



Sounds of the Seacoast Chorus.

St. Kieran Arts Center schedule of 2012 Events

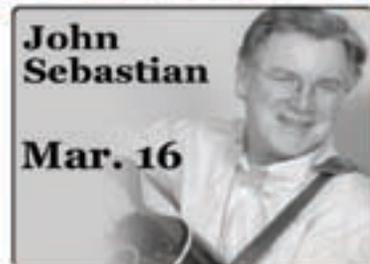
Berlin- Fasten your seat belts for an exciting year of events at St. Kieran Arts Center. The completed 2012 schedule includes singing, jazz, comedy, classical music dance, fiddling and family fun; special events, and a new visual arts series. There is definitely something for everyone! 2012 Membership tickets are still available.

The year-long Main Stage series of Arts and Cultural Heritage events kicks off with two exciting programs in February to be held at the Medallion Opera House/ Gorham Town Hall. Grand Derangement: the world-acclaimed Acadian band returns to the North Country direct from Nova Scotia on Sunday, February 12, at 2 pm. And the 2012 Cabin Fever Follies: a fun and fast-paced variety show featuring local performers and fun skits that will help to "chase away the winter blues" and helps raise funds for the Arts Center on Sunday February 26 at 2 pm. Tickets for each show are \$12 adults, \$6 students/children, and on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The full schedule of coming performances include: March 25- Richard Wood: Master Fiddler with Gordon Belcher; April 15- Royal River Philharmonic Jazz Band; April 22-Mango Groove Steel Drum Band: Celebrate Earth Day with Us!; May 6- Sounds of the Seacoast: 50-member Women's A Cappella Chorus; May 14-Raz de Maree/Tidal Wave: Traditional Songs & Music of Quebec; June 2- Todd Wellington: The King of Silly! Family Fun with unicycle, juggling;

June 10: RP Hale: Master Harpsichordist; June 21- Juston McKinney: NH's Top Nationally Touring Comedian; July 10-IMAI Northward Bound Summer Chamber concert; July 12- Christa Rakich: Organist: A special benefit for "the Response Program"; July 19 -Mellow Yellow: a fun 60's Retro Band show; Sept. 1- Big Moose Bach Fest Concert; Sept. 21- Inca Son: Music of the Andes Mountains; Oct. 14- Eric Kearns: Voices of the Legends/ Impersonator of the Stars; Nov. 4 -Josee Vachon: French Heritage Singer-Songwriter & Franco fest 2012; Nov. 18- Berlin Jazz & St. Kieran Arts Anniversary Celebration; Dec 1-The Nutcracker Ballet: Magical Holiday Family Favorite; Dec 12, 13, & 14 and closing the 2012 series is the popular and breathtaking North Country Community Chorus Christmas Concerts. Season Membership Tickets to all twenty Main Stage performances are available for \$150 for adults, \$125 for seniors and \$75 for children.

The Celtic Mondays Summer Series, featuring International Touring Bands will return with three exciting shows this year. The Lina Boudreau Trio, nationally acclaimed Quebec singer-entertainer on July 30; Ashelin: This phenomenal band of five sisters sing and play a variety of instruments. Returning by popular demand on August 6; The Irish Descendants: Newfoundland's undisputed Kings of Celtic Music on August 27. Celtic Mondays is presented in partnership with Skye Theatre & New England Celtic Arts. Visit www.stkieranarts.org.



Don't forget to care for your eyes as you age

The baby boomer generation makes up an estimated 76 million people – roughly one-fourth of the U.S. population. This means that either you or someone you love is part of this aging group. According to Eye on the Boomer, a recent survey by the Ocular Nutrition Society, almost as many baby boomers say they worry about losing their vision as those that say they worry about having heart disease or cancer. What's more, 78 percent of those surveyed ranked vision as the most important of the five senses. Yet, more than half of the survey respondents ages 45–65 said they don't typically have a recommended annual eye exam, and even fewer are aware of important nutrients that can play a key role in eye health.

Experts recommend that disease prevention, including lifestyle modification, attention to dietary intake and vitamin supplementation must become a greater focus of primary vision care. Studies indicate that proper nutrition promotes healthy eyes, however many American diets are found to be deficient of the critical nutrients that help protect eye health.

