

Currents

An app to fetch all flight info

A new app called FlightBoard turns your iPhone, iPod, or iPad into an arrival and departure board for any airport in the world. Download the \$3.99 application from iTunes, enter the name of an airport, and select “arrival” or “departure.” You get a real-time screen that offers such up-to-date information as gate numbers and flight status. You can have details of a particular flight sent to an e-mail account or posted on your Facebook or Twitter pages. FlightBoard, created by Mobiat, works with more than 4,000 airports and 1,400 airlines and is automatically updated every five minutes. www.mobiat.com

Hotel treats for the kids
Children get special treatment at all Affinia hotels in New York, Chicago, and Washington with the My Family Getaways deal through Dec. 31. Guests 12 and under receive a backpack stocked with a city-specific Frommer’s guide geared to kids, a deck of city adventure cards, a children’s digital camera with a carrying case, and a scrapbook with city-specific stickers. Add to that access to a chest that contains board games, family-oriented DVDs, arts and crafts kits, and children’s books. Nightly rates for all of Affinia’s New York hotels (there are five) start at \$209, based on double occupancy, Chicago at \$199, and Washington at \$189. Affinia Gardens, a few blocks from Central Park, has patio suites and kitchenettes. 866-233-4642, www.affinia.com/myfamily

Adventures in Ecuador
Bike 12½ miles into Coto-paxi National Park, and then post signs that tout leave-no-trace ethics and warn against illegal hunting. Or go ziplining through the canopy at Hacienda Santa Rita Ecological Reserve and help with trail maintenance. This five-day Ecuador trip, run by Montana-based Adventure Life, blends adventure experiences with volunteer conservation efforts. You start with a horseback ride among herds of wild horses to the foothills of Rumiñahui Volcano, led by guides who will tell you about the area and its medicinal plants. Then spend three nights at the Hacienda El Porvenir, around which you will plant trees as part of a reforestation initiative. Rates start at \$930 per person. 800-344-6118, www.adventurelife.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

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Destinations

ARTS



PETER MACDIARMID/GETTY IMAGES

“Venice: Canaletto and His Rivals,” a show of 18th-century paintings of Venice, is up at the National Gallery in London before it comes to Washington.

Canvases, photos, and . . . teapots

THROUGH JAN. 24
PARIS
“**Claude Monet**”: More than 150 paintings have been brought together for this retrospective at the Grand Palais of the great Impressionist’s work. Parisian street scenes, railway stations, poppy fields, Rouen Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament, the banks of the Seine, haystacks, lily ponds: All Monet’s familiar and cherished subjects are here. The show has been called the most important presentation of his painting in decades. Certainly, it’s being treated like an event of national importance: President Nicolas Sarkozy has contributed a foreword to the exhibition catalog, hailing Monet as “an unmistakable emblem of the international influence of French culture.” 3 avenue du Général-Eisenhower, 011-33-1-44-13-17-17, www.grandpalais.fr

THROUGH JAN. 16
LONDON
“**Cezanne’s Card Players**”: The Courtauld Gallery has gathered the painter’s celebrated series of paintings of card players. Also on display are Cezanne’s oil sketches and drawings for the series. The show will run at New York’s Metropolitan

Museum of Art from Feb. 9 through May 8. Somerset House, the Strand, 011-44-0-207-872-0220, www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery

THROUGH JAN. 23
LOS ANGELES
“**In Focus: Still Life**”: This small but choice exhibition at the Getty Museum shows how still life, generally thought of as a painting genre, has a rich and varied tradition in photography. Among the 26 photographers with work in the show are Andre Kertesz, Walker Evans, Man Ray, Edward Weston, Irving Penn, and Josef Sudek. 1200 Getty Center Drive, 310-440-7300, www.getty.edu

THROUGH FEB. 6
BERLIN
“**Hitler and the Germans**”: The first show of its kind in Germany, this much-talked-about and much-debated exhibition at the German Historical Museum examines Adolf Hitler’s appeal to Germans during his lifetime. On display are numerous Nazi-era items (from SS cufflinks to a recording of popular storm trooper marching songs) juxtaposed with photographs and other items showing

Nazi treatment of Jews, political opponents, and the mentally ill. Unter den Linden 2, 011-49-30-20304-444, www.dhm.de/ENGLISH

THROUGH MARCH 6
CHICAGO
“**Gold**”: This exhibition at the Field Museum looks at the most fabled of precious metals and the many aspects of life it touches on, everything from mining and metallurgy to economics and religion. On display are more than 550 items made of gold. Highlights include the first minted coins, doubloons from a sunken Spanish galleon, the Western Hemisphere’s biggest placer nugget, and the 2005 World Series trophy (the White Sox won that year, this being Chicago, after all). 1400 South Lake Shore Drive, 312-922-9410, www.fieldmuseum.org

NOV. 21-APRIL 10
PHILADELPHIA
“**Alessi: Ethical and Radical**”: The celebrated Italian maker of kitchen utensils prefers to call its products “household objects.” Next year it celebrates its 80th anniversary. As this Philadelphia Museum of Art show makes plain, when

design is done as well as this it doesn’t matter what the items are called. The exhibition features 150 Alessi products, teapots and coffeemakers and juice squeezers from the likes of such architects as Michael Graves, Philippe Starck, and Robert Venturi. 26th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 215-763-8100, www.philamuseum.org

PLAN AHEAD
FEB. 20-MAY 30
WASHINGTON
“**Venice: Canaletto and His Rivals**”: This National Gallery of Art exhibition looks at 18th-century paintings of Venice, which were especially prized in England. Twenty of the canvases are by Canaletto, with another 40 by such contemporaries as Francesco Guardi and Bernardo Bellotto. 4th and Constitution Avenue NW, 202-737-4215, www.nga.gov
MARK FEENEY

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; check online. Mark Feeney can be reached at mfeeney@globe.com.

