

SundayTravel

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE DECEMBER 19, 2021 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/TRAVEL



ABOVE: The lobby of the Langham Boston was decked out with disco Christmas trees. BELOW: Grana restaurant at the Langham Boston

Our STEALTH reviews

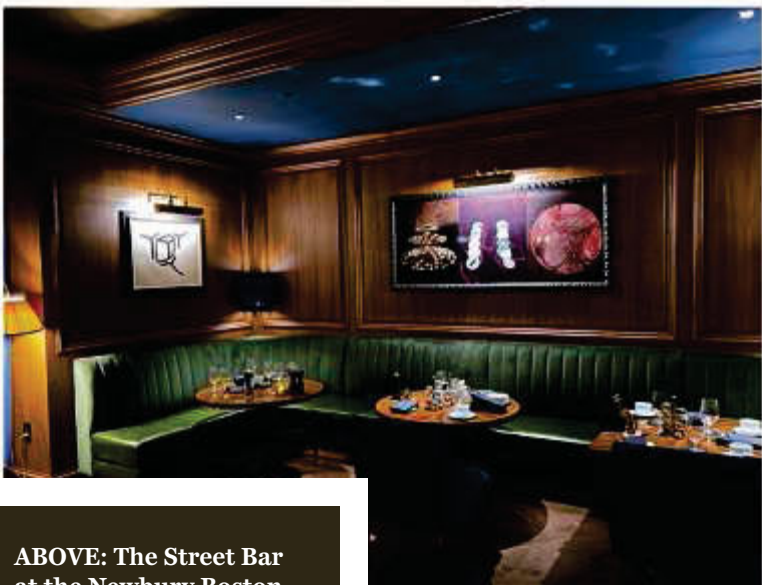
Boston's new and newly-renovated hotels finds some hits — and a miss



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF



ABOVE: The Street Bar at the Newbury Boston hotel. BELOW: The Lobby of the Newbury Boston hotel in Back Bay.



As Tom Jones crooned “It’s Not Unusual,” over the sound system, I dropped my robe and thought to myself “Well Tom, this actually *is* unusual.”

I was preparing to enter the heated outdoor pool at the new Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport on a very brisk December morning. So brisk that I sprinted into the pool, and then jumped into the adjacent hot tub shortly thereafter. I soaked until my fingers got pruny, mostly because I didn’t want to face the chill of getting out.

The outdoor, year-round, rooftop pool (which is technically on the fifth floor) of the Omni Seaport is one of the amenities that has arrived in the city courtesy of new, and newly-renovated, hotels. Despite a year with COVID-19-induced low occupancy rates, Boston saw some of its biggest and most anticipated hotel openings in 2021. I went into stealth mode to review four of them: The Newbury Boston, Langham Boston, the Colonnade Hotel, and the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport.

Before we begin, here’s the usual disclaimer: The hotels did not know a writer from the Globe was checked in, and we paid

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Carousel Museum was the ride I needed it to be

By Meredith Goldstein

GLOBE STAFF

One of my favorite museums is the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto because the whole building focuses on one thing: shoes.

It’s not that I’m a shoe person; it’s that when it comes to museums, I love learning the history of something *very specific*. I like a museum that stays in a narrow lane.

There’s a potato museum in Idaho that sounds perfect. The Umbrella Cover Museum in Maine is on my list.

That is why I was thrilled to learn that the New England Carousel Museum — a museum that is devoted to carousels and nothing else — is just a few hours away from Boston, in Bristol, Conn. There are horses, art, history, music, and interactive experiences, all revolving around one revolving thing. Pun intended.

Technically, at this point, I’ve been waiting years to go to this place. In 2019, I told my friend — young adult author Sara Farizan, who loves things that are nostalgic and playful — that we should

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MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN

You can learn a lot about carousel businessmen Solomon Stein and Harry Goldstein at the New England Carousel Museum in Bristol, Conn. The writer of this story is not related to Harry, as far as she knows.

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Offseason is perfect to visit and learn about its reds and whites

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Can Boston’s new low-cost airline from Iceland survive?

By Christopher Muther

GLOBE STAFF

For Bostonians seeking low-cost flights to Europe, this story is going to sound incredibly familiar. A Reykjavik-based airline will begin serving Logan in the spring. The barebones airline will offer bargain flights to Iceland. Once there, travelers can connect to airports throughout Europe. Introductory fares start at \$109 each way.

The airline, called Play, is closely following a business model established by another Icelandic airline called WOW Air, which began servicing Logan in 2015. The trouble, however, is that WOW went bankrupt four years after it arrived in Boston. In doing so, it stranded hundreds of passengers around the world. The similarities go even further. Much of the management team of Play were on the management team of WOW. Even the CEO of Play was the deputy CEO of WOW. A betting man might gamble that this scenario is not looking particularly positive.

How can Play possibly avoid the same fate as WOW?