"If people are at risk for heart disease



they typically make lifestyle modifications," says Dr. Jeffrey Anshel, president of the Ocular Nutrition Society. "This survey found that people are as concerned about their eyes but do not know the simple steps they can incorporate into their daily lives to take care of them."

▶ Vitamin supplements can be used for your eyes, too

While people take a variety of different supplements to support their health, vitamins specifically formulated to help protect the eyes are often not in the mix – and for many people, they should be. While more than half of those surveyed are taking supplements to protect their joints, bones or heart health only 18 percent say they take supplements to

support their eye health.

"As we grow older, the need for certain vitamins and nutrients to support the eye increases – the survey revealed low awareness of these essential nutrients," says Anshel of nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, lutein and zeaxanthin. He adds that there is a "need for greater education on the lifestyle modifications that baby boomers can incorporate into their daily lives, including proper nutrition, to help safeguard eye health as they age."

To help protect eye health as they age, Anshel recommends people aged 45–65 take the following steps:

- ▶ Stop smoking, exercise regularly and wear sunglasses with UV protection
 - ▶ Make an annual appointment with an eye doctor
 - ▶ Eat foods rich in eye healthy nutrients, such as tuna or salmon for omega-3s and spinach, kale and broccoli containing lutein and zeaxanthin
 - ▶ To help overcome shortfalls in the diet consider a vitamin supplement specifically-formulated for eye health
- To learn more about the Eye on the Boomer survey as well as eye health, please visit ocularnutritionssociety.org.

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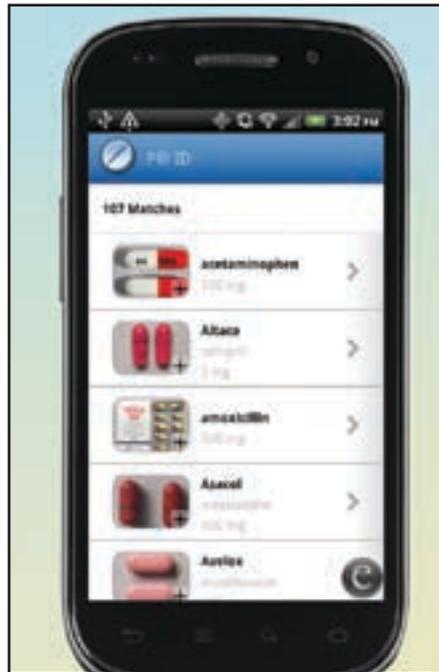
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Here's a remedy for confusion about your pills

A common scenario: You're not sure whether to take a pink round pill twice daily or a white oval capsule. Medications can be confusing for patients, with many pills looking alike in color or shape. For the nearly 20 percent of Americans who currently take at least five prescription drugs, it's especially important that they can differentiate between their medications. Recent research shows that many people may need help making a positive identification for tablets and capsules.

Proper medication identification is increasingly difficult because only a few pill colors and shapes are exceedingly common. There are more than 1,450 round white pills, yet there are only two brown triangular pills and one blue hexagonal pill.

More than 3,500 pills on the U.S. market are white (46 percent of all pills), 285 are red but only 14 pills are black. Round tablets make up nearly half of all pills (48 percent), with oval closely



following at 46 percent. With so many physical similarities in pills, it can be difficult for patients and health care pro-

fessionals to identify medications. When visiting the doctor's office, patients often describe medications by their characteristics or bring in a bag of pills. In fact, nearly 25 percent of physicians report identifying mystery pills brought in by their patients.

There is a simple solution to pill confusion available for a smartphone or tablet device. More than 1.4 million health care professionals, including 50 percent of U.S. physicians, are currently using the Epocrates drug application to help make accurate prescribing decisions and diagnoses. One of the features this application offers is a pill ID tool that lets users identify any pill by size, shape, color, imprinted markings and other characteristics. With this feature, health care professionals and patients can solve pill mysteries and help ensure drug safety and proper use.

