainwater in your gutters. Prevent ice dams from forming and – bonus! – burn about 186 calories in 30 minutes of cleaning out your gutters.

Folding Laundry
It’s a pain to match socks together and fold those stubborn fitted sheets, but doing this task for 30 minutes can burn 72 calories.

Shoveling Snow
As Northeast residents know all too well, shoveling snow can be exhausting. But did you know that shoveling for 45 minutes can burn about 300 calories?

Watching TV
You don’t necessarily have to be doing vigorous activity to burn calories. Sitting on the couch and watching TV for an hour burns about 72 calories. Imagine how much you could burn if you did a few squats or jumping jacks during commercial breaks.

Carrying Young Ones
Parents of young kids, rejoice! Carrying your child for 15 minutes can burn about 34 calories, with slight variances depending on your child’s size.

Light Walking
If you have 15 minutes to spare, taking a light walk or playing with your pet can burn about 31 calories.

Making Dinner
Here’s a reason to skip ordering takeout: Preparing dinner for 30 minutes can burn 72 calories. Make it count by fixing yourself a healthy meal.

Sleeping
Last, but certainly not least, sleep is a beloved activity of many. Sleeping for the recommend-ed eight hours can burn about 360 calories.
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Top 10 Things We Love in...
Portland, Maine

By Kim Foley MacKinnon

This historic seaside city, founded in 1632 as a center of trade between Canada and Europe, is still a major port, but over the years it's also become a haven for foodies, brewers, artists and other creative types. Hip Portland somehow manages to exude a small-town vibe, with independent shops, galleries, bars and restaurants galore, as well as a proud identity as New England’s largest seaport and second-largest fishing port.

1. See how many lighthouses you can visit – there are six within 20 minutes of downtown – including Portland Head Light, one of the first lighthouses commissioned for the U.S. by President George Washington.

2. Stroll along Commercial Street, where boutiques, bars and restaurants vie for your attention, while steps away, the working waterfront bustles with a mix of fishermen, charter boats and yachts.

3. Learn what it takes to be a lobster fisherman with Lucky Catch Cruises, which will teach you how to trap these local crustaceans out on Casco Bay.

4. Pop into the Portland Museum of Art to see its vast collection of more than 18,000 artworks, including pieces by Winslow Homer, Andy Warhol and Claude Monet.

5. Take a free tour of Allagash Brewing Company, one of the city’s first craft breweries specializing in Belgian-style ales, and sample beers while learning about the brewing process.

6. Visit the Wadsworth-Longfellow House & Garden, once home to the world-famous poet, where much of the original furniture, including his writing desk, are well-preserved.

7. Glide over the ice at the William B. Troubh Ice Arena, home to the Portland Pirates hockey team. It offers public ice skating on the weekends and some weekdays.

8. Indulge in the delicious, and addictive, hand-cut Belgian fries at Duckfat. They’re cooked twice in – yes – duck fat and served with house-made dips like truffle ketchup.

9. Have a fun family outing at the Children’s Museum and Theatre of Maine, where parents and kids alike will enjoy exploring the hands-on exhibits and learning through play.

10. Listen to live music, and enjoy a tasty local beer, at the Port City Music Hall, which has a calendar of wide-ranging acts, from funk ensembles to a Talking Heads tribute band.

Looking for a variety of great lodging options in the area?
Visit AAA.com/Hotels.
Keeping their promises, the people of Oberammergau performed the first play in 1634 and have continued the tradition throughout the centuries.

Today, many of Oberammergau’s residents still take part in the powerful work of art, which features dramatic performances, beautiful music and choral accompaniment. The residents of Oberammergau will again perform The Passion Play in 2020. Member Choice Vacations will be there, sharing in the magnificence of this performance with a variety of itineraries that showcase the charm and beauty of central Europe. Will you be there?

The Passion Play Theater

The first performance of the play took place in 1634 on a simple wooden stage in the village cemetery, above the graves of recent plague victims. In the early 19th century, the performance moved to a larger venue due to the number of global visitors coming to see the play. The large, open-air theater seats 4,500 and is set on an incline, so everyone has a good view.

Explore with AAA Member Choice Vacations

Set out to experience Switzerland, Austria, Bavaria and the Oberammergau Passion Play on a 10-day guided tour with AAA Member Choice Vacations in August 2020. The tour begins in Bern, the capital of Switzerland and a UNESCO World Heritage site, nestled in the Swiss countryside. The cobbled Old Town section is so well preserved that residents who lived here 500 years ago would still find it familiar today. Explore Bern on a panoramic sightseeing tour featuring the Bundeshaus (the Swiss Parliament), the Bear Pit, the Rose Gardens and the Gothic cathedral that dominates the skyline.

