

SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE NOVEMBER 6, 2022 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/TRAVEL



ABOVE: Alpine architecture in the town of Leavenworth, Wash.



LEFT: Nutcrackers on display at the Nutcracker Museum in Leavenworth.



An accordion player at the Andreas Keller Restaurant plays a mix of traditional Bavarian folk songs and familiar favorites.



Erika Bowie, general manager of the Leavenworth Reindeer Farm, gives Elsa the reindeer a smooch.



A gingerbread man (with appropriate lederhosen) from the Gingerbread Factory.

In Central Washington state, there’s a Bavarian village in the mountains that doesn’t just embrace the holiday, it gives it a bear hug

CHRISTOPHER MUTHER



LEAVENWORTH, Wash. — “Edelweiss, edelweiss, every morning you greeeeet meeeeee.” The dinner crowd at Andreas Keller Restaurant was getting rowdy, singing along to the “Sound of Music” ditty as a lederhosen-clad accordionist pumped out the melody on his squeeze-box and waitresses in dirndls buzzed about dropping off plates of crisp apple strudel.

I feared that if I didn’t participate in the Bavarian merriment, one of the wait-

resses would take away my schnitzel, refuse me apple strudel, and toss me out into the cold. So I smiled and sang as if possessed by all seven von Trapp children.

“Small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to seeeeee meeeeee.”

Spending time in Leavenworth, a town of 2,400 in the mountains of Central Washington state, requires commitment. You’re either going to arrive and shake your head at the absurdity of an entire municipality that looks like an 18th-century German village, or your heart will melt and you’ll throw your arms around the Alpine architecture and

LEAVENWORTH, Page N16

Travelers stay in step with walking tours

By Jon Marcus
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Ira Schor keeps two inspirational maxims on his desk at his home in Newton. The first reads “solvitur ambulando” — Latin for, “It is solved by walking.” The second is a quote from the naturalist John Muir.

“In every walk with nature,” it says, “one receives far more than he seeks.” Like many other people, Schor, 71, did a lot of walking at the start of the pandemic, which coincided with his retirement from work.

“It’s really in many ways pulled me through COVID,” he said. “I enjoy it, both with people and alone. It’s a kind of meditative experience.”

Now Schor and his wife have taken his hobby on the road, with a walking vacation to Italy.

A lot of other people are doing that, too. Companies that offer walking tours report big spikes in business compared to before the pandemic. And some destinations are blazing ambitious new walking trails to attract travelers.

WALKING, Page N15



CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Two people walked through a tunnel in Franklin Park in Roxbury last month.

Inside

THE VIP LOUNGE	VEGAS AND BEYOND
LIVING HER DREAM	VACATION TRUTHS
Berklee graduate Gabriela Carrillo returns to Boston in the touring production of ‘Six’	People dish on their biggest secrets and regrets in a recent travel survey
N14	N15

Seeking a chef for a shark expedition

By Lindsay Crudele
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

I think of being eaten by sharks more than I think of eating with one. Here in New England, where great white shark sightings have increased in recent years, fins are becoming commonplace shoreline accessories. On a recent beach day in Plum Island, I watched a fin emerge, slicing down the waterline. Someone, straight from Central Casting, shouted “shark!” A nervous crowd gathered. A few minutes after the fin submerged, beachgoers poured back into the waves, toddlers and all. New Englanders are salty like that.

But the team who helped film the live shark sequences for “Jaws” had better ideas than just walking into the drink with them. Andrew Fox has spent more than three decades on board the shark-diving vessel the MV Rodney Fox. The craft is named for his father, who survived

CHEF, Page N16

Making friends is a little different in Barbados





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TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

Lufthansa canceled my flight a year ago. Where’s the refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. I booked four Lufthansa tickets from Brussels to San Francisco through Kiwi.com in 2021. Lufthansa canceled the flight. Kiwi.com offered to request a refund. We have received two automated responses so far, but no refund. I have not yet contacted Lufthansa directly, since Kiwi.com is our online travel agency. It’s been a year since Kiwi promised to help us get a refund. Can you help us get our \$3,450 back, please?

NANCY PLASSCHAERT,
Antwerp, Belgium

A. You should have received a refund almost immediately. Under Lufthansa’s general conditions, the legal contract between you and the airline, “in the event of a cancellation, rebooking or delay, a reimbursement of the fare may be possible under certain conditions.” And you met those conditions, which Kiwi.com verified.

Lufthansa would not refund you directly. It would send it to Kiwi.com, which would then pass the money along to you. So, what happened?

I asked Kiwi if the holdup was on the Lufthansa side or if the agency had experienced a delay. It did not respond.

