EYE ON MONEY

JUL
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2019

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FINANCES

plus

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTIONS (RMDs)

HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

SUMMERTIME TAX TIPS

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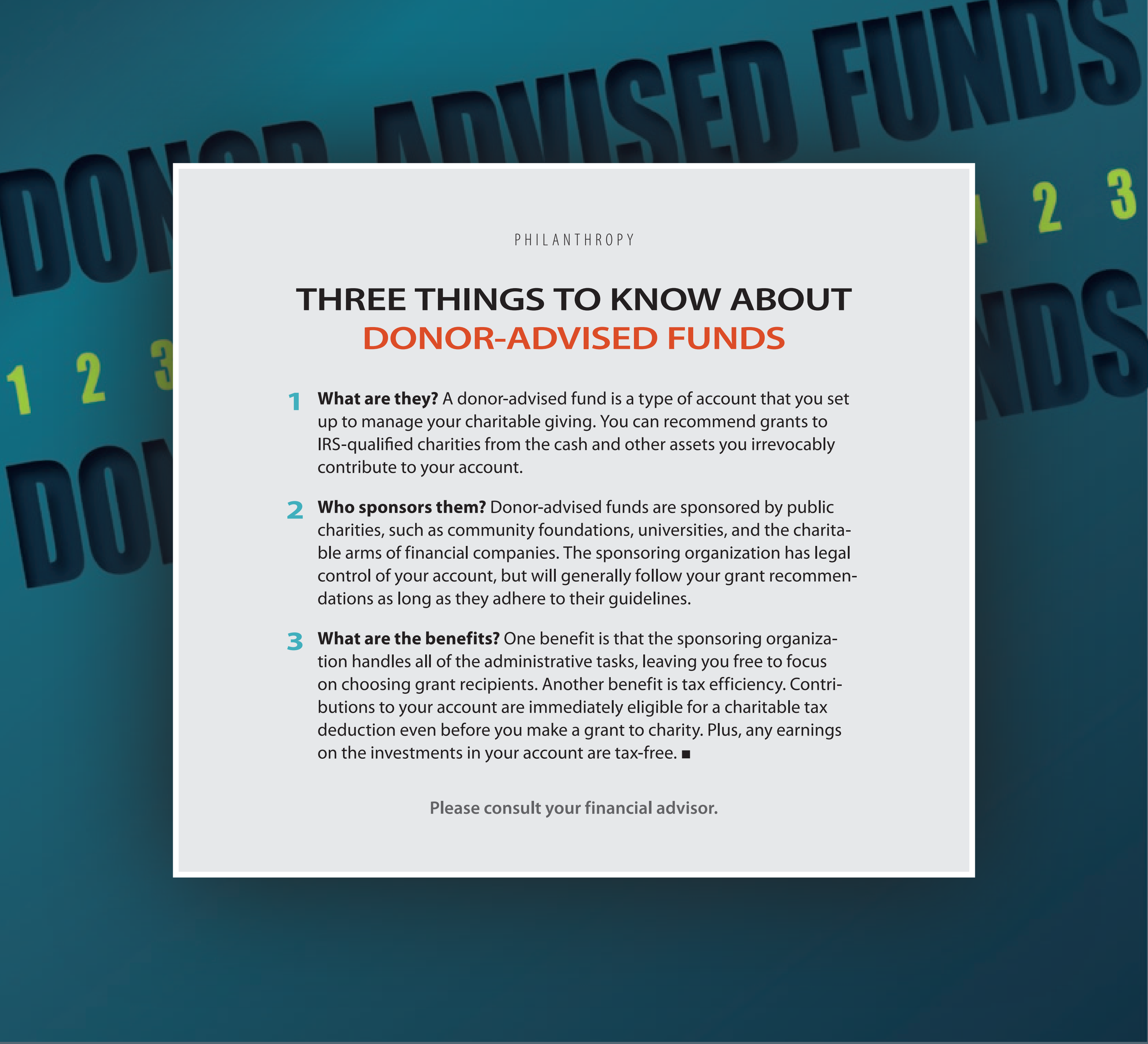

PHILANTHROPY

THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT DONOR-ADVISED FUNDS

1 **What are they?** A donor-advised fund is a type of account that you set up to manage your charitable giving. You can recommend grants to IRS-qualified charities from the cash and other assets you irrevocably contribute to your account.

2 **Who sponsors them?** Donor-advised funds are sponsored by public charities, such as community foundations, universities, and the charitable arms of financial companies. The sponsoring organization has legal control of your account, but will generally follow your grant recommendations as long as they adhere to their guidelines.

3 **What are the benefits?** One benefit is that the sponsoring organization handles all of the administrative tasks, leaving you free to focus on choosing grant recipients. Another benefit is tax efficiency. Contributions to your account are immediately eligible for a charitable tax deduction even before you make a grant to charity. Plus, any earnings on the investments in your account are tax-free. ■

Please consult your financial advisor.

inside

UP FRONT

FEATURES

FYI

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Federal Student Loan Repayment Tips for Recent Grads

If you graduated from college this year with federal student loans, you may have some repayment decisions to make soon. Here are a few tips to help with those decisions.

