

Briefly

Virginia launches new travel website

RICHMOND, Va. — The Virginia Tourism Corporation has launched a new fall travel planning website that features destinations where loved ones can completely connect and celebrate the season.

Visitors looking to take in fall foliage on a scenic drive, sip the best of October Virginia Wine Month or plan a romantic stay at a classic inn can use www.Virginia.org/fall to plan the perfect trip. Interactive mapping pinpoints wineries, orchards and festivals using GPS technology so visitors can search by zip code or locality to find the ideal fall experience.

Virginia.org/fall also features travel packages to enjoy fall foliage, culinary highlights, wine touring and historic sites. The website also lists scenic drives ideas from across the state as well as suggestions of where to stay, dine and visit along the route.

Those looking to travel with little ones in tow will love Virginia's "U Pick" experiences such as apple orchards, corn mazes and pumpkin patches, many of which offer hay rides and special events for families. Call (800) VISITVA to request a free travel guide.

Chocolate Festival Nov. 26 in Delaware

DOVER, Del. — The Sixth Annual Chocolate Festival will be held in the Rollins Center on Nov. 26 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Special guest, Executive Pastry Chef Roland Mesnier, will present cooking demonstrations and tell stories of his days in the White House, at intervals from 1 to 4 p.m.

The festival will feature varieties of chocolate and candy exhibitors, an ice carving contest, one-of-a-kind gingerbread village, an arts and crafts marketplace with plentiful holiday gift selections and food stuffs for purchasing.

Live entertainment will be presented by the Capital Ringers, performing favorite holiday melodies on English Handbells. Instrumentals and choral performances will be featured, in addition to dance presentations by Delaware Ballet Company. "Santa" will appear for photos with the kids.

Delaware Hospice will present its annual Festival of Trees in conjunction with the festival. Admission is free for all children younger than 18, and \$5 for adults at the door. Interested vendors may contact Jeannine Lahey at (302) 857-2166 or jlahey@doverdowns.com.

In addition to his appearance in the afternoon, Chef Roland Mesnier will also host an exclusive VIP dinner in Michele's at 8 p.m. Tickets for the three-course dinner are \$50 per person, and seating is limited to 24 guests. Reservations for dinner are required and may be made by calling VIP Services at (800) 711-5882.

BikeToursDirect to add at least 10 countries on four continents in 2012

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — BikeToursDirect, a central resource for bicycle tours in Europe, will expand its tour offerings in 2012, adding tours in at least 10 new countries on four continents — including tours in New Zealand, South Africa, Vietnam, Thailand, Mexico and Jordan.

The additions include tours in New Zealand, South Africa, Vietnam, Thailand, Mexico and Jordan. BikeToursDirect currently represents more than 50 local bicycle tour companies, primarily in Europe, and offers more than 200 tours on its website, www.biketoursdirect.com or call (877) 462-2423.

The full roster of new tours for 2012 will be unveiled in November when BikeToursDirect launches a new website. Although 2012 information on existing tours won't be added until the new site launches, BikeToursDirect already has details on many tours.

Country fair Oct. 8 in Flat Rock

FLAT ROCK, N.C. — The 5th annual True Nature Country Fair, Oct. 8 at the Highland Lake Cove, Flat Rock, N.C., is a celebration of sustainable living and Appalachian heritage.

Attractions include Artisan bread baking and cob oven building, worm composting and horse logging, acupuncture, spoon carving, nature walks and more.