Your case illustrates one of the drawbacks of using an online travel agency. The intermediary can protect you when things go wrong. But that third party can also cause delays, which would have happened to you even if Lufthansa had refunded you immediately. Kiwi warned you that you might have to wait months for your money.

Your case illustrates one of the drawbacks of using an online travel agency.

“Please be patient,” they said in an e-mail. “We estimate that some refunds will take approximately three months. However, many carriers are now delaying their refund processes, and in some cases, the wait time might be longer.”

Why so long? Well, part of it may be related to the pandemic, although that excuse is getting a little old. By then, Lufthansa was close to two years into the pandemic and should have figured out a way to streamline its refunds.

Here’s what I would have done: After a month, I would have sent a brief, polite e-mail to one of the executive contacts for Lufthansa that I publish on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/lufthansa-airlines/. Failing that, I would have filed a dispute with your credit card company (more information can be found at www.elliott.org/ultimate-consumer-guides-smart-travelers/the-complete-guide-to-chargebacks-and-winning-a-credit-card-dispute/). Your bank or credit card could have taken the money back if you had shown them the e-mail from Kiwi.com. A dispute department would have seen that promise as a credit memo and returned your money.

I contacted Kiwi on your behalf. A representative responded immediately and promised to look into your refund. But two weeks later, there was no sign of your money. So I reached out again. This time, a representative got in touch with you and refunded your \$3,450. “The process got delayed due to a still unprocessed refund from the airline’s side,” a Kiwi representative told me.

So, should you have booked a trip with Kiwi.com? We don’t get a lot of complaints about the company — so few that we don’t even list their company contacts on our advocacy site. But I noted that the company advertises itself as an agency that likes to “hack the system.” Maybe next time, it can hack the system and get you a faster refund.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Elliott’s latest book is “How to Be the World’s Smartest Traveler” (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

THE VIP LOUNGE

She loves Greece, her parents, and coming back to Boston

When she was a student at Berklee College of Music, Gabriela Carrillo had dreams of becoming a pop star and going on tour. But she also loved musical theater and felt a tug in that direction as well. Fast forward to today, and the 28-year-old performer is able to combine both pursuits by playing Catherine Parr, the sixth and last wife of King Henry VIII, in the national tour of “Six,” coming to the Emerson Colonial Theatre Nov. 9-Dec. 31. “I feel like this is the perfect job for me,” Carrillo said in a recent phone call from Miami, where the musical, which reimagine the six wives of Henry VIII as a pop group, was being performed. “I love that there’s pop music in it, so I’m getting the touring pop star experience — we even have handheld mics — and the theater experience.” The show, which is still on Broadway, won a Tony Award earlier this year for best original score. This is Carrillo’s first national tour, and while she is enjoying exploring other parts of the country, she is especially excited to come back to Boston. “There is nothing like New England in the fall,” said Carrillo, who vlogs about everything from the show to her travels on her YouTube channel. “I was so focused when I was at Berklee and was in a ‘Berklee bubble’ a little bit. I’m looking forward to exploring ... [and trying] restaurants in the city that I couldn’t afford to go to in college.” We caught up with the Chicago native, who lives in Los Angeles with her rescue pup, Mochi, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? [It] would probably be Naxos, one of the Cycladic islands in Greece. Less widely known than Mykonos or Santorini ... it seems to have maintained an authentically Cycladic, down-to-earth spirit. It’s unbelievably rich agriculturally, which makes the food on the island what I consider to be the best I’ve ever had. I couldn’t get enough of the local cuisine, not to mention the charm of each and every unique village that makes up the island. It’s got everything I look for in a perfect vacation: history, culture, fantastic eats, and places to escape hustle and bustle; simply sit in the sun and sip on a cold drink. My visit to Naxos this past September was extra special because my mom was along for the trip with me. We spent two weeks in Athens, Naxos, and Santorini. ... I’ll



Gabriela Carrillo in Greece.

cherish the memories of our ... “Mamma Mia!” vacation forever.

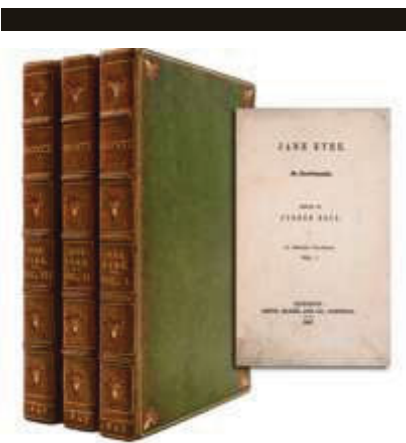
Favorite food or drink while vacationing? While in Greece this past September, I absolutely fell in love with visinada, a Greek sour cherryade of sorts. A syrup is made with fresh cherries and sugar, and then simply combined with water and ice and sometimes lemon juice. In my mind, it’s essentially a Greek Shirley Temple — but unbelievably more delicious because it tastes so fresh and real. I’m already known among my friends as the grown woman who orders Shirley Temples at the bar, so it was only a matter of time until the visinada and I found each other and fell madly in love.

