

## WARM WEATHER BRINGS LOWER RATES

To celebrate spring time fever on the Eastern Shore, the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina is offering rates starting at \$129 through May 23. Guests will receive a complimentary s'mores kit. The Hyatt is Chesapeake Bay resort on 342 acres along the Choptank River with an 18-hole championship golf course, 150-slip marina, 18,000 square-foot Stillwater spa, multi-level indoor and outdoor swimming pools, fitness facility, and a children's recreation center. For reservations and information, call 1-800-633-7313 or visit [www.chesapeakebay.hyatt.com](http://www.chesapeakebay.hyatt.com). — *Jessica Novak*

## What a rush

ThrillCoaster Tours provides the ultimate journey for roller coaster connoisseurs. One- and two-week tours bring teens and families to the Roller Coaster Capital of the World in Ohio, Hershey Park, Orlando's Universal Studios, Boston, Canada's largest amusement parks or Busch Gardens. Beyond the coasters, travelers will go whale-watching, hang out at the beach and take in baseball games. Teen packages range from \$1,325

to \$2,575. Family tours costs \$2,500 for a family of three, \$2,900 for a family of four and \$3,300 for a family of five. The tours include admission to all amusement parks and other attractions, accommodations at hotels, three meals a day and snacks, plus tour accessories. The tours also include transportation on air-conditioned, first-class motor coach buses.

For more information and to register, call 1-888-542-4842 or visit [thrillcoastertours.com](http://thrillcoastertours.com). — *Jessica Novak*



## GAS-TANK AWAY

# Centuries collide at a theme park

By Marie Gullard  
Examiner Correspondent

Here's one for the brave of heart — picture a steel monster soaring 205 feet up into the sky, with cars plunging 90 degrees straight down and hitting speeds of 75 mph.

"For thrill-seekers, [this is] our newest dive coaster, Griffon," said Kevin Crossett, senior communications manager at Busch Gardens, Williamsburg, Va. "In just six months, more than 1.4 million riders have braved it ... the world's tallest and first floorless dive coaster."

Open now for the 2008 season, the park, just 200 miles from Baltimore, spreads before its visitors all of the 17th-century charm of Merry Ole England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany and Italy.

"There's something for everyone," Crossett said. "We have more than 50 rides and attractions, along with nine entertaining shows at our park."

In addition to the roller coasters and other exhilarating rides, the Globe Theatre in "England" presents the show "Pirates," a swashbuckling high-seas adventure starring the comedic geniuses Leslie Nielsen and Eric Idle. This family-friendly journey combines state-of-the-art visual effects with multisensory amusement.

Traditional Irish dance is present-

**If you go**  
For more information, hours of operation and admission prices, contact Busch Gardens at 800-343-7946 or visit [buschgardens.com/va](http://buschgardens.com/va)

ed in "Ireland's" Abbey Stone Theatre, while summer nights jump to life in "France's" Royal Palace Theatre with the antics of Kinetix, a group of acrobats, singers, dancers and aerialists.

Busch Gardens Summer Nights Concert Series has found its way to "Germany" in July and August where musicians such as Rick Springfield, Peter Frampton and the Charlie Daniels Band perform in the Festhaus Park amphitheatre. Viva Italia is a musical revue of love as only the Italians can do through song, food and romance.

"I'm a big fan of theme parks," said Severna Park native Victoria Smith. "I like the fact that the park is separated into different countries, each country having its own feel. It's more of a rounded experience."

Packages are available for a two-day getaway all the way up to a weeklong vacation complete with unlimited access to the park, as well as to the region's many historic destinations such as Colonial Williamsburg, Crossett said.

## THE ROAD

# Where music is king

## Avalon, Mississippi knows how to sing the blues

By Rafael Alvarez  
Examiner Correspondent

At midnight, Elvis Presley Boulevard is deserted, Graceland across the rolling lawn in a bath of blue light. The palace sits just off Interstate 55, GRACELAND on the green highway sign as plain as GLEN BURNIE on the Baltimore Beltway.

It's a bit more complicated to get to the shack where the bluesman John Hurt once lived, down in the Mississippi town of Avalon some 120 miles due south of Memphis.

