

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



A seaside scene from the coast of New England.



Grand Central Station.



A colorful, snowy Russia.



St. Mark's Basilica in Venice.

PHOTOS BY PAMELA WRIGHT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

NEW YORK

It's a small, small world

Gulliver's Gate in Times Square features miniature models of iconic locations

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright
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"Do you see Spider-Man?" the young boy asked his mother. "He's up there, hanging from the bridge!"

Following his pointing finger, we saw the miniature Spidey, dressed in his red cape, scaling the Brooklyn Bridge. We also saw Nessie rise from Loch Ness lake in the Scottish Highlands, Santa Claus and his reindeer flying across the skies over Finland, a robbery in front of the Chrysler Building in New York, Adele performing an outdoor concert in England, people sunbathing on the rocks in Cinque Terre, Italy, and literally thousands of other iconic scenes across the world.

We were at Gulliver's Gate, an

amazing, high-tech mini world that officially opened in Times Square on May 9. The nearly 50,000-square-foot miniature model features locations and landmarks from around the world, built at the standard train-model scale of 1:87. There are 300 built-to-scale models, more than 100,000 little people, some 1,000 trains, more than 10,000 cars and trucks, plus planes, boats, ferries, and a host of interactive and moving elements. The creators have also included what they're calling hidden Easter eggs, tiny, wildly detailed scenes that are easy to miss if you're not looking closely (hint: a rooftop party, a desert caravan, the Beatles walking on Abbey Road, moose roaming the snowy Russian forests, zombies chasing tourists

in Egypt). If you look closely, there are hundreds of tiny scenes.

Gulliver's Gate is the brainchild of Eiran Gazit, an Israeli business consultant who oversaw the creation of Jerusalem's 14-acre Mini Israel, and has always been fascinated with miniature model building. For Gulliver's Gate, he enlisted the work of model builders and artists from around the world. Each country was built by artisans within the region. "I didn't want an American to build Beijing," Gazit says. "I wanted a local perspective." For example, a 16-person, model-building team from Brooklyn worked for nearly a year to design and build New York; a 15-person team in Buenos Aires completed the Latin American scenes in two months. Different

methods were also used; some models were hand-carved, others were built using state-of-the-art 3D printing.

We'd heard some buzz about the attraction and decided to head to the city for a look (it was open to the public for pre-opening viewing through May 8). We booked rooms at the Dream Midtown Hotel (216 W 44th St., 212-247-2000, www.dreamhotels.com/midtown), within easy walking distance to Times Square. We like the small, boutique-style scale and the contemporary vibe of the property — a little edgy without going overboard (the newly-renovated lobby has a two-story aquarium and small sitting area, plus free Wi-Fi throughout). Rooms are small but well-appointed, with deep, soft beds and stylish baths — a

little overnight cocoon in the bustle of Midtown. That evening, at the hotel's rooftop bar, we met a couple from Australia who had visited Gulliver's Gate earlier in the day. "Absolutely fascinating," the woman said. "The level of detail and craftsmanship is amazing. We may go again because I know we missed a lot of the elements."

The next morning, we checked it out. The exhibit, which stretches a full city block, begins with Manhattan. There's the Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center, the Chrysler Building, Grand Central Station, the Staten Island ferry. What fascinated us most were the New York moments found throughout: graffiti on the walls, a crew filming a movie, an accident on the street with flashing police cars and ambulances, a homeless person sleeping on cardboard, a woman who has just dropped her bag on the subway tracks, a lady feeding the pigeons, police officers checking out a suspicious package. Push a button or insert a key and trains move, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade begins, and trapeze artists somersault in air at a West Side school for circus performers.

From New York, we moved through New England (seafood shacks, lighthouses, and ski slopes) into Europe and Great Britain. It was easy to recognize well-known monuments and sights, like the Edinburgh Castle, Stonehenge, Buckingham Palace, the Eiffel Tower, the Coliseum, St. Peter's Basilica. In Greece, we pushed a button to see a cloud light up (Zeus reigning down on Mount Olympus). Tiny people gathered in the Plaza San Marco in Venice, trains chugged along tracks, and when Adele began singing "Rolling in the Deep," concertgoers began to move to the music. The European continent was built in 154 days by 10 model builders in Rimini, Italy.

Latin America, which took 15 Buenos Aires model makers 58 days to create, was filled with water. We watched the Iguazu Falls in Argentina tumble down a mountainside, and the locks open on the Panama Canal as freighters moved through. Asia was green, leafy and serene; Russia was white, snowy, and glistening. In all, five continents are represented, and there are already plans to expand.

There's a behind-the-scenes element to the attraction, also, as visitors are invited into the glass-enclosed computer command center, where they can check out the controls and monitors and speak to some of the designers and model makers about their work.

