

Currents

Leave it in Las Vegas for your next visit

Frequent travelers to Las Vegas will welcome a clever new invention by locals Gena and Matt Marler: The Vegas Box. This 20-by-17-by-12-inch lockable storage box can be used to hold personal items, such as shampoo, conditioner, and shaving kits, or business supplies and convention materials. The durable plastic box is delivered to travelers at their hotel room upon arrival, and then picked up after they leave and moved to a secure, climate-controlled warehouse until their next visit. It helps travelers save on baggage fees and the hassle of clearing security with toiletries. The box comes with dividers, breakaway security locks (customers can supply their own locks), one year of storage, and two hotel deliveries for \$99. Additional deliveries cost \$20 each per trip. 888-969-4404, www.thevegasbox.com

Guided runs around Vancouver

The Metropolitan Hotel Vancouver in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, has launched a Runner's High package to help visitors explore the city and its top jogging routes through picturesque Stanley Park and the green spaces along False Creek. Guests receive a welcome kit with running maps, the latest issue of Running magazine, a 10 percent discount card for the local New Balance store, complimentary valet parking, and a three-course "carb-loading" dinner for two at the hotel's Diva at the Met restaurant (excludes beverages, alcohol, and taxes). Loosen up at the pool, sauna, and cardio-weight room after your run. Rates: \$215 per package, based on double occupancy; some blackout dates apply. 800-667-2300, www.metropolitan.com/packages

A walking tour for Brontë fans

Wander through the towns, villages, and heather-filled moors that inspired the Brontë sisters to pen their 19th-century masterpieces. The Wayfarers' seven-day walking tour along England's Brontë Trail begins in Haworth, home of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, and ends in Chatsworth in the heart of the Peak District. You will visit North Lees Hall, the private manor that inspired Charlotte Brontë to write "Jane Eyre," take a private guided tour of Haddon Hall, the 12th-century medieval manor house that was cast as Thornfield Hall in the new "Jane Eyre" film, and discuss the novel and film with local specialists. Rates: \$3,595 per person for the June 19-25 and August 21-27 trips; includes all lodging, meals, guides, entrance fees, van transport for luggage and tired walkers, and some taxes and gratuities. 800-249-4620, www.thewayfarers.com

KARI BODNARCHUK

Destinations

EVENTS

From green thumbs to Red Sox

MAY 7-14
HOLLAND, Mich.
Tulip Time Festival: Holland is the place for tulips, and this one is significantly less expensive than going to the Netherlands. It calls itself the "American city with a Dutch accent." It's also the city with a Dutch green thumb and fields of tulips — 6 million, to be specific — that spread across the city. The festival also features Dutch food, concerts, dances, a pretty tulip poster designed for the festival by Beth Charles (she calls her work "Drama Queens"), and a carnival at the local civic center. Holland was ranked the second happiest city in the country in a recent "well-being" poll (it beat Honolulu), so expect to be in a pretty good mood. Locations and prices vary. www.tuliptime.com

APRIL 29-MAY 1
TIMONIUM, Md.
Sugarloaf Crafts Festival: This celebration isn't just about paintings and handmade clothing. Vendors on the list also make paper crafts, drink mixes, leather jewelry, pretzels, and, in the case of artists Cat Audette and Rich Holt, of Clay-monster Pottery, "one-of-a-kind whimsical ceramic monster vessels." Just what you need, right? Sugarloaf does bring its festivals to New England, but you'll get a different mix of artists in Maryland. Maryland State Fairgrounds, 2200 York Road. \$7, \$9 at the door, free under age 12. www.sugarloaforcrafts.com

MAY 6 and 7
DENVER
Colorado Chocolate Festival: This pre-Mother's Day fest is basically a display of chocolate products in a 30,000-square-foot space, but the draws of the weekend are the contests, which this year include a chocolate wedding cake competi-



Beth Charles designed the poster for the 2011 Tulip Time Festival; she calls her work "Drama Queens."

tion, the search for the best chocolate cupcake, and a chocolatier championship that hunts for a "thousand-dollar truffle." Sounds serious. It's free to get in with a fee to taste. Denver Merchandise Mart, Interstate 25 at 58th Avenue, \$10 for 12 Taste Tickets, \$20 for 25. www.chocolate-festival.org

