

New England Travel

RHODE ISLAND



Above: the ice rink at Alex and Ani City Center.

Left: Providence Children's Museum.



Left: A rink penguin-shaped skating aid.

Right: Roger Williams Zoo otter.



KYLE AUCLAIR (TOP, MIDDLE) AND MISSY WADE (BOTTOM RIGHT)

A PLAYDATE IN PROVIDENCE

BY JACI CONRY | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

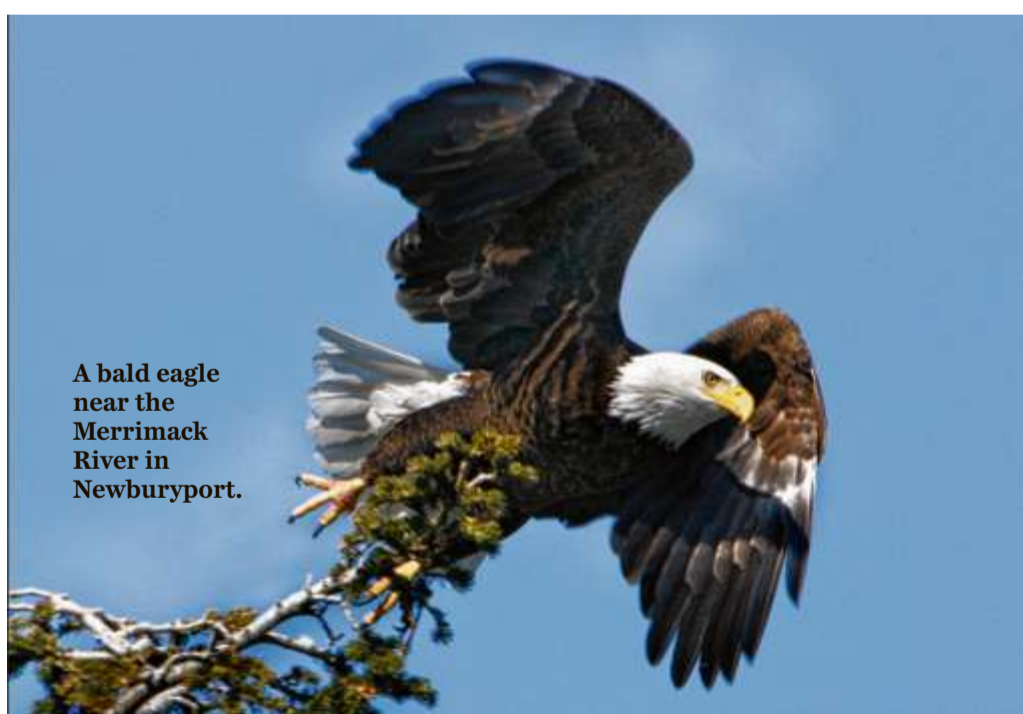
When I went to Providence College in the mid 1990s, Providence was very different than it is today. The city had no luster, and we didn't venture downtown often — particularly after dark. Instead, my friends and I spent our time on Eaton Street and the half-dozen other streets bordering campus, frequenting the neighborhood bars and each other's ramshackle houses. If the city had all the appeal that it does now, I'm certain we would have pushed beyond campus limits to explore more. Since Providence's "renaissance" I've been back a few times to

meet up with my old friends. It's evolved into a fantastic city brimming with culture, history, and all that good food. I'd never considered it a family destination until last year, over the December holiday break, when my husband and I brought our kids for a mini-excursion. Before we left, I wasn't sure there'd be enough to keep us busy for the two days we were there. Yet I soon realized Providence has plenty to occupy and interest young travelers. If you're looking for a mini-getaway during February vacation, consider a trip to the city.

We opted to stay at the **Omni Providence Hotel** (1 West Exchange St., 401-598-800, www.omnihotels.com) for its central location. It's connected to the Dunkin Donuts Center (where the

Providence College basketball team plays) and the **Providence Place Mall**, which is a shoppers dream with multiple dining options — including a food court — as well as a large movie theater.

A recent multimillion dollar renovation has significantly spruced up the Omni, making it appealing for travelers looking for a high-quality experience; at the same time, it's very kid-friendly. The indoor pool delighted my 4- and 6-year-olds, and my husband and I loved that we could enjoy a delicious Italian meal while the kids ate their standard order of macaroni and cheese at **Centro** (401-228-6802; www.omnihotels.com/hotels/providence/dining/centro-restaurant/), one of the hotel's three eateries. **Fleming's** **PROVIDENCE, Page M7**



A bald eagle near the Merrimack River in Newburyport.

BILL MCADAMS

For bald eagles, it's homecoming weekend

By Laurie Wilson
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The bald eagle, America's national bird, is especially striking to see in its natural habitat — which, in midwinter, just so happens to be north of Boston.