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Your legacy of giving: Review your beneficiary lists

As you prepare for tax time and organize your finances, it's also a good time to evaluate your will and legacy.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans offers these tips to help get you started on a beneficiary review.

► **Your estate: for beneficiaries only**

One of the most common mistakes people make is failing to update the beneficiary designations on financial contracts to coordinate with their will and other estate plan documents. Beneficiary designations supersede bequests made in a will.

Your intentions for giving your estate may be at risk if your designations are not kept up to date.

Life insurance and financial services companies can distribute money only to the designated beneficiaries. Life events make it necessary to update your designations from time to time. If your beneficiary moves, you should update their address to ensure they'll be contacted should benefits need to be paid out. Also, if you become divorced or widowed, you should review your designation and possibly update it.

Wills are created to eliminate confusion for your loved ones in your absence. Some work now will be worth it when the time comes to enact your will.

► **Consult a financial professional**

The laws related to inheriting assets are complex and can be confusing unless you have an experienced professional at your side. Financial professionals can help guide you through the process of updating your will. They can answer questions and provide insight on common solutions to will-related issues, and they can ensure that your wishes are granted with the way you set up your plans.

► **An ongoing process**

Thrivent Financial recommends you review and update your beneficiary designations at least once a year or any time you have a life event. Regular reviews can prevent surprises down the road. They also provide an opportunity to discuss the future with loved ones: conversations that may otherwise be avoided. Leaving a legacy for the people and causes you care for most is a lasting, meaningful gift. To learn more, visit Thrivent.com.

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Don't just take our word for it, here's what recognized travel experts have to say about compelling reasons to consult a travel professional:

TRAVELER

"Why do I still like agents? A competent travel adviser can be your greatest asset when you're planning a trip. Good travel agents have an edge over almost any other seller of travel. They know what you want. They speak your language. And they're there for you when you run into trouble."

Christopher Elliot, ombudsman,
National Geographic Traveler magazine

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"It's clear agents can likely save travelers big money and help set a realistic itinerary. Even where they weren't cheaper, the agents competed with what we could find on our own. And we were impressed where they did save us money, in particular with hotels."

Jane Hodges, Wall Street Journal



"Having a travel agent advise you is now more important than ever," as fees, surcharges, and other travel restrictions have become more confusing for consumers. "Travel is one of the most complicated purchases."

Henry Hartevelt, Travel Industry Analyst,
Forrester Research

Make time for family vacations

Between demanding jobs, school schedules, and all of life's little details, finding the time for a family vacation is not always easy. But don't let that stop you. Not only are vacations fun, they can be beneficial in a number of ways.

Leisure time is known to reduce the risk of stress-related health issues and it could even improve your relationship. A Harris Interactive poll indicates that women who take more vacations are happier in their marriages.



A great vacation is a terrific way to make lasting memories with your family, and perhaps even learn something. By exposing your family to different cultures, cuisines and languages, the experiences you have together will improve your understanding of the world.

So sit down and make a list of all the places you want to go as a family. Make a point to check off at least one item on your list this year. If you need inspiration, the new edition of "1000 Places To See Before You Die" by Patricia Schultz is a great place to start, profiling destinations off the beaten tourist path. For more information, visit www.1000places.com.

Travel can mean anything from relaxing on a beach to going on a safari. Figure out what kind of trip you want to take. You can consider more exotic locales like Austria or the Caribbean, or choose the familiar, and opt for a road trip to a nearby state park for a more active vacation.

Don't think you need to go halfway around the world to have a worthwhile experience.

"The number of miles covered has nothing to do with the real pleasures of travel-- the inherent beauty of the world and the discovery it promises is all around us," says Schultz.

