



A Komodo dragon is part of the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's "Restless Planet" exhibit.

Currents

Global habitats converge in Virginia

Virginia Beach seems an improbable place to see Komodo dragons, cobras, desert hedgehogs, and other exotic critters. Yet these and nearly 6,400 animals and species are on display in the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's new "Restless Planet" exhibit. Part of a \$25 million renovation project that doubled the aquarium's collection, the exhibit includes 12,000 square feet of habitats and displays and was designed by Boston's Chermayeff & Poole, architects for the New England Aquarium. "Restless Planet" features four habitats that existed in Virginia millions of years ago: a Malaysian peat swamp, a North African coastal desert, a tropical Red Sea, and an Indonesian volcanic island. 757-385-3474, [www.virginia-aquarium.com](http://www.virginia-aquarium.com).

JetBlue adds Aruba flights

JetBlue Airways adds additional service from Logan International Airport to Aruba this spring, with flights starting at \$375. As of May 3, the airline will run two nonstop flights to the Caribbean island on Saturdays and one flight per day on Fridays, Sundays, and Mondays. While you're there, visit the new National Archaeological Museum Aruba in downtown Oranjestad. The museum has more than 10,000 artifacts, including pottery, tapestries, wall carvings, shells, and glass objects, that reflect the island's heritage and the influence of the South American Indian, Dutch, Spanish, and French settlers. 800-538-2583, [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com); 297-582-8979 (*museum*)

The truth about your hotel

Oyster.com, a new hotel review site, claims to offer consumers honest reports and real-life photos of more than 1,000 hotels in the United States, Dominican Republic, Bahamas, and Caribbean. Oyster.com's reporters stay at each hotel before coming up with their "pearl system" ratings. Oyster.com covers everything from one-pearl hotels, which are typically "no-frills crash pads that don't offer much more than a bed for the night" to five-pearl luxury accommodations, which have top-notch amenities and exceptional service. [www.oyster.com](http://www.oyster.com)

KARI BODNARCHUK

Destinations

EVENTS



The Fun Lovin' Criminals are part of the lineup at the Greenwich Beer and Jazz Festival in London.

They're all tomorrow's parties

MAY 27-31  
LONDON

**Greenwich Beer and Jazz Festival:** Yes, it would be more convenient if this festival took place in Greenwich Village, but sometimes music and beer is worth a trip across the pond. Acts at this year's festival include Fun Lovin' Criminals, the band responsible for the 1996 hit "Scooby Snacks," and the James Taylor Quartet, which has nothing to do with our James Taylor, but does feature a Hammond organ player named James Taylor, who used to play with the Prisoners. As for beer, the menu hasn't been set yet, but organizers promise a variety both weak and strong. Music and beer run from lunchtime until 10 p.m., so expect days full of frolicking. Shows run about \$23-\$30. *Old Royal Naval College, 2 Cutty Sark Gardens, [www.greenwich-beerandjazz.com](http://www.greenwich-beerandjazz.com).*

APRIL 23-MAY 2  
MIAMI

**Gay and Lesbian Film Festival:** It's best to get to this festival in time to attend the opening-night gala at the Calix Gustav Gallery in the too-cool Wynwood Arts District. Directors and actors in town for screenings tend to gather at opening night, and music will be provided by Israeli club DJ Oren Nizri. This year's program

features "The People I've Slept With," which will feature a Q&A with star Wilson Cruz, and the documentary "Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work," a film that begins with shots of Rivers wearing no makeup. Scary. Locations and ticket packages vary. [www.mglff.com](http://www.mglff.com)

MAY 7-9  
LONDON

**All Tomorrow's Parties Festival:** Fans of "The Simpsons" also have a reason to be in London in May. Series creator Matt Groening has curated a weekend of ATP festivities, lining up some of his favorite music acts, including She & Him, Joanna Newsom, and Iggy Pop, who's touring with the Stooges. A note about Iggy's connection to "The Simpsons": his song "Lust for Life" was used as part of an episode inspired by "Train-spotting" that featured Bart and Lisa running through the streets of Springfield high on candy. Got to make Pop's set list. Packages vary. *Butlins Resort, Minehead, [www.virtualfestivals.com](http://www.virtualfestivals.com)*

MAY 15  
SAN FRANCISCO

**Asian Heritage Street Celebration:** This annual street festival entertains the masses with music, dance, and food. The lineup hasn't been secured for this year's festivities, but organizers

usually feature a nice variety of traditional and modern Asian music. Not surprisingly, there's also usually a good deal of karaoke. *Civic Center, Larkin between Fulton and Ellis streets, [www.asianfairsf.com](http://www.asianfairsf.com)*

