



YUKI NK/FLICKR

The Whiskey Library at the award-winning Yamazaki distillery outside of Kyoto, Japan.

TRIPS, TIPS & DEALS

A spirited tour of Japan

BY PHIL MARTY | Tribune Newspapers

Sushi and Japan — sure those go together. But single-malt whiskey and Japan? Actually, the whiskey fits, too, and you can find out during the Spirits of Japan tour offered through the luxury referral service Zicasso. The whiskey comes from the Yamazaki distillery, which won the title of the world's best single-malt whiskey in Jim Murray's "Whiskey Bible 2015." It's one of the stops when the tour hits Kyoto. In Sendai, there's the Miyagikyo distillery, voted Distiller of the Year by the International Spirits Challenge. While visiting Takayama's downtown, you can walk from sake brewery to sake brewery. In Kanazawa, you can visit the 400-year-old Yachiya Sake Brewery. In Osaka, craft beers come to the fore. But this trip isn't just about spirits. There also are lots of sights, including temples, museums and iconic Mount Fuji. There are great eats, too, such as the Michelin-starred Sukiyabashi Jiro sushi restaurant in Tokyo. The 12-day tour is priced from \$6,990 per person double occupancy. tinyurl.com/plh4a3p

Best beer towns ranked

It's really too late for Oktoberfest, but it's never too late for beer. So it's worth taking a look at the list of best beer towns compiled by Trulia.com, a real estate site. Topping the list of what it calls the Oktoberfest Index is Traverse City, Mich., which has a healthy craft beer scene. The Midwest scored high, with Duluth, Minn.; Madison, Wis.; and Lawrence, Kan., coming in at Nos. 5, 6 and 8, respectively. Interestingly, the eastern half of the country got skunked (and no one likes skunky beer). The folks at Trulia also crunched the numbers and say Bend, Ore., and Boulder, Colo., have the most breweries per 10,000 households. Read all about it at tinyurl.com/pztwrzk.

Biking, hiking and cruising

Biking or hiking can pair up with cruising in a new Italy Tour & Cruise package being offered by Windstar Cruises and VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations. If you book one of VBT's tours, you'll get 15 percent off the cruise price, plus two free hotel nights in Rome added on to the tour. On April 13, for instance, you can start a 10-day walking tour of the Amalfi Coast and Capri, then follow up with a seven-day Windstar cruise from Rome to Athens, with port stops in the islands of Capri and Lipari in Italy; Giardini Naxos in Sicily; and Gythion and Monemvasia, Greece. Another option is a 10-day biking tour of the Puglia coastal region in Italy combined with an eight-day cruise of Italy and the Dalmatian coast. Windstar cruises include private events, such as, on this itinerary, a winery visit in Sicily, with a lunch of traditional food. Info: 800-258-7245, tinyurl.com/psmkzbd

Phil Marty is a freelance reporter.

GEARBOX

A bluetooth speaker that sings

BY ROSS WERLAND
Tribune Newspapers

Name: Turcom AcoustoShock Tough Bluetooth Speaker (HR-903)

What it is: A rugged, "splash-resistant" speaker with a rubberized exterior and a push-button handle that extends only when you need it. The sealed control buttons respond to an easy touch. With 30 watts of speaker output, it measures 10 by 38.8 by 4.7 inches and weighs 23 ounces, making it on the large side and a bit heavy for a travel speaker — but keep reading.

The good: Shockproof and water-resistance characteristics aside, this baby can bellow. The ruggedness is gravy. Out of curiosity, I did take this thing into the shower (not into direct spray but off to the side) just to see if it would keep working. It



ROSS WERLAND/ TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

did. The same acoustics that sometimes trick me into thinking I can sing simply bathed me in music. I'm always reluctant to review audio equipment, because a user's reaction can be so subjective, but

this speaker will not disappoint. The treble-bass balance is great, and it really does have bass. There is no "tin" in this thing. You will see previous price listings for this into the \$200s. It's way below that now, but I would not be surprised to see this competing with speakers costing that or more.