“The model of WOW did really well until the company kind of broke it and they began to fly to the West Coast,” said Birgir Jónsson, the CEO of Play. “WOW introduced wide body jets and bigger aircraft. They flew to India, they introduced Israel, and basically broke the business model that actual-

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The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER



NAM Y. HUH/AP

An Uber sign is displayed inside a car in Chicago.

Uber charged me for a ride I never took. Can I get a refund?

By Christopher Elliott
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Q. Uber charged me for two trips from Katy, Texas, to Houston that I didn’t take. The charges were both for \$87 with a \$60 tip, for a total of \$295. I immediately contacted both Uber and my credit card company.

Uber only credited one charge of \$87 and claimed I made that reservation from my phone. So I’m responsible for \$207. Uber says a fraud specialist reviewed my case.

I haven’t been to Katy. I’m certainly not going on any joyrides to Houston at 1:29 a.m. and 3:16 a.m., which is when these rides were taken.

My Bank of America credit card company said Uber claims I made the trips. I disputed the charges, but Bank of America sided with Uber.

Please help. I feel I did everything correctly by canceling my credit card and contacting both companies the day it happened. This is theft.

TJ CAIN, *Mount Pleasant, Texas*

A. Uber shouldn’t charge you for rides you never ordered or used. And by the way, your bank should have sided with you in this dispute — but you already knew that.

Uber doesn’t seem to be that great with geography. You live in Mount Pleasant, which is just outside of Dallas and more than a four-hour drive from Katy. As you say, you were nowhere near Katy and didn’t have a pattern of hailing early-morning rides, so this should be an open-and-shut case for both Uber and Bank of America. Someone accessed your Uber account and ordered these rides fraudulently.

I think the real tipoff that this was bogus was the two \$60 tips. I mean, I’ve heard of generous tipping, but these tips are over the top. Come on! A 1:29 a.m. pickup with an oversize gratuity? That looks wrong. Someone at Uber should have immediately flagged this transaction and frozen the account.

You followed all the correct procedures to fix this. You canceled your Bank of America card and contacted Uber immediately. I see you also established a paper trail via the Uber chat app. That’s excellent because you can prove that you tried to fix this immediately. Guilty people don’t typically take those kinds of steps after committing a crime.

I publish the names, numbers, and e-mail addresses of the Uber executive contacts on my consumer advocacy site at www.elliott.org/company-contacts/uber/. You might have reached out to one of them to appeal this rejection.

It looks as if someone may have hacked into your Uber account. There’s no way to know how someone got your password, but your case is a reminder to change your passwords often and never share them with anyone.

I contacted Uber on your behalf, and it refunded your charges.

Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Elliott’s latest book is “How To Be The World’s Smartest Traveler” (National Geographic). Contact him at elliott.org/help or chris@elliott.org.

THE VIP LOUNGE

Kenny G on keeping his hands warm and his bedding and carry-on handy

Kenny Gorelick, known professionally as Kenny G, is a Grammy- and American Music Award-winning jazz saxophonist, composer, and producer who has sold more than 75 million albums worldwide. The 65-year-old instrumental musician, who brought his smooth jazz sounds to the Emerson Colonial Theatre on Friday, said he couldn’t wait to perform for a Boston-area audience. “It’s going to be a lot more lively than one would think if you’ve never been to one of my concerts,” he said. “We have a great set list with lots of great musicianship. There are six of us in total ... it’s been the same group for 35-plus years.” Gorelick said the set list was to include a variety of songs/genres, including Christmas songs and at least one from his latest album, “New Standards,” which was released last week and is, he said, “my take on jazz ballads of the ‘50s and ‘60s [for which I] wrote brand new songs in that style.” We caught up with Gorelick, who lives in Los Angeles and has two adult sons, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? Tokyo and that would be [because] I just love everything about going to Japan. The hotels are so amazing. The health clubs in the hotels — I like to work out every day — they are so good. They always have a really great spa at the hotel with a hot bath and a cold bath, which I really like to do. And everything about the way the restaurants operate and the food and the meticulousness appeals to me, so I enjoy Tokyo.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? Because I like going to Japan, my favorite food is sushi. Almost anywhere I go, I just love eating sushi. So fish is really my favorite thing, but I really enjoy the Japanese style that they make, so it can be sushi, it can be also the grilled fish that they make with their special sauces, Japanese style with white rice, that’s my thing. Drink-wise, I prefer draft beers and mojitos. Those are my two favorite drinks. Again, when you go to Japan and you get their draft beers, it’s a special thing that they do and it’s so good.

