

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

HERE

AMC’S GEAR DEMO CENTER
Check out the latest outdoor gear and put it to the test for free at the Joe Dodge Lodge in Pinkham Notch, at the base of New Hampshire’s Mount Washington. The lodge, run by the Appalachian Mountain Club, just opened an outdoor gear demo center for lodge guests, enabling them to try out Iowa boots, Leki hiking poles, Osprey backpacks, and Hillsound traction devices, which fit over boots and help keep you upright on slick trails. Equipment is available in all adult sizes, and in children’s sizes for boots and poles. Find something you like and you can get a discount to purchase the same or similar items at the AMC’s Pinkham Notch visitors center. Demo gear is available on a first-come, first-served basis. 603-466-2727, www.outdoors.org/pinkham

HOT HOTEL DEALS
Book a room at The Colonnade Hotel in Boston and you will pay a first-night rate that is equivalent to the temperature at 5 p.m. on check-in day, as part of the hotel’s Frosty Fridays deal. That means, if the temperature, as measured by the National Weather Service, registers 20 degrees Fahrenheit, you only pay \$20 for your Friday night stay. If it dips below zero, you get a free night. You then pay a special rate of \$309 for your Saturday night stay. The two-night package, good through March 30, includes a deluxe room, a choice of two tickets to the Old Town Trolley Tour or admission and rentals at the Boston Common Frog Pond Skating Rink, hot chocolate for two at the hotel’s Brasserie Jo, and overnight parking; based on double occupancy. 800-962-3030, www.colonnadehotel.com



THERE

CRUISE VIDEOS HELP YOU CHOOSE
Whether you want to fantasize about a future cruise or get a sneak peek at your next trip, check out MyCruiseVideos.com, a new site that features more than 2,700 videos of cruises worldwide that you can view for free. Learn about the destination, the cruise line, and the ship and its amenities before you go. Look up your cabin, for instance, or find out about onboard spas, entertainment, and kids’ activities. MyCruiseVideos.com works with Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, allowing you to post your favorite videos and get feedback from friends and family. 312-344-3280, www.mycruisevideos.com



SLEEP IN AN OLD FRENCH COURTHOUSE
Stay at the new Radisson Blu Nantes, a boutique hotel in western France, and you can dine in a room that once served as a grand courtroom and see a wine cellar that used to be the trial judge’s chambers. The 1851 building functioned as the Nantes Court of Law until 2000. Now, the former Palais de Justice has 142 guest rooms, a restaurant, and a spa and Turkish bath. Other amenities include Le Préambule bar, which serves wine and cocktails, and complimentary high-speed Internet. Travel less than a mile to reach the train station and about 6 miles to access the airport. Rates from \$190 per room per night. 800-333-3333, www.radissonblu.com/hotel-nantes

THIS APP CAN GUIDE YOU IN THE BIG APPLE
Download Smartsave’s New York for Less app on your iPhone, iPod, or iPad, and you will get a comprehensive guide to the Big Apple that features more than 10,000 points of interest. It also offers discounts at many New York restaurants and attractions, an ad-free experience, a fully searchable street map, and an interactive subway map. Best of all, the app works when you are offline, so you don’t need to track down a hot spot to access all the information. Download it from iTunes. www.forlessguides.com



EVERYWHERE

A FULL-FEATURED MINI DSLR CAMERA
Save space without sacrificing quality when you take Olympus’s OM-D E-M5 on the road. This weatherproof camera takes 16.1 megapixel images, shoots 1080 HD video, and weighs less than half a pound thanks to its mirrorless technology. What sets it apart: It has a comfortable ergonomic grip (no boxy feel), an option to use manual or electronic zoom, and easy access to many shooting modes without having to drill down through umpteen menus. Compose shots while looking through the viewfinder or the tilting 3-inch touchscreen monitor, and shoot up to 9 frames per second. The 12-50mm kit lens, equivalent to a 24-100mm lens in 35mm-speak, serves as the perfect travel lens, or bring along a selection of interchangeable lenses. The E-M5 comes with a small detachable flash, but it’s worth investing in the FL-600R flash (\$299). \$1,299, includes 12-50mm lens. 800-622-6372, www.getolympus.com



