

The New Haven Register (nhregister.com), Serving New Haven, CT

Life

50 absolutely enjoyable things worth doing or revisiting in Greater New Haven

Saturday, December 11, 2010

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Far be it from us to tell you what to do.

You want to raise chinchillas at home and learn Sanskrit? Excellent. Got a hankering for chocolate-covered cicadas and collecting antique lunchboxes? Go for it.

But really, there are some things we simply must insist that you do. Fifty things, actually.

They're fun, informative and diverse. A few are healthy activities, while others are quite decadent. All of them are part of the fabric of Greater New Haven.

With the calendar winding down and folks giving thought to the year ahead, it might not be a bad idea to include a few of the following on your 2011 to-do list.

1. Have some New Haven-style pizza.

You can't start on an empty stomach, right? It's imperative that anyone who plans to spend more than a couple of minutes living in this area experience the culinary wonder of thin-crust, local pizza. Either try one of the big names (Pepe's, Sally's, Modern) or visit an equally fine pizzeria farther afield (Roseland, Tolli's, Ernie's, Marco's, Grand Apizza, etc.)

2. Hike to the castle at Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden.

The main trail is wide and gentle enough to give you a decent workout without overtaxing your out-of-shape leg muscles. Plus, you see trees, rocks and a refreshing view from the castle's upper level.

3. Spend an evening at the theater.

People wax nostalgic about the heyday of New Haven theater, going back 100 years, yet today's offerings shouldn't be taken lightly. Long Wharf, Yale Rep and the Shubert, as well as the Yale Cabaret, Ivoryton Playhouse, Goodspeed and local theater groups such as The Elm Shakespeare Company put on a wide range of productions every year. Not only do you get to see a show; you also get to read the mini-bios in the program to see how many of the actors have appeared in TV's "Law & Order."

4. Grab a burger at Louis' Lunch.

It's pretty much a requirement for local residency. Enjoy a hamburger with tomato, Cheez Whiz and onions, soak in the banter and thank us later. Do NOT, repeat, do NOT, ask for ketchup.

5. Take a Thimble Islands cruise off the Branford shore.

Right off the coast of Branford's Stony Creek section, hundreds of curious little islands and rocks poke up from the water. Some have interesting stories to tell. You have Horse Island, which allegedly got its name from a horse that got free from a sinking boat and swam to safety; Bear Island, from which stone was quarried to build several Connecticut bridges; and Money Island, where many families still keep summer cottages.

6. See a football game at Yale Bowl.

This is really a two-part suggestion. First, you want to tailgate in one of the nearby parking lots, leaving ample time to walk among the assorted alums, students and interlopers all around you. THEN enter Yale's football shrine and revel in the size and scope of it.

7. Stroll the boardwalk in West Haven.

On warm evenings, it can seem as if everyone in the city is somewhere along this stretch. They're walking over from Chick's drive-in; they're fishing off one of the piers; they're playing bocce; they're listening to a summer concert — they're squeezing every ounce of fun possible out of their slice of shoreline.

8. Take in the view from the summits of East and West Rock.

You've got to do this. Jog, bike or drive up and see the City of Elms from up on high.

9. Have a lobster roll.

A local summer favorite, the preferred style of presentation is as follows: big chunks of lahb-stah in a toasted bun, slathered with butter. No mayo, please. For further research, visit Stowe's in West Haven, Lenny & Joe's Fish Tale in Madison, et. al.

10. Experience the New Haven Labor Day Road Race.

The 20K race is a foot tour of the city's neighborhoods and parks, while the 5K and Fun Run are spirited sprints around downtown. Even if you don't run, it's still a sight to see: thousands of oddly dressed people propelling themselves across a distance, simply for the pleasure of doing it. The start and finish on the Green are particularly thrilling to watch, but it's those middle miles of the race where you see individuals wrestling with their own resolve.

11. Tour Yale University.

Whether you just moved to New Haven or have lived here all your life, it's a good idea to know the basics about the city's biggest employer, biggest landlord and biggest cultural asset. Guided, 90-minute tours leave from 149 Elm St. Monday through Friday at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 1:30 p.m. There are no tours from Dec. 23 through Jan. 1.

12. Sample the cultural fare at the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

The sheer number of artists, experts and academics this festival brings to New Haven each June is stunning. We've had open-air opera, ground-breaking cinema, thought-provoking poetry and pointed discussion of current events — all at our

doorstep.

