A river runs through the foliage



American River Canyon on Oct. 17, 2009.Â Â Â Â Photo/Kathryn Reed

New England might be home to the most famous swath of fall foliage in the United States, but it isn’t the only place to see nature’s palette.

The American River Canyon (Highway 50 between Echo Summit and Pollock Pines) is rich with color right now. Various shades of yellow – ranging from golden to pale are visible. The red spectrum goes from pink to fire engine red. Orange and green fill the gaps.

With the river at a rather subdued state, at times it appears perfectly still – offering reflections of the foliage. A few rapids exist, just a reminder of the velocity of this river in the spring and early summer when whitewater kayakers ply the waters.

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Dog training in SLT

Brilliant Buddy Level 2 taught by Dale Rands, ABCDT.

The group dog training is to provide focus, safety and obedience using positive reinforcement methods, while promoting humane treatment every step of the way.

Classes are in the gym at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center, 1180 Rufus Allen Blvd., South Tahoe.

For more details and enrollment, contact Dawn or Liz at (530) 542.2857 or Dale at (775) 828. 0748 or email Dale at sunny-sierra@msm.com.

Dog training in SLT

Adolescent 101 taught by Dale Rands, ABCDT.

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Dog training in SLT

Puppy Kindergarten taught by Dale Rands, ABCDT.

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Immersion in the SF arts scene



The Academy of Sciences roof. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

SAN FRANCISCO – Lake Tahoe could learn as much about tourism from San Francisco as the Western world could from the Egyptians about preserving ancient treasurers.

That's what I surmised from a recent trip to San Francisco. So often it's the arts that get me to The City.

Arts are precisely what The City's tourism officials are banking on in these challenging economic times.

From the San Francisco Symphony to the de Young Museum's 30-year return of King Tut to the one-year anniversary of the California Academy of Sciences to the annual Fat Tire Bike Festival, the storied city's culture or counterculture as in the case of the latter, boasts the draw of a varied audience seeking a big bang-for-the-buck travel experience.

For tourism officials in The City by the Bay, there's a reason they call the experience "only in San Francisco."

"Events are the big attractions. This is so much a part of what San Francisco is," said San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau spokeswoman Laurie Armstrong, who once lived and worked in South Lake Tahoe.

Sure, times have been tough – especially in terms of hotel occupancy, which stood at 84.2 percent in July compared to 88.8 percent a year ago at that time. Moreover, hotels' average daily rate has plummeted from $252 to $188 to keep the visitors coming.

"Tourism overall has been a mixed bag in San Francisco," Armstrong said.

Armstrong noted how visitors expect a certain, multi-faceted experience from San Francisco. For one thing, almost all events have green standards. Recycling is part of everything – including bins saying "landfill" so people get a clear idea of

what is and isn’t reused. The third year of the Fat Tire Bike Festival in Golden Gate Park brought out a slew of recycling bins, while also touting the benefit of human power to save the planet.

Another example of event creativity, AT&T Park – home of the San Francisco Giants – has hosted a live telecast of the San Francisco Opera.

“It’s something to see the place full – 40,000 people looking at the (AT&T Park) jumbotron appreciating the opera,” Armstrong said.

San Francisco is so serious about the arts that the Convention and Visitors Bureau employs a director of arts and culture. Geraldine O’Brien said she’s noticed the arts remain strong in visitation in a troubling national economy. Like hotel bookings, these visitors tend to make reservations more at the last-minute. When a household budget remains in flux, it’s difficult to know whether the trip to the grocery store will cut out entertainment for the week.

O’Brien added how more than half of the city’s visitors come from outside the area. Many are seeking an experience one can’t get on Main Street USA.

“This summer museums have done remarkably well,” O’Brien said.

The Asian Museum has absorbed days of record-breaking visitors. The California Academy of Sciences’ unique experience has brought out 2.3 million people to take in its journey into the planet’s origin and sustainability along with an up-close-and-personal view of wildlife and its varied habitats.

Preserving ancient culture

The de Young Museum in Golden Gate Park has enjoyed a summer and fall filled with visitors day after day witnessing the

unearthing and display of artifacts of Egypt's boy-king pharaoh King Tutankhamun. It's been 30 years since the ancient treasures have graced the museum, introducing the young and old to his mystery.

But unlike the display in the 1970s, the famous mask was not part of this tour.

At age 9 in 1332 B.C., King Tut took control of the valley of the Nile River, the longest in the world. He died 10 years later after inheriting a country in disarray. For a perspective of the Egyptians' tenure, the ancient pyramids were already 1,000 years old.

