Destinations

NIGHT LIFE

New Year's ball, cruises, DJs, and guitars

DEC. 31
SAN FRANCISCO
San Francisco Symphony's New Year's Eve Masquerade Ball: For many — and by "many" I'm speaking primarily about myself — New Year's Eve consists of locating a dive bar that offers drink specials and getting pie-eyed as quickly as possible. Dressing up means wearing a paper hat and trying to keep unsightly stains off one's jeans. However, there are more sophisticated ways to welcome a new year, such as listening to a symphony and wearing a snappy ensemble. The San Francisco Symphony's New Year's Eve ball begins at 8 p.m. at Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall with cocktails. Symphony starts at 9 when musicians party like it's 1909 with waltzes and polkas. The evening concludes with a 1980s dance party and a 2,012 balloon drop. Although in keeping with the 1980s spirit, shouldn't that be a 99 red balloon drop? Tickets range from $85 to $195. *201 Van Ness Ave., 415-864-6000, www.sfsymphony.org*

Balloons drop on the New Year's Eve ball-goers at the San Francisco Symphony's Davies Symphony Hall.

DEC. 31
LONDON
New Year's Eve river cruise: While many a boat cruising the River Thames on New Year's Eve may be the holiday equivalent of a bachelorette party bus, the advantage to being on the water is the stunning views of London's amazing fireworks. It is also an opportunity to see the entire city without staggering about the streets like a drunkard. There are several options for NYE cruises, but try the classier-than-most Silver Barracuda. It includes a three-course meal and the obligatory champagne at midnight. Tickets are $300. *www.silverfleet.co.uk*

JAN. 12-14, 19-21, and 26-28
MONTREAL
Igloofest: Yes, spending time in Montreal in the dead of winter is like getting stuck in the freezer case at your local grocery store. But the ingenious organizers of Igloofest have stumbled across a way to make the most of the cold. The multi-weekend series of outdoor parties hosts a selection of world-renown DJs that keep crowds moving, and moving crowds equals heat. Nearly 60,000 braved the cold last year. This year's Igloofest features sets from international DJs such as Tiefschwarz, Terence Fixmer, Green Velvet, Sébastien Léger, Ben Klock, and Marcel Dettmann. Tickets range from $15 to $60. *The Quays of the Old Port, www.igloofest.ca*

JAN. 6-29
NEW YORK
New York Guitar Festival: More than 35 guitarists perform classical, jazz, and rock shows around the city. Highlights include an all-day marathon interpreting the work of Italian composers and tributes to greats such as Jim Hall and Brian Eno. Several guitarists also try their hand at scoring 11 Buster Keaton silent films. Performers at this year's festival include Jeff Parker, Mike Gordon, Thurston Moore, Mark Stewart, David Tronzo, Ben Monder, Kaki King, Lee Ranaldo, Keller Williams, and Gyan Riley. Concerts take place in venues throughout the city. *www.newyorkguitarfestival.org*

PLAN AHEAD

MARCH 10
SYDNEY
Future Music Festival: The Sydney stop of this mammoth music festival includes performances from Swedish House Mafia, New Order, Fatboy Slim, Paul van Dyk, Jessie J, and Tinie Tempah. Tickets are $155. *Royal Randwick Racecourse, www.futureenterrainment.com.au*

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; check online. Christopher Muther can be reached at muther@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @Chris_Muther.

Hector's dolphin bests the kiwi for touching time in New Zealand

RAVE

AKAROA, New Zealand — Hector's dolphins may be the smallest and rarest dolphins in the world, but they will seem larger than life when you are swimming nose-to-nose with them in the Pacific Ocean. In this seaside village no more than a few blocks long on the South Island's Banks Peninsula, you can hop in the ocean and splash around with these playful and curious creatures.

Black Cat Group, an Akaroa-based outfitter, runs daily tours year-round to see the dolphins. Once you get suited up in a 5-millimeter wet suit, complete with hoody and booties (or a dry suit come winter), climb aboard a Black Cat vessel for a three-hour tour. The dolphins sometimes stick close to town and frolic in Akaroa Harbour, which is the flooded crater of an extinct volcano that stood here millions of years ago; the harbor is now designated a marine mammal sanctuary. The day I went, we had to motor seven miles from the downtown dock out to the mouth of the harbor, where we soon spotted a pod of about a dozen dolphins.

The water here is frigid — around 60 degrees Fahrenheit in the summertime, and the mid 40s in winter months — and you may be bobbing in several-foot swells, but it's worth it to see the zippy little dolphins swim circles around you, often just a foot or two away.

Leave your inhibitions behind: The dolphins are attracted to you if you sing, hoot, yelp, or make any kind of playful noise underwater. It is illegal to touch them (or swim with them if any are calves, feeding, or mating), but just seeing these mammals up close is a thrill.

Only 12 people can swim with the dolphins on any one trip, and with no other boats in sight, it did not feel like a touristy experience.

The drive to Akaroa, about 90 minutes from Christchurch, is worth the trip. State Highway 75 passes sparkling Lake Ellesmere and then winds along a serpentine, at-times narrow road through beautiful hill country before dropping down into Akaroa. Enjoy the scenery because you will probably find yourself behind a tractor or a sightseeing driver with few opportunities to pass.

And leave a couple of hours to explore Akaroa. You will find hints of its former life as a French settlement: French-style architecture, cuisine, and outdoor cafes, and street names such as Rue Lavaud. If swimming with dolphins is not your thing, Black Cat Group also runs harbor cruises, during which you may see dolphins, penguins, and fur seals.

KARI BODNARCHUK

Black Cat Group, Main Wharf, Akaroa, New Zealand. 011-64-3-304-7641, www.blackcat.co.nz. Runs up to three trips a day October through April, and once a day May through September. Swimming with the dolphins/without: adults $139/$72, children ages 8-15 $115/$35.

KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A Hector's dolphin amid four swimmers in Akaroa, New Zealand.