The 10th annual Mass Audubon's Merrimack River Eagle Festival, sponsored by Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center and the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, takes flight in Newburyport on Feb. 18. The daylong event is eagle-centric with indoor and outdoor activities and guided eagle tours,

and is appealing to those with little bird watching experience, as well as experienced birders.

"Joppa Flats Education Center is one of 20 staffed centers or sanctuaries of Mass Audubon," says David Moon, sanctuary director at Joppa Flats Education Center. "We specialize in adult programming centered on bird watching, as we are in the best place in the state to see birds."

New this year, the festival will include a photography-focused van tour, led by instruc-

EAGLES, Page M7

CHECK-IN

P-town B&B elevates the put-on to an art form

By Julie Hatfield
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PROVINCETOWN — At first glance, the Eben House B&B at 90 Bradford St., looks a little stuffy, with its expensive antique highboy greeting you in the foyer and its 18th century family portraits hanging pretentiously throughout the lobby. One of just three stately brick homes left in town from the Colonial era, built in 1776 by wealthy seafarer Captain Eben Snow, this house seemingly could put you to sleep before you turn in.

Take a second look,

Spoofy portraits at Eben House

though, at those portraits and you might think they're winking back at you. If you concentrate on Captain Snow himself, for example, you'll see that he seems to have excessively long eyelashes. Fake ones, for sure. And, he's wearing a diamond drop earring.

The presumed Mrs. Snow, in a Victorian-like prim white collar and Puritanical black dress, has an empty flask in her hand.

One of the other Snow

women, dressed nunlike as her sister-in-law, is clutching an open copy of the "Kama Sutra." A male Snow cousin, with an impressive military jacket and hat, is revealed below his waist to be wearing a pair of ruffly white underpants and a garter belt. A prudish Snow aunt has huge tattoos peeking out from under her sleeve.

Turns out that Eben's married owners David Bowd and Kevin O'Shea, who also own Salt B&B a few blocks away, got the naughty idea into their heads to commission P-town

EBEN HOUSE, Page M7



Several portraits of members of the fictional Snow family at the Eben House.

She can be a kid again in Providence

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Prime Steakhouse and Wine Bar is slightly more upscale; **Morsels** offers pastries, sandwiches, and delicious brewed coffee.

A short walk from the hotel, our young ice skaters were captivated by **Alex and Ani City Center** (2 Kennedy Plaza, 401-331-5544; www.alexandani.citycenter.com), an outdoor ice rink double the size of the arena at Rockefeller Center and far less crowded. Skate and helmet rentals are available, along with “Penguins” that serve as skate aids for kids learning to skate (kids hang on to the penguin ears for support as they amble across the ice). There’s an on site snack bar and plenty of places to sit and take a break.

Just beyond city limits and sprawled on more than 40 acres is the **Roger Williams Park Zoo** (1000 Elmwood Ave., 401-785-3510; www.rwp.zoo.org), one of the oldest zoos in the country. “People don’t tend to think about going to the zoo during the winter,” says Diane Nahabedian, the park’s director of marketing and communications. “But there is a lot to see here in February and March.” You’ll want to bundle up for the outdoor trek, but it’s well worth it. The zoo has Masai giraffes, zebras, and African elephants, kangaroos and wallabies, along with red pandas and camels. During the winter, North American River otters and snow leopards are particularly fun to watch, says Nahabedian, as the species thrive in cold habitats. If you need to warm up, there are more exhibits inside including the flamingos and sloths; there’s also an indoor activity space.

With kids along for the trip, the **Providence Children’s Museum** (100 South St., 401-273-5437; www.childrenmuseum.org) is a must-do. Sprawled on two levels, the place has multiple rooms with abundant opportunities for hands-on learning. There’s a designated water area where kids can explore ice, mist, and swirling ways of water. There’s a life-size Lite Brite that captivated me for its nostalgia — though my kids

The eighth Providence Children’s Film Festival, with the theme “Explore New Worlds,” will be held throughout the city Feb. 17-26.

weren’t nearly as enthralled, perhaps because there were so many other aspects to explore. Older children will enjoy learning about Rhode Island history and space discoveries; there are also areas devoted to nature and craft projects. If it’s not too cold, the outdoor garden and playground has a climbing maze that’s a great way for kids to burn off some energy. During school vacation week there will be special events. On Feb. 20, for example, children’s singer and storyteller Keith Munslow will present an entertaining family performance full of music, tongue-twisting poems, and silly rhymes.

This year marks the eighth year for the **Providence Children’s Film Festival**, which will be held throughout the city Feb. 17-26. With the theme “Explore New Worlds,” the festival will feature 14 feature-length and more than 75 short films created by filmmakers from around the world including a film classic, live action, documentaries, and animations that are geared to families with children as young as 4. “Films are selected for their compelling stories with a global perspective that challenge young audiences to better understand the world,” says festival executive director Anisa Raouf. “We try to find films that will encourage kids to think and to inspire conversations about the themes reflected onscreen.” Films will be held at various locations around the city, including Avon Cinema on Thayer Street and the RISD Auditorium on North Main Street. Check out the website (www.providencechildrensfilmmfestival.org) for a full schedule of films and descriptions.