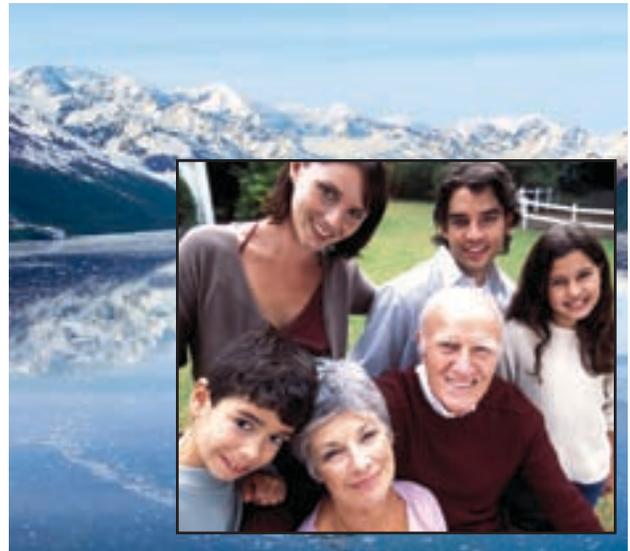
If you're on a budget, there are a great number of online resources to help you find the best deals on flights, accommodations and car rentals. A little bargain hunting will go a long way toward putting your dream vacation within reach.

If you don't have the resources to make a trip happen now, open a special savings account designated for travel and contribute a small portion of every paycheck into it.

"There really is no downside to travel, save a little jet lag and a dented bank account," says Schultz.

Some quality time with your loved ones on a family vacation will allow you to broaden your horizons -- probably beyond your expectations. (StatePoint)

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Charitable giving: Important tips for tax season

Charitable contributions are a great way to give back to those who need it most. Of course giving back is great for the soul, but it can also be good for the pocketbook, in the form of a tax deduction. When you begin tax preparations, keep those 2011 donations in mind.

"Many charitable givers are aware of tax deductions," says Todd Baylis, president of Qgiv, an online fundraising platform that helps organizations connect with the next generation of donors. "But many of those who give are not always aware of the qualifications come tax season." Here are a few things to keep in mind to make sure your good deed doesn't go unnoticed during tax season.

► **Make sure your donations qualify**

First, make sure your donation qualifies. In order to receive tax savings your contribution must go to an IRS-certified, 501(c)(3) qualified organization. You can find an updated list at many public libraries as well as the IRS website. Another important tip, itemize, itemize, itemize. Make sure you itemize your deductions on your tax form under Schedule A, otherwise you'll be out of luck.



► **Keep records**

Now is the time to make sure you receive a receipt or acknowledgement from the organization you give to. Donations of \$250 or more will not be allowed as a tax deduction unless you have the right documentation. To claim a deduction for cash, check or other monetary gift, you must have written acknowledgement from the charity that includes the name of the organization and the date and amount of the contribution. For donations less than \$250, if you do not have a receipt, a cancelled check or bank record will work. You can also receive a deduction for donations such as property,

clothing, household furnishings or office equipment, but there are specific rules. The process is the same when claiming your deduction. You must have a receipt for the goods from the charity, and if the item donated is worth more than \$500, you will need to file IRS Form 8283.

"Many nonprofit organizations now have the ability to accept online donations," says Baylis. "When a nonprofit organization partners with Qgiv, those donating to that organization will receive customized receipts by email in addition to the having the ability to print a receipt for their tax records." With the increase use of smartphones, mobile giving has become more and more popular. If you donated using your phone, you can use your phone bill as a receipt as long as it lists the date, amount donated and the name of the charity.

► **When in doubt, ask**

When preparing for tax season there are many resources to help you make sure you are getting your correct deduction for charitable giving. If you have a question, ask a tax adviser or go visit the IRS website for specifics on charitable giving. (ARA)

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New Year's resolution might be more important than you think

Every January, Americans resolve to be healthier in the new year. We change our diets and start exercising. This is a good time to make annual doctors' appointments and talk to your doctor about your health and any symptoms, no matter how insignificant they seem. Seemingly minor symptoms like dry mouth may be a sign of a more serious condition like Sjogren's

► **(SHOW-grins) syndrome.**

Sjogren's is an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks moisture producing glands.

Although most people have never heard of it, Sjogren's is the second leading autoimmune disorder in the U.S., affecting almost 4 million people.

"As a Sjogren's patient, I know how uncomfortable dry mouth can be, yet I never mentioned my dry mouth to my doctors until my dental hygienist noticed symptoms and asked me about them," says Kathy McCarren from Woodbridge, Va.

