

Pumpkin-chucking events popular for fall

Pies, jack o'lanterns take back seat to flying gourds.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

What can you do with pumpkins? The list is not all that long. You can make pumpkin pies and breads, carve jack o'lanterns or use them to decorate your front porch.

Or you can send them hurtling into the autumn sky at 400 mph with a 30,000-pound cannon.

It's pumpkin-chucking season!

The World Championship Punkin Chunkin' contest — www.punkinchunkin.com/main.htm — takes place Nov. 2-4 in Bridgeville, Del., about 30 miles from Lewes and 90 miles from Washington, D.C. The event began in 1986 and bills itself as the oldest and largest competition of its type. Last year more than 50,000 spectators turned out to watch 100 teams compete, organizers said.

Launching machines at the Delaware event will include air compressors, catapults, centrifugal machines that spin the pumpkins before hurling them, and trebuchets. (The trebuchet design dates to the Middle Ages, using a counterweight to power its missile.) There is also a "theatrical" category in



Team 'PumpkinHammer' watches its trebuchet as it fires in the Punkin Chunkin 2006 World Championship in Delaware. This year's contest is Nov. 2-4 in Bridgeville, Del.

which the rules state that "distance is not the goal; ability to ham it up is the goal."

"People start out thinking they have to see some idiot who's built a machine to throw a pumpkin a mile," said Frank Shade, president of the World Championship Punkin Chunkin' Association. "Then, after spending a weekend grilling and cooking out with 70,000 of their newest best friends, they find out this is really a good time."

The contest's record for distance was set in 2003, when a pumpkin went 4,434 feet.

Another well-known event, the Morton Punkin Chuckin' contest, takes place this weekend in Morton, Ill., where 85 percent of the world's canned pumpkin is manufactured.

The contest was nearly canceled this year when the town's Chamber of Commerce withdrew sponsorship, saying that there are now so many fling-and-smash events that Morton was no longer attracting the big air cannons and monster catapults needed to draw crowds.

But the Morton event got a reprieve when five organiza-



ADAM GERIK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Devin Selby, 12, of Herrick, Ill., aims his slingshot machine last year in the Morton, Ill., contest.

tions — the local Jaycees, Kiwanis and Knights of Columbus, along with the Morton Hospitality Association and the

IF YOU GO

Other contests are held at pumpkin farms and fall festivals around the country. A few take place early in the season but many are held the weekends before and after Halloween. They include:

■ Pumpkin Chuckin in Moab, Utah, Saturday, www.youthgardenproject.org, on Old Airport Runway, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

■ The Bristol Pumpkin Festival, Bristol, Conn., Oct. 28, noon-2 p.m., at Roberts Orchards on Hill Street.; www.bristolpumpkinfestival.com. Contestants are invited to power their pumpkins with 'springs, rubber bands, air, muscle, centrifugal force, brute strength, power architecture and bicycles.'

■ Pumpkin-chucking weekend, Nov. 3-4, in Ellicott City, Md., at Clark's Elioak Farm, 10500 Clarksville Pike, www.clarklandfarm.com.



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Jeff Webb ties a chicken foot to the end of his pumpkin cannon last year in Millsboro, Del.

■ Pumpkin Chuck, Nov. 3, in Cincinnati's Stanbery Park on Oxford Avenue, noon-5 p.m. Buy a pumpkin on site or bring one from home for the 'Two Buck Chuck,' where for \$2 you can launch your gourd sky-high from a trebuchet.

Morton Business Association — agreed to staff the event.

Over the years several of Morton's winners have landed on late-night television with David Letterman and Jay Leno. Morton's Punkin Chuckin' began in 1996 and typically attracts a few thousand visitors. The Morton con-

test is held at the Uhlman family farm on the corner of Springfield and Allentown roads, about 10 miles southeast of Peoria. Details at www.morton-il.gov. For those lacking the engineering skills to build a mighty pumpkin-throwing machine, there are also hand-tossing contests.

Islands are perfect spots for family bonding and relaxation

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jump on the bed). We manage a pleasant dinner alongside the pool. Everyone cannot help but smile as the kids enjoy the resident cat.

After a night of much-needed sleep, we eat breakfast together and then break up into two groups. Newlyweds Caryn and David opt for sun and sand on Orient Beach. Dave finds difficulty in concentrating on his book when the nude bathers constantly stray from their end of the beach.

Everyone else visits the Butterfly Farm. Little eyes get as big as saucers as 19-month-old JJ and 3-year-old Annie are surrounded by hundreds of fluttering creatures. Annie could not stop giggling about the caterpillar with a camouflage cocoon that resembles guano. As we head for nearby Gallion Beach for kiddy activities — getting our feet wet, sand-castle building and shelling — we can't believe how much more we have learned about these flying beauties.

The family dinner reunites us at a favorite eatery, Los Gauchos Argentine, where the steaks and sunset are always delicious. The day is topped off with the family gathering in Mom and Dad's room where we do silly things like passing straws with our feet and making bad jokes.

Next morning, the clan packs its 15 bags and departs for Anguilla. This flat, eel-shape piece of land, about a 30-minute ferry ride from St. Martin, is tiny — about half the size of Washington, D.C. Traffic is controlled by the island's two stoplights. On our way to our lodgings, we pass the island capital, the Valley. This commercial hub contains a few banks, some shops, a courthouse, a jail and the Uni-



LOU SOTONOFF/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

David and Caryn sing a Johnny Cash/June Carter Cash duet on a rainy island day.

versity of the West Indies, which has one teacher who teaches one class. No one can tell us exactly what the class is. We spend the next 20 minutes of the ride cracking each other up with guesses. Suntanning 101? A master's degree in beachcombing? A seminar in chilling out?