Travel along the shores of Lake Geneva to the medieval Chateau de Chillon. Later, enjoy inspiring Alpine views with a ride on the GoldenPass Panoramic Train from Montreux to Gstaad. Discover the delightful ambience of this world-famous Alpine ski resort with its many traditional wood chalets.

Set out for Lucerne, the Swiss paradise on the lake. Enjoy a leisurely paced walking tour featuring the covered Chapel Bridge; the famous water tower which has served as a prison, watchtower and treasury; the Renaissance-style Town Hall; the Baroque Jesuit Church; and the Lion Monument, carved from natural rock to commemorate the heroic Swiss Guard.

En route to Innsbruck, you’ll make your way through Liechtenstein, the smallest and richest German-speaking country in the world, and the only country to lie entirely within the Alps. Travel through the picturesque Austrian countryside to Salzburg, Austria. Upon arrival, enjoy a leisurely paced walking tour featuring Mirabell Gardens, which were featured in “The Sound of Music,” the birthplace of Mozart, and many other highlights of this beautiful city.

After crossing the border into Oberammergau, you’ll witness an afternoon performance of the Passion Play. The performers are all native to the village. To lend authenticity to the performance, they start to grow their hair and beards more than a year in advance. During a break, you’ll join your fellow travelers for dinner before returning for the remainder of the performance.

Afterward, visit Lindenhof Palace, one of the most artistic and stylistically complex ensembles of the 19th century. It is the only palace King Ludwig II of Bavaria was able to complete. Behind the Baroque facade lies a rococo world rich in ornamentation and sculptural elements. Finish your tour by exploring medieval Fussen, a romantic town in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps.

For more information about the AAA Member Choice Vacations’ Passion Play tour, contact a AAA travel agent at 413-785-1381 or visit AAA.com/MCV.
Live Well

Namaslay Your Next Flight

By Christina Elston

Would a few minutes of yoga make that flight from L.A. to London easier on the spine and legs? Yoga rooms that have popped up in at least seven international airports in recent years suggest it would.

“I’ve been to yoga rooms at Chicago and San Francisco during layovers,” said Jill Miller, L.A.-based founder of Tune-up Fitness. “People are in there and they are really doing it.” If you’re a yogi headed through one of those airports – the list also includes Dallas/Fort Worth, Burlington, Vt., London Gatwick, London Heathrow and Hong Kong – turn on your favorite podcast and go.

Not a regular practitioner? No yoga room at the airport you’re in? Miller suggests waking up your back, bottom and legs right at the gate. Hold onto the back of one of the seats and do a few squats for your quads and buttocks, then stand straight with your feet parallel and do some calf raises by repeatedly lifting and lowering your heels. This stimulates circulation in the lower legs and reduces your risk for deep-vein thrombosis, a rare but life-threatening blood-clotting condition.

Let go of the seat and raise your arms straight overhead, then stretch up and over to the left, then the right, for a full-body side stretch. Finally, put one foot up on the seat and step the other straight back into a runner’s lunge to pre-stretch your hip flexors. Repeat on the second side.

Brave enough to get down on the floor? “If you have the courage to do some planks, they are really good for firing up all of your core muscles,” Miller said. Hold each stretch or pose for 30 seconds to two minutes – enough that you feel energized or even a little tired. “You want to feel some type of shift,” she said. “That will indicate that your body actually put out.” Whatever you do, don’t sit until you have to. Walk, stretch or give that yoga room a try. “Your flight is definitely going to put your body to sleep,” Miller said. “If you have access to the lounge, don’t lounge.”

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Save & Splurge

Quebec City

By Craig Idlebrook

If you want a taste of Europe without leaving the continent, Quebec City is a great destination. Cobble streets, a castle-like city center and stone fortifications give the downtown a medieval feel, while Old Quebec, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the only walled city in the Americas north of Mexico. Busy with buskers in summer and picturesque with snow in winter, Quebec City offers endless opportunities for strolls and sightseeing.

Want to explore the Old-World charm of Quebec City? Visit AAA.com/Hotels to start your vacation planning.

$ Budget

Stay: Located a short drive from Old Quebec, the Ambassador Hotel offers an affordable base camp from which to explore the city. The hotel has a large pool and aquatic play area, making it a good option for families. There's also a lounge with live entertainment, and good places for budget meals within easy walking distance. Other perks include free in-room Wi-Fi and free parking.