Where would you like to travel to but haven’t? Two places I’ve felt incredibly drawn to visit have been Tahiti and Japan. I am just such a xenophile, and any place I can travel to where culture is very different than what I know at home is a place I’ve got to go. In my life, I’ve been an admirer — and brief student — of Tahitian dance, and the photos I’ve seen of the landscapes there are almost too beautiful to believe. I guess I’ve got to see it for myself. When it comes to Japan ... I was always absolutely fascinated by Japanese culture, cuisine, and media starting from when I was about 7 or 8 years old. I’m so grateful to my parents, who always encouraged me to indulge my

love of other cultures — helping me look for ways to study Tahitian dance, taking me to every Japanese festival we could find ... paying for all my manga comic books and Shoji Beat magazine subscriptions. ... I just know a visit to Japan would make me and my inner child so unbelievably happy.

One item you can’t leave home without when traveling? My vlog camera. I do try to stay in the moment and be fully present as much as I can while I travel, so recording content isn’t always something I’m thinking about when I travel, but I always bring my vlogging camera to capture extra-special travel moments I want to immortalize forever, both simply on my own hard drive and for my subscribers on my YouTube channel.

Aisle or window? I used to be a window girl, hardcore, because I tend to absolutely pass out in deep slumber on planes. It’s nice to just be able to prop a pillow against the window and drift away, not worrying that my head is going to snap forward and wake me up, or end up on some stranger’s shoulder. Now that I’m older, wiser, and more responsible and therefore actually try to drink enough water every day, I prefer an aisle seat so I don’t disturb my neighbors — or have to crawl over them pseudo-lap dance-style while they’re knocked out asleep — when I need to visit the [bathroom].



HERE

A BOOK LOVER’S EVENT
Poke around rare books, old maps, and illuminated manuscripts during the 44th annual Boston International Antiquarian Book Fair at the Hynes Convention Center, Nov. 11-13. The event draws more than 100 exhibitors from nine countries who will showcase original books, photos, autographs, historic documents, original illustrations, fine and decorative prints, and more. Highlights include rare first editions of Charlotte Brontë’s “Jane Eyre,” the first edition of the health and civil rights landmark book “Our Bodies, Ourselves,” and John F. Kennedy’s book “Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States,” inscribed by Jacqueline Kennedy. Free appraisals on Nov. 13, 1-3 p.m. Admission \$25, Nov. 11, 4-8 p.m.; free, Nov. 12, noon-7 p.m. and Nov. 13, noon-5 p.m. www.bostonbookfair.com

SKI FILM TOUR VISITS NEW ENGLAND
Get stoked for ski season with a night of in-person films that showcase a women’s backcountry ski trip in Alaska to the adventures of Cody Townsend, who’s attempting to climb and ski North America’s top 50 lines. Watch seven new films — suitable for all ages — during Salomon’s Quality Ski Time Film Tour, showing at the

Somerville Theatre Nov. 15 and Main Street Landing in Burlington, Vt., Nov. 16. Other films convey the challenge — and fun — of being the sister of a pro skier, what it’s like to be a sponsored teenage skier (skied, filmed, and edited by under-18 members of Salomon’s junior ski team), and the pursuits of Josh Daiek as he seeks solitude and challenging lines off the grid in the Nevada mountains. Tickets \$15 for general admission plus booking fees; all proceeds benefit the nonprofit Protect Our Winters. <https://bit.ly/QSTtour>

PASSIM’S POWER OUTAGE PARTY
The heat will still be on, but there will be no mics, no amps, and no lights during Club Passim’s Power Outage Party Nov. 15-18. The four-night event features music, storytelling, and entertainment by Zachariah Hickman, a bassist, producer, and bandleader who’s worked with artists such as Josh Ritter and Ray LaMontagne. The performance will feature the POP House Band and include special guests each night: Mike Block Nov. 15, Celia Woodsmith Nov. 16, Rose Polenzani and Kip Drozek Nov. 17, and Peter Mulvey and Colin McGovern Nov. 18. Tickets \$30 each night (\$28 for members). 617-492-7679, www.clubpassim.org

THERE

BRACE FOR BELLY LAUGHS IN NY
One of country’s largest comedy festivals returns to the Big Apple Nov. 7-13 with headliners Bill Maher, Tracy Morgan, Wanda Sykes, and Brookline-native Conan O’Brien. The New York Comedy Festival features more than 200 comedians performing more than 100 shows at venues throughout the five boroughs and — for the first time ever — at UBS Arena at Belmont Park on Long Island, with John Mulaney.