13. Canoe or kayak a local waterway.

Every city and town in the area has its paddling devotees. They make their way along the Mill River in New Haven, meander around coastal marshes and see the sights from the Quinnipiac River. You should, too.

14. Attend a concert on the New Haven Green.

Bring chairs, bring supper and bring friends. In recent years, the Green has hosted cool jazz, frisky funk, sublime classical and energetic blues. And guaranteed, as you look around you'll spot old friends you haven't seen in months.

15. Pick apples in early autumn.

The area is flush with apple orchards, and people flock to them in September to pluck Galas and Empires right off the tree. Some of the popular local spots include Lyman Orchards in Middlefield, Rose Orchards in North Branford and Bishop's Orchard in Guilford.

16. Ride the Essex Steam Train.

Just try not to be charmed by the sight, sounds and even smell of the old-fashioned locomotives here, which draw huge weekend crowds when the weather is nice.

17. See the dinosaurs at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History.

Local parents understand full well the drawing power of the Peabody's apatosaurus skeleton and reconstructed stegosaurus, camarasaurus and camptosaurus skeletons in the Great Hall of Dinosaurs. Looking down on it all is Rudolph Zallinger's Pulitzer-winning, 110-foot long mural, "The Age of Reptiles."

18. Explore Edgerton Park.

Behind the walls of this former estate, near the New Haven-Hamden border, are 22 acres of serenity. There are greenhouses, gardens, an old carriage house, a fountain, benches and a bridge to enjoy.

19. Sit on the patio at Amarante's Sea Cliff Inn at the end of summer.

It's a little slice of heaven, here on the waterfront in New Haven's Morris Cove. Amarante's offers food, drinks and music on the deck on weeknights, starting in late June and going through September.

20. Browse around Whitlock's Book Barn in Bethany.

The Whitlock brothers are no longer with us, but those two red barns out on Sperry Road, in bucolic Bethany, are still full of books. They have everything from genealogies to joke books, and they're just the place to pass a quiet afternoon. The Book Barn is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesdays to Sundays.

21. Watch some professional tennis.

The players and sponsors may change, but it's always exciting to sit in the Connecticut Tennis Center and witness world-class hardcourt action. Between sets, you can study the program and work on your player-name pronunciation.

22. Hear the New Haven Symphony Orchestra.

Year in and year out, local audiences file into Woolsey Hall and are treated to carefully crafted programs of famous masterworks and overlooked gems. The orchestra began its 117th season — no small accomplishment — in September.

23. Ride the carousel at Lighthouse Point Park.

A host of summer beach visitors, not to mention wedding reception attendees, have been entranced by the Lighthouse Point Park Carousel in New Haven. It was built in 1911, featuring hand-carved, wooden horses and a pipe organ.

24. Traverse the Farmington Canal Linear Trail.

This former transportation corridor is now home to a small army of cyclists, runners, inline skaters, stroller pushers, dog walkers and skateboarders. The trail goes through New Haven, Hamden and Cheshire for now, with visions of someday connecting to Massachusetts.

25. Gaze at the stars at Yale's Leitner Observatory and Planetarium.

Up on Prospect Street, the observatory (with two permanently mounted telescopes) and planetarium offer lectures and viewing opportunities to the public. To find out about upcoming events, visit <http://fop.astro.yale.edu/> and don't forget to bring your sense of wonder.

26. Skate on a frozen pond.

No Zamboni machines here. Local favorites such as Wright's Pond in Orange, Sochrin's Pond in Seymour and Mill Pond in Guilford are perfect for ice-cold adventures.

27. See the cherry blossoms in Wooster Square.

Every spring, the Yoshino cherry trees planted in 1974 burst forth in a dazzling natural display. It's an amazing sight. They even have a festival in April to celebrate the blooms.

28. Stand aboard the Amistad.

The freedom schooner Amistad, replica of the ship at the center of the famous 19th-century civil rights case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, calls New Haven home when it's not sailing around the world.

29. Visit the art galleries at Yale.

Steps from the Green on Chapel Street, a wealth of beauty awaits. On one side of the road, the Yale Art Gallery has everything from Winslow Homer paintings and all the American decorative art you can imagine, to African ceramics and Mayan figurines. Across the street, at the Yale Center for British Art, you can marvel at works by William Hogarth, Henry Moore, Stanley Spencer, Thomas Gainsborough and dozens of others.

30. Walk down to the duck pond at Edgewood Park.

This stretch of urban park land almost seems like a hidden world, set down below the hurried concerns of the rest of New Haven.

