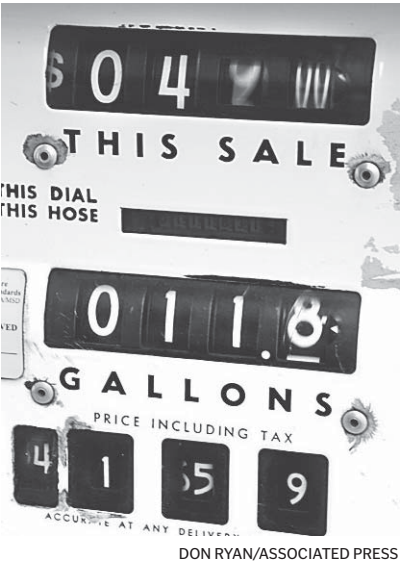




Encounter

PAY AS YOU GO

Resignation speech

Headlights of trucks and buses and who knows what dart through thick fog in the Shenandoah night. It lasts for miles along Interstate 81 and the western edge of Virginia. Near an exit, at 3 a.m., a lone gas station convenience store floats as a fluorescent island. Inside: atlases, bags of chips and beef jerky, and a soda machine with ice. It could be just about anywhere in America. A heavyset man with a mustache sits at a table and pages through a newspaper. He looks at a cashier nearby. “Pretty soon,” he says, “it will be \$5 a gallon. What can you do? You have to pay it if you want to go.”

TOM HAINES

Globe-trotting

NOTES FROM OUR BLOG

Help for hitchhikers

Travelers interested in snagging a ride should look at a couple of specialty message boards: hitchhikers.org for European travel and digihitch.com for the United States and Canada. Drivers willing to offer rides post listings, with info on departure dates, how many seats are available, and whether they’re looking to share expenses (some drivers just want the company to keep them awake on a long ride).

PAUL MAKISHIMA

Nebraska blackout

I had heard about how thunderstorms can be in the Midwest. But until I got to Omaha, I hadn’t seen anything close to what happened here last weekend. This was something out of the Bible. The sky turned black at 4 o’clock in the afternoon. The wind soared to 80 miles an hour. The rain poured down in a blinding curtain. The thunder sounded like a bomb set off in an underground garage. And the hailstones were as big as golf balls. I had a bird’s-eye view, sitting in my room on the 17th floor of the Doubletree Hotel, and it was jaw-dropping. Day turning into night in a matter of minutes, cars stopping dead, everyone scattering inside. I’ve seen hurricanes and nasty northeasters, but this was a meteorological novelty for a Bostonian. And then, just like that, it was over. But my personal dictionary now has a different entry for “thunderstorm.”

JOHN POWERS

NEWS, DEALS, DISPATCHES
Boston.com/travel/blog is where to go no matter where you want to go.

Gearing up



Lightweight library

Amazon.com’s new portable electronic reading device, the Kindle, is slimmer than most paperbacks but lets you tote around hundreds of titles. Choose from more than 130,000 books, magazines, newspapers, and blogs through the Kindle Store and your reading material is transmitted to your device using Amazon’s free wireless delivery system — no computer necessary. If you finish your book at the airport or beach, just download a new one. This remarkably lightweight device has a nonglare, black-and-white screen that’s easy to read. Flip through, “dog ear,” or make notes on the pages with a quick click, look up words using the built-in dictionary, or listen to audio-books. The Kindle retails for \$349.

KARI J. BODNARCHUK



MATIAS CORRAL

British postmodern soul man Jamie Lidell is one of the headliners at Helsinki’s Flow Festival. Other performers include Mum and the Roots.

Gotta go with the Flow in Finland

AUG. 15-17
HELSINKI

Flow Festival: There’s something both romantic and quite creepy about the thought of seeing disparate collections of bands performing at a defunct power plant in Finland. But the SuviLahti power plant, site of this annual festival, also happens to be one of the most significant pieces of Finnish architecture. Less than a decade old, the Flow Festival has yet to flower into a mammoth stage for over-hyped newcomers and rock dinosaurs, so its programmers take some fascinating risks with their choice of bands. Moody Iceland quartet Mum headlines the first of three nights, while the Roots headline on Saturday, and 1960s Motown sensations Martha Reeves and the Vandellas close on Sunday. Others on the bill include Kings of Convenience, Sebastian Tellier, Crystal Castles, and a number of Finnish bands you’ve never heard of, but would probably like if you heard. *Tickets range from \$63 for a single-day pass to \$126 for a three-day pass. SuviLahti, Kaasutehtaankatu 1, flowfestival.com.*

JULY 8-AUG. 26
BROOKLYN, N.Y.

Movies at McCarren Park Pool: The empty Brooklyn pool has been the seasonal cultural epicenter of the Greenpoint

neighborhood, with regular concerts and films. Starting this week for eight consecutive Tuesdays, movies are shown at sunset. This year’s films include “Desperately Seeking Susan,”

“Blue Velvet,” “Wet Hot American Summer,” and “Rushmore.” The movies kick off at sundown. Because of the popularity of the series, it’s recommended you arrive early or get stuck sitting in the deep end. *Free, Lorimer Street, between Driggs Avenue and Bayard Street, mccarren park.com.*

AUG. 8
LONDON

Underage Festival: Finally, someone has realized that teens enjoy going to rock shows and has smartly figured out how to cash in on this phenomenon. After last year’s sellout debut, London’s Underage Festival returns to let teens age 14 to 19 rock the day away without parents. In fact, parents are not allowed to enter the concert site, but can wait outside the gate.

