

Gift Guide

→ INSTEAD OF ENDURING THE CRUSH OF BLACK FRIDAY SALES AND ONLINE SHOPPING THIS YEAR, GIVE AN EXPERIENCE. USE OUR ACTIVITY-BASED GIFT GUIDE TO FIND SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE, FROM ARTS ENTHUSIASTS TO ADRENALINE JUNKIES. WHETHER YOU CHOOSE ZIPLINING THROUGH THE REDWOODS OR GOING ON A BREWERY TOUR OF THE TRI-VALLEY, YOU'LL MAKE LASTING MEMORIES WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

Edited by Lauren Bonney

FOR THE Creative

By Katherine Ann Rowlands

Beyond Arts and Crafts

For the creative people on your list who like to *do* rather than just acquire, The Crucible offers exciting options. A nonprofit arts education organization, this hive of classes, workshops, and artistic inspiration literally sparks with energy.

Anyone who has ever watched a glassblower, a metal welder, or a woodworker and wondered what it might be like to try these art forms can get an up-close, hands-on experience at the Oakland warehouse facility. Nearly 1,000 classes are offered every year, each taught by local artists who share their talents with novices and experienced folks alike.

Ralph McCaskey, cohead of the flame-working department, teaches students how to work with glass and also loves to see the facility transformed into a performance space.

Gift certificates for \$50 and up can be purchased online and used for everything from making jewelry to neon sculptures. Classes range from private lessons, to group team-building activities, to courses lasting several weeks.

Bonus: The Crucible will hold its annual GIFTY event and open house, with creative arts—such as purses made out of basketballs—for sale on December 15–17. *Check online for a full listing of classes, prices, and schedules; (510) 444-0919; thecrucible.org.*



From top: Students on a field trip watch a demo class at The Crucible; a collection of handmade glassware; a student shows off a metal ring she crafted.

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF THE CRUCIBLE

FOR THE Creative

Feature-Length Feasts

Want a more refined experience when settling in for your next dinner-and-a-movie date than TV trays and the couch? Babette café at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) has just the ticket.

For \$65, you can indulge in a four-course dinner at the museum, with a complimentary glass of wine—curated to match screenings of selected films at the theater next door. (A separate ticket is required, priced at \$12.) BAMPFA's Film to Table pairings let you watch a film and then retreat to the museum café for a communal dining experience shared with other filmgoers.

Be sure to check out what's screening next to reserve your film feast. \$65, (510) 684-3046, bampfa.org.



Creative Giving

A \$25 (or larger) donation to Oakland's Creative Growth Arts Center helps this non-profit provide programming for more than 150 artists with disabilities—and gets you a membership, with early admission to gallery exhibitions and a 10 percent discount on purchases. Think of it as art with heart. \$25, (510) 839-2340, creativegrowth.org.



From top: Sarah Chang plays the violin during a Chamber Music San Francisco performance; Jamie Jones, Alix Cuadra, and Devin S. O'Brien of Aurora Theatre Company perform in *Luna Gale*.

Classical Acts

Classical music lovers will delight in a series subscription to the Chamber Music San Francisco season. Tickets cost \$250 for six concerts—including the Artemis Quartet and the Israeli Chamber Project—from February through May at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek. \$250, (925) 943-7469, lesherartscenter.org.

The Play's the Thing

Mark three Saturday night engagements on your calendar for an intimate theatrical adventure at the Aurora Theatre Company in Berkeley. Pick three plays from the 2017-2018 season—including the Bay Area premiere of *Dry Powder*—for a dramatic date. \$150, (510) 843-4822, auroratheatre.org.



Safari in Sonoma

It's probably unrealistic to gift a family trip to Africa, but you can experience a slice of the Serengeti just two hours north, at Safari West in Santa Rosa.

Luckily, the 400-acre preserve was spared from the catastrophic fires that ravaged Northern California in October, so animal lovers can still discover African wildlife in the heart of Wine Country. On the classic safari tour, open-air vehicles bump over dirt roads to visit roaming zebras, rhinos, and

giraffes—the latter occasionally greeting guests with a friendly lick. Afterward, walk through the aviary, where birds from all over the world fly overhead.

For a more immersive experience, spend the night. After a BBQ dinner and an anthropologist-led campfire chat, retreat to a canvas tent imported from Botswana, featuring luxury comforts such as hardwood flooring and an en suite bathroom. You'll wake to the shrieks of red-ruffed lemurs.

Safari West's mission is to promote conservation and environmental education, and that is a major component of everything it does—from the wildlife information imparted by safari

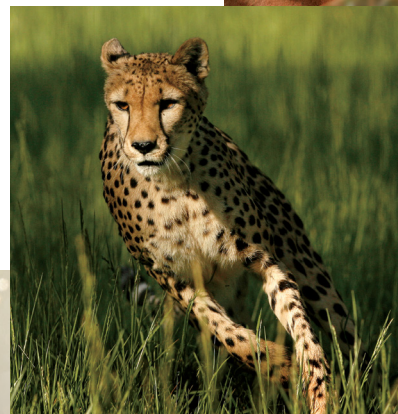


From top: Passengers wave during a drive through Safari West in Santa Rosa; a giraffe greets guests on a tour; a running cheetah.