Other headliners include Mo Amer, Shane Gillis, Jo Koy, Nurse Blake, Ms. Pat, JB Smoove, Jenny Slate, Jimmy O. Yang, and Bassem Youssef. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of Carolines on Broadway, a New York comedy venue owned by Caroline Hirsch who founded the comedy festival. Tickets \$10-\$180. www.nycomedyfestival.com

GO VISIT LOVELAND
See an art exhibit by singer-songwriter John Mellencamp, a dazzling winter lights festival, and a new IMAX theater in Loveland, a hip, up-and-coming city one hour north of Denver. The award-winning musician, activist, and artist has a new exhibit at the Loveland Museum called “John Mellencamp: Painting and Assemblages” that runs through Feb. 12, 2023. Mellencamp’s “large-scale portraits and mixed-media pieces document America’s heart and soul, revealing unsettling but beautiful truths with a kind of anti-establishment frown,” according to the museum. Winter Wonderlights Downtown — a new season-long light display — opens on Nov. 18, featuring live reindeer, ice sculpting, interactive art displays, and live music (or see the original Winter Wonderlights at Chapungu Sculpture Park at Centerra, opening Nov. 19). Stay tuned for the opening of the new IMAX theater in the next month. www.visitlovelandco.org

EVERYWHERE

NEW FIRE PITS FOR FALL
Solo Stove’s fire pits have become wildly popular for good reason: They are super sleek, lightweight, and portable; they light quickly; and they emit very little smoke (no need to change seats to avoid shifting smoke gusts). The new 2.0 version of these smokeless fire pits have an added new fea-

Favorite childhood travel memory?
Although we traveled to quite a few of the US states and a few countries abroad, I think my parents and I went on about 13 or 14 cruises throughout my childhood, and honestly, those were some of the best memories of my younger years, and partially where I fell in love with performing. We would go to the shows every single night, from the big theatrical productions to the one-man-and-a-piano lounge shows. I was absolutely dazzled. I remember being starstruck seeing some of the singers and dancers around the ship. I also remember eating in the dining room for dinner every night with my parents and finding so much enjoyment trying new dishes. ... It’s because of [my parents] that my love for culture, cuisine, and travel came to be.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? I don’t really feel guilty about anything that brings me pleasure, but to some, I might commit a bit of a traveling faux pas. I’m a sucker for an unplanned and completely laid-back day or two on a trip abroad. ... I know many would see that as time wasted, and believe your itinerary should be packed sunrise to sunset so as to make the most of your time, but to me, scrambling around while completely exhausted and never having time to “stop and smell the roses,” as it were, is a quick way to ruin a day for me — and a quick way to look back and feel like you were never actually present on your trip.

Best travel tip? This may seem old-fashioned, but if you’re going somewhere that you have absolutely no experience visiting, use a travel company. When planning my mother-daughter trip to Greece, because it was a multi-location trip, I was worried about being able to effectively organize travel between Athens and the islands. Planes, shuttles, ferries. ... I ended up on the website Zicasso, where you can send in an information brief about what kind of trip you’re looking to take and where, activities you’re interested in, and your budget, and you get paired with two local travel agencies who send you competing itineraries to choose from. I went with Greece Insiders, an Athens-based travel group [that] absolutely nailed our trip to Greece. ... We stayed within our original budget and both my mom and I ended the trip feeling like all money spent was absolutely well worth it.

JULIET PENNINGTON

ture — a removable base plate and ash pan unit that sits on the bottom of the stove and makes emptying ash a cinch (no more turning the fire pit over to dump out debris). Try the ultra-portable Ranger 2.0 (just 15 pounds and 15 inches in diameter) or the Bonfire 2.0 (23 pounds and 19.5 inches in diameter); both come with a carrying case and are currently 25 percent off. \$199-\$239, www.solostove.com

NEW ENGLAND-MADE AXES
Chop up wood for your fire pit with an ax hand-forged in South Portland by Brant & Cochran Axes from Maine. The company makes the Allagash Cruiser and Dirigo Belt camp axes. The 2.5-pound Allagash Cruiser has a carbon steel blade embossed with the maker’s initials and manufacture year and a beautifully shaped and comfortable 28-inch Amish-turned-hickory handle. The smaller Dirigo Belt axe weighs 1.75 pounds and has an 18-inch hickory handle. Use them in the backyard to split wood for your smokeless fire pit or bring them on your canoe or camping trips. Both come with a Maine-made leather sheath. \$239-\$299. www.bnc-tools.com

KARI BODNARCHUK



People dish on biggest secrets and regrets in travel survey

By Chelsea Henderson
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Making memories is an integral part of traveling, but it turns out that regret is often attached to these vacation memories.

