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# THE CONCIERGE

## GEO QUIZ

The Jura mountain range extends along the border between France and which landlocked country?

- Switzerland
- Austria
- Hungary

Answer below. Source: National Geographic Bee

## TIPSHEET

### Dig into the Year of the Pig

BY MARY FORGIONE

On the lunar calendar, the Year of the Pig starts Feb. 5. Here are five places to embrace the Pig, which rules until Jan. 24, 2020, when the Rat takes over.

#### Portland, Ore.

Head to Portland for a chance to meet Shadow, a friendly New Zealand KuneKune pig. The long-haired creature will be holding court at the Lan Su Chinese Garden from 2-4 p.m. Feb. 5, 8 and 15 (included with \$10 general admission). Feb. 17-19, you can see glowing red lanterns and an illuminated dragon (\$15-\$45).

Info: [lansugarden.org](http://lansugarden.org)

#### Toronto

Activist and sculptor Ai Weiwei created bronze sculptures of the 12 creatures in the Chinese zodiac that toured the world's museums. Last year he used colorful Lego pieces to create portraits of the Pig, Monkey, Rat and others in a work called "Zodiac." See them Feb. 28-June 9 at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto.

Info: [gardinermuseum.on.ca](http://gardinermuseum.on.ca)

#### Seattle

Money and prosperity are themes for Chinese New Year, which is why a visit to Seattle's 550-pound bronze piggy bank should be on your calendar. Rachel the Pig has stood beneath the Pike Place Market sign since 1986, collecting about \$20,000 a year to help the needy in her community. Add your donation, then share a selfie on Rachel's Instagram site.

Info: [lat.ms/rachelpiggybank](http://lat.ms/rachelpiggybank)

#### Las Vegas

Eight is considered lucky in the Year of the Pig, which is why the Bellagio Conservatory and Botanical Garden created eight piglets as part of its Chinese New Year floral display. The show features other good-luck new year icons: blooming cherry trees, Chinese Fu dogs and giant ancient coins. It's free and continues until March 9.

Info: [lat.ms/bellagiogarden](http://lat.ms/bellagiogarden)

#### San Francisco

The golden dragon Gum Lung is the star of San Francisco's Chinese New Year Parade, one of the oldest and biggest in the U.S. It takes more than 180 men and women to carry the 288-foot figure through city streets. The parade will be 6-8 p.m. Feb. 23; you can watch for free or buy \$35 tickets for seats in the viewing stands.

Info: [chineseparade.com](http://chineseparade.com)

## GEO QUIZ ANSWER:

Switzerland



Monster Towel



FitKicks



Biaggi



My Audio Pet

**MONSTER TOWEL**, clockwise from top left, is good for a crowd; foldable FitKicks allow full range of foot motion; golf-ball-size My Audio Pet generates a big sound; Biaggi is easy to stash and expandable.

## GEAR

# Small things, big effects

**By JUDI DASH >>>** Discover hidden pockets in a big towel that packs small; get plenty of traction with featherweight amphibious footwear; power up cute acoustics from tiny, animal-shaped Bluetooth speakers; and grow a stashable pouch into a wheel-aboard bag.

### Big spread

A large lightweight microfiber towel can be a great multitasking take-along, good for lying on the beach and drying off. A big towel also can cushion delicate items in your luggage, fold into a pillow and double as a wrap-around bathrobe twisted and tied behind the neck.

The Monster Towel is a 100-foot-square (roomier than a king-size bed) multitasker made of suede-like absorbent microfiber. The towel rolls up to 15 by 5 inches. An included carry strap secures the roll tight at both ends.

The towel has large corner anchor pockets you can fill with sand to keep it weighed down in place at the beach. You can stash your keys, wallet and other small items in an inconspicuous sewn-in zippered pocket (although the towel can be stolen).

The Monster Towel comes in seven colors, air-dries quickly and is machine washable and dryable.

