

Currents

Get a free pass to area’s museums

More than 35 Boston-area museums will offer free admission on Sept. 25, as part of Smithsonian magazine’s annual Museum Day. Participating venues include the Boston Children’s Museum, Harvard Art Museums, Mary Baker Eddy Library, Museum of Fine Arts, Museum of Science, Old South Meeting House, and Salem Witch Museum. In Worcester, you can visit the Higgins Armory Museum, Worcester Art Museum, and Worcester Historical Museum. Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston will offer special docent tours and interactive trivia contests. Go to Smithsonian’s website for a full list of museums and to print out a free admission card (search for “Museum Day” to access the ticket). A ticket gets you and a companion into one museum for free; one ticket per household. 202-633-1000, www.smithsonianmag.com

Your Jamaica conservatory

If you’re a musician or music lover, consider traveling to Jamaica to teach a child how to play an instrument. As a volunteer with Projects Abroad, a Britain-based program, you will teach children ages 6 to 18 how to play keyboard, guitar, violin, flute, or drums. Or you can offer

instruction on melody improvisation, and how to read, notate, compose, and arrange music. The Music Project focuses on traditional Jamaican music but incorporates cultural influences from around the world. Projects Abroad provides all instruments and resources. 888-839-3535, www.projects-abroad.org

Let iPhone apps guide you

Whether you are headed to Rome or Boston’s North End, download an iPhone app from GPSmyCity and let it show you where you are going. Self-guided walking tours can steer you around more than 180 cities around the world. Each application comes with detailed maps and GPS-based navigation features that provide accurate turn-by-turn directions. Download walking tours such as Casanova’s Venice, Belgian Beer Tour in Brussels, Ultimate Girls’ Night Out in Buenos Aires, Romantic Fountains of Rome, and Beijing Markets. Boston’s eight tours include Historical Cambridge, Kids Entertainment, Boston Museum, Famous Historical Sites, and Art and Culture. The apps cost between \$2.99 and \$4.99 per city. 510-931-6182, www.gpsmycity.com

KARI BODNARCHUK



YOSHIKI HASE

The Theater of Electricity at the Museum of Science.

Destinations

EVENTS



Ed Harris will be promoting “Touching Home” at the Syracuse International Film Festival next month.

Screens and street scenes

Oct. 13-17
SYRACUSE, N.Y.
Syracuse International Film Festival: While Syracuse University’s football team prepares to battle Pittsburgh, movie buffs around here will be watching the indie film “Session,” a thriller filmed in the city that stars Bar Refaeli. As of now, we don’t see an appearance by Refaeli (a model, too, whose boyfriend is Leonardo DiCaprio) on the schedule, but we do see events that feature Vincent Pastore (“Big Pussy” on “The Sopranos”), who will show his film “Alienated”; Ed Harris, who is promoting “Touching Home”; and Robert M. Young, a Syracuse director responsible for some episodes of “Battlestar Galactica” and a new movie, “Human Error.” Ticket prices and packages vary. 315-443-8826, www.syrfilmfest.com

Oct. 2-3
RENO
Reno Celtic Celebration: OK, so maybe Celtic traditions aren’t what come to mind when you think of Reno. But the biggest little city in the world does have an active Celtic community that will get together next month for dancing, music, and glorious Scottish and Irish food. One of the weekend’s big activities is a Celtic Critters parade featuring breeds such as Irish wolfhounds, Scottish deerhounds, Irish retrievers, and

Irish setters. There will also be ponies — Celtic ones, of course. \$10, \$15 for both days. *Bartley Ranch Regional Park, www.renoceltic.org*

Oct. 16
ST. PAUL
FallCon: Comic book geeks of all ages will take over the fairgrounds to show off their best work. Representing the old guard will be artists such as Dan Jurgens, who drew Superman, Thor, and created the DC Comics superhero Booster Gold (whose story would be perfect for an “Iron Man”-style movie). Representing the new world of graphic artists will be Ryan Dow, of Introspective Comics, and Mitch Gerads, the illustrator of “Johnny Recon.” \$7. *Minnesota State Fairgrounds, 1621 Randall Ave., www.midwestcomicbook.com*

Oct. 22
JACKSONVILLE, Fla.
Rocky Horror Picture Show Parade: Before “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” is featured on “Glee” on Oct. 26, fans of the Time Warp will convene here not only to watch the much-beloved movie, but also to run around outdoors dressed like their favorite characters. It starts with a parade near the water with prizes for best costumes and culminates with a midnight screening.

