



Courtesy photo

Families ride the Peppermint Twist at Santa's Village.

Finding Santa

Wonders of the season abound at Santa's Village in Jefferson

By PEGGY NEWLAND
Correspondent

I find myself skipping along Ho Ho Ho Lane as I follow a jolly-looking fellow in bright red faux fur and Sorel snow boots.

He has a flyaway beard and wears black wire glasses. He heads past the Jingle Bell Theater, where electronic elves sing Elvis carols, and he takes a hard left past the Snowball Mall. He doesn't even glance at the Reindeer Carousel or the Nutcracker Sweets, because

ONE-TANK TRIP

he's heading for a cabin in the woods. Children see him and scream. Some run at him and hug him. Parents pull out cameras and cell phones and take flash photography of the man.

When he turns, it's him. The Big Guy. Santa Claus. And he's in Jefferson, ready for your wishes at Santa's Village.

Normand and Cecile Dubois opened this "little park for the kids" in 1953, offering pony rides and a Mule Show featuring Francis the Famous Mule. In order to get Francis the Mule, to move, they often had to coax her to drink some oats from a whiskey bottle.

That first year, they "found" Santa a home in Jefferson, and Santa brought some real reindeer and many elves and

IF YOU GO

MOUNTAIN VIEW GRAND RESORT

Mountain View Road, Whitefield. 1-866-484-3843.

A historic grand hotel located in the heart of the White Mountains and just down the road from Santa's Village. The resort features cross-country skiing, spa and wellness center, pub, dining and indoor pool.

ROCKS ESTATE CHRISTMAS PACKAGE

\$107 per person per night. Package includes: select and harvest your own Christmas tree, old-fashioned horse-drawn wagon ride and handmade holiday wreath.

Wagons roll Dec. 12 and 19.

Rates per-person double occupancy; no resort fee. Two-night minimum required.

SANTA'S VILLAGE PACKAGE

Weekends until Dec. 30 starting at \$125.50 per person per night. One Santa's Village admission ticket per person. One breakfast buffet per person. Complimentary cookie plate upon arrival. No resort fee.

SANTA'S VILLAGE

528 PRESIDENTIAL HIGHWAY, ROUTE 2, JEFFERSON, 586-4445, WWW.SANTASVILLAGE.COM

WINTER HOURS: December Saturdays through the 18th: 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sundays through the 19th: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Dec. 28-29: 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; New Year's Eve: 4-9 p.m. \$25 per person.

helpers. Soon, there was a Santa Schoolhouse, a Blacksmith Shop, Santa's Workshop and a chapel.

I have to visit Santa. Plus, I've traveled

with small children, and to them, he's the Big Deal.

The excitement hovers in the air, along with some piped-in carols featuring the

diversity of singers such as Donny Osmond, the Chipmunks, David Bowie, Bing Crosby, Celine Dion and Frank Sinatra. I'm partial to the high ring tones of Celine Dion singing "Oh Holy Night" and find myself screeching along to her voice as the line lengthens and the children run in circles screaming with exhilaration.

Keeping the "family fun" theme, new generations of Dubois family members expanded the park to include a dancing chicken and rabbit show. "Metal rides" were soon added, and by 1969, the park had food shops and playgrounds, as well as a Jingle Jamboree theater. "Good Luck" rings made out of pounded nails were handed out for free at the Blacksmith Shop.

When we finally get on Santa's porch, the excitement turns to awe. Children stare slack-jawed through the steamed windows as Mrs. Claus pours hot cider into tiny cups. She has bright pink cheeks and spun white hair and is dressed, of course, in red.

Two children sit on Santa's lap, both looking rather confused. They have cookies in their hands as an Elf takes their souvenir photo. The Elf waves a penguin stuffed animal at them, and this finally makes them smile. Their parents look relieved.

SANTA | PAGE D-11

Opulent RI mansions are 'architectural treasure chest'

By ERIC TUCKER
The Associated Press

NEWPORT, R.I. – Bellevue Avenue, home to a series of eye-catching mansions that famously embody America's Gilded Age, crams enough history in a 2-mile strip of Newport to be a mini-city unto itself.

Now, to accommodate both history buffs and casual passers-by, the nonprofit organization that owns and operates this city's historic mansions has created a self-guided walking trail linking 11 historic clusters of properties along the avenue.

Markers outside the properties help identify the trail while also detailing the buildings' history, architectural style and

cultural commentary. They even include descriptions of neighboring buildings that have been demolished or are simply less well known.