**Cost, info:** The Monster Towel costs about \$90; [monstertowel.com](http://monstertowel.com)

### A shoe-in for comfort

Imagine your feet could roam free and unencumbered by shoes but shielded from hazards. FitKicks may be the next best thing. The lightweight hybrid slipper/loafer/water

shoe has stretchy, breathable spandex uppers that allow plenty of toe-wiggle room.

Black pebble-ridged rubber soles provide protection and traction yet allow full range of foot motion, so you can point, twist or flex. They fold in half for packing. FitKicks come in solid colors and whimsical patterns in men's, women's and children's sizes.

For extra warmth, a version called KoziKicks (available in women's sizes) is lined with fleece. A women's Maritime model has white pebbled soles to prevent scuffing boat surfaces.

**Cost, info:** FitKicks cost \$20 to \$24 in men's and women's sizes; \$18 in FitKids styles; Fleece-lined KoziKicks are about \$30; Maritime model, \$23; [fitkicks.com](http://fitkicks.com)

### Bluetooth buddy

The penguin, goldfish, monkey and panda Bluetooth speakers from My Audio Pet can boom surprisingly big sound for such tiny audio devices, which are about the size of a golf ball. The colorful creatures have multiple little holes in their heads for belting out whatever's streaming plus a built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery that charges using an integrated micro USB port (cable included).

An LED indicator light and chimes show when the animal is up and running — about four continuous hours on a charge — and a built-in microphone can be used for phone calls. The power button can activate a cellphone's camera function for selfies on the go.

My Audio Pets are available in 17 big-eyed animal shapes and include a lanyard.

**Cost, info:** My Audio Pet Animal Shaped Wireless Bluetooth Mini Speakers cost about \$30 at [myaudiopet.com](http://myaudiopet.com)

### Space changer

Most expandable luggage has a zipper around the perimeter, that, when unzipped, provides an inch or so of extra storage room. The new Zipsak Boost from Biaggi starts as a stashable nylon pouch, unzips to become a 22-by-14-by-9-inch-deep carry-on with four spinner wheels, handles on the side and top, and two exterior zippered pockets.

Unzip the wrap-around zipper just above the wheels, and the Boost lengthens to a 28-inch check-through suitcase. The Boost weighs less than 4 pounds.

**Cost, info:** Biaggi Zipsak Boost, in a choice of six colors, lists for \$95; [lat.ms/biaggiboost](http://lat.ms/biaggiboost)

## DEAL OF THE WEEK

### Tahiti airfare and hotel from \$1,499

Want a tropical escape? Air Tahiti Nui has an airfare-and-hotel Tahiti deal that starts at \$1,499 per person.

**The deal:** The Take Me to Tahiti vacation includes round-trip airfare from Los Angeles and round-trip ferry transportation to the neighboring island of Moorea. Visitors spend five nights on Moorea at the Manava Moorea Beach Resort and Spa, which includes a daily buffet breakfast. You must book by Feb. 15 for stays through Aug. 13. Blackout dates apply; offer is based on availability.

Info: [lat.ms/airtahitiniuideal](http://lat.ms/airtahitiniuideal)  
— MARY FORGIONE



Manava Beach Resort and Spa

**DOES FIVE NIGHTS** at the Manava Beach Resort and Spa sound good? The Air Tahiti Nui deal also includes a daily buffet breakfast.

## TOURS & CRUISES

### IRELAND

# Celebrate St. Patrick at a parade

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Dublin on a six-day tour offered by CIE Tours International. Participants will get a behind-the-scenes look at preparations for the city's parade and join a private party in the General Post Office, one of Dublin's most famous buildings, where they will watch the parade. Other highlights include visits to the Wicklow Mountains, Stone Age tombs at Newgrange and the ruins of Glendalough.