You’re allowed to bring your own props, of course. Confetti, noisemakers, rice, and newspapers are allowed, according to the Jacksonville Special Events office, but lighters and candles are not. 904-630-3690, www.makeascenedowntown.com

PLAN AHEAD

Dec. 4
LONDON
Kensington Dollshouse Festival: For some, doll houses are serious business. Maybe too serious. But who are we to judge? This December in London you can see the work of master crafters whose doll house displays are so intricate they might give you ideas about your human-size house. The day also features classes for those who want to learn how to paint miniature tables, construct a bedroom scene, run a tiny train set, and manicure a baby garden. Artists include doll maker Jill Bennett. *Kensington Town Hall, Horton Street. 011-44-20-7812-9892. www.dollshousefestival.com*
MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN

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

Alpacas, artisans flourish side by side in New Mexico

By Meg Pier
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT
SANTA FE — Deep in a wide valley encircled by snow-capped mountains, I stood surrounded by dozens of creatures with soft brown eyes. A few nudged me gently, while others spat noisily on the ground.

The 1,100-acre Victory Ranch, home to 300 alpacas, is one stop on New Mexico’s recently blazed rural Fiber Arts Trails. Envisioned in 2005 at a gathering of the state’s cultural tourism advocates, the circuit features more than 200 artisans at 71 destinations.

From downtown Santa Fe, I had driven east to Las Vegas, a small railroad town, then veered north on a country road that took me into the southern Rockies. Arriving at the spectacular expanse that is Victory Ranch, I felt as though I had reached Patagonia, an illusion enhanced by the grazing herd of alpacas.

Alpacas, members of the camel family and native to the Andes, do well in the 7,000-foot-plus elevation of northern New Mexico with their enlarged hearts and lungs.

“Their fiber can be finer than cashmere,” said Darcy Weisner, ranch manager. “It’s very lightweight as it is a hollow hair, which gives it unique insulating qualities. We analyze every alpaca’s fiber every year when we shear. This helps us with our breeding program as well as with deciding whose fiber should be sent to a mill and whose will be handspun or sold as raw fiber in our store.”

At the Mora Valley Spinning Mill, a mile down the road, director Carla Gomez walked me through the process of transforming hefty bags of tangled fur into skeins of vibrantly-colored, silky wool. A staff of eight operates the machines that produce about 50 pounds of wool a day. Gomez hopes to double that by year’s end.

Early Spanish settlers introduced sheep to this region in the late 16th century. Gomez sees the mill as both an economic engine and preserver of “heritage” breeds.

“For a small farmer, the ani-



MEG PIER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Victory Ranch in Santa Fe harvests the fleece of alpacas for yarns, garments, and blankets.

mals that are raised are a part of the family,” she said. “When an animal is raised for its wool, fiber is a harvested crop, just like picking a peach that is ripe and sweet off a tree.”

Leaving the mill, I drove through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, then along the Kit Carson National Forest to the tiny town of Youngsville, about 100 miles west of Mora. Here, from its perch at 6,800 feet, the property of fiber artist Katy Blanchard has a stunning 360-degree view: Ghost Ranch, where Georgia O’Keeffe painted for 50 years, is to the northeast; the artist’s beloved Cerro Pedernal mountain to the east; lovely mesas to the west; and the Santa Fe National Forest to the south.

In 1983, when Blanchard was trying to create a shade she refers to as Navajo red, she discovered what she called “the wonderful world of natural colors.” She now has about one-eighth of an acre devoted to natural dyes, growing plants for herself and for sale to other fiber artists.

“I finally achieved the red I wanted using cochineal, which is a bug that grows on cactus,” said Blanchard, the director of New Mexico Fiber Artisans, a statewide coalition of artists, growers,

businesses, and groups committed to developing fiber and fiber art as a primary income source.

Next I headed to Española, a sprawling suburb of Santa Fe. At the Española Valley Fiber Arts Center’s adobe storefront, merchandise included pictorial and abstract tapestries, rag rugs, jer-ga blankets, shawls, felted scarves, willow baskets, colcha embroidery, quilts, and handmade paper.