On our way out town, we stopped for lunch on Federal Hill at **Caserta Pizza** (121 Spruce St., 401-621-3618; www.casertapizza.com), one of the few haunts that could lure me off campus during my college days. While it had been nearly 20 years since I’d been back for the joint’s signature traditional Italian-style pizza, I was glad to see the place hadn’t changed. The black-and-white tile floor, utilitarian decor, and friendly counter service was just as I remembered it. My children deemed the thin crust pepperoni pizza the best they’d ever tasted.

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PROVIDENCE CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL

Fun hidden in plain sight

► **EBEN HOUSE**
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artist Michael Gredler to create the fictional Snow family and give each of them a little playful Provincetown touch.

Copies of the ancestral portraits are in each of the 14 rooms of the inn. It wouldn’t be a surprise, if a guest wanted to purchase one of these

unique art works, that the owners would let it go out of the house.

Eben House, opened in 2015, is open for weekends year-round, with rates starting at \$195 per night. www.salt-hotels.com.

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LARK HOTELS

A treat for eagle-eyed birders

► **EAGLES**
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tor Rick Berk of Hunt’s Photo & Video. Berk will “help folks with in-field photo tips while we lead them to the local wildlife,” says Melissa Vokey, development director and administrative manager at Joppa Flats Education Center. Also new to the festival this year: Raptor demos will be led by Mary-Beth Kaeser of Horizon Wings, a nonprofit wildlife rehabilitation center located in Ashford, Conn.

Eagles typically migrate to the Newburyport area by February, says Vokey, and the area is already home to two pairs of year-round nesting eagles. Eagle viewing sites will be on both the Newburyport and the Amesbury sides of the Merrimack River, with Lowell’s Boat Shop operating as the festival’s Amesbury headquarters.

“Eagles don’t care much about snow, but they do care about a source of food, and since they’re big fish eaters, they need open water,” says Vokey. “In February, they usually like to hang out here around the lower Merrimack, because when other local waters freeze up, the Merrimack River stays open around the Chain Bridge. I don’t think there’s been one Eagle Fest when we haven’t had an eagle or two floating by Joppa Flats on an ice floe around 4 p.m. I have no idea how that happens!”

Although bald eagles are the sought-out celebrities, the festival isn’t all about eagles. “It’s a great time for buffleheads, and mergansers, and other really charming waterfowl,” says Vokey. “The ooh-ah factor is definitely there!”

The festival is family-friendly — not only are there activities geared toward families, but



DAVE LARSON

the festival is held on President’s Day Weekend, and kicking off vacation week for many school kids.

“Kids love bird demonstrations, and we’ve got them for all ages,” says Vokey. For kids 6 and younger, the demonstrations at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge headquarters, as well as at Joppa Flats Education Center, are held in intimate-size rooms and offer flexibility — you can drop in for a short while or stay as long as you like. The demonstrations that are held at Newburyport City Hall, on the other hand, are for large audiences and last about an hour. “You need to be able to sit still, have patience, so we recommend them for ages 6 and up,” says Vokey.

For more information about the festival, visit www.massaudubon.org/joppaflats

If you go ...

Here are some convenient spots to grab a good meal, and suggestions for where to spend

Looking for bald eagles along the banks of the Merrimack River. Top: Blue, Inn on the Beach in Newburyport.

chowder and a burger. www.blackcowrestaurants.com

The Grog: This Newburyport tavern and restaurant (sandwiches, salads, pasta, and seafood) is on the radar every year during the festival. There are also live local and regional bands at night. www.thegrog.com

Plum Island Beachcoma: Locals love this beachy restaurant thanks to its casual menu (burgers, pizza, salads), neighborhood vibe and, for festival-goers, it’s walkable to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge as well as the Atlantic Ocean for a beach stroll. www.pibeachcoma.com

Plum Island Provisions: A seashell toss to the beach and walkable to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge — if you want seafood boxes (scallops, clams), hot and cold subs, and creative pizza pies, you can get them here to go. www.plumislandprovisions.com

Blue, Inn on the Beach You’ll have the best of both worlds at hip, beachfront Blue. Many of the inn’s striking suites and guestrooms have stunning ocean views, and Blue is also within walking distance of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. www.blueinn.com

Essex Street Inn and Suites This unpretentious, historic, 37-room inn is located in downtown Newburyport, a quick drive to all the eagle action. www.essexstreetinn.com

Laurie Wilson can be reached at laurieheather@yahoo.com.

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