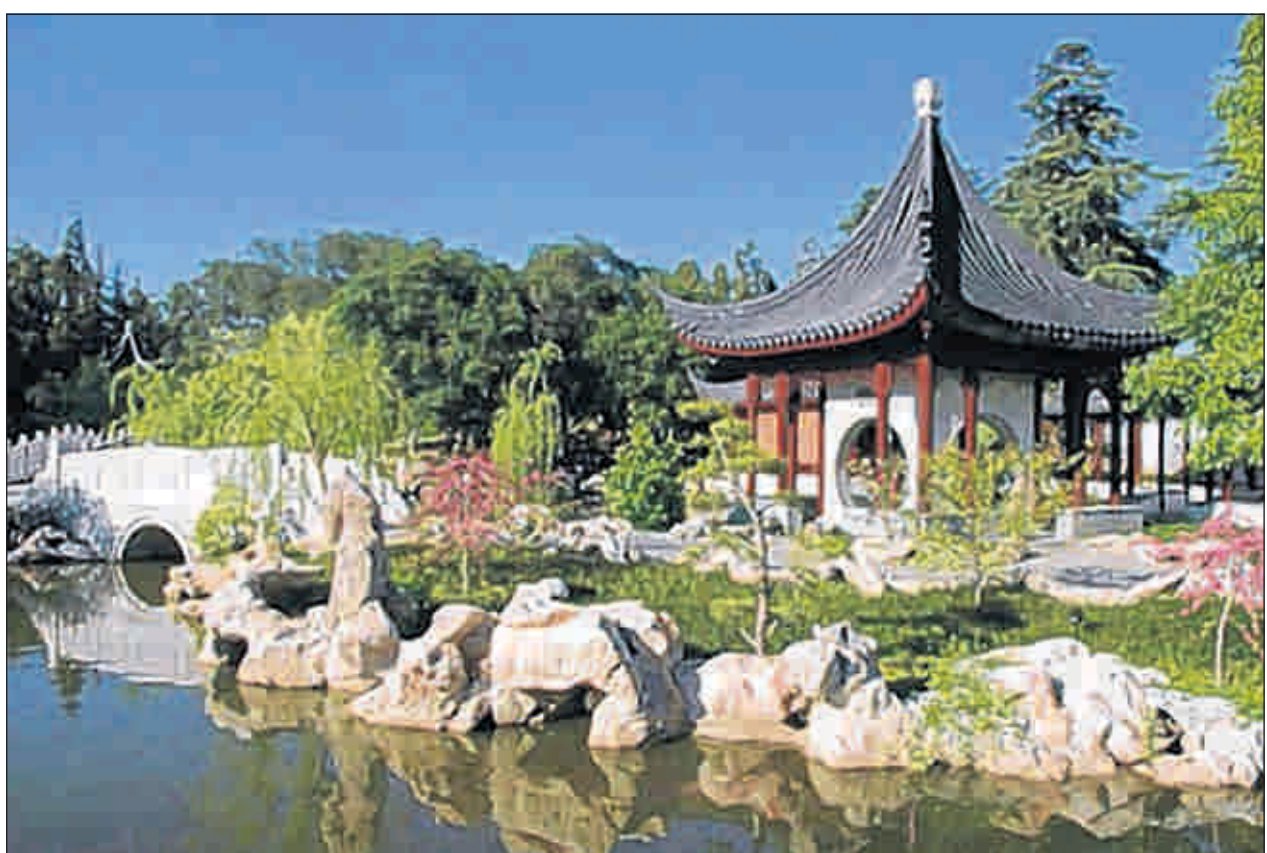
The full program, vendor forms, volunteer opportunities, tickets to the fair and to the farm to table dinner, One Bowl, are available at www.organicgrowersschool.org. Purchase an admission ticket online in advance, and receive a free kids pass. Dinner seating is limited.

The gate fee of \$10 includes admission to all the sessions. There are two sessions with an extra fee for materials and the One Bowl dinner, which will be served after the gates close, is \$25 for adults and \$7 for children under 12. A special need is locally crafted soup bowls for the dinner. This year's entrees are Blue Ridge bison stew and sweet corn chowder.

Highlands Cove is a wooded site 25 minutes from Asheville and two miles off of I-26.

Submitted reports

PASADENA, CALIF.



COURTESY OF THE HUNTINGTON LIBRARY

The Chinese Garden at the Huntington Botanical Garden features a lake and tea house.

More things to do than you can count

Pasadena, Calif., is a treasure. There are more wonderful, surprising things to do than you can count.

The Westin Pasadena comes highly recommended for its perfect location and comfortable rooms. The California Pizza Kitchen is on the corner of the block. Sitting outside in the courtyard facing City Hall built of stone and the courtyard between the two has waterways, and squared ponds. The Westin is within walking distance of Old Town and the Convention Center. The hotel also offers use of their shuttle and driver. Since there is limited parking in Pasadena, take advantage of the shuttle that will take you anywhere within a 10 minute radius of the hotel.

The Huntington Library, Art Collection and Botanical Gardens are a short drive from the Westin. The Art Gallery, a total of 55,000 square feet was built as the home of railroad and real estate mogul Henry Huntington and his wife Arabella. When finished in 1911 it was considered one of the finest villas in Southern California. It is actually in the town of San Marino, that is basically a suburb of Pasadena.

This lovely villa is now The Huntington Art Gallery with high quality European art. Both British and French art are displayed. The portrait gallery houses Gainborough's famous "Blue Boy" and Thomas Lawrence's "Pinkie."

