



EXPLORE

Holy men take part in the Indian religious festival of Kumbh Mela, held every three years.

TRIPS, TIPS & DEALS

A promise of unique trips

By PHIL MARTY | Tribune Newspapers

Explore is a company that specializes in modestly priced worldwide adventure travel trips. It has a new batch of offerings called Explore Beyond that promises unique experiences in off-the-beaten track locations. Some are one-time trips tied to a festival, for instance, and in some cases these are scouting trips for proposed new locations. One trip focuses on the Indian religious festival of Kumbh Mela, which is held every three years and rotates among four sites. Anywhere from 1 million to 30 million pilgrims may be present, and it offers lots of colorful photo-ops, such as holy men taking a ritual dip in the Shipra River. This trip will run April 16-24 and is priced from \$1,850 per person double occupancy, not including air. It also includes visits in Delhi, Jaipur, Pushkar and Bhopal. Find information on all of the new trips at tinyurl.com/qbonh6q.

A year for Christian pilgrims

The coming year will be a special one for some religious pilgrims because Pope Francis has declared it a "Holy Year of Mercy." There will be special events in Rome and Santiago de Compostela, the Spanish city at the end of the famous Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route. In Rome, the entry to St. Peter's Basilica known as the Holy Door will be opened to pilgrims for the year, and holy doors to other cathedrals in the city also will be open. In Santiago de Compostela, the cathedral's holy door also will be open. Caminoways.com advises planning well in advance for such trips, particularly ones timed around Easter and other important religious events. tinyurl.com/jcy8cvz.

Phil Marty is a freelancer.

Top college town food joints

Anyone who's ever gone to college knows the importance of late-night food joints. Whether studying or trying to recover from a round of partying, you need somewhere with good grub to chow down. Business Insider has come up with a list of such places in 40 major U.S. college towns. In Los Angeles, for instance, they tapped Pat Sal's Deli, featuring hearty sandwiches popular with the UCLA crowd. In Athens, Ohio, home to Ohio University, there's Big Mamma's Burritos, where you can tackle the Mega Mamma Challenge and try to down 5 pounds of burrito in 20 minutes or less. For pizza fans, there are choices such as Shakespeare's Pizza in Columbia, Mo., or Woodstock's Pizza in Davis, Calif. Hot dog mavens might visit Top Dog in Berkeley, Calif., or Famous Franks in West Lafayette, Ind. Read and drool at tinyurl.com/zhtkrt.

GEAR BOX

This jacket is a perfect fit

By TERRY GARDNER
Tribune Newspapers

Name: The North Face Women's ThermoBall Hoodie

What it is: a lightweight ripstop nylon hoodie with PrimaLoft synthetic down that mimics down's ability to capture heat. The ThermoBall technology uses small circular PrimaLoft synthetic fiber clusters that trap heat inside small air pockets for warmth in frigid or rainy conditions. The water-repellent jacket offers warmth without the bulkiness of down. And the fill stays warm when wet because it is synthetic. The hoodie has two zippered hand pockets and compresses to fit in a pocket. It is available in 10 colors, including blue, pink, purple, gray and black. The men's ThermoBall hoodie also costs \$220 and comes in eight colors.

The good: This jacket kept me warm on multiple trips this year. With layers, it kept me toasty on both dry and rainy days on a cruise in Alaska's Inside Passage. And it kept me warm under a heavier coat on a cold, windy night



NORTH FACE

when I photographed the aurora borealis. The jacket packs easily when compressed and is ideal for all seasons because the amount of heat can vary depending on your layers. I slept with it zipped up over a pajama top on a chilly night camping in Quebec. I also carry it on flights to use as a pillow.

The bad: Although the pockets are roomy, I wish there were one or two

more pockets for stashing my ID, cash or my phone when I want the zippered pockets for my hands alone.

Cost: \$220

Available from: www.thenorthface.com, www.rei.com and www.dicks.com

Terry Gardner is a freelance reporter.

NEED TO KNOW

SkyMall is back for now

By HUGO MARTIN
Tribune Newspapers

The Phoenix, Ariz.-based in-flight catalog that was known for selling quirky items such as hoodies for dogs and garden Yetis filed for bankruptcy this year, a victim of a digital age that made ordering from a catalog obsolete. In April, New Jersey-based C&A Marketing purchased SkyMall out of bankruptcy protection with plans to revive the

business. The first step began in October when SkyMall paid to be included as an insert into United Airlines' in-flight magazine, Hemispheres. It will continue to be in the magazine through the end of the year. Representatives for C&A Marketing said United is the only airline to carry SkyMall so far, but the catalog also appears in Amtrak's Arrive magazine around Boston, New York and Washington.



Purchased out of bankruptcy, SkyMall now is appearing in United Airlines' magazine.

News to use

By PHIL MARTY
Chicago Tribune

Here are some of the more interesting deals, websites and other travel tidbits that have come across our desk recently:

La Compagnie, the all-Business Class airline, is offering Winter Duo fares priced at \$2,900 for two, round trip New York to Paris or \$2,500 New York to London. Both deals are available for travel through March 31.

The Paris offer must be booked by Dec. 31 and the London offer by Jan. 31. tinyurl.com/p9mvq2z

Liberty Travel has a four-night package at all-inclusive Paradisus Punta Cana Resort in the Dominican Republic priced from \$909 per person double occupancy, including round-trip air from Miami.

Pricing from other cities includes Chicago and New York, \$1,105, and Boston, \$1,109. 877-823-8888, tinyurl.com/hsd9ez2

For golfers, Wyndham Extra Holidays has deals on lodgings in a variety of warm-weather destinations, including Phoenix and Las Vegas, as low as \$89 a night for a minimum two-night stay. You have to book by Jan. 4 and travel by April 30. tinyurl.com/jx4nnq6

Travelers to Michigan for Kalamazoo Beer Week, Jan. 16-23, can find lodging packages as low as \$69 a night. tinyurl.com/lyy-kawh

Get coupons for lodgings and attractions in Missouri at tinyurl.com/pneqjpy

Enter for a chance to win a Colorado Hot Springs & Cool Adventure for 10 People at tinyurl.com/zd3blbo

Quark Expeditions, which specializes in polar travel, has its latest brochures available at tinyurl.com/o32jkd8

IrelandWays.com specializes in biking and hiking tours of Ireland.

The Berlinale Film Festival, billed as the largest public film festival in the world, will be Feb. 11-21 in Berlin. tinyurl.com/qevlyry

CruiseCritic.com lists its picks for 15 best cities for pre-cruise stays at tinyurl.com/nm5f42z

FamilyVacationCritic.com has tips on how to avoid and survive lost luggage at tinyurl.com/qy6mgp9

UnitedHealthcare Global offers tips to prepare for the possibility of getting sick or injured during holiday travel at tinyurl.com/ne8bpc8

Prices include taxes and fees unless otherwise noted. Deals and websites listed here have been checked for availability as of press time, but the listings are not an endorsement.

Phil Marty is a freelance reporter.



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