"We tell the stories of each individual house, and yes, you can reference one house with another, but we felt we didn't have an effective medium for linking the whole neighborhood together and telling the whole story," said John Tschirch, an architectural historian and director of museum affairs for the Preservation Society of Newport County, which owns most of the city's famous mansions and opens them to the public as tourist destinations.

"You get a rich experience in each house, but we wanted to give the experience of the

whole streetscape and the urban plan," he added.

There are about six homes in each of the clusters. Among the best-known homes are the Elms, Chateau-sur-Mer and Rough Point, the onetime home of tobacco heiress Doris Duke.

Some of the homes are private; many of those that aren't private are open to visitors during certain hours.

The four-year trail project was completed in November and cost roughly \$35,000, most of which was given by a private donor. It's similar in intent to the red-brick Freedom Trail in Boston, although the pale-green markers in Newport are designed to blend into the neighborhood.

The markers read like a

list of who's who of wealthy dignitaries and socialites from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The sign outside the Preservation Society's headquarters, for instance, reveals that it once was the home of Herbert Pell, a congressman from New York and the father of Claiborne Pell, who represented Rhode Island in the U.S. Senate for 36 years and died in January 2009.

A nearby Gothic Revival house, the marker says, was built for Albert Sumner, the brother of Charles Sumner, a senator from Massachusetts who in 1856 was badly beaten on the Senate floor by a South



Photo by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Elms mansion is shown Nov. 19 through an opening in an iron fence, in Newport, R.I. The mansion is one of many on Bellevue Avenue in Newport that are part of a walking tour.

MANSIONS | PAGE D-10

SHORT HOPS

Hotel brand loyalty takes a nosedive

In its 2011 travel forecast, TripAdvisor published several interesting finds, including the fact that 3,000 Americans surveyed voted themselves both the friendliest and most annoying travelers.

Australians and Canadians rounded out the top three friendliest and French and Japanese followed Americans as most annoying.

Equally interesting was the nosedive in hotel brand loyalty. According to the survey, 39 percent of travelers say they're faithful to one hotel brand, down from 59 percent a year ago.

Travel industry watchers have noted for several years that travel brand loyalty, be it to hotels, airlines or rental car agencies, has dipped. But 20 percentage points in a year?

Brooke Ferencsik, a TripAdvisor spokesman, speculated that the drop came in response to travelers being better informed of their options.

"Travelers have access to a lot more information that allows them to make savvy decisions," Ferencsik said, noting the power of user-generated reviews and, of course, his own employer.

Henry Harteveldt, a travel industry analyst for Forrester Research, has conducted similar research and found that travel brand loyalty, at 42 percent in 2002, was down to 30 percent in 2009.

He attributed the drop to several factors, including a wobbly economy.

"This recession has taken a toll on loyalty," Harteveldt said. "A lot of people believe prices charged are too much even if it's a good product."

Airlines have suffered because, in short, many aren't doing their jobs very well, he said.

"People are saying they're not so loyal to airlines, unless they're very frequent fliers, because airlines haven't done much to deserve their loyalty," he said.

Hotels tend to preserve loyalty because they provide "a more intimate experience."

- Chicago Tribune

Hotel allegiance

The Brand Keys market research firm rated hotel allegiance in its Customer Loyalty Engagement Index for 2010. Hotels are listed in the order they rated.

Luxury: InterContinental, W Hotels, Fairmont and Ritz-Carlton.

Upscale: Embassy Suites,

Santa Claus" plays softly in the background, and I've been told not to sing or whistle or do anything that might detract from the moment.

Lists of wishes come out of back pockets and jackets as Santa smiles at us. No one moves.

"Go ahead, honey," Mrs. Claus says. "He's waiting just for you."

Santa waves his white-gloved hands and we inch slowly toward him.

The Dubois grandchildren still run the park. In the mid-1990s, they decided to open the park during the holidays: from late November through New Year's Eve. Skyway Sleighs were added that whisk families above the treetops, and a Polar

going places

Hyatt, Marriott, Hilton, Radisson, Swissotel, Sheraton, Wyndham, Doubletree and Westin.

Midscale: Best Western, Comfort Inn, Ramada, Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn.

Economy: Days Inn, Travelodge, Econo Lodge and Motel 6.

- Chicago Tribune

TRAVEL GEAR

Compact diapers good for the road

NAME: Diaper Buds

WHAT IT IS: Individually wrapped, vacuum-packed disposable diapers designed to take up less space in a diaper bag or suitcase. Available in sizes 2-5.

THE GOOD: When you peel off the packaging, the bud blooms into a full-size diaper that functions as well as any disposable diaper we've ever

purchased. Absorbency and fit aren't compromised in favor of compactness.