Priceless French furniture mostly from the 18th century is displayed along with tapestries that hang in the library of rare books and manuscripts. Altogether there are about six million items.

In the main exhibition hall there is a Gutenberg Bible, and early editions of Shakespeare works, manuscripts of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" and a folio edition of Audubon's "Birds of America."

The Botanical Gardens cover 120 acres. The Desert Garden is remarkable, with a large grouping of huge unusual cacti and succulents. The beautiful Chinese Garden features a lake, tea house, restaurant and shops and five stone bridges. The magnificent Rose Garden shows the history of the Rose over 2,000 years. The variety of roses is a spectacular sight when in full bloom.

Make reservations for high tea at the Huntington. Hot scones are brought to the table along with your choice of tea. While there serve yourself from the buffet of tea sandwiches, salads, caviar and delectable desserts. If you are lucky enough to get Kimberly as your waitress, she will add to the delight of a real English high tea.



Steve and Caroline Lake
Travel Notes

The Tournament of Roses is what Pasadena is most famous for. Held on Jan. 1 or 2, the floats are made of flowers, seeds, leaves and stems. The floats seem to get more spectacular each year. To see the floats in person instead of on television is quite a unique experience. They can be viewed before and after the parade. To see the floats up close and smell the lovely flowers is a real treat.

The Melting Pot Food Tour of Old Pasadena is not to be missed. Learn about the history and architecture of Old Pasadena, which is on the Register of Historic Districts, while enjoying the frequent stops at restaurants of different cultures. The hidden courtyard and alleyways offer some of the best food to be found in Pasadena. The stories behind the different cuisines offered are fascinating and the food at each stop is delicious. There are eight stops in all, both savory and sweet. One of the restaurants is Choza Mama with fabulous Peruvian cuisine and don't miss Mignon Chocolate that offers an exotic range of chocolates.

Known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled, the Norton Simon Museum is a must see. The collection starts from the Renaissance and takes you to the 20th century. There are Monets, Rembrandts, Van Gogh's and Renoirs along with Asian and Indian sculptures. Although flash cameras are not permitted, pictures taken without the use of flash come out remarkably well.

The Theater District is acclaimed for being the home of the Pasadena Playhouse founded in 1925. The Pasadena Playhouse has been recognized as California's State Theater. The beauty of the theater as well as the offering of fantastic talent is wonderful. Recently Hershey Felder as George Gershwin in "George Gershwin Alone" gave a brilliant performance.

The Gamble House was built for Proctor and Gamble heir David Gamble. The house was dedicated to the City of Pasadena in 1966. Built in 1908 the Gamble House is a great structure built in the Arts and Craft

If you go

» **Pasadena Convention and Visitors Bureau:** (626) 795-9311 or (800) 307-7977, www.visitpasadena.com, www.visitpasadena.com/

» **Huntington Library Art Collection and Botanical Gardens in San Marino:** (626) 405-2100, www.huntington.org

» **The Westin Pasadena:** (626) 792-2727, www.westin.com/pasadena

» **Norton Simon Museum:** 411 W. Colorado Blvd., (626) 449-6840, www.nortonsimon.org

» **Tournament of Roses:** (626) 469-7673, www.tournamentofroses.com

» **Melting Pot Food Tours:** (shown below) (424) 247-9666 or (800) 979-3370, www.meltingpottours.com

» **Pasadena Playhouse:** (626) 356-7529, www.pasadenaplayhouse.org

» **Gamble House:** (626) 793-3334, www.gamblehouse.org

» Los Angeles International Airport is 29 miles to Pasadena. Bob Hope Burbank Airport is 16 miles to Pasadena.



COURTESY OF MELTING POT TOURS

The Equator Restaurant, which serves excellent Chinese dishes, is one of the dining experiences on the Melting Pot Food Tour.

mode. Seventeen varieties of wood are used throughout the lovely home and can now be toured.

Forty miles west of Pasadena in Simi Valley is Ronald Reagan's Presidential Library and Museum. Situated on a 100 acre site with spectacular views. There is a full size replica of the Oval Office when Regan was President. Air Force One the "Flying White House" can be boarded. The library and museum are definitely worth the visit.

With a population of 133,000 the vast array of cultural activities available in Pasadena is amazing. Pasadena is a place to return to again and again to discover innovative museums, restaurants and theater.

Steve and Caroline Lake are freelance travel writers living in Las Vegas.