PLAN AHEAD

AUG. 12-15  
ORLANDO

**Star Wars Celebration:** This extravaganza will feature an appearance by Princess Leia, whom non-fans know as Carrie Fisher. There also will be many opportunities for people-watching, as "Star Wars" diehards tend to dress for the convention as characters from Lando Calrissian to Queen Amidala. The convention is still accepting ideas for fan tables and events, so if you want to take part in a specific meet-and-greet or party at a Wookiee shindig, make your opinion known. \$27 to \$128. *Orange County Convention Center, 9800 International Drive, Orlando, [www.starwarscelebration.com](http://www.starwarscelebration.com)*

MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN

*Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; call or check online. Meredith Goldstein can be reached at [mgoldstein@globe.com](mailto:mgoldstein@globe.com).*

Where they went

CANADIAN ROCKIES

**WHO:** Chris Hennigan, 40, with her children, Delaney, 8, and Riley, 10, all of Woburn, and her parents, Cathy, 68, and John Looney, 69, of Winchester.

**WHERE:** Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada.

**WHEN:** Nine days in July and August.

**WHY:** To take the Appalachian Mountain Club trip "Family Hikes in the Canadian Rockies."

**WOW FACTOR:** Chris Hennigan wanted her children to enjoy hiking as much as she does. "I thought I'd wow them with the Canadian Rockies," she said. "I've been hiking since I was 2; my dad used to put me in his backpack. I hiked until I was about 18 and stopped until I was in my mid-30s. The AMC was trying out these family trips, so I asked my parents to go along, too. Hiking isn't really my mom's thing, but she was excited because the kids were going."

**ALL AGES:** The group of 25 hikers, ages 2 to 81, including four leaders, met in Calgary and traveled in three minivans. They stayed in private rooms at two hostels for four nights each, the Banff Alpine Centre and then Lake Louise Alpine Centre, both run by Hostelling International. Several children were on the trip. "It was a good mix," Hennigan said. "The older ones could look out for the little ones and motivate them. They had a blast."



From left: John Looney, Cathy Looney, Delaney Hennigan, Christine Hennigan, and Riley Hennigan in Alberta, Canada.

**MINOR CHANGES:** Each day three trips of varying levels were offered. "In the original itinerary, the easiest trips were far too difficult for a kid or older person. The first day's hike was a good six hours and the kids were in tears." The

leaders adjusted the schedule, and "after that it was great. We got up later, had a leisurely breakfast, and didn't feel pressured to keep moving."

**WHAT A VIEW:** "It was unbelievable scenery," she said. "When my kids keep saying, 'Mom, look at that glacier, look at that cliff,' you know it's spectacular. What really got to them was the color of the water, this deep blue green." One day they drove the Icefields Parkway, where visitors can walk on a glacier. "It's like walking on ice with crunchy snow on top of it."

**TEA TIME:** They knew the final day of hiking, to the Lake Agnes Teahouse above Lake Louise, would be the hardest. "It was switchbacks the entire way up," Hennigan said. "It was a tough climb on everybody. But once we got to the top it was one of the most unbelievable places I've ever been. You sit on a porch and have tea and homemade bread with this unbelievable vista. The kids thought it was neatest thing. Before we got back home from Canada, they told me they were already planning to go on the family trip to Colorado next summer."

DIANE DANIEL

*Send suggestions within a month of your return to [diane@bydianedaniel.com](mailto:diane@bydianedaniel.com).*

Gearing up

Portable and protective

We've used KidCo's travel tent, the PeaPod, as a portable bed and play space for our daughter at the beach, where it protected her from sun and blowing sand; at Grandma's house, where it kept a curious cat at bay; and even in our hotel room, when we didn't trust the loaner crib. This foldable, nylon tent is a cinch to set up, with its built-in plastic poles — just watch your chin when the packed bundle springs open. Use the included plastic pump to inflate the air mattress, which slips into its own storage sleeve on the tent's floor. Then place your child in or on the sleeping bag (also provided). The small PeaPod fits children up to 3 years old and can be stashed in your airline bag, while the larger but still lightweight version suits children up to 6. It's available for \$69.99 (small) at Magic Beans in Cambridge (617-300-0171, [www.mbeans.com](http://www.mbeans.com)) or contact KidCo (800-553-5529, [www.kidco.com](http://www.kidco.com)).

KARI BODNARCHUK



Tired of the tourist menu, so why not eat like a Mexican?