Fruits and spice and tastes of old-time Florida

By Aaron Kagan
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Eden exists and admission is a mere \$8. After a juicy bite of freshly picked tropical fruit still warm from the sun, you’ll agree that the Fruit and Spice Park is paradise indeed.

A half-hour drive from Miami International Airport, the park is a Florida attraction unlike the rest. There are no roller coasters, water slides, cartoon characters, or stuffed alligators at this 37-acre facility run by Miami-Dade County. Instead, there are pineapples, cinnamon trees, 150 varieties of mango, and 75 kinds of bananas, all of which you are encouraged to try.

Visitors can stroll the park’s grounds at their leisure or hop aboard a tram for guided tours that frequently stop for samples. Some you eat, but others, like bay rum leaves and allspice berries, are for smelling. You’ll see the origins of familiar products like cocoa, coffee, sugar, and vanilla, as well as specimens you never



PHOTOS BY AARON KAGAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The entrance to the Fruit and Spice Park in Homestead, Fla. Chris Rollins, the park’s manager, holds an annatto fruit, the seeds of which are used to make a natural food coloring.

knew existed. These include the peanut butter fruit, Panama hat plant, a thick-rinded fruit named marmalade box, and mango varieties with names like “donkey killer,” “ice cream,” and one simply called “Justin.”

Some fruits resemble other foods. The small blackberry jam fruit is filled with an inky substance that looks, tastes, and even has a seedy texture like its namesake. Dip into a ripe black sapote or “chocolate pudding fruit” and you’ll find a sweet, smooth pulp that could pass for the popular dessert. The canistel, or “egg custard fruit,” is dense and rich, part fruit, part creme caramel. The park comes close to the room in Willy Wonka’s factory in which every extraordinary thing is edible.

The park also grows miracle fruit, a bizarre berry made famous for its power to turn sour tastes sweet. These little, red African fruits have inspired “flavor tripping” parties in which participants eat the berries and then happily drink vinegar and down hot sauce.

The most eye-opening of the park’s offerings are the pepper vines. To compare a fresh peppercorn with the stuff in the shaker is to stand Michelangelo’s “Da-

If you go . . .



Fruit and Spice Park
24801 South West 187th Ave.
Homestead, Fla.
305-247-5727
www.fruitandspicepark.org
Daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m. except Christmas. Guided tours daily 11 a.m., 1:30 and 3 p.m. Adults \$8, children ages 6-12 \$2,

under 6 free. The Mango Cafe daily 11:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. **Robert Is Here Fruit Stand and Farm**
19200 South West 344th St.
305-246-1592
www.robertishere.com
Daily 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; closed September and October

vid” next to a stick figure. “Pepper more than any other spice loses all of its character and pungency by the time you get it,” says Chris Rollins, park manager. “It’s almost worthless. When you try

fresh pepper, it blows the top of your head off. It’s just wonderful. . . . But it’s not a like a chili pepper that’s hot and painful,” he says. He is right: A pale green peppercorn plucked from the

vine wraps the tongue in potent spice and warms the back of the throat long after it has been swallowed.

The pepper vines grow in a greenhouse as part of an Asian plant collection. This sultry space exists for those species that need even more heat than Florida can offer. The greenhouse, which recently opened to the public, is also home to mangosteens, which many consider to be the best fruit in the world. Also new is a landscaped waterfall and lake lined with coconut palms and passion fruit vines. Plans exist to fill the waterway with aquaculture crops such as rice, taro, and papyrus. Last year, the park opened the Mango Cafe, a cozy, bright little restaurant whose menu includes a fruit salad made from the park’s bounty.

Even in the dead of winter, when New England’s fields and orchards are bare, the sample table in the gift shop is brightly colored and fully stocked. Thanks to a year-round growing season, there is always something ripe for the picking. However, like Eden, there are a few rules. There is no picking from trees permitted. Fruit can be sampled only in the gift shop, while on a guided tour, or from the ground (and there is plenty of the latter). As Rollins puts it, “The only fruit you can take out of the park is inside your stomach.”

Not that people haven’t tried. On more than one occasion employees have observed guests attempting to steal enormous, spiky jackfruits by tucking them under baby blankets and pushing them in strollers. Rollins attributes these acts to nostalgia. “Jackfruit is beloved where it comes from,” he says (they originated in India). “It looks like a watermelon wrapped in an alligator skin and it tastes like banana, cantaloupe, and Juicy Fruit gum mixed together. It’s just incredible.”

If you wish to stock up before leaving the area, visit the nearby fruit stand called Robert Is Here, where many of the same things grown at the park are available for purchase.

Aaron Kagan can be reached at aaronwkagan@gmail.com.