NEW FITNESS GADGET
Keep tabs on your fitness stats and the quality of sleep you get while on the road with the new Fitbit One. This tiny device tracks miles walked, calories burned, steps taken, and number of floors climbed, and it records the amount of deep versus restless sleep you get at night. You can also record the food you eat each day, and set health and fitness goals. Clip the device onto a shirt or slip it into a pocket during the day, and then wear it in a thin wrist band at night. Plug a tiny dongle into your computer’s USB port and upload data wirelessly. Then consult the Dashboard on the Fitbit website to see your results. \$99.95. 877-623-4997, www.fitbit.com
KARI BODNARCHUK

The List

PLACES TO PLUNGE INTO 2013



STEVE RUARK

1
CONEY ISLAND POLAR BEAR CLUB, BROOKLYN, N.Y.
www.polarbearclub.org
The Coney Island Polar Bear Club, founded in 1903, these days attracts about 1,500 participants who kick off the New Year with a daring dip in the Atlantic Ocean.

2
L STREET BROWNIES, SOUTH BOSTON
www.lstreetcurley.com
In our backyard, upward of 700 swimmers jump into the frigid waters of Boston Harbor for the annual Jan. 1 plunge from the Curley Community Center. The Brownies, who started the event in 1904, are so named for their year-round tans.

3
MSP POLAR BEAR PLUNGE, ANNAPOLIS, MD.
www.somd.org
The largest plunge in the country (pictured), hosted by the Maryland State Police as a fund-raiser for Special Olympics Maryland, is held later in January, this year on the 26th. In 2012, some 11,000 plungers jumped into the Chesapeake Bay, raising \$2.6 million.

4
THE COURAGE POLAR BEAR DIP, OAKVILLE, ONT.
www.polarbeardip.ca
While polar bear plunges are a New Year’s Day tradition all across Canada, the Courage event on the shore of Lake Ontario has become the country’s biggest, with more than 700 dippers and thousands of on-lookers. To date, nearly \$1 million has been raised to support clean water projects through World Vision Canada.

5
NIEUWJAARSDUIK (NEW YEAR’S DIVE), SCHEVENINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS
www.unox.nl/nl/event/nieuwjaarsduik
As in Canada, New Year’s Day dips are held in dozens of communities across the Netherlands. The largest is in Scheveningen, a beach resort town near The Hague, where about 10,000 dive into the North Sea, many wearing sponsor Unox’s orange hats and gloves.

DIANE DANIEL

Sunday Morning

WHISTLER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

It’s early Sunday morning at the base of Whistler Mountain and you just want to sleep in. The entree last night at dinner was a Vancouver specialty, sablefish, washed down with a heady British Columbian syrah. The room is so warm and the pillow so fluffy. Just one more hour of rest, maybe two. . . . No way! This is Whistler, my friend, where the wise get up early and board the Whistler Village Gondola at 7:30 a.m. for Fresh Tracks. For \$19.95 (children ages 7-12 \$13.75), you get the green light to head up the

mountain an hour before it officially opens, grab breakfast at the Roundhouse Lodge, and get two to three good runs in before the masses arrive. Before 8 a.m., you’re already at 6,069 feet, dining on a buffet breakfast of waffles and eggs, waiting to hear those magical words, “Runs are open!” Hit the trails that tend to get busy during the course of the day such as the blue cruisers Little Red Run and Franz’s that lead you through the tall trees. The Big Red Express chair heads back to Roundhouse, where you can sample

another run like G.S. that will bring you to the Harmony lift. And herein lies the beauty of Fresh Tracks. You’re always one step ahead of the crowds, who are already an hour behind on their first run. The heavenly Harmony bowl, with its steepes and chutes, can be all yours for a magical moment. Isn’t that worth getting out of bed?
www.whistlerblackcomb.com/events-and-activities/winter-activities/fresh-tracks.aspx