Where would you like to travel to but haven’t? I’ve always wanted to go to Bora Bora. I’ve never been there. And I’ve always wanted to go to Greece. Those are my two spots that I have not been to, and I’m hoping I can get there sometime in the next year. Bora Bora, because the water just looks amazing and those hotel rooms that are right over the water also look amazing and I just want to experience that. It seems like it would be nothing but fun and they speak French there and I’m learning to speak French, so I like that idea as well. As far as Greece goes, I’ve just seen pictures of the water and the buildings and there’s a Nobu restaurant there — see the theme that’s going on here — so going to Mykonos and going to the Nobu restaurant there and vacationing in the Greek islands ... sounds amazing to me. Also, Capri in Italy. I haven’t been there and that looks great as well.



Kenny G performs in Japan, his favorite vacation destination.

One item you can’t leave home without when traveling? Besides my saxophone, because I always bring my saxophone with me — that’s obviously the number-one thing — I always carry my bedding with me. I have a down comforter and two pillows. I like very soft pillows ... and I have them with me on the road everywhere I travel. I have a special suitcase just for them and the suitcase is called the albatross, and so anybody who ever travels with me knows there’s going to be an albatross traveling with us.

Aisle or window? I’m always an aisle guy if I can have a choice because I’m fidgety: I like to get up, I like to get into my bag — which is usually above in the overhead compartment — so I need to get up, get something, sit down, get up, sit down. ... If I have to use the restroom, I don’t like walking past people.

Favorite childhood travel memory? Driving through Canada in the Banff area. I think that’s in Alberta; it’s in their Canadian Rockies and the Banff/Lake Louise area. ... I remember driving through there with my family. We stayed in the big chateau there. It’s like a castle and it’s just beautiful. And they had a big, huge Olympic-size swimming pool there with a high dive. I remember going up on the high dive and my brother — who was older than me — was scared to do it but he wanted me to go first, and I wasn’t scared and I enjoyed it. I remember feeling like hey, I’m teaching my big brother something, and it was a good memory for me.



HERE

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS IN P-TOWN Celebrate the holidays with a visit to always-fun-and-festive Provincetown. See the Lobster Pot Tree, a tree-shaped display that’s made from more than 100 stacked lobster pots covered with ribbons and lights. The Canteen features a holiday pop-up market and food options on weekends through Jan. 2. Buy items from local woodworkers, jewelers, painters, and other artisans; go for a spin around the skating rink (free skate rentals) and then enjoy hot chocolate beside a firepit; and indulge in schnitzel, mulled wine, and more at the chalet-style pop-up restaurant. Ring in the new year at First Light, which includes the Light Bright Bike Ride on New Year’s Eve, when locals and visitors decorate their bikes with lights and parade through town, and the infamous Polar Bear Plunge at noon on Jan. 1, followed by a dazzling fireworks celebration at dusk (go to MacMillan Pier to watch). ptowntourism.com.

EXPLORE BOSTON’S TRAIN EXHIBIT Watch model trains zip around miniature versions of Boston’s Custom House, Zakim Bridge, and other iconic landmarks during “All Aboard! Trains at Science Park” at the Museum of Science, Boston, open through Jan. 17. Elements in this exhibit were made by

master model-maker John Goodson, known for his creations in “The Mandalorian,” “Star Wars,” “Star Trek,” and “Back to the Future.” See multiple model train layouts among the wintery landscapes and snow-capped peaks, featuring O-Scale, G-Scale, and HO-Scale model trains, a Village Trolley display, and the Boston-themed layout. Don’t miss the hands-on activities: Kids of all ages can lay wooden tracks, design and engineer layouts, and “drive” trains by hand and push-button devices. Admission included with regular Exhibit Hall ticket: \$24 ages 3-11, \$29 for ages 12 and older, \$25 for ages 60 and older. 617-723-2500, www.mos.org.

THERE

TAKE FUN CLASSES WHILE TRAVELING Spend your holiday travel time learning how to start a garage band, speak Spanish, edit and post your travel videos, or create a happiness plan for 2022. Skillshare offers thousands of creative and skills-based online classes — offered by experts in their fields — that you can take from home or while on the road. Choose a topic based on your interests, such as animation, creative writing, photography, music, or Web development, and then select a



specific offering — anything from a 52-minute class on outdoor photography to a 19-hour Complete Web Design course. Filter the offerings by choosing the class level (beginner, intermediate, advanced) and length, from less than 15 minutes to more than an hour. Watch from anywhere using your laptop, tablet, or phone or download the class so you can enjoy it on a plane or during a long car ride. \$15 per month for an annual membership. www.skillshare.com.

WHERE GEAR MEETS HIP HOTEL Keep your travels simple and stay at The Hotel Zags in downtown Portland, Ore., where you can borrow everything from cruiser bikes to cameras (choose from a Leica DSLR, a GoPro or a Mini Instamix Polaroid camera). This new modern hotel in the city’s Fountain District has a Gear Shed that’s loaded with items for guests to use for free: soccer ball, backpack, binoculars, fishing pole, guitar, bocce balls, Nintendo games, and even a portable record player. Check the hotel’s website for availability and book items in advance. The hotel has 174 rooms and 6 suites, each one uniquely decorated with bright colors and bespoke furnishings. It’s a short walk from the Portland Art Museum, Powell’s Bookstore, farmers’ markets, food vendors, and the MAX light rail. Guests receive a \$15 “treat credit” for mini-bar or sundry shop purchases, 24-hour day passes to a fitness center, and access to the hotel’s game room. Rates start at \$99. www.thehotelzags.com.