This September, PlayUSA — an online news organization focused on the legal gambling industry — surveyed just over a thousand people between the ages of 21 to 93 about their vacation experiences. The respondents, whose average age was 39, shared their regrets and secrets from their vacations, especially those spent in Las Vegas.

The survey yielded interesting results, showcasing some of the craziest vacation experiences people have had. Getting drunk, pulling all-nighters, and losing money are at the top of the list. In fact, 52 percent of respondents said they have gotten drunk on vacation, which may have contributed to some other

experiences listed, including breaking the law and sleeping with strangers.

In Las Vegas, in particular, wild experiences are aplenty — and so are the subsequent regrets. People travel to Sin City for a variety of reasons, including to see the shows and concerts, celebrate a birthday, or have a girls’ or guys’ getaway. Fifteen percent of respondents, however, said that their reason to go to Vegas was to party and get drunk.

Despite the popular phrase “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” (which 70 percent of the respondents said they have used), 13 percent of people do not keep their Vegas escapades under wraps. Nearly half of these secrets include sexual encounters, and a quarter include instances of cheating or going to a strip club.

Gambling is another big draw



JOHN LOCHER/AP/FILE

According to a recent travel survey, what happens in Vegas, doesn’t necessarily stay in Vegas.

to the neon capital of the world, with 22 percent of people citing it as a reason to visit. Eighty-one percent of people traveling to Vegas gamble, and half of the respondents reported winning

Vegas is also known for its weddings (which are sometimes officiated by an Elvis impersonator). Thirty-seven percent of people have reported going to a wedding while in Vegas, though approximately a third of these once-married couples are no longer together.

Following these wild times spent in Vegas, 20 percent of people said they behaved worse than they would have at home. Ten percent were embarrassed by their behavior, and 12 percent were embarrassed by their friends or family members.

Anywhere you go, however, it seems that the company you keep can have a large impact on the travel experience. Friends and loved ones are often welcome travel partners, with nearly half and a third of respondents, respectively, enjoying their company. But parents and in-laws? Not so much. Nineteen

percent of people prefer to not go on vacation with their in-laws or with their mothers. Only 15 percent said they would prefer to travel without their father.

With the ongoing effects of the pandemic and inflation, some people are pulling back on their plans to travel. More than half of the survey respondents have limited their vacation plans this year because of these financial concerns. Forty-eight percent have limited plans for 2023.

Nevertheless, more than a third of respondents are still planning on vacationing during this year’s holiday season. Next year, many Americans are planning for two vacations throughout the year. Despite the potential financial toll, people’s desire and willingness to travel is strong.

Chelsea Henderson can be reached at chelsea.henderson@globe.com.



TOURISM PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Travelers stay in step with walking tours

►WALKING
Continued from Page N13

Before COVID, “I don’t think people took the time to be outside and commune with nature, and now they’re thinking, ‘How can I incorporate that into my vacation?’” said Linda Lowther, project manager of the Island Walk in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island.

sense when you think about it as a longer break in their routine.”

Country Walkers has seen a 40 percent increase in the number of first-time customers, Thompson said. Every domestic trip last year was full. “If you wanted to create a tour anywhere in the country, I could sell it out,” he said.

Walking tour bookings at the international travel company Explore, whose North American headquarters is in Boston, are up 82 percent since before the pandemic, said Sam White, a company director. Walking trips now comprise 20 percent of its business, up from a pre-pandemic 10 percent, White said.

“That’s a huge increase and it’s growing as we see more business come back,” she said. “It is definitely a trend.”

The walking and hiking category at the touring company Backroads has increased 30 percent, said Tom Hale, founder and president. “People have realized it’s a great way to travel.”

Destinations are recognizing this, too. Prince Edward Island has connected 435 miles of existing inland and coastal trails, dirt roads, beaches, boardwalks, and side streets into its new Island Walk. The idea is based in part on the Camino de Santiago, a 500-mile network of pilgrims’ walks in northwestern Spain that attracts 100,000 visitors a year.

Organizers see the Island Walk as a sort of Appalachian Trail for walkers who prefer level terrain, bed-and-breakfast inns, cafes, and microbreweries to mountain hiking, campsites, and cooking fires. At about 15 miles a day, it would take a month to complete, but has 32 sections meant for people who prefer to sample only parts of it.

“You get a better feel for a place” on foot, said Lowther. Walkers who tried out the trail in its debut season last year “told us how they connected to people,” she said. “They met farm-

ers, they met fishers, and saw things you don’t see from a bus or from a car.”

The number of visitors so far is not in the hundreds of thousands but in the hundreds, Lowther said. Still, she said, “that’s big room money for a small province like ours.”