Except for a splash in its crystalline waters or a stroll on the sand — so white and soft that it feels like you are walking on powder — there isn't a lot to do. That is the charm of this tony playground. Brad Pitt found it to be the perfect setting to tell Jennifer Aniston that he had decided to go traipsing around the world with Angelina Jolie instead of being married to her.

Our digs? Sheriva at Sheriton Estates. The villa is equipped with all the necessities that Brad, Jennifer or anyone else would require, including a staff of five and Santiago, our chef. To find your way around the seven bedrooms, small gym, office, kitchens and other rooms takes some time. I never did figure out how many bathrooms we had.



ROBERTA SOTONOFF/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS



ROBERTA SOTONOFF/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Visitors learn of the complete life cycle of the butterfly at the Butterfly Farm.

What a life this is. Breakfast is a buffet with fresh fruit, juice, cereal and pancakes. One day the pineapple is carved to look like a bird. Santiago is quick to supplement the menu with omelets, eggs or whatever. The result? Some of us head for the treadmill in an attempt to burn off breakfast.

Climbing into our chariot — an eight-passenger golf cart — we head for the beach at Cap Juluca, the posh Moroccan-looking hotel down the road. Sandcastle building, a dip in the water and shelling are on the pro-

gram. David did some waterskiing at no charge — a perk of Sheriva. The water is warm and so transparent; you can see lots of fish just by wading into the water. Not far away, in a little cove, there is good snorkeling.

Back at the villa, it is difficult to get anyone to move off the lounges. Some adults laze around the pool reading books, while a few join the kids in the water and goof off together. They make pretend ice cream. JJ's little body jams to some tunes playing on the sound system. Tough life.

Daughter Jamie, who declared herself social director, fills our evenings with activities, including poker, silly games and movie night. One night she leads a book discussion on the book she assigned before the trip. Usually, these evening activities end up being a laugh fest.

Mornings become routine. The smell of Santiago's sumptuous breakfast preparations or the sound of his fruit chopping is my wake-up call. The bad part? We have three days of

rain, which puts a crimp on our plans to go snorkeling, beaching and glass-bottom boating. Some of us have spa treatments at Cap Juluca. Others just hang out, watch movies or play games in the entertainment area. Everyone has his or her space, but still enjoys each other's company.

One rainy day, I decide I need a bubble bath. The bath foam is flat. I pour in some more then turn on the jets. The suds start to build — and build. They are almost 3 feet above the tub. There is so much white I feel like I am lost in the snows of the Himalayas. The bubbles keep rising. Soon only the top of my head is visible. I call for

help. My family laughs and grabs their cameras. I throw them out. Looking like the abominable snowman, I head for the shower.

Finally the sun comes out and we head for Scilly Cay. The little island — a three-minute ride from shore — is nothing more than a grass shack protected by conch shell retaining walls. Food is cooked from scratch, so the average wait time for sumptuous lobster, chicken or crayfish is about 1½ hours. Guests order their food, then swim, snorkel or chat with owner Eudoxie Wallace. He will tell you his nickname is Gorgeous because he looked in the mirror and decided he was.

Our last dinner is a gala. I hear the sound of steel drums and realize that we will have local musician Dumpa's steel drums and keyboards to entertain us. Everyone sings and jives to the beat. Dumpa even tries to teach me to play his steel drums. A waste! I am musically challenged.

Santiago has prepared a candlelit feast — chicken, lobster and steak — topped off with a Winnie the Pooh birthday cake for me. Everyone cannot believe how lucky we are. Memories of the fluttering butterflies, mountainous bubble baths, the powdery sands and transparent waters of Anguilla and the incredible Sheriva will always have a special place in all our hearts.

IF YOU GO

Getting there: American and US Airways have direct flights to Anguilla. These airlines plus Delta, United and Spirit fly to St. Maarten. For St. Maarten flights, tell your travel agent to check FunJet (www.funjet.com). It buys in bulk, often you can get a better price. WinAir (www.fly-winair.com) flies from St. Maarten to Anguilla, but the ferry ride is cheaper (\$15 each way) and takes only 30 minutes.

PLANNING THE TRIP

The secret to making those memories golden is having it together before you leave. Consider the where, what and when of the trip.

■ The 'where' has to be chosen by democratic process. Everyone should be enthusiastic about the destination. Nobody wants to spend time and money on an undesirable place.

■ Three generations are involved, so the 'what' must be kid-friendly, appeal to adults and



ROBERTA SOTONOFF/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Caryn checks out the view from Scilly Cay. Island retainer walls are made from conch shells.

accommodate older folks who may not be as mobile.

■ The 'when' has to be convenient for the whole group. This isn't easy when everyone has his or her agenda.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR A FAMILY VACATION

It isn't that you don't love each other, but setting up some

parameters before the trip will keep you from hating each other after it.

■ If someone does something of which you do not approve, keep your mouth shut.

■ Before departure, make sure everyone knows that it doesn't have to be family togetherness 24/7.

■ No one should have a hissy fit

if one of the family doesn't want to join an activity. Keep in mind that togetherness is great, but everyone needs to do his or her own thing, too.

■ Before you leave, try to pinpoint particular areas that might cause conflict and jointly figure out how to deal with them. For example, it should be understood that disciplining children is solely the parent's responsibility.

■ The whole group should be together for at least one meal per day.

PLAN B — THINGS TO DO IF IT RAINS

If gray clouds appear, be prepared to not let it rain on your parade. Having alternative plans will keep the fam from being grumpy.

■ Bring plenty of reading material for yourself.

■ Choose a book that is interesting to all the adults and have a leader to prepare some questions for discussion.

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