Bands at this year’s festival include Gallows, Foals, the Rascals, and Bonde Do Role. *\$45, Victoria Park, 360 Victoria Park Road, underagefestivals.com.*

AUG. 8-9
HOOGSTRATEN, BELGIUM

Caribbean Festival: When you think of locations where the world’s largest Caribbean festival should take place, you would not think of a small town near the Belgian-Dutch border. More than a dozen acts from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Spain are slated to perform, including Binomio de Oro from Colombia and Machel Montano from Trinidad. Even if the weather isn’t sunny and warm, it will certainly sound tropical. *\$55 for one day, \$86 for two days, antilliaansefeesten.be.*

PLAN AHEAD

OCT. 23-25

AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam Dance Event:

This is perhaps the largest night life gathering in the world with nearly 700 electronic bands and DJs performing in front of many very sweaty Europeans. This year’s lineup is yet to be announced, but last year’s performers included a who’s who of the dance music world entertaining thousands of club kids at 40 venues throughout the city. *amsterdam-dance-event.nl.*

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; call or check online to confirm. Contact Christopher Muther at muther@globe.com.

Where they went

BURMA

WHO: Michael Romanow, 53, and Gary Kelly, 53, both of Westwood; Trond Skramstad, 47, of Newton; and Curt Allen, 51, of Marlow, N.H.

WHERE: Burma (also called Myanmar).

WHEN: Two weeks in February.

WHY: “I wanted to see Burma before it opened up to the world,” Romanow said. “I did a bike ride to Vietnam with VeloAsia (veloasia.com) 12 years ago and knew they went to Burma. So I started e-mailing friends about going.”

WELCOME WAGON: “I was ambivalent, wondering if it made sense to support a regime that has a horrible reputation,” Kelly said, referring to the country’s military dictatorship. “But I was so glad I went. We all were. We had a great time and it didn’t feel oppressive in the way I thought it would be. The Burmese were so thrilled to see us there. Everywhere we rode, everybody would come out and yell ‘mingalaba,’ which means hello, and slap high-fives.”

TOUR FOR FOUR: Although the men were on an existing tour, they were the only travelers, and had two assistants and a Burmese guide, Melvin. “Melvin really loved his country and knew a huge amount about the central part, where we were, and was a great resource about Buddhism. He rode with us a few times, but mostly he drove,” Kelly said. The foursome brought their own hybrid bikes, and shared the mostly paved but rough roadways with ox carts, tractors, pedestrians carrying goods on yokes on their shoulders, mopeds, and buses.

CULTURAL HARMONY: At Inle Lake they saw floating gardens and fishing villages on stilts.



Curt Allen (left), Gary Kelly, Trond Skramstad, and Michael Romanow in Bagan, Burma.

“There was silk weaving, silver making, and rolling cheeroots, like cigarettes,” Romanow said. “The work was all labor intensive.” They took a balloon ride over Bagan, dotted with thousands of pagodas. “Bagan was probably the biggest tourist area, with mostly Australians and Europeans,” Kelly said. In and near Mandalay, they watched locals promenade the

almost mile-long teak U Bein Bridge and saw hundreds of red-robed monks line up for lunch at the famed Mahagandayon monastery. “The Buddhist presence was just amazing,” Romanow said.

NICELY SPICY: Accommodations ranged from resorts to “a couple funky old places that looked like they should have been in the Alps,” Romanow said. They usually had a Western breakfast, “but for lunch and dinner Melvin would take us to local restaurants. Rice was always the staple and then we’d have all these side dishes, vegetables and meat, with several different condiments. It was really spicy and really good.”

SINCE THE CYCLONE: The news of the cyclone in May brought the men an “overwhelming sadness,” Romanow said. They were able to contact Melvin and donate aid money through a friend of his in Thailand. “His home wasn’t affected, but he was trying to help other families.”

DIANE DANIEL

SEE WHERE THEY ALL WENT

For more photos and to share yours, visit boston.com/wheretheywent. Send your suggestions within two weeks of your return to diane@bydianedaniel.com.

Rave



WESSEL KOK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Art accents Virginia region

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — In a historic downtown chock full of antiques stores, Vincent Hester Gallery stands out not only because it sells contemporary art, crafts, and jewelry, but also because of its terrific selection.

Opened in 2003, the gallery is housed in a century-old building that had been abandoned for 20 years after a fire. Thanks to an impressive restoration, the building is now an architectural beauty on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the airy space you will find cheerful paintings and an impressive collection of pottery, hand-blown glass, and wood turned into functional objects and sculptures.

“I represent all local and regional artists, so a lot of our work reflects the region,” said owner

Barbara Vincent Hester. This means many pieces depict coastal and mountain scenes, but in a range of artistic styles.

While the shop has an assortment of stylish handmade jewelry, the sailboat pendant collection is what caught our eye and our hearts.

The collection of five pendants and earrings, one a year from 2003 to 2007, was designed by members of the Hester family, with proceeds going to Edmarc Hospice for Children. They are available in sterling silver (\$40 to \$48) and 14-karat gold (market prices).

Vincent Hester Gallery, 607 High St., Portsmouth, Va., 757-397-7173, vincenthestergallery.com.

DIANE DANIEL