**Dates:** March 14-19  
**Price:** From \$1,490 per person, double occupancy. Includes five nights' accommodations, five breakfasts and two dinners, and transportation. International airfare not included.  
**Info:** CIE Tours International, (800) 243-8687, [lat.ms/stpatricksdaysdublin](http://lat.ms/stpatricksdaysdublin)  
— ANNE HARNAGEL

### NORWAY

# Ferry to fiords

Explore the rugged coastline, fiords and islands of western Norway on an independent tour that features coastal travel by ferry and inland transportation by private minivan. This new, eight-day 50 Degrees North tour begins in Bergen, where participants tour the city and then board a ferry to Kalvag, a picturesque fishing community. From there, they travel overland on a hop-on, hop-off minivan. Travelers can hike glaciers, see waterfalls and visit small towns and local museums.

**Date:** Weekly from May to September, with Friday departures from Bergen.  
**Price:** From \$2,207 per person, double occupancy. Includes seven nights' hotel accommodations, some meals, transportation between destinations, activities and tours. International airfare not included.

**Info:** Fifty Degrees North, (888) 880-0286, [lat.ms/westernfiordstour](http://lat.ms/westernfiordstour)  
— ROSEMARY MCCLURE

### MEXICO

# Cleansing detox

Kick off your wellness goals for 2019 with a detox program at Rancho la Puerta in Tecate, Mexico. Choose one to three-day juice cleanses, offered Saturdays through Wednesdays through February, or try a two-week retreat in March or September. Five spa therapies and consultations with Michael Finkelstein, author of the book "Slow Medicine," also are offered during the detox retreats.

**Dates:** Short-term retreats in January and February, two-week courses are March 16-30 and Sept. 14-28.

**Price:** From \$2,959 for one person for a four-night stay, including a one-day juice cleanse, in January or February. Rates for the 14-day detox programs start at \$12,200 per person, double occupancy. Includes fitness classes, meals, accommodations and transportation from San Diego International Airport on Saturdays.

**Info:** Rancho la Puerta, (858) 764-5500, [rancholapuerta.com](http://rancholapuerta.com)  
— ROSEMARY MCCLURE

## AIRFARES

	ATLANTA	CHICAGO	DENVER	HONOLULU	LAS VEGAS	NEW YORK/NEWARK, N.J.	PHOENIX	SAN FRANCISCO	SEATTLE	WASHINGTON, D.C.
LAX	\$318	\$254	\$202	\$449	\$98	\$388	\$138	\$88	\$157	\$303
SNA	326	318	222	552	122	388	166	88	158	348
BUR	326	294	242	521	146	384	167	92	168	356
LGB	335	318	232	409	119	364	186	104	158	353
ONT	318	303	222	560	192	379	167	112	160	378

INT'L	AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND*	CABO SAN LUCAS, MEXICO	LONDON*	PARIS*	SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA*	TOKYO*	VANCOUVER, CANADA
LAX	\$903-\$1,326	\$228	\$546-\$1,171	\$752-\$1,241	\$747-\$1,312	\$766-\$1,257	\$270

Restricted round-trip airfares are researched on Thursday, the day before the Travel section goes to press. Fares change daily, and availability is not assured. Fares, which may involve a change of planes, are for airlines serving Los Angeles International (LAX), Orange County/John Wayne (SNA), Hollywood Burbank (BUR), Long Beach (LGB) and Ontario (ONT). Domestic fares and international airfares include taxes and fees. \*These international fares vary because of differing fuel surcharges on different airlines. Sources: Sabre reservation system, airlines and Web.

## \$699 TO AUSTRALIA

**Fare:** From LAX, \$699 round trip, including all taxes and fees, to various cities in Australia and New Zealand, which allows a stopover of 72 hours or less, on Fiji Airways.  
**Restrictions:** The fare, subject to availability, is for travel from Wednesday to Dec. 10. Tickets must be purchased by Feb. 8.  
**Info:** (800) 227-4446, [fjiairways.com](http://fjiairways.com)  
**Source:** Airfarewatchdog