EVERYWHERE

SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF HEST My tweens loved the new HEST Foamy travel mattress so much, they abandoned their beds at home for a weeklong slumber party on the floor

— it’s that comfortable. Good news for winter campers: Foamy comes with a top layer of temperature-regulated memory foam that won’t freeze like traditional memory foam — meaning you can use it car camping at ski areas and tent camping year-round — and a firm bottom layer for support and pressure-point relief. The machine-washable cover has a soft material on top for comfort and a waterproof fabric on the bottom to protect the mattress from ground moisture. The best part: The Foamy comes with clips on each side so you can attach it to another Foamy and create a secure, nonslip double bed — ideal for snuggling without falling into the cracks. The compression harness also doubles as a handy welcome mat for shoes, while a side pocket holds your car keys and phone. Roll the mattress up into a compact bundle for travel. \$299 for a 25-by-78-inch mattress; \$349 for a 30-by-78-inch-wide version. <https://hest.com/products/foamy>.

A LAST-MINUTE GIFT FOR ANYONE Voited’s new Soul Slippers work well for keeping your feet toasty on cold mornings, for dashing out to the mailbox to grab your holiday cards, and for the walk to your hotel’s outdoor hot tub — or even for wearing around town (no one will know). The lightweight indoor-outdoor shoes have a fleece liner and memory foam footbed for keeping your feet comfy and warm. The waterproof outer fabric protects the Soul Slippers in case of light drizzle or spilled eggnog, and the super-grippy (hand-stitched) rubber soles help keep you upright on slippery terrain. For eco-minded souls, the slippers are made using REPREVE fabric, meaning fiber material made from recycled plastic bottles. Available in men’s and women’s sizes. \$54.95. <https://voited.com>.

KARI BODNARCHUK

By Michael Apstein
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Though the Greeks were not the first to make wine — that distinction goes to the Georgians of the Caucasus Mountains — they’ve been at it for over two millennia. Today, they make a high-quality, exciting array of both reds and whites. The problem is learning about them. When I taught introductory wine classes, I advised students that the best way to learn about a wine is to focus on one type for a month. So, if you want to learn about Chardonnay, drink only Chardonnay for a month. That exercise is even more important with Greek wines because the nomenclature is overwhelming and truly foreign even for those who know a lot about wine. There are hundreds of indigenous Greek grapes and 33 individual appellations or PDOs (protected designation of origin) and scores of PGIs (protected geographical indication). (PDO wine and other foods are made in a specific geographical area, using a defined, usually traditional, method. PGI wine or foods are similarly based on geographic origin, but with fewer production regulations.) Then there are the names of the grapes themselves: Assyrtiko (ah-SEER-tee-ko), Moschofilero (Mos-koh-FEE-leh-roh) and Malagouzia (ma-la-goo-zee-AH), to name just three of the whites.

The opportunity for me to dive into Greek wines arose when we decided to take a 16-day family vacation to Greece over Christmas in 2019 — just before COVID-19, as it turned out. Visiting Greece in the offseason means far fewer crowds, lower prices in general, including half off at many of the archeological sites, and little difficulty eating wherever you want. It means bypassing the islands, because although it’s bright and sunny, it’s still really not beach weather.

Greek wine spans an enormous spectrum. Even with the potential for 32 meals accompanied by wine during our trip, it was clear to me that I needed a focus. I decided to limit our sampling to those three white indigenous Greek varieties because most of our travel would be on the coast, where seafood is plentiful. As I rapidly learned, the energetic acidity of Greek whites also made them a fine match for ever-present roasted lamb or pork.

Greek wine culture is laid-back. The Greeks drink a lot of wine at lunch and



DEE MCMEERAN

What better place to learn about Greek wines?

dinner, but they don’t fuss about it. Even at chic restaurants with top producers’ wines, vintages were rarely noted. At family-run tavernas, we had wine drawn from a barrel or other large container and served in unlabeled bottles. No one turned an eye when we ordered white wine with lamb.

Greece’s most important grape, Assyrtiko, produces riveting, mineral-y wines with a saline-like edginess — especially when grown on its home turf, the island of Santorini. There the vines are sunk into a hole in the island’s volcanic soil and trained in a basket-like fashion to protect them from the island’s constant winds. Assyrtiko has been planted all over Greece as producers in other parts of the country capitalize on its popularity. The ones from Santorini need several years of bottle age to show

their true character and will be labeled PDO Santorini. Assyrtiko grown outside of Santorini can also produce an excellent wine but one that has more of a fruity profile with less minerality and is more accessible with far less bottle age. You will also see Assyrtiko blended with other white grapes, such as Moschofilero and Malagouzia, to add structure and backbone.