The vacuum-sealed packaging also offers a hygienic seal, so your diapers are protected from spills, dirt and other gunk you would rather not place on your baby's bare behind.

THE BAD: The convenience comes at a price. A box of 140 Pampers Cruisers (size 4) typically retails for around \$39 - or about 27 cents a diaper. Diaper Buds are about 87 cents a diaper.

COST: \$6.99 for a pack of eight; \$18.99 for a pack of 24.

WHERE TO GET IT: www.diaper-buds.com.

- Chicago Tribune

TRAVEL Q&A

Holiday Flying 101

Q. I'm taking a rare flight to

see my sister and her family for Christmas, and a friend told me not to bring wrapped gifts. Is she right?

A. Your friend speaks the truth. The Transportation Security Administration warns that wrapped gifts - in carryon and checked bags - may get unwrapped by a TSA agent. Just be safe and wrap after you arrive.

Here are a few other (unsolicited) tips for infrequent travelers this holiday season:

■ The airport will be crowded, so it's best to check in online and print your boarding pass at home; you can do so beginning 24 hours before a flight.

■ Remember the TSA 3-1-1 rule. In carryons, liquids or gels must be in containers of 3 ounces or less, the containers must be placed in one clear quart-size zip-top bag and each passenger is allowed only one bag.

■ But be careful not to pack too much. Keep checked bags under 50 pounds or you'll face an onerous excess baggage fee.

- Minneapolis Star Tribune

WEB BUZZ

TripAlertz.com's hotel offers drop price

TripAlertz.com offers hotel

deals that get cheaper as more people buy them.

WHAT'S HOT: This private-sale member website is free to join. Here's how it works:

After you join, click on "View Deal" to see the current Trip Alertz sale price and the lower "Epic Price" that the site will offer after a certain number of bookings. If enough people book, you'll get the lower price; if not, you still get the original deal.

That's pretty cool, especially if you have a large family booking a reunion getaway.

There are buttons to share the deal through e-mail, Twitter and Facebook.

You can cancel or change your reservation up to 15 days before the scheduled travel date for a \$25 fee; after that, the website won't accept changes.

WHAT'S NOT: There wasn't enough variety in the destinations, and prices weren't always the lowest. When I tested a two-night deal at the Atlantic Resort & Spa in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., I found a cheaper price at Expedia.com.

That said, the Trip Alertz deal offered a spa credit and extra amenities to the first 20 customers who booked it. And the deal still had 16 hours left to gain more customers, which would drop the final price.

- Los Angeles Times

Santa

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE D-12

By the 1980s, the park had grown to a "real" amusement park. A Yule Log Flume that transported families in logs around a holiday-themed river was added. Trained macaws roller-skated across a stage and rode bikes on a tightrope. Local "helpers" for Santa were hired to keep the park clean and bring "joy" to the bundles of families heading north for Santa-time.

It's our turn to line up for Santa. We're in the house. We have a cup of hot cider and a cookie in hand. "Here Comes

Theater offers 3D Elf shows every half hour. Dancing elves on a stage and a Talking Tree that sings are some of the highlights.

We leave Santa's cabin with a candy cane and a promise. He'll fly over our house in a couple of weeks and visit us "if we are good." We agree to leave him cookies and milk.

"Now, go check on my reindeer," Santa whispers.

And out into the night we go, to the barn where the magic flying reindeer live.

That night, with visions of sugarplums dancing in our heads, we make the short drive to Whitefield. The Mountain View Grand Resort is lit up like a yellow jewel, and inside, a roaring fire burns in a

fireplace.

Families dressed in pajamas gather in the lobby. Grandparents take photos of new grandchildren while mothers

and fathers sprawl on couches. Everyone looks dazed and ready for bed, especially the kids.

Outside, the wind picks up

and fat snowflakes begin to fall on the mountains surrounding the inn. We're in the North Pole, it seems, and Santa is coming soon.



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Little Tikes Farm Playset	\$14.99	\$8.99
Kid Size Picnic Table	\$29.99	\$17.99
Little Tikes Fly Brights	\$12.99	\$7.79
Elmo's Tickle Hands	\$16.99	\$9.99
Undersea Adventure Board Game	\$13.99	\$5.99
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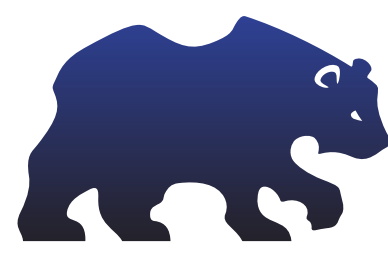

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