STEPHEN JERMANOK



MIKE CRANE

50 destinations for adventurous cyclists

By Shira Springer
GLOBE STAFF

The Tour de Tuli takes cyclists through parts of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, traveling along elephant trails and past all kinds of wildlife. A photo of the event features cyclists passing a giraffe. A difficulty rating calls the route “extreme — and even tougher if you encounter charging elephants.” It is a six-day bike safari covering roughly 200 miles. And it is exactly the type of trip you expect in a book entitled “Fifty Places to Bike Before You Die.”

While bucket-list books inevitably encourage debate about what makes the cut and what doesn’t, “Fifty Places to Bike Before You Die” negotiates its varied terrain skillfully. Author Chris Santella asked cycling experts for suggestions, yielding some unexpected destinations and routes with various degrees of difficulty. That said, the book is best used as a starting point, an introduction to the many cycling tours out there. For some cyclists, it may open up new areas for exploration — the Icefields Parkway in Alberta, Canada; the rice fields of Bali; or the roads from Hanoi to Angkor Wat. Or, it may confirm the appeal of certain destinations like California’s wine country or western Ireland or Majorca, Spain, where many professional cyclists train.

Santella followed no set criteria, but generally included routes that offer either breathtaking scenery, unique culture, tasty culinary offerings, or all of the above. He recognizes the subjectivity of his endeavor, listing rides that will suit avid cyclists who crave high mileage and tough climbs and others that will please casual cyclists who prefer frequent stops at French bistros and Italian wine tastings. For cyclists who fall somewhere in between, the itineraries seem somewhat flex-



BOOK REVIEW

FIFTY PLACES TO BIKE BEFORE YOU DIE
By Chris Santella
Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 224 pp., \$24.95

ible with detours to take or skip.

The book includes mostly off-the-beaten-path trips, making some urban destinations seem a little out of place. I’m not sure New York City and Portland, Ore., merit top 50 inclusion. Of the 50 destinations, 24 feature roads in either the United States or Canada with the Portland, Ore.-based Santella favoring the Pacific Northwest with three routes in Oregon and two in Washington. Yet, having cycled through different parts of Oregon, it’s hard to argue with Santella’s home region bias. Of the remaining 26 routes, two feature South or Central America, two cover

parts of Africa, six pedal through Southeast Asia and Oceania, and 16 tour Europe.

Still, some omissions stand out. No treks through popular cycling spots in Germany or Austria? My most memorable and most scenic bike trip climbed from Salzburg, Austria, to the Salzkammergut lake district east of the city. So, it surprised me that Austria makes only a few-day cameo in the Prague-to-Vienna trip. But part of the book’s fun is the debate it encourages, even with well-made cases for each selection.

The entries offer brief, yet thorough, descriptions of bike routes with nearby options like Maine’s Casco Bay region and Vermont’s Champlain Valley and faraway destinations like New Zealand’s South Island and Taiwan’s Taroko Gorge. Depending on the place, the entry highlights local history or food or geography and provides just enough information to encourage further exploration. And for the most part, the entries are colorful and informative enough to make for interesting reading even if places like Lithuania’s coast or Thailand’s Golden Triangle never make your cycling bucket list.

At the end of each route description, the “If you go” information takes the suggested itineraries from the plant-a-seed stage to actual planning. It lists the nearest airports and best airlines to use, as well as the best time to try each route, the level of difficulty, duration of each trip, and options for accommodations and guided tours.

With tips like that, “Fifty Places to Bike Before You Die” gets adventurous cyclists going in the right direction. The real challenge comes once they start pedaling.

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