Find out when you must begin repaying your loans. The first payment on your federal student loans will generally be due about six months (nine months if it's a Perkins Loan) after you graduate, leave school, or drop below half-time status. The six- or nine-month grace period is intended to give you a chance to find a job after you finish school. Your loan servicer will let you know the exact date that payments must begin.

Make a budget. Creating a budget that spells out how much income you have coming in and how much cash you have going out to cover your living expenses will help you determine the amount you can afford to pay on your student loans each month.

Choose a repayment plan. Once you have an idea of how much you can afford to pay each month, you're ready to choose a repayment plan for your Direct Loans. The Repayment Estimator at StudentLoans.gov can help you choose the plan that suits your budget best. And keep in mind that you can switch plans at any time for free so if your financial situation changes in the future, you can change to a plan with a monthly payment that suits you better.

Consider consolidating your loans. If you have multiple federal loans with different loan servicers, consolidating them into one Direct Consolidation Loan with one monthly bill may simplify loan repayment. On the other hand, consolidating your loans usually increases your repayment period so you may end up paying more interest over time than if you had not consolidated. Be sure to consider all the pros and cons before deciding whether to consolidate.

Consider the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. If you plan to work full-time for a government agency or certain non-profit organizations, you may be eligible to have the remainder of your Direct Loans forgiven after 10 years of loan payments. Be sure to check this program out before choosing a repayment plan because you'll need to use an income-driven repayment plan to take advantage of the program.

Reduce your interest rate by automating your payments. You'll get a 0.25% reduction in the interest rate on your Direct Loans when you sign up to have your loan payments automatically debited from your bank account.

Deduct the student loan interest you pay. You may be able to claim a federal tax deduction for up to $2,500 of the interest you pay during the year on your qualified student loans. To be eligible, your income must be under certain limits and you must meet a few other requirements. ■

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For more information about repaying federal student loans, please visit studentaid.ed.gov.

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5 Things to Know About REITs

REITs, or real estate investment trusts, are companies that usually own and manage income-producing real estate—and distribute part of the income they receive to their investors in the form of dividends.

1 **Most REITs own and manage income-producing real estate.** For example, a REIT may own and manage office buildings, shopping centers, apartment complexes, and other types of real estate that generate a stream of rental income.

2 **Some REITs finance real estate.** Known as mortgage REITs, these real estate finance companies typically focus on acquiring, originating, investing in, and managing real estate loans and mortgage-backed securities.

3 **REITs are required to pay out at least 90% of their taxable income each year to their shareholders.** As a result, REITs tend to pay higher dividends than many other types of companies. Keep in mind, though, that the dividends are not guaranteed and will fluctuate in value.

4 **REITs may help with portfolio diversification.** REITs sometimes react differently than stocks or bonds to market conditions. So adding REITs to a portfolio of stocks and bonds may help diversify the portfolio and reduce its overall volatility.

5 **There are a few ways to invest in REITs.** You can purchase shares of a publicly traded REIT just as you would any other stock, or you can invest in a mutual fund or ETF that focuses on REITs. Non-publicly traded REITs may also be an option, but be aware that they involve special risks, such as lack of liquidity. ■

PLEASE NOTE: Investing in REITs involves special risks, such as possible lack of liquidity and potential adverse economic and regulatory changes. For this reason, there are minimum suitability standards that must be met. Please ensure you read the prospectus carefully before investing. In addition, an investment in real estate will fluctuate with the value of the underlying properties, and the price at redemption may be more or less than the original price paid.

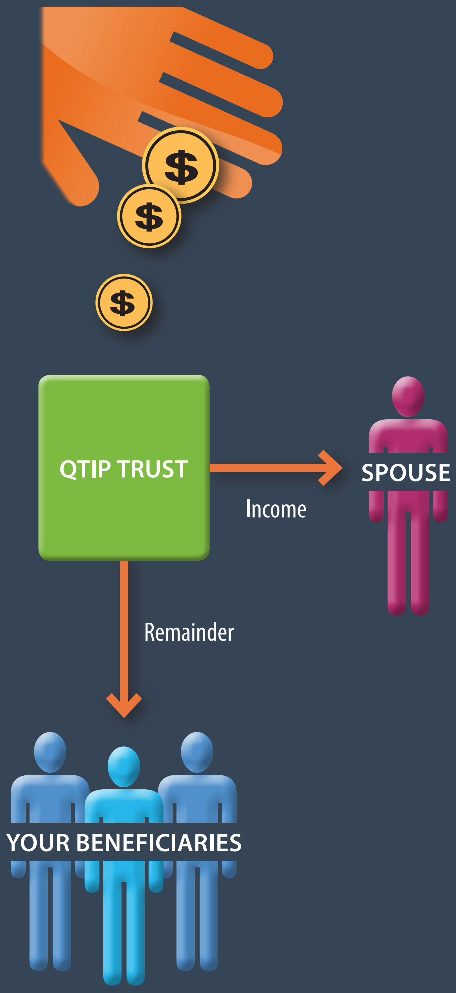
Before investing in mutual funds or ETFs, investors should consider a fund's investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses. Contact your financial advisor for a prospectus containing this information. Please read it carefully before investing.