Moschofilero, a grape indigenous to the Mantinea region of the Peloponnese, produces a floral wine, reminiscent of Muscat, though far less fragrant. Some compare Moschofilero to Gewurztraminer, but I find it both less aromatic and less flamboyant. Moschofilero’s perfumed nature might make you think it’s sweet, but it’s not. It displays a distinctly tropical character with excellent balancing acidity that im-

parts liveliness.

Malagouzia, sometimes spelled Malagousia, is an aromatic grape indigenous to northern Greece. It was nearly extinct until the 1970s when an enology professor encouraged Vangelis Gervassiliou, one of his students and now one of the best producers, to explore its possibilities. Malagouzia is now grown all over Greece and makes a uniquely energetic wine, combining subtle floral and tropical notes with variable amounts of minerality. Both Moschofilero and Malagouzia would be an excellent choice as an aperitif to accompany a Greek salad — which is a real thing and not an American invention — or with highly flavored foods. The floral elements balance the spice.

Greeks eat late. Many taverna don’t open for lunch until 2 p.m. The wait

Visiting Greece in the offseason means far fewer crowds, lower prices, including half off at many archeological sites, and little difficulty eating wherever you want.

staff at Yama, a simple taverna in Kalabaka, the small town at the foot of the Meteora monasteries, laughed when I tried to make a dinner reservation for 8 p.m. We acquiesced to a 9:15 slot and found we were the only diners at that time. By 11 when we left, only one other table was occupied — also by tourists. Don’t be surprised when traditional desserts appear as a complimentary end to the meal. Though meals at elegant restaurants are expensive by Greek standards, the prices are still low by US standards and include tax and tip.

For what must be the largest selection of Greek wines by the glass in the world, head to Vintage Wine Bar and Bistro in Athens, where they offer more than 300. Their food menu is also extensive, making it a fine choice for dinner. For a light lunch or aperitif before dinner, Heteroclitto, a small wine bar down the street from Vintage Wine Bar is excellent. The food and wine selection, though far more limited, is still well-chosen and the setting cozy and intimate.

Unsurprisingly, you can find a wide array of Greek wines outside of Athens. At Mia Feta, a modern taverna in Thessaloniki, a plethora of feta cheese awaits along with an extensive selection of wines by the glass thanks to bottles preserved under argon gas. The knowledgeable and friendly owner insisted we try what turned out to be the one red interloper we had on the entire trip, a stunning 10-year-old Xinomavro from Boutari. It made me reconsider my plan to focus solely on three white wines.

Finding Greek wines in Boston is easy. Go to Krasi, a restaurant in Back Bay where they have an outstanding selection of Greek wines, many by the glass. Go to other Greek restaurants. There are plenty in and around Boston. Or go to your local wine store and ask for Greek white wines. Take them home and drink them with fish or spicy Asian cuisine, or pork or lamb or pizza. You get the idea. After a few weeks, you’ll be surprised how much you’ve learned.

Carousel Museum is worth the ride

►CAROUSELS
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drive to Bristol to see the museum. We started planning for a 2020 trip, but then the pandemic began.

It wasn’t until this fall that it seemed right for us to go, and I’m so glad we waited. After the last year and a half, it felt thrilling — blissful, really — to ride a carousel together in Connecticut.

But let me back up. If you’re going visit the museum from the Boston area (or anywhere that’s more than a few hours from Bristol), you might want to stay at a hotel for one night. Why? Because the New England Carousel Museum is actually multiple museums in one building, and down the street there is yet another narrowly focused museum, the American Clock & Watch Museum.

That’s where we started. I learned about the Clock & Watch Museum by googling the Carousel Museum. (They do their best to promote each other.) The museum is as described, a haven for clock enthusiasts (watches are less important there for now, but museum director Patti Philippon says more watches in the collection will be on display in the future). There are 2,500 clocks in the collection, 1,500 time pieces of all kinds on display, and many of the clocks have Boston-area roots. (Not just Waltham, I swear.)

Highlights included some nice pocket watches (it was fun to see the time pieces get smaller and smaller throughout the rooms), a small area that focused on how watches were marketed, and an alphabetical fact-finding route for kids. There’s some information there about the labor history related to clocks — who made them, who sold them, and why the trade wasn’t always fair. All of this is good for fans of the Charles River Museum of Industry and Innovation.

Not surprisingly, my friend Sara, the nostalgia fan, liked the



MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN/GLOBE STAFF

room with the novelty clocks. I did, too. There was an E.T. alarm clock and a Porky Pig watch. It’s a big ’80s vibe in there.

I did realize pretty quickly that I was on borrowed time (pun intended) at the museum because the ticking clocks — oh yes, they tick! — were not helping my anxiety. If those noises, which include dings and dongs, make you feel like you’re late for something, plan to stay for an hour tops. (I actually loved the sounds for a bit, but depending on the room and tones, I had my limits).