FOR THE
Family
By LeeAnne Jones

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK; FROM TOP: LOVE IMAGES; DAVID ALLEN



FOR THE Family

guides to eschewing plastic straws in the Savannah Café. “We’re more than a place to see exotic animals,” says spokesperson Aphrodite Caserta.

To pay it forward, consider donating to the Safari West Wildlife Foundation, which funds a Junior Keeper Program and subsidizes field trips for underserved schools. \$45–\$115 for safari; \$250–\$350 for lodging, resuming March 2018 (double occupancy; \$25 each for additional guests up to six maximum); (800) 616-2695, safariwest.com.

From left: Kids enjoy the Penguins and Pajamas Sleepover at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco; a driver races around the track at K1 Speed in Dublin.



Night at the Museum

Forget Truth or Dare: The thrill of a California Academy of Sciences sleepover is letting the soft sway of a kelp forest lull you to sleep. At the numerous Penguins and Pajamas events scheduled throughout the year, children and their adult chaperones get to explore the San Francisco natural history museum after hours, take in private planetarium and live animal shows, and lay out their sleeping bags in the exhibit areas. (The most popular is the underwater tunnel in the aquarium.) Admission includes a Continental breakfast in the Academy

Café and next-day admission for more exploration. \$89 for members, \$109 for nonmembers, ages five–17 plus an adult chaperone, (415) 379-5854, calacademy.org.

Need for Speed

Let sibling rivalry play out on the race-track. At the new K1 Speed in Dublin, the go-karts are electric, so as the kids (minimum four feet tall) race at up to 45 mph, there are no stinky exhaust fumes. A winner’s podium in front of a checkered backdrop is perfect Snapchat fodder. \$19.99 per race, (925) 230-9502, k1speed.com.

Escape Artistry

Teamwork makes the dream work. Test your family’s skills at Limitless Escape Games in Livermore. Work together to escape one of three adventures in less than an hour: Steal precious gems, get rid of a menacing ghost, or save your ship from the Kraken. \$30 per person, up to 10 players, (925) 215-1238, limitlessescapegames.com.

Pinball Wizardry

Power off the PlayStation, and go retro at the Pacific Pinball Museum in Alameda. Everyone from Grandpa to cousin Sophia will enjoy the simple pleasure of hitting flashing, clanking targets with a little steel ball. The 90 playable machines include the 1981 Flash Gordon and the 1992 Addams Family. \$10–\$20 for day pass, (510) 769-1349, pacificpinball.org.



FOR THE Foodie

By Lauren Bonney

Brews Cruise

You’ve probably gone wine tasting in the Livermore Valley, and you may have gone on a tour (or two), but now, you can swap that glass of vino for something a little hoppier on the Blue Brew Bus.

The Livermore craft brew–tasting tour provides the fun of imbibing with a group without the headache of figuring out who will be DD. It also offers a glimpse into the region’s steadily growing microbrewery scene, which includes five new breweries and the development of the Tri-Valley Beer Trail in the last five years.

During the tour, guests sit back and relax on the giant, royal blue school bus—which has been retrofitted with a sweet sound system, interior mood lighting, and a triple tap Kegerator to fill your souvenir glass with a complimentary “cheers” beer.

Once you’ve clinked your drinks with the rest of the passengers (who soon become your new best beer buddies), the wheels on the bus go round and round for the next four hours, taking you to three different tastings at a rotating list of Livermore breweries, such as Altamont Beer Works and Shadow Puppet Brewing.



From top: Climb aboard the Blue Brew Bus to enjoy tours of various Livermore breweries; a group of passengers poses for a photo in front of the bus.

FOR THE Foodie

Each spot gives guests a different take on the brewing process and offers some excellent—and quite generous—pours. You may even discover your next favorite beer. (Nutty Operator from Altamont, anyone?) Just be sure to pace yourself when enjoying each sip of the foamy, hopped goodness. After all, you have a whole afternoon ahead of you to let the good times roll. \$89, (925) 233-7777, bluebrewbus.com.



**GIFT THAT
GIVES BACK**

Check, Please

Get ready for 10 days of culinary delights during Oakland Restaurant Week. With more than 100 participating eateries, this event is sure to wow.

From January 11 to 21, you can make reservations at dining hot spots such as Lungomare and Nido Kitchen and Bar, and order a meal from a prix fixe (and discounted) menu. Some restaurants may offer exclusive foodie experiences, such as special tastings.