Walkers also have fast-expanding choices in US destinations. There are now 24,905 miles of trails converted from former rail lines nationwide, with 9,197 more miles planned, according to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Trail use tripled in

the first weeks of the pandemic, and is still at levels 60 percent higher than before COVID, the conservancy reports.

The 3,700-mile Great American Rail Trail across 12 northern states from coast to coast is half finished. And the \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure act included \$200 million a year for walking and cycling connections in and between communities.

That’s a slow way to get around. Which seems to be the appeal of it.

“Just being outside and in the environment makes all the dif-

The newly-launched Island Walk, a 435-mile walking trail that loops around Prince Edward Island.

ference in the world,” said Schor, whose plan for an earlier walking trip to Portugal was canceled by COVID. He’d never take a bus tour, he said. “That’s just not my idea of a vacation.”

Walking tours are “a different type of travel, to some extent,” said White, at Explore. “You get to see more of the place where you go. It’s being outdoors, not being in a crowded city, not being on a bus.”

The popularity of walking, Country Walkers’ Thompson said, is in part because of shifts in customers’ relationship with time and how they use it. “The idea of waiting around and getting on a bus has much less appeal to people.”

For those and other reasons, travel industry insiders expect the walking craze to stick around.

“This surge in interest is going to definitely carry into the future,” said Hale, at Backroads. “The interest among baby boomers in terms of staying active — that is an absolute trend” that has only been intensified by the pandemic.

He compared the popularity of walking to the relative decline of Peloton, which reports a “significant decrease” in demand after turbocharged sales at the start of the pandemic, and is temporarily halting production of some of its fitness products.

“What a surprise,” Hale said sarcastically of consumers getting off the stationary bikes in their basements. “Maybe they’re all going out walking.”

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In Wash. village, it’s like Christmas in Bavaria

►LEAVENWORTH
Continued from Page N13

soak up the delicious corniness of it all. It’s “The Twilight Zone” meets the Grimm Brothers, sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.

I decided to drop all cynicism and feel the love. Honestly, it was difficult to resist a town *committed* to pulling off the illusion of being located in the European Alps. Last year, a study from travel company Next Vacay examined the most Christmassy towns in America, scoring them on criteria such as the number of Christmas markets, snowfall amounts, coziness, and Instagramable winter scenes. Leavenworth took the crown. The town looks like a small German village, it’s surrounded by snow-capped mountains, and has a reindeer farm. There’s really no competition.

I was here in the fall, but Leavenworth seemed ready to roll out the holly. The Christmas lights were being strung up on the town common, and it was snowing on the drive from Seattle through the Cascade Mountains.

The town boasts 21 miles of holiday lights through the winter, plus the requisite German Christmas markets and Nordic sports. There are holiday events every day in December. The town even has its own Christmas song. Winter Karneval promptly follows in January.

Before I made the rounds at the Biergartens and Nutcracker Museum, there was one very serious question that required an answer: How did a tiny hamlet become a chalet-filled fantasy land? The town may look as if it’s been around for 200 years, but according to the vice president of Leavenworth’s historical museum, it began its Germanic-ish transformation less than 60 years ago.

In its infancy, Leavenworth was a prosperous place. In the 1860s, it was a fur trading outpost, then a gold rush boomtown, and finally an exporter of timber. By the 1920s, the timber supply had been depleted, the railroad had relocated, and Leavenworth was becoming a ghost town. But a pair of enterprising businessmen had a vision, and that vision was ... Bavaria. Bob Rogers and Ted Price, the aforementioned businessmen, began working with merchants,



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF



town officials, and the University of Washington. In six years, the dead downtown was well on its way to becoming what visitors marvel at today.

Everything in Leavenworth is Bavarian. Zoning laws are strict. Even chains such as McDonald’s, Starbucks, and the Hampton Inn sport Bavarian-style lettering and architecture. But the best part of Leavenworth is that most of the stores and restaurants are not chains.

Instead, Front Street (or Front Strasse, as the street sign reads in a Germanic font) is filled with independently owned shops and restaurants.

It’s also where you’ll find the Nutcracker Museum. If you’re going to recreate an alpine town and make it the most Christmasy locale in the country, it should have a museum with a collection of more than 9,000 nutcrackers, beginning with prehistoric nutting stones

Left: The Nutcracker Museum is a star attraction in Leavenworth, Wash.

Below: The view from Peshastin Pinnacles State Park in Cashmere, Wash.

up to contemporary pop culture nutcrackers. It’s not all blocky wooden soldiers painted red. There’s at least two Hillary Clinton nutcrackers, plus Yoda, Elvis, elephants, squirrels, birds, every Disney character imaginable, football players, an entire nut-cracking brass band, and, of course, soldiers in every possible shade of uniform.