MAY 5-8
HOMER, Alaska
Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival: Besides the shorebirds (and there will be many), this festival also features talks by Carl Safina, writer of "A Sea in Flames," which is about last summer's oil spill, and "The View From Lazy Point: A

Natural Year in an Unnatural World," a book about explorer Safina's experience with nature. A warning: Safina appears to be dreamy and quite knowledgeable about the environment. We recommend getting to the festival in time for the Annual Shorebird Follies. Registration for events opens this week online. 907-235-7740, www.homer.alaska.org

PLAN AHEAD

JULY 22
SALEM, Va.
Christmas in July: The Salem Red Sox, our farm team in the Carolina

League, bring Dec. 25 to the thick of summer with a holiday-themed night of baseball. Lewis-Gale Field at Salem Memorial Ballpark will be decorated for the night, which has our Sox up against the Hillcats of Lynchburg, Va. Santa Claus will be there — and yes, he will be rooting for the home team. There will also be post-game fireworks. 540-389-3333, www.minorleaguebaseball.com

MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; check online. Meredith Goldstein can be reached at mgoldstein@globe.com.

Extreme seaside barbecue, S. Africa fashion

By Sandra MacGregor
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

LANGEBAAN, South Africa — "Just remember to pace yourselves," says Johann Booyens as he goes from table to table greeting diners at Die Strandloper, a restaurant in Langebaan, an hour and a half north of Cape Town. "There are 10 courses and you can eat as much as you want." I nod to let him know I've heard his instructions. In answer, he shakes his head, smiles, and says, "We'll see. It's surprising how few people take my advice."

You would be forgiven for not taking Booyens's advice seriously. Looking more like a shipwreck than a restaurant, Die Strandloper appears to be the kind of place that throws caution to the wind. Upon arrival, guests are led to a jumble of seafarers' bric-a-brac seemingly strewn haphazardly upon a breathtakingly beautiful beach.

This bucolic seaside village retains its charm because of its location on the least developed (and visited) stretch of coastline on the Western Cape. Though a few resorts have begun to appear in the area, their growth has been curtailed because of the town's proximity to the West Coast National Park, one of South Africa's top destinations for seeing birds and wildflowers.

Die Strandloper is casual, open-air dining at its best. And I do mean casual. Shoes are optional and beachwear — including swimsuits — is encouraged. Silverware, too, is optional; however, utensils in the form of mussel shells are offered to the more genteel clientele. Several varieties of South African wine are on offer at the beach bar and guests are also invited to bring their own alcoholic beverages (with no corkage fee).

Having been informed by residents that Die Strandloper was the place to experience a traditional South African seafood "braai," Afrikaans for barbecue, I also was warned that the meal requires a serious time commitment — four



JONATHAN STRUG

Die Strandloper is seaside and casual; between some of the 10 courses diners can go for a swim.

hours on average. None of the 10 courses is prepared beforehand.

Guests are invited to watch as the food is cooked on the barbecues and fire pits set up along the beach. Standing where the traditional "roosterkoek," or bread cooked on coal, is being baked sends my olfactory system into overload and without thinking, as soon as the bread is ready, I grab three big pieces, two of which are gone before I even make it back to my table. A rookie mistake, I soon realize, as my stomach begins to hint it is on its way to full.

Mussels, dried fish, and seafood paella soon follow. Though I begin to doubt my ability to make it to the 10th course, I still manage to go up for seconds on the mussels. Knowing well the limits of the human stomach, one of our hosts announces a break, the first of several timeouts designed to break up the meal and allow guests a chance to digest their food.

Never has the slogan "make yourselves at home" been so sincere. As soon as the break is announced, shoes come off, shirts are removed to reveal bathing suits, and benches, which moments before were used for seating, are transformed into loungers as more than a few diners become horizontal. I resist the urge to nap and decide to take a dip in the sea with some of the others.