The bad: It is a bit heavy for a travel speaker. A road trip? No problem. In a carry-on? It's doable, but you really have to want that music along. And if you're going camping, please have mercy on your neighbors because this thing gets loud enough to disturb the peace.

Cost: \$89.99

Available from: www.turcomusa.com and www.amazon.com, among others

NEED TO KNOW

You can say you went to Oxford

BY ROSEMARY MCCLURE
Tribune Newspapers

Unleash your inner geek next summer during the Oxford Experience, a weeklong program of study at the oldest university in the English-speaking world. The one-week Christ Church residential program, which has no requirements, exams or papers, offers the choice of more than 60 courses, including history, politics and creative writing. Excursions, tours, pub walks, whiskey tastings and croquet are available. The



GILLIAN ALLEN/AP

The Oxford Experience is a weeklong program of study at the oldest university in the English-speaking world.

continuing-education program, available for weeks beginning July 3 and ending Aug. 13, draws students ranging in age from 20s to 90s, many from the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Rates start at \$1,950, including tuition, accommodations in student housing, evening enter-

tainment, a welcome reception and all meals. International airfare, private bath and excursions are not included. Info: Oxford Experience, tinyurl.com/oxfordexperience. Early application is recommended.

Rosemary McClure is a freelance reporter.

News to use

BY PHIL MARTY
Chicago Tribune

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

■ Yellowstone National Park Lodges offers nine Winter Getaway and Adventure packages. The park's winter season begins Dec. 18 with the opening of the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, and Old Faithful Snow Lodge opens Dec. 20. Among packages available

are Trail of the Wolf and Yellowstone on Skis. tinyurl.com/kg8mxq8
■ The Online Vacation Center has seven-night Caribbean cruises aboard Princess Cruises as low as \$399 per person double occupancy for an ocean-view cabin. The Jan. 3 sailing from Houston makes port in Cozumel, Mexico; Roatan, Honduras; and Belize City, Belize. 800-760-5417, tinyurl.com/psjxtnd
■ Keytours Vacations offers an eight-day/six-night

German Christmas Markets Tour that's priced from \$1,295 per person double occupancy land only or \$2,199 with air from New York. Cities and markets visited include Frankfurt, Rothenburg, Nuremberg, Dresden and Berlin. Air is available from other cities at higher prices. 800-576-1784, tinyurl.com/nce5ene
■ Germany isn't the only place for Christmas markets. Ireland has its yule markets too. tinyurl.com/qb4hckf
■ Discover the Palm Beaches on Florida's east coast has made the Discover Pass a permanent

offering. It gives savings of up to 38 percent on Lion Country Safari, Palm Beach Zoo & Conservation Society, South Florida Science Center and Aquarium and Visit Palm Beach Sunset Sailing Cruise. www.palmbeachsummer.com
■ You can order a 2016 brochure from European Waterways, which specializes in river barge cruises, at tinyurl.com/n9l4vvz
■ The Moab International Film Festival is Nov. 20-23 in the Utah town that's home to Arches National Park. www.moabfilmfestival.org
■ Paradise Jam, a pre-season NCAA basketball

tournament, will be held in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Nov. 20-23 for men's teams and Nov. 26-28 for women's squads. www.paradisejam.com
■ The 103rd Grey Cup Festival will be Nov. 25-29 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. www.103greycupfestival.ca
■ Hurtigruten, which specializes in cruises of Norway and polar regions, has its 2016-17 brochure available for order or to view online at tinyurl.com/pg72qwt

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.

GEOQUIZ ANSWER

Amsterdam. The museum is dedicated to the arts and history of the Netherlands. The house is where the young Jewish girl and her family hid from the Nazis and where she penned what became known as "The Diary of Anne Frank."



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