Guitarist Cecil Abels of nearby Carrollton, Miss., can tell you: Off Highway 35, take a right at Sherrie's general store, turn right at a little white church on a hill and keep making left turns down every gravel road you see.

There sits the shack of Missis-

sippi John Hurt, a blues singer who made his hometown famous in a 1928 recording called "Avalon Blues."

"Avalon is my hometown, always on my mind," sang Hurt. "Pretty mamas in Avalon want me there all the time ..."

A tarpaper shack like the ones that dot the Eastern Shore, it stands alone in a grass field, locked up while blues fans chase money for a museum. Hurt's grave (1892-1966) is not far away.

Abels and his sister, singer Glenda Jones, run the Carroll County Market on Lexington Street, across from the county courthouse that still finds it necessary — to the embarrassment of some locals and the pride of others — to fly the Confederate flag.

On weekends the market hosts American music, the kind for which the South is famous from Tokyo to Towson. It is Abels' quixotic aim,



Hurt

**On the Net**  
» [nps.gov/history/delta/blues/people/msjohn\\_hurt.htm](http://nps.gov/history/delta/blues/people/msjohn_hurt.htm)  
» [msjohnhurtmuseum.com](http://msjohnhurtmuseum.com)  
» [carrollcountymarket.com](http://carrollcountymarket.com)

sweetened with fiddle music and absolutely the best pork barbecue I have ever had, to bring the local population together in a way they tend not to. Next door to the market is Miss Sippy's, a lunchroom with a different homemade meal every day.

Cook Belinda Morrison makes chicken pot pie with cheese biscuits to write Mom about. Jeanette McNeer, whose art hangs on the wall, will serve you. And young singer-songwriter Alana Mosley comes in after school to help close up.

For a stone soul day, get lunch at Miss Sippy's, go sit on the porch of the Hurt shack to feel the music in the wind, and get back to the market before the sun goes down for a plate of barbecue and night of live music.

# Lagging economy extends season for cruisers

By Andrea Farnum  
Examiner Correspondent

When's the best time to get cruise deals? Traditionally, it's been between January and March during Wave Season, when cruise lines entice travelers with extra incentives and value-added amenities.

But changing travel habits and a lagging economy may have consumers riding a wave of deals all year long.

"I book a cruise for my family every year right after the holidays when the deals start appearing," said Dan Fearing, a marketing consultant from Towson. "But with the state of the economy, I didn't feel comfortable spending the money and decided to wait until later in the year to make a decision."

Savvy travelers are shopping all year long for the best deal possible. "Typically, Wave Season represents a peak of interest in booking cruises in the yearly cycle," said John Frenaye, owner of Travels with Fred, an agency in Annapolis. "I am



finding Wave Season locally to be morphing into a yearlong event."

Economy woes may be shifting vacation habits.

"Wave Season occurred at the worst possible time, just as people in the U.S. were really starting to feel the pinch of the economy," said Carolyn Spencer Brown, editor of CruiseCritic.com. "Our members that haven't booked in advance are telling us that they're beginning to make changes in the way they plan their cruises; like driving to a port to save on airfare or choosing a Canada/New England cruise over a European one."

**On the Net**  
» [travelswithfred.com](http://travelswithfred.com)  
» [cruisecritic.com](http://cruisecritic.com)  
» [royalcaribbean.com](http://royalcaribbean.com)  
» [ncl.com](http://ncl.com)

Cruise lines out of the Port of Baltimore are now offering extraordinary deals. Royal Caribbean alternates a five-night Bermuda sailing (from \$749 per person) with a nine-night Caribbean sailing (from \$1099 per person) and Norwegian Cruise Lines also offers a five-night Bermuda sailing (from \$749 per person). "Sailing down the Chesapeake Bay on a cruise ship is quite impressive," Frenaye said.

When it comes to bang for your travel buck, cruising can be your most economical vacation option. "Cruising offers a tremendous value to the traveler, since all of your basic needs are included in one price," says Frenaye. "The credit card shock when you return is likely to be manageable."

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