After the break, the courses continue, this time with an emphasis on whole fish. As the fish is prepared, seagulls arrive. I start on the angelfish. It has a delicate yet

Die Strandloper
Langebaan, South Africa
011-27-022-772-2490
www.strandloper.com/map.asp

During high season, December and January, lunch and dinner are served daily. In winter, May to October, only lunch is served. Hours vary depending on the weather and season and availability is updated weekly on the website. Reservations are a must in high season. Set menu and only one price 190 rand (\$30 a person).

smoky flavor and I worry I might have to fight the birds for seconds. But the birds don't bother the diners. They only go for the fish heads and fins the cooks throw them.

"That snoek was swimming in the ocean this morning," says Chris Maltby, noticing my obvious enjoyment as I bite into the meaty flesh of this local favorite. He says all the seafood Die Strandloper serves is caught daily nearby. "Local food prepared by local people, that's what we aim for," he adds as he dishes out generous servings of various dried, smoked, and grilled fish, all of which are cooked to perfection.

Next is a unique stew containing a local vegetable delicacy I've never had before called "waterblommetjie," or water flower. The

stew is followed by the pièce de résistance: whole, grilled crayfish, South Africa's equally delicious answer to lobster.

"Look, it's a pirate," whispers a child at an adjacent table. Certainly the atmosphere is ripe for a youngster's imagination. But indeed a "pirate" has landed among us, a woman with an enormous parrot on her shoulder.

"Are animals allowed?" I say to Maltby as he walks by. "Of course. They eat for free," he says as though surprised by my question. "We've had cats, dogs, birds, and someone once even brought a snake in a cage." With a wink he adds, "We find animals can sometimes be better behaved than their owners."

As the meal nears its end, I decide to admit defeat and resist the last course of coffee and "koek sisters," a delicious, traditional South African dessert similar to a doughnut. But the call of caffeine is too tempting and as I wait for a cup I witness the most unique preparation of coffee I have ever seen: A burnt log is dunked several times into a large kettle of boiling coffee. "We don't know why it works, but this log is the magic touch," says Booyens, noting my skeptical gaze.

The aroma rouses even the napping patrons. Together we line up for the last time, smiling at one another like victors after a glorious battle where, thankfully, our waistlines are the only losers.

Sandra MacGregor can be reached at sandra-macgregor.com.

Be it art or fashion, Capucci exhibit stuns with its magic

PHILADELPHIA — The best way to enjoy the startling new Roberto Capucci exhibit, "Art Into Fashion," on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through June 5, is to forget it's a fashion exhibit. "This isn't a show for women, or people who are in fashion," said Enrico Minio, director of the Fondazione Roberto Capucci in Florence, who was in Philadelphia for the show's March 16 opening. "Just let yourself go. You will be touched on so many levels."

The dramatic and visual impact of this first ever US homage to the revolutionary Italian designer's work is jaw-dropping. The more than 80 dresses-as-sculptures are testimony to Capucci's vision. Starting in the mid-'50s, with his stunning flame-colored Boccio (Bud) dress and the striking Nova Gonne (Nine Skirts) dress in scarlet, these dresses push the boundaries of art and fashion, something Capucci continues to do at age 80. Using nature and architecture as his muses, his art-as-couture evokes themes of smoke, fire, seashells, autumn leaves, and flowers. Pleated, beribboned, kinetic, each bespoke creation of silk, chiffon, and georgette conjures drama, movement, and beauty.

A trip to India in 1970 transformed his use of color, freeing him to group families of color together to strike a fearless kind of harmony. Although he resigned from the official couture calendar in 1980, Capucci continues to manipulate materials, color, light, and volume in one-of-a-kind magical forms. "For him, the woman is part of the sculpture he creates," said Minio. "And art is at the heart of his vision."

BETH D'ADDONO

26th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 215-763-8100, www.philamuseum.org. Tue-Thu 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri 11-8:45, Sat-Sun 10-5. Timed tickets are available online, adults \$25, children ages 5-12 \$10, seniors \$23, students and ages 13-18 \$19.



PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Nove Gonne (Nine Skirts), Roberto Capucci's 1956 sculpture-dress of red silk taffeta and overlapping elements, in Philadelphia.