As you may have gathered, the word “subtle” doesn’t really exist in Leavenworth, and that’s what makes it fun. The pretzels are big, the bratwurst is plentiful, and the gingerbread cookies at the Gingerbread Factory are fresh year-round. The cookies were so good that you could eat them for breakfast. Well, at least I did, and I’d do it again despite the judgmental stares of passersby. The Christmas ornament shop, Kris Kringl (no e, thank you), is not for the faint of heart. I’d never seen so many ornaments representing such a wide variety of foods, sports, drinks, animals, and hobbies. You need an ornament that looks like a jar of almond butter? It’s here. How about a string of Bud Light Christmas lights? Step right up.

I should mention that there’s a lot more in Leavenworth than pretzels and peppermint bark. Among the T-shirt shops and souvenir stores, there’s the Cheesemonger’s Shop, a European-style chocolate shop called Schocolat, and even a speakeasy called Pika Provisions. For such a Lilliputian town, Leavenworth has a lot of dining options. Sulla Vita is a shockingly good pizza restaurant with a very impressive patio. There’s Mexican at Pavz Tacos, because every faux Bavarian village deserves decent tacos, and a seafood restaurant called Yodelin. Outside of downtown, there’s fine dining at Wildflour, which specializes in pasta.

But to be honest, I was here for the kitsch and Christmas. I can find fine

dining anywhere, but reindeer farms are entirely unique. I was under the assumption that the Leavenworth Reindeer Farm would be a sad petting zoo with a few mangy reindeer and perhaps an angry goat that gave visitors the stink eye. Erika Bowie, the general manager of the family-run farm, set me straight. The farm has a herd of 27 reindeer (also several cats) that look very robust. She’s like a walking encyclopedia of reindeer facts. If you come here, you will be schooled on all things reindeer, like it or not.

“Reindeer have color changing eyes, from brown to blue,” she excitedly explained. “They are the only mammal on earth that can see in ultraviolet. They can run 50 miles an hour and swim 6.2 miles per hour. That’s faster than Michael Phelps. The antler is the fastest-growing tissue on the planet. It grows up to an inch a day.”

After hearing all of that I opted against sampling the reindeer sausage at the snack bar, but according to Bowie, reindeer is a staple in her family’s native Norway. The farm has family-friendly activities and tours, and is in the process of erecting what will be the West Coast’s largest geodesic projection dome. Inside the dome, visitors will be able to watch the northern lights and reindeer herds from around the world in 360 degrees.

On my flight from Boston to Washington state, a local told me to make time for hiking around Leavenworth, and after multiple bratwurst tastings, it felt like it was time to heed his advice. With my limited time — all that schnitzel wasn’t going to eat itself — I strategically chose Peshastin Pinnacles State Park in nearby Cashmere. The 1½-mile trail I took was steep, but the short hike yielded dramatic views.

I’d like to say that watching the sunset and taking in the beauty of nature truly filled me with the holiday spirit. But who am I kidding? It was definitely the gingerbread men that did the trick.

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Seeking a chef for a shark expedition

►CHEF
Continued from Page N13

one of the world’s most severe shark attacks in 1963. Instead of heading to dry land forever, Rodney invented the world’s first subaquatic shark-diving cage and founded a shark expedition tour business. Today, Andrew Fox operates Rodney Fox Shark Expeditions, multiday cruises through the waters of Australia’s Neptune Islands, where voracious appetites and expansive menus are top of mind. But the feeding frenzies in question are human, and this year, its crew is hoping to net a new chef to fuel the staff and guests of their voyages.

I reached out from one popular shark hangout to another to learn more about what Fox and the team are looking for in their next onboard chef, and what’s different about cooking for cage-divers.

“As soon as the great white shark appears, everything stops,” said Fox. Everybody rushes to have that first look ... and quite often, they’re just all jumping into their wet suits and trying to get into the cage, and that can be really frustrating for the chef actually, [who’s] gone to a lot of trouble to make something.” But, he said, it’s something the chefs come to understand about the natural pace of expedition life.

Weather variations, shifting locations, and the unpredictable schedule of the sharks themselves present additional challenges to navigate. Seasick sailors may not tolerate food at all, and may sleep for long periods of time.

“The chef needs to be ready to cook at any time and wait till we get up into calmer waters,” said Fox.

The onboard chef will have more hassles to chart than sauce-on-siders, in the parlance of the late Anthony Bourdain. The menu accommodates myriad dietary requests. Cooks must cater to a crew of up to 25, considering vegans and vegetarians, Keto, and allergies to lactose, gluten, alliums, and peppers, as well as bake a mean birthday cake. But that’s not all.

Though the guests may be green, the chef shouldn’t be. Job requirements include experience working on vessels, so that the chef is not surprised by motion sickness and can maintain a long day aboard, preparing breakfast and working into evenings. And, close quarters



PHOTOS BY ANDREW FOX

Mealtime on board a recent Rodney Fox Shark Expedition (above) and for sharks below the vessel (right).

means that the chef needs to be chummy with the existing crew.