By Necce Regis  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, Mexico** — Located in the rugged sierra four hours north of Mexico City, this prosperous colonial city is awash with boutique shops, restaurants, and enough arts and crafts emporiums to keep its many American and Canadian expats and tourists busy.

In a town geared toward playing it safe, I wasn't surprised when well-intentioned people began offering advice on what not to eat.

"Only eat ice cream in the main square. The rest is made with bad water." "Never eat any street food." "Only eat salads from a 'good' restaurant." "Only eat corn if it's grilled, not boiled." "Don't go to that bakery; they use lard."

It made me wonder: If the food is so dangerous, why aren't the Mexicans getting sick? ("Their stomachs are used to the germs," was one response.)

I didn't take the advice, though I do admit to some initial caution on what could be called my "Rebellious Eating Tour." I wasn't eating lizards or gizzards

— not my style — but I was breaking those eating-in-Mexico rules. It felt bold.

I started with ice cream. On an unexpectedly warm day after a week of rain and cold, I was overdressed, sweating, and a good walk from my rented apartment. The vendor outside the Temple of the Immaculate Conception was doing a brisk business under his striped umbrella, scooping cups and cones for schoolchildren from a small, wheeled cart. It looked good. Real good. And the flavors were enticing: zapote, chamoy, limon, cajeta, café, chocolate, vanilla, queso, coco. I chose café, which was slightly icy — possibly made with that questionable water, not milk — and utterly delicious. I walked home. Did not get sick. Wanted more.

I realize it's silly to say I felt empowered by eating ice cream from a street vendor, but I did. So I moved on to something riskier: vegetables.

Every day at 5 p.m., a man's voice sang through our cozy neighborhood of Guadalupe. "Elotes! Ejotes!"

The notes were elongated at the end of each word, reverberating like a bell. Two plastic buckets dangled from a yoke

across his shoulders as he strolled the cobblestone streets. One bucket held corn, which he slathered with mayonnaise before handing it to customers for what I assumed was a pre-dinner snack. The other bucket held mysterious bright green things. From my rooftop terrace, I observed a woman put one in her mouth

I wasn't eating lizards or gizzards — not my style — but I was breaking those eating-in-Mexico rules. It felt bold.

and then spit something out. Olives! I grabbed my wallet, raced to the street, looked in the bucket. Not olives!

Here's where I confess I speak only five words of Spanish. The vendor spoke about the same in English but our enthusiasm — his to sell, mine to taste — was all we needed to communicate. "Qué?" "Garbanzos!" "With salt?" "Sí."

"With a squeeze of lime?" "Sí." Ten pesos, about 80 cents, bought a small baggie-full. Steamed to perfection, they were sweet, salty, tangy, marvelous. I ate a dozen. Did not get sick. Wanted more.

I might have maintained this try-one-thing-at-a-time approach if I hadn't met Dr. Laura Elias, a dentist and a reliable guide to food in San Miguel that the ordinary tourist might not discover.

Elias laughed at the cautions of my acquaintances while waxing lyrical about Mexican cuisine. I filled my notebooks with her suggestions, and reported back about the joys of sampling "gorditas" (corn pouches stuffed with meats, beans, and sometimes potatoes) at the Tuesday Market outside of town; the "huaraches" (a flat, shoe-shaped tortilla that's deep fried and topped with sausage, ground beef, chicken with chipotle peppers, cheese, or even prickly pear cactus) at the stand in the San Juan de Dios market; and the "chiles rellenos" and chicken "mole poblano" at a small restaurant in the same market.

The only thing Elias advised avoiding on the street were vendors selling cut fruit. ("In Mexico City, I saw someone

sharpening a knife on the sidewalk," she said, clearly appalled.)

I led friends on culinary explorations. We ventured into La Camaroncita, a hole-in-the-wall joint where we scarfed down chilled "camarones" (shrimp) served in enormous parfait glasses with a tangy red cocktail sauce, cilantro, vinegar, and habanero chiles, and plopped on top like whipped cream on a sundae: an avocado. At a 30-year-old seafood restaurant, we supped magnificently on ceviche-topped tostadas and grilled fish with green sauce.

And I learned to trust my intuition. If it looked fresh and well cooked, I tried it. Gorditas cooked on a three-legged stove outside the church in Atotonilco? Yum. Tostados with ceviche in the old train station in Guanajuato? Sublime. Lemon-iced cookies made with lard? I'll take a dozen. My all-time favorite was pineapple ice sprinkled with chili powder that I'll be dreaming about when I'm 90.

Did not get sick. Most definitely want more.

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