Do: You can spend all day exploring Old Quebec while barely opening your wallet. Enjoy the busker shows in the summer near historic Chateau Frontenac and retrace the battle that shaped much of Canada's history as you walk the Plains of Abraham. Or stroll the fortifications and shop as you go, pausing to let your children roam in one of the city's many small parks.

Dine: The streets inside the Old City are lined with restaurants. If you're looking for a festive place for a great dinner at an affordable price, try Pizzeria D'Youville, the oldest pizzeria in the old city. The cherry-red interior seems to enhance the flavor of the pies, and the pizzeria also offers a great selection of cocktails and wines. There is good outdoor seating in warmer months.

$ Mid-Range

Stay: Situated on a quieter street of the Old City, Hotel Champlain Vieux Quebec is just a short stroll to all attractions. The rooms are small but well-appointed, and afford beautiful views of the city. The hotel also offers the rare perk of on-site parking. Other amenities include a continental breakfast, an espresso machine in the lobby and free Wi-Fi.

Do: There are many museums dedicated to Quebec's history. The Musee de la Civilisation uses multimedia exhibits to tell the stories of white settlers and aboriginal civilizations, the Musee de l'Amerique Francoophone focuses on the region's rich Catholic history, and the Musee de la Place Royale provides historical exhibits. Art lovers can also choose from several museums, including the Musee National des Beaux-arts du Quebec.

Dine: Culinary traditions carried over from France to Quebec include crepes filled with every ingredient imaginable. You'll get a good introduction at Le Billig Creperie-Bistro, where you can order sweet or savory crepes in an intimate cafe setting. (Just leave room for pastries!) The hockey jerseys hanging on the wall complete the Quebecois ambience.

$$ Luxury

Stay: Hotel 71 is a boutique hotel located just a short walk from Old Quebec. Its rooms feature sleek modern designs and offer good views of the St. Lawrence River. You can enjoy free continental breakfast in a cozy cafe tucked off to the side of the lobby. Other amenities include valet parking and a 24-hour fitness center.

Do: If you have children, they'll love the year-round fun park that is Valcartier Vacation Village. Located 20 minutes from Quebec City, it offers an outdoor water park, water slides and beach volleyball in the summer, and an indoor water park, tubing and an ice hotel in the winter. Camping is also available in the summer months.

Dine: With care and good design, even a warehouse can transform into an elegant eatery. Chez Muffy (formerly Le Panache), one of Quebec City's most chic restaurants, is housed in a 19th century warehouse. The interior still includes the original stone and exposed beams. You can sit by a fire and enjoy elegant reinventions of traditional Quebecois cuisine.

Holiday Travel Tips

The year-end holiday season is one of the busiest times of the year, when millions of travelers take to the roads and air to spend time with family and friends. To help you plan your holiday getaways, AAA travel experts offer these travel tips.

Plan Ahead
Book early for the best deals and availability on hotels, airfare, car rentals and more.

Choose a Travel Agent
Travel agents often have access to extra amenities and added benefits to help plan a magical holiday getaway. They can also be a tremendous help in the event something changes or goes wrong on your trip.

Be Flexible
If your schedule permits, consider traveling on the holiday itself to encounter less congestion and fewer crowds.

Safety First
Get plenty of rest before setting out on a holiday trip. If driving, schedule breaks every two hours or 100 miles to remain alert and avoid driving drowsy.

Prep Your Ride
Motorists should check the car battery and windshield wipers, inspect tires and pack a winter emergency kit containing a snow shovel, flashlight, ice scraper, jumper cables, warning devices and extra warm clothing for everyone riding in the vehicle.

Pack Your Patience
The holiday season is one of the busiest times of year for traveling. Expect heavy crowds and allow plenty of time to get to your destination safely.
Escape Winter in Sultry Costa Rica

By Craig Idlebrook

It was an ambitious plan, one hatched while experiencing cabin fever: We would travel with our 3-year-old daughter to Costa Rica to explore the Latin American country for two winter months. With a steamy climate and plenty of beaches, Costa Rica is a welcome refuge for travelers escaping the cold. It’s also one of the most stable countries in Central America. Costa Ricans, or Ticos, as they call themselves, enjoy a higher standard of living than those in neighboring countries, as the government has invested heavily in health care, education, infrastructure, and sustainability after it abolished its military in 1948. This has helped create a relatively strong middle class.

Tourism is one of Costa Rica’s most important economic engines. Travelers often find that the country provides a high level of comfort for such an exotic locale, and at an affordable price. That’s perhaps why Costa Rica has gained so many expatriates over the years—it can be hard to find a reason to leave.