“You’ve got to be able to work as a team and get on with everybody, which is hard for grumpy chefs sometimes,” said Fox.

“It’s a real lifestyle choice,” he said. The job is intense, but often served through shorter terms, sometimes as brief as weeks as opposed to entire seasons. The next chef will support an existing team, primarily a couple who are readying their retirement plans and would like some relief between dives.

As someone who gets seasick bobbing in Boston Harbor, it’s hard to imagine how adding apex predators to the equation might further whet my appetite. It turns out that’s a common problem. While most experienced back-of-house teams know how to wrangle a ravenous brunch crowd, shark tourists are their own breed of diner. For one thing, there’s an added ingredient: fear.

When seafaring challenges are overcome, Fox said that the nautical appetite becomes insatiable. Sharklike, you could say.

“Once you get used to your sea legs, nearly everybody admits to eating a lot more than they normally do, and it seems like the whole day revolves around the mealtimes,” he said. Other fare known to appear includes oven-roasted meats, piled with vegetables, and shellfish sourced from nearby coves. Fox recalls a wonderful chicken



curry dish special to one chef; another excelled at tiramisu.

“After a dive, it’s wonderful to come up and have a nice, hot cup of soup.”

The boat, Fox explained, is a former pearling ship converted into a liveaboard-style vessel. In its previous life, the boat traversed the remote waters of the Northern Territories, seeding and harvesting pearls. Now, the jewel of the ship is its 25-person saloon, attached to a galley which thrums with production all day long. Tour-members can wander in at any hour to find freshly-baked muffins, scones, snacks, and gather there at the end of a long day (unless beguiling weather inspires a sunset barbecue). Like the kitchens in most homes, it is often a gathering place, redolent

with the scent of baking bread.

Shark season in New England peaks in the fall, so I checked in with our local shark-spotting boats to see if anyone is dishing while fishing closer to home. The Atlantic White Shark Conservancy, research institute and source of the Sharktivity tracking app, runs short tours in search of sightings, and recommends packing a bag lunch.

“While guests are permitted to bring food/snacks/drinks aboard the vessel (no hard alcohol or glass allowed), we operate on a ‘pack in pack out’ policy,” said Captain Darren Saletta of Monomoy Sportfishing, who runs shark-spotting tours off Chatham.

“Shark tours are roughly two hours long, and most clients opt not to eat on

these adventures. During trips, we are often underway in the wind and sea at speed, or hopefully viewing a shark ... which is an exhilarating experience for most folks and not a choice time to partake in culinary delights.”

Chatham Fishing Charters operates with a similar policy: Bagged lunches are welcome, but please: no bananas — they’re cursed. That’s an old nautical superstition often repeated on crafts, certainly apocryphal, but if you’re cruising for great whites, you’ll need all the luck you can get.

You don’t have to leave it to chance with Down Cape Charters, which runs a shark cruise through “Shark Alley,” a stretch by Monomoy Island where shark sightings are common, and which features an “on the water menu.” Selections include picnic lunches: turkey clubs, roast beef, and tuna, for example, paired with kale salad or crudite. A kids’ menu features, brazenly, a banana burrito, and of course, Cape Cod potato chips. There is seafood cocktail: poached shrimp, king crab, and lobster rolls among that list, along with crisp white wine to toast.

How, when faced with the prehistoric majesty of a 4,000-pound shark, can anyone think about potato chips? But like Rodney Fox, who saw that the only way out of fear was through it, shark-watchers find their own way: through the kitchen.

“Even when great white sharks are arriving, and there’s a lot of excitement, sometimes the dinner bell gets everybody’s attention, and we’ll go in and have a big feed.”

I asked Andrew Fox to describe the scene on deck when the star arrives.

“When the fin first appears, they hear the ‘Jaws’ music in their head — they have that sort of fear of the unknown, that monster element — and that sort of stops people from wanting to snack.”

But that’s where the chef rises to the challenge: She will emerge from the kitchen, and, sharks circling, pass out appetizers.

Fear owes so much to ignorance, and, standing on the deck, maybe it’s possible to get used to the sight of one of nature’s most awesome predators. But it’s hard not to imagine that a chef knows something else: how to nourish and comfort, despite circumstances. And maybe that’s what’s different about this job.

“That’s a wonderful thing, to be served, you know, pies or quiches or muffins and pizzas when people are up watching sharks on the observation decks,” said Fox. Adrenaline recedes and appetites swell.

“Having great white sharks swim around while you’re eating is a wonderful thing...” added Fox. “It’s like a very exciting dinner party.”