

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

BUMP IN THE ROAD

THE MOM MOBILE MINUS TWO

BY BELLA ENGLISH | GLOBE STAFF

We were on a college tour trip, trying to turn it into a fun family vacation, throwing in some sights along the East Coast to make the forced march more palatable to both our 11-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter. Instead, it turned into the stuff of family folklore.

We were driving the Mom Mobile, my purple minivan that had seen its best days. We had been to the Washington area, then down to North Carolina, visiting campuses. Heading back north, the Mom Mobile broke down in Baltimore, forcing a two-day layover in a cheap motel with faulty air conditioning. By the time we got back into the repaired Mom Mobile, Megan and I had raging colds and took to our sick beds, me stretched out in the van's middle seat, Megan in the back seat, each of us covered by quilts. Nick was in the front with his dad, mesmerized by his Game Boy. We were headed north to Princeton, N.J., to visit my niece on the way home.

While we were sleeping, my husband pulled into a rest stop somewhere on the New Jersey Turnpike and asked if anyone wanted to get out. None of us answered, so he went to gas up and use the restroom. When the car door slammed shut, I stirred and encouraged both kids to follow my lead to the bathroom.

Megan and I decided it would be a good idea, but Nick, fixated on his Game Boy, was having none of it. It was a broiling summer day, Megan and I were woozy from our nap and feeling pretty miserable. When we came out of the bathroom, there was no Mom Mobile in sight.

"They must be getting gas," I said, and we wandered over to the gas pumps. No Mom Mobile.

After waiting a few minutes, it occurred to me. But no, it couldn't be. I waited a few more minutes. It occurred to me again: Had we been left at the rest stop?

Without a purse or cellphone, I was at a loss. Finally, a young man selling sunglasses offered to lend me his phone. This was several years ago. Neither kid owned a cellphone, and my husband's

had not been working. So I called my own number a few times.

No answer.

Meanwhile, in the Mom Mobile . . . well, here's the way my husband tells it. "The phone started ringing, and I asked you to please answer it, but you didn't respond. Nick looked back and said, 'Mom's not here.' I said, 'What do you mean, Mom's not here?' "

"Megan?" Nick called to the backseat. "Mom's not here!"

Silence.

"Dad, Megan's not here, either."

Nick then fetched my ringing phone from my purse.

"Nick, this is Mom. Where are you?"

"Mom, where are you?"

"We're at the rest stop, where you left us!"

He handed the phone to my husband.

"Are you by chance missing something?" I asked. (Insert irate wife voice here.) "Like half your family?"

"I thought you and Megan were sleeping."

"Just come get us!" I barked.

"OK, but where are you?"

"I'm at the rest stop!"

"I know, but which one? They all look alike."

When we finally figured out which one, my husband said, "We're on our way but the next exit is 14 miles away."

There are times when words fail, and it's probably a good thing.

About 40 minutes later, they pulled up, looking sheepish.

"We've decided to take it like men," said my husband. "We're sorry. But we thought you were under the quilts."

I am convinced that, had I not called on my cellphone, the two of them would have made it all the way to Princeton before realizing that Megan and I were not in the car.

I even made up a country-western title to mark the occasion:

"My husband left me at the rest stop and ran off with a red head."

Our son has red hair. It has been 10 years, and I can laugh at it all — now.



HERE

AMC dinner series offers a taste of global adventure
Go on a culinary and cultural tour to destinations around the world during the Appalachian Mountain Club's International Dinner and Adventure series, held weekly at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center in New Hampshire from January through March (no program Feb. 18). Local and regional guides, explorers, and travelers share stories of their adventures in Lebanon, Tasmania, British Columbia, Greenland, Madeira, St. Maarten, Ireland, Peru, and Iceland. The series, now in its 25th year, launches Jan. 14 with a focus on Nepal. Each event features a traditional family-style four-course dinner; guests may bring their own beer or wine. Dinner and presentation \$24 per person for adult AMC member, \$29 nonmember; lodging package runs \$49/\$59 per person for adult AMC member/nonmember, includes Joe Dodge Lodge accommodations with shared bath, dinner, presentation, breakfast, and a one-day trail pass for cross-country skiing and tubing at Great Glen Trails. 603-466-2727, www.outdoors.org/internationaldinner.