Two Tickets to Paradise
We had already been to Costa Rica once. She had studied abroad there, and I came for a mid-semester visit. We were college kids with a thirst to see as much of the country as we could while spending as little money as possible. During my weeklong visit, we fitted from destination to destination, a travel strategy that left me with only blurred memories. I recalled two locales from that trip. The first was Monteverde, the rainforest preserve an easy day’s travel northwest of the country’s capital, San Jose. There I was enveloped in wetness while walking the canopy catwalks and dodging fruit thrown by howler monkeys. The second was Arenal, the country’s beloved volcano. As time ran out during my stay, we got only close enough to see the volcano’s red glow at a distance.

Today, there is no external lava flow, but the volcano is still active. Other memories from that distant trip include endless plates of gallo pinto, the country’s popular staple dish of rice and beans, and the sound of rain on a tin roof.

Welcome (Back) to the Jungle
The second trip would be much different; we knew we’d enjoy the experience more if we didn’t gallivant too much with a 3-year-old in tow. To stretch our budget and provide a stable landing spot for the start of the trip, we opted to volunteer on a horse ranch in San Rafael de Puriscal, a bit south of the capital. We had minimal daily chores, which left long stretches of time to hike the sugar cane fields and citrus groves surrounding us. We found a waterfall that doubled as a local swimming hole and visited it daily. San Rafael de Puriscal may not be a sought-after tourist destination, but nearly everywhere in Costa Rica offers postcard-worthy beauty.

After our stay on the farm, we had ambitious plans to travel coast-to-coast and soak up all there was to see. Those plans melted away, however, once we hit the picturesque beaches of Samara along the middle of Costa Rica’s Pacific coastline. There is a seemingly endless choice of beaches in Costa Rica. While each one offers varying levels of tourist amenities and remoteness, Samara felt just right. Within an hour of arriving in town, we found an affordable beachfront home to rent and had washed off the dust of the road in the waves before dinner. Although there were kayak outfitters and surf shops within walking distance of our house, we found our days pleasantly full of nothing to do. Our daily schedule included multiple dips into the surf, coconut harvesting and chats with Ticos and expats. Our only concerns were the fire ants that sometimes guarded fallen coconuts.

Samara was difficult to leave, and it took work to rouse ourselves to get back to San Jose in time to catch our flight home. The exit tax travelers have to pay at the airport felt like a last temptation to linger. If we didn’t have a New England spring awaiting us at home, that temptation might have proved too great.
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Rock Around the Dock in 2018

Some of rock ‘n’ roll’s most memorable tunes are coming to the high seas, daddy-o.

Rocky and the Rollers will sail the eastern and western Caribbean with Royal Caribbean International for two sailings in March. The band – which plays tunes from the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s – includes musicians who have performed with some of rock’s best-known recording artists.

Other noteworthy bands will perform, too, and each sailing will feature special events like prom nights and sock hop dances.

The sailings depart from Florida’s Port Canaveral. The eastern Caribbean voyage stops in St. Martin; Labadee, Haiti; and other destinations. The western Caribbean voyage stops in Labadee; Falmouth, Jamaica; and Cozumel, Mexico.

Both trips will take place on Oasis of the Seas, which offers a variety of restaurants and onboard activities ranging from spa sessions to zip lining.

Rocky and the Rollers will take to the sea again in August, sailing to Alaska aboard Royal Caribbean’s Explorer of the Seas.

For more on these trips, contact a AAA travel agent.
This Month in Automotive History

It’s All About the Speed

By Roberto X. Cruz

The holidays are finally here and there’s plenty to be jolly about. Celebrate these exciting moments in automotive history along with all the other reasons to be merry this month.

Dec. 1, 1913

Automaker Henry Ford revolutionized automobile production when he introduced the moving assembly line at the Ford plant in Highland Park, Mich. Influenced by production methods used at flour mills and meatpacking factories, the process reduced the build time for a Ford Model T from 12 hours to 2½ hours.

Dec. 17, 1979

Hollywood stuntman Stan Barrett claimed he was the first human to drive faster than the speed of sound. Barrett rocketed across a dry lakebed at California’s Edwards Air Force Base in a three-wheeled car that had an afterburner made from a Sidewinder missile. While his exact speed has been disputed, reports estimated Barrett hit 740 mph in 16.8 seconds.

Dec. 12, 2000

General Motors announced a four-year phaseout of the 103-year-old Oldsmobile brand. The oldest American automobile marque when it disbanded in 2004, Oldsmobile built more than 35 million vehicles and was the first to offer a fully automatic transmission in its cars.

