

Coastal retreat

The romance of the ocean isn't limited to the beach; try a treehouse or a yurt for a romantic getaway

BY BRIAN R. BURKE
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

With the approach of Valentine's Day weekend, couples throughout Eugene will begin the annual struggle to come up with new ways to express their love. While last-minute roses might be enough, few gestures match a weekend getaway for romantic potential. Just try to skip the truck stop motel, and head somewhere a bit more interesting. In southern Oregon, amorous opportunities abound.

Out 'n' About Treesort, Cave Junction

Perhaps it's the large wooden pirate ship in the front yard, but visitors can't ignore the sense of playfulness at this village in the sky. For 15 years the owners of this alternative bed and breakfast have invited guests to stay in their 10 tree houses, each built with unique character. There's the Forestree; a one-room hide-away lofted 35 feet in the air, accessible only by crossing a rope

bridge. The cozy Treeloon is modeled after an old west saloon and comes with a queen-sized bed, while the impressive Tree-room Schoolhouse Suite has stained-glass doors and an antique claw-foot bathtub — ideal for a late-night soak. According to www.treehouses.com, romantic interludes are the Treesort's off-season "specialtree."

"It brings back the inner child," says Melody O'Donnell, the self-described "Breakfast Fairy" of Out 'n' About. "When people first arrive, their necks are crooked back, and they've all got smiles on their faces."

Winter rates range from \$80 to \$145 per night, and reservations can be made by calling the Treesort at (541) 592-2208. Occupancy includes bedding, towels and breakfast.

Umpqua Lighthouse yurts, Winchester Bay

For a more grounded and economical approach to the weekend, try renting a yurt at the Umpqua Lighthouse State Park.

Yurts are durable circular structures made of wood and canvas that are designed to minimize impact on the surroundings.

"It's a cross between a tepee, a log cabin and a tent" said Jon Bilenki, who recently spent a weekend in one of the park's deluxe yurts with his girlfriend and their 3-month-old daughter. "It's luxury in a campground like I've never seen before."

The yurt included an indoor bathroom with shower, a television with VCR, a refrigerator and a propane grill on the front porch.

"The best thing is you don't have to pack up the tent in the morning," said Lee Adams, a ranger at the park. Adams strongly suggests that campers looking to spend a night in one of the park's six deluxe yurts make reservations in advance.

"They've become really popular around Valentine's Day," he said.

The deluxe yurts are available for \$45 per night through April 30 and are exclusive to Umpqua Lighthouse State Park. For an experience with fewer amenities, try renting a rustic yurt, available at 14 campgrounds on the Oregon Coast for \$27 to \$29 per night. To make a reservation, call (800) 452-5687.

chocolate CITY

Chocolate shops are popping up all around New York City as demand surges for better-than-M&Ms fare

BY BETH J. HARPAZ
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Is New York the Big Apple or the Big Bonbon? Connoisseurs say the city is turning into a destination for chocolate — lovers.

"The whole reason I want to move here is chocolate," said Sharon Wang as she sipped thick hot chocolate at Payard, one of a half-dozen Manhattan cafes known for fine chocolate. Wang studied at the Culinary Institute of America in California, but she's come to New York to pursue her dream — a career in chocolate.

"New York is giving Europe a run for its money in the fine chocolate department," said Tish Boyle, editor in chief of Chocolatier magazine. "As American consumers have become more discriminating about their chocolate — and a Hershey bar with almonds just doesn't do the trick anymore — pastry chefs are realizing that opening a chocolate shop can be a profitable endeavor, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like New York where a high-price point can actually be a lure."

When organizers of a yearly chocolate show in Paris wanted to expand, they chose New York as a second venue. Last year, 30,000 people attended the fifth annual

Chocolate Show in Manhattan. The Washington Square Hotel, which offers a chocolate-lover's package in conjunction with the show, already has a list of guests waiting to reserve rooms for the 2005 event, scheduled for Nov. 10 to 13.

The show's success "is a sign of New Yorkers' interest in chocolate," says Pierre Cluizel, son of — and spokesman for — the renowned Parisian chocolatier Michel Cluizel.

But New York is not yet on par with Paris. "Paris, Brussels or Geneva are the three chocolate capitals in my opinion," he said. He added, however, that "New York is now evolving very quickly."

"There are more and more people ... who live or pass through New York — who are now looking for quality chocolate. This didn't exist several years ago," he said.

San Francisco's renowned Scharffen Berger chocolate-makers opened a store on Manhattan's Upper West Side four months ago. Vosges, a Chicago chocolatier, recently opened a cafe in Soho. La Maison du Chocolat has five locations in Paris and two in New York; and the logo for the exclusive Richart chocolatier's Manhattan boutique says "Paris—Lyon—New York."

But can upscale chocolate be

appreciated by Americans raised on M&M's and just-add-water Swiss Miss? What if you can't tell a truffle from a trifle, or if your first impulse upon hearing the word "ganache" is to say "Gesundheit"? (Ganache is a base for many confections made from chocolate and heavy cream.)

Relax. Even the hoi polloi can tell this stuff tastes better than anything you ever got on Halloween. And you needn't be a millionaire to try it. At most cafes, chocolates from the display case are \$1 to \$3.50 apiece; desserts requiring a fork run \$5 to \$8. Hot chocolate so thick you'll need a spoon and a cold water chaser runs \$3 to \$7.

Each cafe has its own personality. The Chocolate Bar, in the West Village (48 Eighth Ave., near Jane Street), has the fun feel of a college-town hangout, with '80s music and bold decor — brown, beige, orange and white stripes, like a Mondrian painting in chocolate. The chocolate tea here is a light, palate-clearing alternative to the thick hot chocolate, and the treats are creatively flavored — rosehip chocolates, for example, and seriously spicy brownies.

Jacques Torres Chocolate Haven (350 Hudson St., near King) is like a scene from a children's storybook. Torres is the only New York chocolatier to make his chocolate from scratch, starting with the cocoa beans. If you stand outside the building's picture windows, you can

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