"Now I always suggest to others that if they notice that they are drinking a lot of liquids or have difficulty chewing, swallowing or talking because their mouths are dry, they need to tell their health care professionals right away. Not only can dry mouth lead to increased dental cavities, like it did for me, but it can also lead to more serious health problems."

If you suffer from dry mouth, resolve to Defy the Dry in 2012 and talk to your doctor about your symptoms. For more information on Sjogren's and to download a symptoms checklist, visit www.DefytheDry.com. (ARA)

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New twists on dessert favorites

Getting your family to eat right doesn't mean forcing them to skip dessert or forego favorite cakes and cookies. You just need to learn to prepare those sweets in better ways.

Here are some tweaks for your family's sweets:

► **Substitute:** Replace ingredients with smart alternatives. Try swapping white flour with whole wheat flour in cakes and cookies. You can use two egg whites for a whole egg in most recipes, or dark chocolate instead of more fattening milk chocolate. And low-fat milk usually can be used instead of whole milk.

► **Reduce:** For starters, serve-up smaller dessert portions. Plate a small slice of cake or pie with some fruit and your kids won't notice the difference. Within recipes, try reducing the amount of sugar or butter. In most cases you won't miss what you leave out.

► **Don't Deprive:** Most desserts add some fat and sugar into your family's diet. Deal with it. Saying "no" will lead loved ones to look elsewhere for sweets at school or work. You can even indulge their urge for candy. Just be careful with portions and consider smart options,



such as Nestlé Raisinets, California raisins drenched in rich Nestlé Milk or Dark Chocolate. They have 30 percent less fat than the leading chocolate brands and provide real fruit in every serving.

► **Add Fruits:** Add fruits to cakes and pies, even as toppings instead of whipped cream. You can add apples or applesauce to most recipes without anybody complaining. And tossing in some berries or raisins will add antioxidants.

To get started, here's an easy recipe for oatmeal cookies using whole wheat flour, brown sugar and a special twist. More creative recipes can be found at Facebook.com/raisinets.

Deluxe Oatmeal Raisinets Cookies
 1 1/4 cups white whole-wheat flour
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
 3/4 cup granulated sugar
 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 2 large eggs
 3 cups quick or old-fashioned oats
 1 cup Nestlé Raisinets (dark or milk chocolate-covered)
 1 cup chopped nuts (optional)
 Preheat oven to 375° F.

Combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt in small bowl. Beat butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until creamy. Beat in eggs; gradually beat in flour mixture. Stir in oats, Raisinets and nuts. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased baking sheets. For smaller cookies, use a level tablespoon. This yields about 4 1/2 dozen cookies.

Bake for 9 to 11 minutes. Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes; remove to wire racks to cool completely. (SP)



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Health story of the year: Salt vindicated

Paul T. Meagher sometimes gets disapproving stares when people see him sprinkle his food with salt as he has done since he was a young lad growing up in Ireland. He has a response for such people. "I tell them you can take my blood pressure right now, or we can have a run around the block, and I guarantee you I'm in better shape than you," said Meagher, 68, who now lives in Westport, Mass. Recent research quantifies Meagher's experience. In 2011, half a dozen medical studies showed the health benefits of salt or revealed the significant risks of low-sodium diets -- providing vindication for this essential nutrient and the people, like Meagher, who love it.

"The vindication of salt is probably the biggest health and nutrition story of the last year," says Lori Roman, president of the Salt Institute. "Everyone knows salt tastes good, but the latest research published in leading medical journals confirms that salt is good for you, too. The medical studies underline what we have been saying for years: science is on salt's side." The new data raises questions about the federal government's effort to put Americans on a low-salt



diet. The Food and Drug Administration is inviting online public comments about ways to reduce sodium consumption. The six peer-reviewed medical studies documented:

► **Type 1**

Diabetes risk: In a study of patients

with type 1 diabetes, low sodium intake was associated with renal disease and premature death.

► **Type 2 Diabetes risk:** In an Australian study of type 2 diabetes patients, lower sodium was associated with increased risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

► **No benefit to salt reduction:** A study published in the American Journal of Hypertension showed eating less salt will not prevent heart attacks, strokes or early death. On the contrary, low-sodium diets increase the likelihood of premature death.