After we left, we were off to the Carousel Museum, the main attraction! We were the only ones there on a Thursday afternoon, which meant we got special treatment from Cate Mahoney. She’s on the board and has volunteered there for 30 years. I asked if she’s always available for tours, and she said when asked, if she’s free, she’s happy to lead a party through the building. She does a fun thing where she asks where you’re from, and after you tell her, she’ll tell you if there’s a working carousel where you live. She almost always knows the answer, partly because there aren’t many working carousels.

Guests can ride this carousel is inside of the New England Carousel Museum.

Even without her personal guidance, we would have learned a ton about the history of carousels, how they used to be more like thrill rides, why certain artists began to bedazzle their horses.

I was interested to learn that two of the most famous carousel businessmen were Stein & Goldstein, also known as Brooklyn-based artistic carousel manufacturers Solomon Stein and Harry Goldstein, who left Russia for the United States and went from carving ladies’ combs to carving large wooden horses.

No relation, by the way. If there is and I haven’t been told, I would like my Goldstein carousel inheritance, please.

Mahoney says there are probably about 200 horses and other carousel animals in the building. I asked, and she does have a favorite.

“I’m particularly fond of the donkey. He’s a large donkey with the big ears. He was made in France.”

A very cool part of the museum, which you can catch for an extended period of time, was a look at the work of Jeffrey Briggs, who designed and built the carousel on Boston’s Rose Kennedy Greenway.

I’ll admit, I didn’t expect there to be a working carousel in the building, but when Mahoney took us to the back room and we saw it, I wanted to jump on. Honestly, after learning so much, it felt special to pick a horse, listen to very loud carousel music played by a 1920 band organ machine, which sits nearby, and just ride. Best to do that at the end.

I mentioned that the Carousel Museum is a bunch of museums in one building. It’s 90 percent carousel-focused, but the structure also houses the Fire Museum and Greek Museum, the last being a room of reproductions established by a Greek heritage group in the area. Those rooms don’t take long to tour, and are especially interesting, I’d imagine, if you’re a Connecticut local.

That night, we stayed at the DoubleTree by Hilton Bristol, where at the restaurant, surrounded by heat lamps, our

masked server told us that yes, Bristol might be known for the massive ESPN campus down the street, but the clock and carousel museums are just as famous, at least locally. She said her dad’s first job was cleaning the clocks. He was 10. If you grew up there, it would have been a field trip.

We returned the next morning to our Boston-area realities. No flying horses. No music. Only the regular ticks and tocks in our brains.

I had a Globe deadline. Sara, meanwhile, had to work on a draft of her next young adult novel, which is about a haunted pinball machine.

I haven’t told her that I’ve been googling, and that there is a new Pinball Hall of Fame museum in Las Vegas. The website says it’s “nothing but pinball for

25,000 square feet.” Sounds like a very specific plan for 2022.

New England Carousel Museum 95 Riverside Ave. Bristol, Conn., 860-585-5411. Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday, noon to 5 p.m.; Admission: adults, \$8; seniors and students with ID, \$7; children 2-14, \$5; free for children under 2.

American Clock & Watch Museum 100 Maple St., Bristol, Conn., 860-583-6070. Hours: Wednesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Admission: adults \$8; seniors \$7; students 6-17 or with college ID, \$5; free for children 5 and under.

Meredith Goldstein can be reached at meredith.goldstein@globe.com.

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Some hits — and a miss — at Boston hotels

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the going rate for the night. Rates at hotels vary wildly from season-to-season, and even night-to-night, so check carefully before making your reservation. Normally my reviews include a look at the gym, but given the pandemic, I decided to forgo hotel gyms.

The Newbury vs. the Langham Boston: Who can lay claim to the most luxurious renovation?

In previous hotel reviews, I’ve never pitted one property directly against another, but I couldn’t resist putting The Newbury and the Langham Boston in the ring and letting them duke it out for sumptuous supremacy. Both buildings were constructed in the 1920s, and both reopened this spring after down-to-the-studs, multimillion dollar renovations. It seemed like a fair fight. Let the polite sparring begin!

The Newbury began life as the iconic Ritz in 1927, transitioned to the Taj, and then, after a long pandemic delay, reopened as the Newbury in the spring of 2021. Was it worth the wait? The short answer is yes, with a capital “y.” The public spaces in the hotel, designed by acclaimed architect Jeffrey Beers, are rendered in dreamy jewel tones. The look of the Street Bar, the beloved pub in the hotel, could be used in a text book on how to design a bar to look both expensive and unpretentious. The lobby, while unfortunately still small, gleams. The caramelized sugar on top of this crème brûlée of a hotel is Contessa, an Italian restaurant with food almost as good as the incredible, sweeping views and beautiful interior design.