The Egyptian culture used tombs as a mini universe for the deceased, prompting some visiting the museum to question whether British archaeologist Howard Carter should have taken the 16 deep steps to exhume the boy king's 5,000 treasures from a remote tomb grave. But many museum visitors were in awe of the variety of artifacts, ranging from sharp daggers and a game board the boy played called "Senet" to a decorated chest and 150 pieces of jewelry.

"Everywhere was the glint of gold," a display dictated the words from Carter.

Also on display within the exhibit is a collection of photographs from Harry Burton who followed Carter on the Tut expedition.

The King Tut exhibit is at the de Young through March 28. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster. Reservations are highly recommended.

Academy of Sciences

The California Academy of Sciences celebrated its first anniversary in Golden Gate Park Sept. 26-27 with a test in internal operations. A fire alarm sent scores of visitors out

in the park plaza and staff on high alert. After distributing vouchers for Ben & Jerry's ice cream for the inconvenience on an unseasonably hot day in The City, visitors didn't miss a beat. They stuck around for more than 90 minutes in the heat before being able to return to the fun and air conditioning.

A live display put on by the Wild Cat Education and Conservation Fund of Sonoma County introduced many of the fascinated children and big kids to a sampling of the 22-acre center's 20 species.

"Ooooh, ahhhh," kept being repeated as host Barbara Dicely talked about how the rather small caracal African desert lynx can bring down a 100-pound antelope.

Much of the majestic new building's displays focus on habitat, whether it's the simulated rain forest, life outside the Milky Way or how climate change in the Sierra has a ripple effect through all of California.

One interactive display welcomes visitors to the carbon cafe to test how their lifestyle creates an emissions score.

To give back to the environment, attendees are urged to visit the 2.5-acre rooftop where a living roof is dotted with mini weather stations that contribute to the building's ventilation system. The roof measures rainfall, solar radiation, wind direction and speed as well as temperature and humidity levels.

Academy of Sciences staffer Rene Blanco said her biggest challenge is avoiding the bees, which albeit good news for scientists, have found safe haven in the self-healing flowerbed of 40 species surrounding the nervous naturalist.

From the bees to the birds, the academy's science and sustainability tent was also the setting for an up-close showing of a kestrel and great horned owl by bird handlers. The place became a children's paradise with wildlife and

interactive exercises in which they could grow their own plants.

Penguin feeding in the aquatic park of the African center captured more of the children's attention (and those turning 44 that weekend) – their eyes bugging out at watching the tuxedo-clad birds swimming and waddling in their designated space.

Throughout the building, people of all ages were transfixed by the reality of the displays.

For a true escape, the academy just launched the "Journey to the Stars" show in the world's largest digital planetarium. Warning: high-back chairs in the darkness may prompt a weary visitor to get a little too comfortable. But for those paying attention, Whoopi Goldberg narrates a remedial and easy-to-understand trip into space.

In the spring, the Academy will host an exhibit called Extreme Mammals highlighting various living and extinct species. For more on the attraction, visit www.caladademy.org. General admission is $25 and open 9:30am to 5pm Monday through Saturday and 11am to 5pm Sunday.

Timeless music

As a blues and jazz lover, the symphony isn't the first genre that turns the dial of my musical tastes – and much of that preference or lack thereof, is generated from a limited exposure and education. However, I must admit the San Francisco Symphony can make the hair stand on end when the angelic sounds emit in perfect harmony in a building constructed for such delicate artistry.

The acoustics at Davies Symphony Hall made me wishing for such a venue in Tahoe. The three tiers above the graduated floor level provide a great seat to all.

Plus, the compositions of Prague native Gustav Mahler in the hands of any music director other than Michael Tilson Thomas may have been lost in translation. Even under pressure of show-taping cameras on rails passing before him and his 100-plus accomplished musicians, Tilson Thomas provided a narrated introduction into the life of Mahler for the novices in the crowd.

The journey took the attentive listening audience into a yearnful romance that turned bittersweet.

Tilson Thomas brought baritone Thomas Hampson on stage for the more sentimental pieces.

The violin strings played in such harmony it was hard to imagine this instrument is the one that can make an entire household cringe when someone is learning it.

All along, I found my body and spirit sway with the kind of beauty I have experienced with romantic scores from “Out of Africa” or “Somewhere in Time.”

Prices for the 8pm symphony range from $15 to $125.

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based out of South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysue1@yahoo.com.

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Upscale vegetarian cuisine at Greens



The view from Greens Restaurant. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SAN FRANCISCO – Faced with the task of picking any restaurant I wanted to go in San Francisco for my birthday, I went with the one I knew would not disappoint – Greens.

Sept. 25 was the third time I had dined at this vegetarian wonder at Fort Mason, the old fortified military base first established by Spaniards.

What keeps me wanting to return to Greens is the incredible food that proves eating a vegetarian meal goes so far beyond a cardboard tasting burger, scary tofu dishes, bland and mushy vegetables, portabella mushrooms and pasta.