Restaurants will donate proceeds from the sales to the Alameda County Community Food Bank. *Prices vary, oaklandrestaurantweek.org.*

Curds and Whey

With three different cheese-making classes to choose from—all accompanied by expert-led wine pairings—Farmcurious in Emeryville offers an experience that will make any cheese aficionado melt. Whether you want to learn how to make mozzarella, ricotta, Burrata, Brie, Camembert, chèvre, or all six, these classes will deepen your appreciation for the craft of making cheese. \$50–\$250, (510) 877-9955, farmcurious.com.



Wine Not

Sipping wine at Livermore's Wente Vineyards can be a relaxing way to spend your day, but rather than popping open that bottle, learn how to make the delectable nectar yourself during a Winemaker Blending Session. Taste, evaluate, and blend estate wines to create an amazing vino that's worth decanting. \$75 for wine club members, \$95 for nonmembers, (925) 456-2385, wentevineyards.com.

Breaking Bread

There's nothing quite like eating a fresh-out-of-the-oven bâtarde. At Uptown Oakland's Firebrand Artisan Breads, baker, pastry chef, and co-founder Colleen Orlando teaches guests how to make and bake various types of breads before sending carb lovers home with a loaf of choice and a sourdough bread recipe. \$80, (510) 594-9213, firebrandbread.com.

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK; FROM TOP: COURTESY OF VISIT OAKLAND; COURTESY OF FARMCURIOS

BACKGROUND IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK; FROM TOP: LEORI; COURTESY OF MOUNT HERMON ADVENTURES

FOR THE Adventurous

By Kristen Haney

Gliding Over Monterey Bay

Sure, you could book someone a standard flight as a gift and call it a day, but a thrilling engine-less glide over the Monterey Bay is the more daring choice for anyone with a penchant for bucket-list adventures.

Hollister's Bay Area Glider Rides offers a roughly one-hour ride over Monterey, with passengers' choice of views of the coast, Half Moon Bay, and—on clear days—San Francisco; or of the Gabilan Mountain Range and the San Juan Bautista and San Andreas Fault lines snaking through the landscape.

Unlike a typical flight, the gliders are towed by a traditional airplane to roughly 8,000 feet, then released by the glider pilot for a quiet and smooth float back to the airport. "It's the closest you'll ever get to flying like a bird," says pilot Gianni Leonarduzzi.

Flights before 1 p.m. are the smoothest, but if the riders crave real thrills, the pilot can perform a few zero-G acrobatic moves.

(Think the drop off a roller coaster.) Even better: The flights can squeeze in two, so you can book for someone else and score a ride yourself. *Starting at \$199, (831) 636-3799, bayareagliderrides.com.*

Thrills Through the Trees

The perfect gift for any tree huggers in your life, the redwood canopy zip-line course through Mount Hermon Adventures gets participants up close to nature—150 feet off the ground.

Located in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the two-hour tour includes gear and a brief training before the small group tackles six ziplines and a suspended sky bridge. Along the way, the guides share local history and ecological facts about redwood forests, including surprising stats about the trees' origins. *(continued on page 89)*



From top: Try a circus-themed class at Oakland's Kinetic Arts Center; take a canopy tour through the redwoods with Mount Hermon Adventures.

From top: Enjoy a tasty plate of tacos at Nido Kitchen and Bar during Oakland Restaurant Week; take a cheese-making class with Emeryville's Farmcurious.



Gift Guide

(continued from page 57)

While you can grab a gift certificate for just the price of the zipline tour, make it an extraspecial present by throwing in an additional \$35 for a GoPro rental and 16GB memory card to document your adventure junkie's time in the air. \$99-\$109, (831) 430-4357, mounthermonadventures.com.

A Stint With the Circus

For Cirque du Soleil fans, the greatest gift on Earth may involve hanging from the ceiling or tumbling across the floor at Oakland's Kinetic Arts Center. Perfect for beginners or the indecisive, a three-class pack lets adventurous gift recipients test their choice of circus-themed classes, including contortion, clowning, and gravity-defying options such as a static trapeze. \$50, (510) 444-4800, kineticartscenter.com.



Overnight in a Lighthouse

You might not expect an island getaway in the middle of the East Bay, but Richmond's East Brother Light Station offers the gift of a secluded respite from everyday life. The fully restored California Victorian inn offers luxe perks and is reached by boat. Funds from your stay go toward the ongoing restoration and maintenance of the building. \$345-\$425 per night, (510) 233-2385, ebls.org.

Swimming With Sharks

Gift the thrill of a daylong great white shark cage-diving experience with Great White Adventures. Boats head from the East Bay to the Farallon Islands, and divers (and observers) receive hands-on guidance from the crew. (No scuba certification or experience is required.) Plan ahead for this one: Groups are limited to eight people in the water, and the experience has a short season: late September through November. \$375 to observe, \$775 to dive, (510) 808-4499, greatwhiteadventures.com. ■

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— Alyssa Rollins '12



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