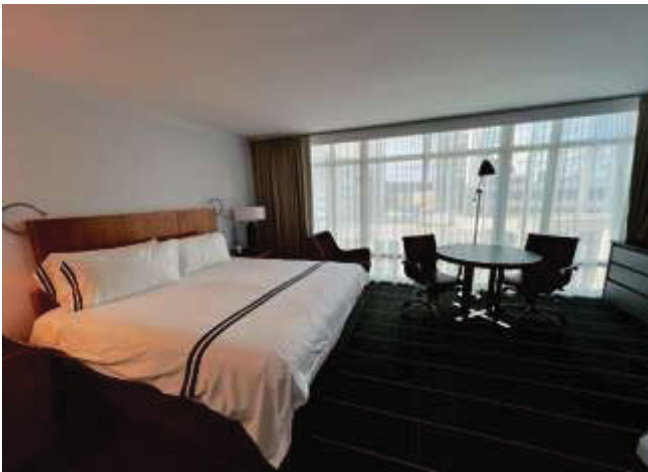
The Newbury was knocking it out of the park (or, more accurately, the adjacent Public Garden). Then I checked into my room and I was crestfallen. There was nothing wrong with the room, except it was, well, boring with a capital “b.” After walking through the stunning, colorful public spaces, I was suddenly swimming in an ocean of beige. Everything was top notch and comfortable. The linens were from Frette, the bath products were made specifically for the hotel, as was the furniture in my room. There was also a Nespresso Vertuo espresso maker. It was expensive and oozing class, but also very milque-toast. Some may say that the lack of pizzazz was a visual palate cleanser, or intended to soothe and relax. I thought it came off as average, considering the price tag (\$649 for the room, plus \$153 in taxes and fees). I was in a midrange room, called the Park View King.

There was also nothing anchoring the room to the city. Still, the service was top notch, the bathroom was beautiful, and the location is probably the best in the city.

Facing off against the Newbury is the newly renovated Langham Boston. Once the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, the 1922 bank-turned-hotel has been in need of a face lift for quite some time, and after a \$200 million makeover, it’s finally worthy of the Langham name.

Going head-to-head against the Newbury, the Langham has one big disadvantage, and that’s location. There’s nothing wrong with Post Office Square and its proximity to Downtown Crossing, but it’s not Newbury Street. The Langham has a lobby bar called the Fed, which is a touch more playful, but less romantic than the Street Bar at the Newbury. Like the Newbury, the Langham has an Italian restaurant. Instead of city views, Grana has a soaring ceiling and no windows, but it’s bright and elegant. The restaurant is currently only serving breakfast and lunch. Because of its Financial District location, the Fed bar has the potential to be a hit with the after-work crowd, but getting diners to Grana might be a challenge because the area clears out after 7 on weeknights.

Back to the battle: The Newbury may have the location and the buzzy restaurant, but the Langham’s big advantage is the rooms. I chose a comparable room category (called a Premier



From top: The lobby of the Colonnade Hotel Boston; rooms at the Langham Boston (left) and the Colonnade (right); rooms at the Newbury Boston (left) and the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport (right); the Sporting Club at Omni Boston.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

Room) at the Langham, checked in, and I was wowed. The room was lively, full of patterns and textures with art that hinted at the city and the building’s banking history. Furniture details harkened back to retro suitcases and steamer trunks. It had all the comfort of the Newbury, but with a lower price (I paid \$460 for the room with an additional \$108 in taxes and fees). The adjective I would use to describe the Newbury is “classy”; the phrase I would apply to the Langham is “upscale fun.”

The two hotels are evenly matched

and score off-the-charts high, from the turndown service to the Nespresso machines, to the linens and bathrooms. Both receive a gold star, but I’m going to declare the Langham Boston the winner in this round for its pluck, vivacity, lobby bar, cheeky point of view, extremely attentive service and, most of all, the guest rooms.

Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport

When I previously wrote about the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport, a friend said “It sounds like a cruise ship

on land.” There are some similarities to a ship on land. First, the hotel is massive. With 1,054 rooms, it’s the largest hotel built in Boston since 1984. There are seven food and beverage options and if a guest is at the Omni for a convention, a direct tunnel can take them to the Convention Center. Bottom line: If a guest was staying here they would never need to leave the hotel. There’s also that pool, which is only open to guests.

The Omni is striving to be a convention hotel that doesn’t feel like a con-

vention hotel, and it succeeds. On a recent Friday night, the sports bar, called the Sporting Club, was buzzing with a mix of guests and South Boston neighbors. The Crescendo Bar in the lobby was pulling in a more subdued collection of patrons. It felt like a good place for a clandestine meeting and a sophisticated cocktail.