As a vegetarian, this is one of those rare moments where I have a difficult time deciding what to order. The only criticism I have of Greens is there isn't a sampler platter.

Early dinner reservations because of going to see the San Francisco Symphony that evening prove fortuitous. It means everyone with 5:30pm reservations gets a window seat.

Sailboats rock gently. Windsurfers jump the waves of the bay. Fog rolls in over the Golden Gate Bridge. Like a movie script, it dissipates as sunset arrives.

I have a hard time focusing on the menu as I notice a seal swimming below the window – adding that San Francisco touch.

But my stomach growls, saying, “Let’s get on with ordering.”

Leslie, the ever-so punctual waiter, brings almonds to start with. What a nice change. Scrumptious bread with organic butter follows.

Sue and I each have a cup of Moroccan Lentil Soup ($7.50).

“I would say this is one of the best soups I have ever had,” Sue says.

The seasonings were perfect – spicy, but not overpowering.

I order the Mascarpone Leek Risotto Cake with chanterelle mushrooms, sweet 100 and sungold cherry tomatoes, roasted Walla Walla onions, Savoy spinach, herb cream and grana padono. ($24)

It didn’t matter, and still doesn’t, that I don’t know what all that is.

I didn’t want to put my fork down, but at the same time I didn’t want to inhale my entree. I tried to pace myself by taking sips of the Sonoma Cuvee Russian River Valley Pinot Noir that complemented both of our meals.

I can’t do justice in describing this meal. Superlatives seem trivial. The nuance of flavors, the presentation, the marrying of flavors – it’s as though Executive Chef Annie Somerville created a concerto for the palate.

Sue and I traded a bite. Good thing we each liked what we had ordered because I really didn’t want to share.

She ordered the Provencal Eightball Squash with Japanese eggplant, peppers, roasted onions, asiago, pine nuts and basil; served with roasted tomato sauce, grilled fingerling

potatoes and torpedo onions on rosemary skewer, summer beans with shallots and pepper flakes. ($23)

She marveled at the sweetness of the sauce being balanced by the salt on the potatoes. She called the sauce killer.

“I think most people are afraid to order vegetarian because it’s boring and empty,” Sue said. Nothing was boring this night.

When Somerville came by the table I told her I wanted to order more items – not because I was hungry, but because everything sounded good.

She seemed a bit jealous that we live in South Lake Tahoe. The chef said she would love to take off from late August through October to be in the mountains. She likes being among the 10,000-foot peaks along Highway 395.

Maybe a lodging for food trade needs to be worked out.

I have two cookbooks written by Somerville. In 2004, I saw her demonstration during the annual Yosemite Chef’s Holidays at the Ahwahnee. She will be in Yosemite for the 2010 event during the last session, Feb. 3-4. Yosemite Chefs Holidays at the Ahwahnee is Jan. 10-Feb.4. It’s an event I highly recommend.

The meal wasn’t over. My sister, Jann, had prearranged to pay for my birthday dessert. Sue and I split the Roasted Pear with cardamom cream mille feuille and amaretto caramel. ($9) Next time I’ll order my own.

Greens is online at www.greensrestaurant.com or call (415) 771.6222.

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Health issues force Martin from STPUD race

Jimmy Martin has pulled out of the Nov. 3 race to be on the South Tahoe Public Utility District board.

On Thursday he said, â€œI have some health issues and some personal issues.â€

He was seeking Seat 1. Remaining in the race are incumbent Ernie Claudio, and challengers John Adamski and Chris Cefalu.

“I am supporting John Adamski because he use to work (at STPUD) when I did,” Martin said. “I believe he can do us a nice job.”

Ballots are printed and mailed, so it’s too late to remove Martin’s name.

Ready for another escape to Inn San Francisco



Inn San Francisco is a wonderful bed and breakfast. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SAN FRANCISCO – Feeling at home – it's not something most lodging establishments are able to pull off.

The Inn San Francisco made me feel like I was back living in San Francisco for three spectacular days and nights in September, instead of merely being a guest in the city I once called home.

This 1870s era Victorian is nestled in among other houses just like it. It's part of the original mansion row. In 1906, the four-day fire from the devastating earthquake burned to within 1.5 blocks of the South Van Ness property.

Marty Neely, who with his wife Connie Wu, own the bed and breakfast, is the consummate host, as opposed to a traditional innkeeper. Their dog Marshmallow adds to the homey feeling.

Neely gives arriving guests a tour of the 27-room establishment – so they know where the sherry is, that the hot tub never closes and that when the fog rolls out the views from the roof are stunning.

Arriving late that Thursday, it was time to fill the stomach with food. Neely whips out a sheet of paper with more

restaurants in walking distance of the B&B than are in the entire South Shore of Lake Tahoe.