Snow Got You Down? Check Out Our Tips

Continued from page 1

A clogged exhaust can fill a vehicle cabin with deadly carbon monoxide when the engine is on.

Spin Stops Here

Pedal to the metal is not the right philosophy. Flooding the accelerator could dig the vehicle deeper into the snow and cause unnecessary wear and tear on important parts like the transmission and tires. Instead, slowly press the accelerator and ease up if the wheels start to spin. Turn off traction control and turn on the low-gear snow mode if your car has it.

Let’s Rock, Carefully

One way to escape a snowy drift is the rocking technique. Put the car in drive and then inch up as far as the car will go. When the car stops, brake and then put it in reverse. Gently accelerate and when it stops again switch back to drive. Repeat this rocking process until the car crashes enough snow for you to power through it. But be careful. While this method does work, you could damage your transmission if you shift before you come to a complete stop, said AAA’s Car Doctor John Paul. “Make sure the RPMs come all the way down before you switch gears,” he added.

Get Creative

If you’re still stuck, you could try to get traction by placing your floor mats under the drive wheels. But this will likely ruin the mats. Instead, pour sand or kitty litter under the tires to get traction. Just be safe, even if you’re in a hurry, Paul said. Never stand in front or behind a running vehicle, either, he added.

For more information visit AAA.com/Registry

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Test Drive

2017 Lincoln Continental

Lincoln calls the latest Continental “quiet luxury,” and I can’t disagree. The ride is smooth, the cabin is trimmed in high-quality materials and the engine delivers almost silent performance. Features include pre-collision and pedestrian detection as well as parking assist, which helped me squeeze the Continental into a tight spot. It fits five and the seats are some of the most comfortable I have sat in. All models use a six-speed automatic transmission and this Lincoln flagship can be configured in front- or all-wheel drive.

— John Paul

$70,945 (Price as tested)
6-cylinder
400 hp
16/24 mpg

2017 Lexus CT 200h

Unlike many hybrid cars, which began life as a gasoline-only model, the CT 200h was designed only as a hybrid. It features a sporty five-door hatchback design with plenty of power and handling that places it squarely in the fun-to-drive category. Thanks to the hybrid setup, the sporty driving experience doesn’t compromise fuel economy, with a combined 42 mpg – the best of any Lexus. With a starting price of $31,250, the CT 200h is the least expensive model in the entire Lexus product line. Yet even as the entry-level model, it comes with a long list of luxury items.

— Tara Baukus Mello

$38,475 (Price as tested)
4-cylinder
134 hp
43/40 mpg

Around the Horn

By Roberto X. Cruz

Ford Motor Co. wants you to be a good neighbor. That’s why the automaker has introduced a new stealth mode in its 2018 Ford Mustang GT. The feature gives drivers the ability to quiet the rumble of the pony car’s engine at times when neighbors might be asleep. Aptly named Good Neighbor Mode, the feature reduces ignition noise to 72 decibels, which is about as loud as a household dishwasher, Ford executive Steve von Foerster said. The optional feature is included in the Mustang’s active valve performance exhaust package.

The world’s best-selling electric car has a longer range than ever before. The 2018 Nissan Leaf can travel up to 150 miles between charges, up from 107 in the previous model, according to Nissan. The base model for 2018 includes a suite of driver assistance features like automatic emergency braking. Nissan has also upped the horsepower in the electricity-powered hatchback by 38 percent. In single-pedal mode, the vehicle automatically slows and stops when the driver lets up on the accelerator. The 2018 Nissan Leaf starts at $29,990 before a $7,500 federal tax credit kicks in.

New Porsche models will sport a feature that lets them anticipate roadway changes nearly 2 miles down the road. The German automaker recently announced that 2019 Porsches will be equipped with its InnoDrive driver-assistance feature, which uses topographical 3-D maps to adjust the engine mapping and suspension settings to handle conditions like sharp curves and slick surfaces. The feature was previously only available in Europe. A Traffic Jam Assist component of InnoDrive also helps the car automatically steer and maintain a safe distance from the car ahead during heavy traffic.

Rick’s Auto Body Earns Kudos

Rick’s Auto Body, a AAA Approved Auto Repair facility in Springfield, was recently selected by The Republican and MassLive.com readers as the area’s best auto body shop.

“It can be very emotional for people who have been involved in an accident with their vehicle,” said Mari Tarpinian, co-owner of Rick’s, “and we go out of our way to make it as smooth and as pleasurable as possible given the situation.”

Rick’s is certified by major car manufacturers to repair vehicles back to pre-accident conditions. The facility has achieved I-Car Gold certification, which is a training program their technicians complete on a yearly basis.
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