► **Risk of death:** A study published in the Journal of the American Medical

Association concluded that lower salt intakes resulted in higher death rates.

Other negative effects of low-salt intakes: An analysis published in the American Journal of Hypertension showed individuals placed on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines-recommended salt levels experienced significant increases in cholesterol and other risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Risk with current U.S. Dietary Guidelines: An analysis published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that people who ate salt at the levels recommended by the U.S. government were at greater risk of cardiovascular events. The research has prompted new scrutiny of the government's attempts to put all Americans on a low-salt diet. Scientific American reviewed medical studies over several decades and concluded in a headline: "It's time to end the war on salt." The respected magazine also said, "The zealous drive by politicians to limit our salt intake has little basis in science."

Meagher remembers when the federal government told him eggs could be bad for his health. He ignored that advice, too. (ARA)

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The No. 1 countertop secret

By Ashley Fleming

Everyone loves granite for kitchen and bath countertops, but many homeowners find this option for adding value to their home, too pricey. When considering a kitchen update I found that granite typically costs \$50 to \$100 per square foot (including installation). Gail Turner, a top real estate agent in Chicago, agrees that, "While there's nothing functionally wrong with laminate, it's not what buyers are looking for. Her advice is to install granite countertops in your kitchen and bath if you really want to sell your home in this economy.

So if you are looking for the beauty of granite without the price tag, consider paint. Giani Granite Paint kits allow you to give outdated countertops a granite look for about \$70 a kitchen. Giani's parent company, located in St. Louis, Mo., began in 1959 and now sells to paint retailers nationally and internationally. Each kit comes with the primer, mineral paints, applicators and a demo DVD to help you update your Formica, laminate, wood, tile and Corian countertops. Gianigranite.com has several before and after photos along with customer testimonials.

One kit can transform an average L-shaped kitchen countertop (which has about 30 to 33 square feet of countertop) in a weekend. I'm a savvy homeowner, but not an expert at remodeling projects and found this process to be easy enough for a first time painter. The finish has the same functionality as your old countertops as well as general care instructions; use cutting board and warming pads.

Before you begin, thoroughly clean the area with a scouring pad and then rinse with water. Look for any nicks and seams and apply a fast-drying wood fill, and then lightly sand the area with a fine grit piece of sandpaper or sanding block.

For consumers who are willing to try this low priced alternative before throwing out your old counters (like I was), you will find the results well worth it. I selected the Chocolate Brown kit, which contains three colors: brown feldspar, Inca gold and chocolate brown. This look will achieve a natural granite style.

Although it was fun having everyone think I had granite installed, I had to reveal my new countertop secret.

How to apply:

1. Roll on the black primer and allow eight hours of drying time.
2. Lightly sponge on all the mineral colors in the order specified on the packaging. Let dry for a minimum of four hours. A simple artists brush helped me complete a veining pattern.
3. Next, apply the first clear top coat and dry for four hours. Then, apply the second top coat and wait four hours.

For more information, visit gianigranite.com or call 1-800-650-5699.

For a standard L-shaped kitchen (about 30 to 33 square feet of countertop) the cost is \$69.95

The product is also available at select Lowe's Centers - Check Gianigranite.com for location details. (ARA)



Ideas for 're-feathering' your empty nest on the cheap

For empty-nesters, it's easy to find redecorating options that pack grown-up appeal without a grown-ups only price-tag. You can make over bedrooms and play rooms with a few budget-friendly tricks.

► Walls

If you're afraid of committing to wallpaper, repositionable peel and stick wallpaper is a great option for creating a unique decorator feature in a room. Whether you're looking for beach wall murals to evoke the relaxed feeling of your last tropical vacation, or a city skyline to create a sophisticated aura, you can find many options online at websites like DecorPlace.com.

► Entertainment

Bring in that big-screen, high-def TV you didn't buy before because you couldn't bear the thought of sticky fingerprints all over it. Buy that awesome surround-sound system you passed on for years because you feared how it would sound with your kids' favorite cartoon blasting out of the speakers.