We opt for Beretta on Valencia and 23rd streets. The 45-minute wait for a table at 8:30pm throws us off because that doesn't happen in the mountains. We find a seat at the bar and let Ryan fix us rum concoctions with names like Dolores Park Swizzle and Agricole Mule – each $9.

Ryan knows a lot of the people shuffling in. He says it's a slow night. The place is packed. What would a busy night look like? What would it be like if there weren't a recession?

Sue and I split a pizza filled with grilled veggies, tomatoes, spinach, pesto and mozzarella. It's a tad greasy, but at $12 is priced right.

Today it's my birthday

It's time for another meal – breakfast at the inn. It's my birthday, so it's time to celebrate. Sue brings out the champagne so all the guests can partake in mimosas.

Breakfast is a nice blend of European and American – with a cheese-meat platter, mass quantities of fresh fruit (with non-traditional selections like kiwi and mango), hot-cold cereal, sweet breads, hardboiled eggs, juice, and coffee. Platters seem to always be full even though the plates of guests are as well.

The nice thing is breakfast seems to be available all morning; none of this one-hour window to be fed. It's leisurely, relaxed – it's like being at home.

The staff seems invisible except when you need them. Some have worked at the inn for more than 15 years.

This area of San Francisco is experiencing a bit of a renaissance. Mission and Valencia streets are a couple blocks away, as is Market Street.

Our mission, literally, is to find the mission. In all my time in San Francisco I had never been to Mission Dolores.

First stop, though, is the swing set at Mission Dolores Park. People are out enjoying the unseasonably warm weather with friends, family and dogs. The vast greenway beckons Frisbee throwers.

Just up the block is the mission. Like all of the missions in California that I've visited, the architecture is breathtaking, the craftsmanship of the woodwork exquisite and the delicateness of the stained glass inspiring.

We take our time strolling through the neighborhood – on sidewalks. Bookstores seem be in nearly every block. I spend some cash on a book about cycling.

Hunger pangs sound the alarm that a bite to eat is necessary. I'm in vegetarian heaven – a restaurant called Herbivore is dead ahead on Valencia Street.

To save room for dinner, Sue and I split the Vegetable Sampler ($8.25). Charbroiled veggies come with three sauces – pesto, tahini and lemon garlic. With our glasses of white wine, the bill comes to $23.06.

Life at the inn

It's time to enjoy the Inn San Francisco's roof. Comfy outdoor furniture is situated to look at the skyline. A smidgeon of the Bay Bridge is visible. At night, the lights of AT&T Park are on when the Giants are home. Views of Twin Peaks are 45 degrees to the left.

A queen bed dominates our cozy room. Some of the rooms look like estates. Some have shared baths. Our bathroom was private, but was down the hall.

The antique decor is so appropriate for such an old dwelling. Still, a mini flat screen TV is in one corner for those who

are in need of such diversions.

Dinner is at Greens – one of my favorite restaurants in San Francisco. (See story in the Food-Wine section.)

Entertainment that night is the SF Symphony. The next day it's all about the fun in Golden Gate Park. (See story in Lifestyle.)

Part of one afternoon is spent in the inn's garden enjoying cheese and crackers, and wine we brought in. It's relaxing – like being in your own backyard, but not having to do the pruning.

Plush robes are perfect to wrap ourselves in as we walk down the narrow stairs to the outdoor redwood hot tub.

Inside, people are enjoying the common area. Fortunately, there is no television here. It's about decompressing. Books are everywhere. Soft music plays. Friendships are made.

Finally, it was time to say goodbye – though, I hope not for long.

Rooms run from $120 to $335 per night. Covered parking is an additional $18/night. For more information, go to www.innsf.com or call (415) 641.0188.

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Reno's latest conventions commit for multiple years

Reno Gazette-Journal

Tourism officials have landed three new conventions for veterans, hunters and volleyball players that will bring more than 100,000 visitors to Reno from 2012 to 2017.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars will come to Reno in July 2012, said Ellen Oppenheim, president of the Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority.

The Wild Sheep Foundation has committed to three consecutive Februarys, from 2013 to 2015, and the Northern California Volleyball Association committed to six Aprils from 2012 to 2017.

Read the whole story

Cloud seeding to resume in Tahoe area

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The Southern Nevada Water Authority hopes to squeeze a little extra water from the sky by reviving a cloud-seeding program doomed by state budget cuts.

For decades, the state's Desert Research Institute operated snow generators in northeastern Nevada and around Lake Tahoe, but the program was due to be mothballed this winter amid deep cuts to the state's higher education system.

In a unanimous vote Thursday, water authority board members approved funding that will allow cloud seeding to continue in northeastern Nevada.

Read the whole story