Step back in time at Berkshires' inn
Horse-drawn coaches carrying travelers from Hartford to Albany in the mid-1700s often stopped at The Old Inn on the Green in the Berkshires for a whiskey and a good night's sleep.

The inn, in New Marlborough, has just unveiled a renovated taproom that features a bar top made from locally mined schist, custom-designed pine woodwork, and handmade bar stools crafted from local ash trees and hickory, all recreated with historical accuracy to fit the 1700s décor. Today, in this seven-seat taproom, you'll find classic cocktails, local draught and bottled beer, an extensive wine list, and nationally renowned American cuisine. (It has received the AAA Four Diamond Award since 1995.) Modern amenities include a swimming pool, Frette linens, in-room Jacuzzis, Wi-Fi, and satellite TV. 413-229-7924, www.oldinn.com.

THERE

New insurance for US travelers worldwide
You don't have to be a scuba diver to take advantage of two new travel insurance plans offered by Divers Alert Network. Purchase the company's new Trip Insurance and get protection for one trip, including emergency assistance and transportation, medical, dental, trip interruption and cancellation, protection for your luggage and sports equipment, concierge services, identity theft resolution services, and on-demand medical services. The Annual Travel Insurance plan suits travelers who take multiple trips throughout the year. It includes similar protection and services, plus accidental death and dismemberment. Both plans offer three levels of coverage, de-

pending on your budget and coverage needs, and are available to DAN members and nonmembers. Coverage varies by state and is available to US residents traveling anywhere in the world. Rates vary. 800-446-2671, www.dan.org/travel.

Handy travel apps for the holidays and beyond
As you travel this holiday season, and throughout the new year, keep in mind these helpful free apps for those on the go: GasBuddy locates the closest gas stations and provides approximate pricing. GateGuru provides a map of terminals, reviews of airport restaurants, and average wait times at security points. ExpertFlyer's Seat Alerts helps you find the best available seat: Enter your airline, flight number,



and date of travel and then request an aisle, window, or other specific seat. Seat Alerts notifies you when it finds your desired seat. And Waze helps you find the quickest driving route to your destination, especially helpful when traveling in unfamiliar territory. Just type in an address and Waze provides the fastest route, taking into account up-to-date traffic reports to help navigate you around trouble spots.

EVERYWHERE

Keep your hands toasty while driving
Make winter road trips more enjoyable with Hammacher Schlemmer's new heated steering wheel cover, which fits snugly on the wheel and keeps your hands warm without having to wear gloves or mittens. The battery-powered cover fits standard wheels from 14½ to 15½ inches in diameter and is easy to install: Slip the rubber cover around the outside of the steering wheel and then Velcro the battery to the steering column so it's out of the way during use. The cover has three heat settings that range from 95 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit, and heats up in less than three minutes. Recharge the battery by plugging it into your car's 12-volt power outlet. \$79.95. 800-321-1484, www.hammacher.com.

Tablet car mount helps keep passengers



entertained
Make car rides for your backseat passengers more enjoyable with Road-Show, made by Hopkinton-based Felix Brand. This tablet car mount — one of the best we've ever tried — lets you attach an iPad or Android tablet to the back of your car's headrests, and offers excellent adjustability so you can watch in landscape or portrait mode, and angle the tablet to suit multiple viewers. The sturdy mount quickly and easily attaches to headrest posts that are spaced between 8 and 15½ centimeters apart (no tools needed). Slip the bottom of your tablet into a secure slot on the car mount and then stretch plastic caps — secured to the car mount by thick rubber band — over the top corners of your tablet. The tablet and mount remain snugly in place, even when getting nudged by little hands and feet. \$39.99. www.felixbrand.com.

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