Diane Bowman, the director, said the goods are made by the membership. The center was founded in 1995 by a small group of weavers who knew area families had inherited looms but had little knowledge of the heritage and techniques of northern New Mexico textiles practiced by their grandparents. With donated looms and space in a local church, they began to teach weaving. Today, the nonprofit organization has a staff of five.

“Weaving offers a way to earn income for the elderly, women with young children, the many people who are underemployed here or live in isolated areas where work is not available,” Bowman said. “Artists need markets for their work beyond once-a-year studio tours.”

On another day, I visited Centi-

nela Traditional Arts in Chimayó, about 45 minutes north of Santa Fe. This is the studio of Irvin and Lisa Trujillo, weavers whose work is in the Smithsonian. I had admired several of Irvin’s pieces featured at the Museum of International Folk Art, in Santa Fe, as part of its exhibit of New Mexico artists designated as “masters” by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Irvin is a seventh-generation weaver. He has worked with a range of historical blanket styles: Rio Grande from the Spanish Colonial period; Saltillo from the Mexican period; Vallero from the American Colonial period; and Chimayó from the Industrial Revolution period. In time, Irvin became known for both his mastery of traditional styles and his spirit of innovation.

“Weaving is my life and my pieces reflect my observations and experience of my culture and surroundings,” he said.

Touring the Fiber Arts Trails, I experienced the rich tapestry of the area’s textile heritage from “sheep to shawl,” discovering artistry and cottage industry hard at work.

Meg Pier can be reached at meg.pier@viewfromthepier.com.

If you go . . .

What to do

The **New Mexico Fiber Arts Trails** cover almost 1,800 square miles, encompassing more than 200 artisans at 71 destinations. A guide is available at www.nmfiberarts.org, or from New Mexico Arts at 505-827-6490. The brochure contains three distinct “loops,” each offering magnificent scenery and fascinating fiber arts venues. Among them are: **Centinela Traditional Arts** Route 76, Chimayó www.chimayoweavers.com 505-351-2180 A tapestry gallery specializing in handwoven wool products using natural dyes and traditional Chimayó/Rio Grande weaving styles. **Española Valley Fiber Arts Center** 325 Paseo de Oñate, Española 505-747-3577 www.evfac.org The site includes a gallery, yarns, equipment, books, and handmade textiles. **Urban Eagle Herb Co.** Highway 96, Youngsville 575-638-0306 www.urbaneagle.com Katy Blanchard’s dye garden can be visited by appointment in July and August. **Victory Ranch** Route 434, Mora 575-387-2254 www.victoryranch.com Sells alpacas as well as products including alpaca roving, yarns, garments, and blankets; other yarns; and fiber arts supplies. Daily tours 11 a.m., and 1 and 3 p.m., adults \$3, children \$2. **Tapetes de Lana & Mora Valley Spinning Mill** Highway 518, Junction 434 Mora 575-387-2247 www.tapetesdelana.com

Mill tours, yarns, and handwoven textiles available.

Where to stay

Bishop’s Lodge Ranch Resort & Spa 1297 Bishop’s Lodge Road Santa Fe 505-983-6377, 800-419-0492 www.bishopslodge.com A secluded retreat at the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo range, with 15 separate lodges, with 111 guest rooms. Activities include horseback riding, skeet shooting, mountain biking, hiking, and a world-class spa; from \$179. **La Fonda** 100 East San Francisco St. 800-523-5002 www.lafondasantafe.com The most historic of Santa Fe’s hotels, on the plaza downtown with a restaurant, La Plazuela. Rooms \$175-\$430.

Where to eat

Coyote Cafe 132 West Water St. 505-983-1615 www.coyotecafe.com Innovative Southwestern cuisine; appetizers \$14-\$20, entrees \$28-\$56. **Restaurant Martin** 526 Galisteo St. 505-820-0919 www.restaurantmartinsantafe.com Progressive American cuisine; appetizers \$8-\$17, entrees \$19-\$30. **San Francisco Street Bar & Grill** 50 East San Francisco St. 505-982-2044 www.sanfranbargrill.com Long a Santa Fe favorite, moderately priced New Mexican, American, and international cuisine; dinner entrees \$7.95-\$14.95.