► Bathroom

If you've held off on buying new towels, bath mat and a shower curtain until there were no more teenagers in the house to mess them up, it's time to treat yourself. While you're at it, replace the utilitarian shower head with a luxurious multi-head unit or a rainfall shower head. (ARA)



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5 tips for safe and healthy travels

Vacations should be a time of rest, relaxation and adventure. For too many travelers, they're anything but. A double whammy of stress and anxiety on top of an already compromised immune system is a formula for disaster, sending many jet-setters home sick as dogs. Fortunately, a few essential items are all you need for a safe and healthy getaway. Be prepared for the inevitable with these five health and safety tips:

▶ **Bring a first aid kit.** While you can't guard against all accidents, you can foresee the minor surprises with some degree of probability. Have something handy to relieve headaches, diarrhea and insect bites. Your "just in case" kit should also have bandages and plenty of antihistamines. You might not know that you're allergic to certain plants or insects until it's too late.

▶ **Keep your hands clean.** Wash your hands often, especially before eating, to ward off germs and viruses. Rely on hand sanitizer when there is no running water available. Use wet wipes to make sure the surfaces you touch frequently are kept as clean as possible.

▶ **Beware of pests.** Check the seams of your mattress, cracks and crevices of the headboard, nightstand and drawers for critters or droppings. To prevent bed bugs from coming home with you, EcoSmart Technologies (www.ecosmart.com) offers a travel-size bed bug killer and repellent with natural ingredients. "The pest control industry is trending toward using stronger products to treat bed bugs because these pests have developed resistance to some of the current chemicals," says Steve Bessette, bed bug prevention expert. "EcoSmart incorporates over 15 years of science into a completely natural, safe and -- most importantly -- effective line of pest control products."

▶ **Stay hydrated.** In a plane or on the road, it's important to stay hydrated while in transit to prevent achy muscles and deep vein thrombosis. At your destination, rely on bottled water for hydration to ward off various bacteria, viruses and other parasites that can cause diarrhea. If you need to use tap water, pack purification tablets just to be safe.

▶ **Remember your smartphone.** It's a guidebook, GPS, Internet connection, dictionary, camera, alarm clock and restaurant-business-movie theater-gas station-and more locator. It's also a phone that can be used for emergencies anywhere you are. Don't forget to pack yours in case of emergencies.



Do travel web sites offer the best bargains?

Before Americans hop aboard planes, they go online. According to the U.S. Travel Association, the Internet was the nation's top-ranking source of travel information in 2009. Between travel agency Web sites and search engines, Americans saw little reason to call travel agencies or airlines. But do travel Web sites really offer the best deals?

Many Web sites offer ridiculously low prices at first glance, like a \$99 flight from New York City to London. But the price you see might not include taxes and other fees, which can increase costs quickly. In a 2004 Consumer Reports Webwatch research report, testers experienced repeated fare-jumping -- the largest jump increased the ticket price by \$748. Would-be travelers might also click on a good deal, only to find that, by the time they enter their information, the seat is no longer available. Travelers might also spend hours online comparison-shopping, only to find the best prices gone by the time they go to book.



Others might struggle to find a reasonable price on the return flight. What is going on?

"When you're buying a ticket online, your seats aren't confirmed until you enter your credit card information, so the seat can be lost while you type," explains John Ferry, CEO of CheapTrips (www.cheaptripsandfreeairfare.com). "However, if you're on the phone with one of our agents, they secure the price as they talk to you on the phone. You're always bet-

ter off speaking to a person."

Travel agents can also compare prices far faster than the average computer user -- often closing deals within five minutes -- and advise travelers on hidden fees, like those on checked-baggage.

Ferry says that many Web sites do not publish the best prices. Airlines frequently offer less expensive, wholesale tickets that cannot be sold online. "Our travel representatives and vendors buy these confidential tickets in bulk, then sell them to our customers for less than online ticket prices." If you're determined to book your flight online, look for travel Web sites that offer flexible booking -- many tickets cannot be refunded, even if you find a better deal. For example, CheapTrips not only lets its members cancel trips, but also offers a full money-back guarantee if the customer finds a lower price within 24 hours. The Web site also offers free trips every day, which are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. (NewsUSA)




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