31. Watch a high school football game in the Valley.

No disrespect to pigskin fans in other towns, but people in the Valley really do love their high school football. The Ansonia Chargers, Derby Red Raiders, Naugatuck Greyhounds — they all have devoted followers who make each home game an event.

32. Peer at the translucent marble slabs inside the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale.

It's a light show like no other. The coolest part is that it always changes, depending on the time of day, time of year and quality of light.

33. Take advantage of Restaurant Week in New Haven.

We're all on a budget these days, right? Here's a chance to sample first-class cuisine at an affordable price — particularly the lunch specials. Other local cities have started their own restaurant weeks, too.

34. Attend a local fair or festival.

We've got more of these than you can shake a corn-dog at: the North Haven Fair, the Milford Oyster Festival, the Durham Fair, the Savin Rock Festival in West Haven, the Guilford Fair ...

35. Take in Movies & Mimosas at the Criterion Cinema on Temple Street.

On Saturday and Sunday mornings, New Haven's downtown movie theater shows a classic film and sells mimosas in the lobby. Today's film is "It's a Wonderful Life," at 11:30 a.m.

36. Tour Grove Street Cemetery.

Pass through the iconic Egyptian Revival gate and commune with the city's past. This well-tended spot is the final resting place for luminaries such as Eli Whitney, Noah Webster and Roger Sherman.

37. Ride at an Elm City Cycling event.

New Haven's cycling community is active and growing, as evidenced by the variety of rides organized by Elm City Cycling. From "ice cream rides" to the New Haven Century ride, there are bicycle jaunts to fit all skill levels.

38. Listen to the Yale Philharmonia.

A free, Friday evening concert by the Yale Philharmonia is a beautiful thing. This orchestra is the largest performing group within the Yale School of Music.

39. Marvel at Boothe Memorial Park & Museum in Stratford.

The late, great Boothe brothers, David and Stephen, created a wonderland of quirky collections on their 32-acre estate. Come for the antique clock tower and stay for the basilica, rose garden, lighthouse, windmill and miniature models of presidential houses.

40. Take a class at Hamden's Eli Whitney Museum.

You will believe in the power of toy boats, model trains and tiny pieces of wood. Kids of all ages have made the museum

an oasis of creativity for decades.

41. Be part of a Chapel on the Green outdoor worship service.

Begun in 2008, Chapel on the Green meets at 2 p.m. on New Haven's Upper Green, behind Trinity Church. After worship, those who are gathered there give out bag lunches to people in need. For more information, call (203) 777-2197 or visit Chapel on the Green's Facebook page.

42. Visit the Shore Line Trolley Museum in East Haven.

The only thing more fun than sitting back in a rattan seat and riding in one of the museum's vintage trolley cars is seeing the dedication and enthusiasm of museum volunteers in action.

43. See a hockey game at Ingalls Rink.

The top-ranked Yale hockey team should be enough reason, but there's also the chance to take stock of the rink's multimillion dollar upgrade. Architect Eero Saarinen would be proud.

44. Hear a local band.

Toad's Place, of course, is a famous New Haven concert spot. There's also Cafe Nine, Rudy's, The Space and others. Thanks to an abundance of local musical talent, everything from rock and blues to jazz and rap are part of the mix.

45. Bring a little kid to the Connecticut Children's Museum in New Haven.

Open to the public on Fridays and Saturdays, the museum's themed rooms include a full-scale re-creation of The Great Green Room from "Goodnight Moon." That's right, parents.

46. Eat at Mory's.

Now that the storied Yale dining club has relaxed its rules to include more local members, you have no excuse not to partake of the "tables down at Mory's."

47. Serve a meal to people in need.

Nourish your soul as you help others. You'll find opportunities at New Haven's Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, Community Soup Kitchen and Columbus House, for starters.

48. Stop in at the Knights of Columbus Museum.

Among the permanent exhibits here are galleries devoted to Christopher Columbus, the Vatican and Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus. There's a holiday creche exhibit, "Christmas in Asia," there now, too.

49. Listen to Woolsey Hall's pipe organ and Harkness Tower's carillon.

Officially, that's the Newberry Memorial Organ and the Yale Memorial Carillon.

50. Get thee to Judges' Cave.

On your way up to the top of West Rock, don't forget to take a gander at the rock formation named for the British

regicide judges who fled to New Haven after signing the death warrant for King Charles I. Two of the famous "Three Judges" hid here in 1661.

Call Jim Shelton at (203) 789-5664.

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