

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



LINDA LABAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

THE FIRE IS SO DELIGHTFUL

By Linda Laban
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Many Boston hotels have fireplaces in spots where people drink and eat: The Four Seasons’ ground floor Bristol Lounge, the Ritz-Carlton’s lobby level Avery Bar, the Mandarin Oriental, Boston’s Lobby Lounge, the Fairmont Copley Plaza’s OAK Long Bar + Kitchen, and the Seaport Hotel’s Tamo bar all include one. But at these and most hotels, the glow stops at the public areas.

Some hotels are a little more democratic, though. At XV Beacon, the lobby fireplace is only the beginning. There’s a fireplace in every bedroom. You don’t even need to get out of bed to turn the fire on and off — the control is right by the nightstand. XV Beacon suites include a fireplace in the sitting room, too. You’ll pay for the luxury, however: Rates start around \$330.

Most fireplaces in hotels are gas fueled, but two Boston hotels have wood-burning ones. At the Taj Boston, there are 42 fireplace suites, each with a sitting room with a wood burning fireplace. The fireplace butler service means you don’t have to lift a finger —

other than dialing guest services. The fireplace butler not only gets the fire going, but will return to pop on a log or two, if needed.

Guests can even choose what type of wood they’d like: maple, oak, cherry, birch — or pick the Taj blend. Each has a different aroma and burning speed. There is no charge for the butler service; it’s included in the price of a suite. (Fireside suites run from \$425, depending on size.)

Just up Boylston Street, similarly, the Lenox Hotel lobby has wood-burning fireplaces in 48 of its guest rooms. While some are original to the 1900-built hotel, more were added during recent renovations. The fireplaces aren’t only in suites,

either. All corner rooms, that is the Executive King, Executive Queen, and Queen fireplace classified rooms, have wood-burning fireplaces. (The fireplace rooms start at \$249 per night.)

The Lenox also has a fireplace butler service, and that means Walter Villatoro is kept very busy during the winter. The recent cold snap had guests calling down for their fires to be lit at 7 in the morning so they could have breakfast in their rooms. The fireplace rooms, according to the Lenox’s general manager Shane McWeeny, “are a hot commodity.”

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HERE

KIDS DITCH DEVICES, EMBRACE THE OUTDOORS

Get your kids away from their screens and into the outdoors. The Jackson Ski Touring center has launched the Youth Nordic Program, which offers free supervised ski tours for children 11 through 17 every Sunday through March 5 (except today, Feb. 19). Participants go on 90-minute adventures along wooded trails, stopping to watch birdlife, identify animal tracks, and spot ice crystals in the streams. Kay Leigh Kearns, a youth program director in the local school district, and her husband Andrew, a ski patroller and Wilderness First Responder, lead the tours. The program, geared to intermediate to advanced cross-country skiers, runs 10 a.m. to noon to allow extra time for equipment rental and introductions. Tour includes hot chocolate, but not the \$10 trail fee or rentals, if needed. Maximum 10 kids; parents welcome to join. 603-383-9355, www.jacksonxc.org.

LUNCH TRAY RACES AT WILDCAT

Grab a lunch tray from Wildcat Mountain and see how fast you can go during the Lunch Tray Luge competition Feb. 22 from noon to 1 p.m. Race your friends and other competitors on the track at the base of the mountain. Winners of each heat advance, in a series of elimination runs, until the fastest overall winner is declared. Don’t miss this February vacation tradition, and the only day lunch trays are allowed on the slopes. Sorry, parents: This event is for kids 14 and under. Pick up a free Snowbelt ticket at the customer service/ticket desk if you’re not skiing. 888-774-9453, www.ski-wildcat.com.

THERE

CELEBRATE THE BICYCLE’S 200TH ANNIVERSARY

Cycle across five countries to where modern-day bikes were invented on a new tour offered by Wilderness Scot-

land. The UK-based company’s Five Countries Tour features a 12-day bike journey through Great Britain and Ireland. Participants start in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and pedal 500 miles, cycling through Snowdonia National Park in Wales, from Dublin through Donegal and around the Antrim Coast in Ireland, and across the Dumfries and Galloway regions of Scotland. The trip also passes through Keir Mill, a small Scottish village where Kirkpatrick Macmillan invented the modern pedal bicycle in 1839 (22 years after a German inventor designed the original push bike model in 1817). Trips depart May 15 and Sept. 11. Starting rate: \$3,362, includes accommodations, most meals, ride support, and vehicle, ferry, and private boat transportation. 866-740-3890, www.wildernessscotland.com.

WASTE NO TIME WITH THIS SKI AREA APP

Getting around the largest ski area in the United States can take time, but

the free EpicMix app can help you navigate Park City Mountain’s 7,300 acres much quicker. Its new EpicMix Time feature gives you real-time chairlift and gondola wait times so you can get the most out of your visit. The award-winning ski and snowboard app also works at several Colorado resorts (Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge, and Keystone), and California ski areas (Heavenly, Kirkwood, and Northstar). It offers up-to-date weather information for each resort, keeps track of your vertical footage (from single day to lifetime totals), and lets you post photos and ski/snowboard achievements, such as the most number of lifts you’ve ridden in a day. www.epicmix.com.

EVERYWHERE

MINIMIZE KIDS’ SCREEN TIME ON THE GO

Keeping track of your children’s screen time can be harder while traveling. A company called unGlue, created by two dads, has developed two apps that help parents manage kids’ screen time, and ensure they don’t view anything unacceptable. It also gives kids the freedom to decide how and when they use their screen time. Download the parents’ unGlue app onto your smartphone, tablet, or computer, and the kids’ app onto their devices. Make

sure you’re all on the same Wi-Fi network and then set each child’s Entertainment Time, indicating how much time he or she is allowed online for videos, social media, and games. Kids can bank unused screen time for later, and earn more screen time by completing chores or tasks that you assign to them through unGlue. The app, currently free, can monitor any Apple or Android device, and many home-based Wi-Fi devices such as computers, tablets, and game consoles. www.unglue.com.

LEAK-PROOF CONTAINERS FOR TRAVEL

Bring one of Sea to Summit’s new X-Seal & Go containers on your trip and you can pack a kid’s meal for the car ride or airport leftovers for your flight, or have something handy to use in your hotel room or on your camping adventures. The best part: It won’t leak all over your car, travel bag, or backpack. The X-Seal & Go series includes food-grade silicone bowls and cups that come with airtight lids. They quickly collapse for easy portability, and come in a variety of sizes, including 7.2- and 14-ounce cups, and 20- and 28.8-ounce bowls. Purchase each item separately, or buy a small or large set in which the cup nests in the lid of the bowl when collapsed. \$16.95-\$39.95 at REI. 303-440-8977, www.seatosummit.com.

KARI BODNARCHUK