But the coolest thing for us? Visitors can step into a 3-D body scanner, with more than 100 cameras, to make a mini 3-D replica of themselves. And then, you can put yourself anywhere in the world, to live on as a "model citizen" forever — or at least as long as Gulliver's Gate is open.

GULLIVER'S GATE 216 W. 44th St., www.gulliversgate.com; adults \$36, ages 3-12 \$27, buy online and save \$5.

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HERE

NEW AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL SITES

Celebrate the lives of historic and new populations of Africans in Vermont on the African American Heritage Trail. Visitors can tour museums and cultural sites where exhibits, films, tours, and personal stories illuminate the history of slavery and freedom in the state, including documentation of Vermont's Underground Railroad. Two new sites have been added this year: The 148-acre Clemmons Family Farm near Lake Champlain, one of the oldest and largest African-American-owned farms in Vermont, includes six historic farm buildings, and serves as an African American heritage and multicultural center; and the Buffalo Soldiers Historic Markers that commemorate one of the first peacetime all-black regiments established in the regular US Army after the Civil War. A downloadable map provides addresses, links, and useful info about 22 historic destinations. www.vermontvacation.com/africanamericanheritagetrail

TAKE A HIKE IN THE BERKSHIRES

Heading to the Berkshires? Two summer packages, offered by the Red Lion Inn and the Porches Inn at MASS MoCA, encourage visitors to hike in the bucolic landscape of western Massachusetts. The Take a Hike package includes choice of accommodations and a special Berkshire backpack loaded with locally produced goodies, including an autographed copy of "50 Hikes in the Berkshire Hills," a container of Berkshire-made Mighty No Bitey insect repellent, a bottle of regional Just Water, a Berkshires' own Matt's Cookie Bar and — to keep you healthy — an apple. Available through Nov. 18. Rates from \$209 at the Porches Inn at MASS MoCA. 413-664-0400, www.porches.com. Rates from \$276 at The Red Lion Inn. 413-298-5545, www.redlioninn.com.

THERE

NEW HOTEL AND SHELLFISH FEST IN PEI Oysters! Mussels! Music! The port city of Charlottetown on



Prince Edward Island is gearing up for its annual International Shellfish Festival, a four-day extravaganza filled with culinary delights and rocking live entertainment. (Sept. 14-17). Highlights include cooking demonstrations, a big band party, Matt's Clamato best Caesar cocktail contest, Tie-One-On mussel industry competition, chowder championships, oyster shucking competitions, and more. Day pass: \$15; weekend pass \$33. peishellfish.com.

While enjoying a plethora of shellfish, stay in the historic district at the newly opened Sydney Boutique Inn & Suites. Located in the former 1857 Notre Dame Academy, the property combines historic elegance with modern conveniences and amenities in its 18 suites. Rates from \$199 includes breakfast, parking, and Wi-Fi. 1-855-372-0888, sydneyinn.com.

TRAVEL LIKE A LOCAL IN NYC

You've seen the Empire State Building and the lights of Broadway. Now what? Those looking for affordable and off-the-grid experiences in the Big Apple may want to check out LOCALIKE New York, an innovative online service that curates customized tips on where to go and what to do away from traditional tourist areas. The user-friendly service gathers information based from your preferences via an online profile (complete with 40-plus categories) that generates unique suggestions based on local insider-tips and recommendations. For example, dine at an exclusive Japanese restaurant that doesn't publish its phone

number, or find a neighborhood jazz bar tucked in the basement of an Italian restaurant. Choose one of two options: NEW YORK SELECTION (\$49) features tips with addresses, subway connections and maps; NEW YORK PERSONAL (\$79) includes a detailed itinerary based on your travel profile. www.localike-newyork.com.

EVERYWHERE

SNAZZY NEW UNIVERSAL ADAPTER

International travelers will love this handy-dandy 5-in-1 Universal Travel Adapter and USB port. Looking much like a interlocking Legos, this brightly colored system features four different adapters and a cube with two USB ports. The plugs fit outlets in more than 150 countries, meaning you'll always be able to connect your essential devices including tablets, phones and even DSLR camera. Electronics need to be rated 100-125 or 220-250 volts because the adapters do not convert power. \$35. www.flight001.com/trending-

now/100-new-arrivals/f1-5-in-1-universal-travel-adapter-usb.html

COMBO BACKUP DEVICE AND CHARGER CABLE

Let's say you are in Timbuktu, or Machu Picchu, or Rome, and your smart phone is lost, stolen or damaged. And

let's say that during your travels you neglected to back up your personal information. What to do? Now you can protect your data with MEEM, a phone charger cable that automatically backs up the personal data on your phone to the cable itself every time you charge your iOS or Android smartphones and tablets. And since phones are usually charged at least once a day, your personal information is always saved with no third party access to your info. Users create a personal PIN, so data is safe on the cable. Once you activate your replacement device, MEEM transfers all your photos, videos, calendar, and contacts in one simple step. From \$59.99. www.meememory.com NEECE REGIS