The hotel has two towers, one had more traditional rooms, called Patron Rooms, the other had a category called Artist Rooms, which were filled with exposed concrete and wooden floors. The Artist Rooms are what my parents would refer to as “funky.” It’s an appealing option for conventioners. I opted for a traditional Patron Room, and was immediately a fan. I loved the wood accents and the clever use of space. The carpet looked a bit like the beach at low tide, but thankfully didn’t smell like it. There was (modern) wood paneling in the bathroom, which gave the space a warm feel as opposed to most marble hotel bathrooms.

I heard some hallway noise from my room (I think there was an office Christmas party happening somewhere in the massive hotel that night), but like all the hotels I stayed in during this round of reviews, it was mostly quiet, and I slept well.

At \$189 a night, plus taxes and fees of \$44.50, The Omni was a good value, particularly for those looking for a hotel in the Seaport neighborhood. The most off-putting thing I could find was a program that offered a donation to charity if a guest opted out of housekeeping. The Omni would donate a meal per day to Feeding America for those forgoing service. My immediate thought was, “What about the staff who will miss out on tips? I’d rather make a donation to them.”

The Colonnade Hotel

Late last month the Globe ran a story about the Colonnade Hotel’s 50th anniversary, and how the hotel had embraced its Brutalist 1960s-designed past with a big renovation. As a fan of retro and midcentury design, I was aching to check in and see what had been done. Sadly, I set my vintage expectations a bit too high. Some of the stodgier elements of the lobby had been stripped back, but I saw nothing nodding to decades past, save for some exposed concrete and a few tchotchkes sprinkled here and there. I wouldn’t expect the hotel to turn into a retro-themed playground, like the TWA Hotel in New York, but I hoping for a renovation along the lines of the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. Five years ago the Watergate reopened with a modern, playful take on the 1970s. Instead of embracing a bit of retro fun, the Colonnade was simply a nice city hotel, and there’s certainly no shame in that.

What I did find odd, however, was my room. It was large enough and comfortable, but it looked like a hodgepodge renovation. Some of the furniture was new and some had been there for a while. The walls were stark white and mostly bare. There was a chair randomly placed at an awkward angle at the window. Why was it there? Was there a Jimmy Stewart “Rear Window” situation happening outside? I was so confused.

That’s nitpicking. The hotel checked all the important boxes: It was clean, comfortable, there was a Keurig coffee brewer and brisk Wi-Fi, plus it’s in a prime location (across from the Prudential Center) in the Back Bay. At \$206 a night, plus \$50 in taxes and fees, it didn’t feel unreasonable given the amount of space in my room. The Colonnade has a rooftop pool open during the summer and a new restaurant called Lucie in the lobby. But in my mind the space will always be Brasserie Jo. Hopefully the next time the Colonnade renovates, they’ll also be feeling nostalgic and go full retro throughout the hotel.

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Can Boston’s new low-cost airline from Iceland actually survive?

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ly had proven to work.”

The business model that had originally worked for WOW, and that Jónsson is hoping will do the same for Play, is short-haul flights from the East Coast of North America to Play’s hub at Keflavík Airport. This time, there will be no expansion to the West Coast or other locations that require a long flight to Iceland. At one point, WOW introduced a first-class cabin. Jónsson said none of that will be happening with Play.

“We can take the lessons learned and build on them,” he said. “And try to avoid making the same mistakes as they did.”

Play launched in 2019, an unfortunate time to introduce an airline given the plummeting demand that came

with the pandemic the following year, but Jónsson said business through the summer of 2021 was robust. Passenger counts began declining last month as COVID-19 cases increased throughout Europe. But the airline is forging ahead, banking that the virus will be better contained by next spring. Its summer 2022 schedule currently includes flights to 23 destinations in Europe. Flights from Boston and Baltimore will begin in the spring. Jónsson said other East Coast cities will gradually be added.

While its chances of survival may sound suspect, Play has a few advantages. When WOW went bankrupt, it handed an Iceland monopoly back to Icelandair. (JetBlue has a codeshare program with Icelandair.)

“Going back to that period there was a huge price war in the market and you



Play, a new, low-cost Icelandic airline begins serving Logan Airport in spring 2022.

had an absolutely over-saturated market,” Jónsson said. “There was way too much capacity at that time. I think that the players that are coming in are more

realistic about what’s possible. We sincerely believe that there is a market for this.”

That market is bargain-hunters who view airplanes as transportation, and nothing more. Travelers pay for all extras — from beverages to baggage. About 25 percent of Play’s profits will

come from these ancillary fees. You’ll also pay for carry-on items and seat selection. For low-maintenance travelers, the tradeoff is the price. After the introductory fare sale, Jónsson said prices will average about \$350 round-trip from Boston to locations throughout Europe, depending on the season and demand.

“We will always be really small,” he said. “WOW had an ambition of being a big airline. We expressly do not want to do that. I will never be in an interview with you and try to show off that we have a large number of employees and planes. I’m always gonna be proud that I’m small and flexible. And then, at the end of the day, we’ll have happy customers and a profitable business.”

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