Please consult your financial advisor for help in developing and implementing an investment plan.

QTIP Trust: An Estate Planning Tool for Blended Families

If you are married with children from an earlier marriage, you may be wondering how you can provide for your spouse after your death and yet ensure that your assets ultimately pass to your children and not your second spouse's heirs. One way to accomplish this is to use a QTIP trust.

HOW A QTIP TRUST GENERALLY WORKS



1

Your assets are transferred to the QTIP trust during your lifetime or after your death.

2

Your spouse receives the income from the trust assets and perhaps a portion of the principal for the rest of his or her life, but your spouse cannot change the final beneficiaries you chose for the trust.

3

After your spouse's death, the assets remaining in the trust are distributed to the final beneficiaries, such as your children.

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THE QTIP TRUST

A QTIP trust makes it possible for you to provide financial support to your spouse after your death without giving up control over who will ultimately inherit your assets—a useful feature if you are in a second or later marriage and want to ensure that your assets end up with your children from an earlier marriage after your spouse's death.

With a QTIP trust, your spouse is entitled to the income from the assets that you place in the trust. However, your spouse cannot sell or give away the assets, and your spouse cannot change the final beneficiaries you choose for the trust.

If you instead leave your assets outright to your spouse, your spouse will gain full control of the assets after your death, and can decide who will inherit them after he or she dies—and there is no guarantee that it will be your children. Your spouse may decide to leave your assets to his or her own children or a new spouse. A QTIP trust can help you avoid this scenario, while providing for both your spouse and your children.

Your estate planning professional can help you determine whether a QTIP trust may be a good choice for you. ■

Please consult your estate planning professional for advice on planning your estate.

How to Protect Your Finances

Life happens. Jobs may be lost. Health issues may prevent you from working. Major expenses may pop up unexpectedly. How well you financially weather events such as these may depend on how well you prepare today. Here are a few tips on how to use savings, insurance, and legal documents to help protect your finances and your financial security from the challenges you may face one day. Your financial advisor can help you determine the strategies that may be appropriate for you.

Create an emergency fund.

One way to protect your finances is to have a stash of cash that you can use in an emergency, such as losing your job or incurring a large, unexpected expense. With cash to draw on in an emergency, you may be able to avoid racking up credit card debt or raiding your retirement savings—both of which can have a long-term negative impact on your finances.

It's generally a good idea to have enough cash in your emergency fund to cover a few months of living expenses. Some experts recommend a sum equal to three to six months of expenses, but the amount that is right for you will depend on your circumstances. For example, someone in a field where jobs are plentiful may be comfortable with fewer months of emergency savings than someone in a field where jobs are scarce. Working couples who can rely on the other person's paycheck if their own paycheck stops may be comfortable with fewer months of savings than a one-paycheck individual or family.

An emergency fund should generally be kept in an account that is easy to liquidate in an emergency, but separate from your other funds so that you are not tempted to dip into it for non-emergencies. An interest-bearing account, such as a savings or money market account, can be a good choice. Laddered certificates of deposit that mature at regular intervals can also be used. An investment account containing lower-risk investments, such as money market funds, may also be an appropriate choice.

Protect your income with disability insurance.

If you are like many workers, your ability to work and earn a living may be your most valuable asset. Lose that ability, and your long-term financial security may be threatened if you end up depleting your retirement savings in order to pay your current living expenses.

Fortunately, there is a type of insurance that can help ensure that you receive an income even when you cannot work. It's called disability insurance, and it's designed to replace part of your income for a period of time when you are too ill or injured to work. The income payments you receive from this type of insurance can help you pay for housing, food, utilities, and other expenses that must still be paid even when you are laid up.

What are the odds that you will ever need disability insurance? Greater than you may think. The Social Security Administration estimates that more than one in four individuals entering the workforce today will become disabled before they reach retirement age.

When contemplating the odds that you may one day need to file a claim for disability insurance benefits, be sure to consider that the disability does not need to happen at work to be covered. It might be an injury that occurs outside of work or an illness, such as cancer or a stroke, that prevents you from working.

Some employers offer disability insurance. If you have a policy through your employer, it's a good idea to find out whether it is adequate for your needs. Many employers offer only short-term disability insurance, which pays out benefits for a short period of time, such as three to six months. Some employers may also offer long-term disability insurance, which kicks in for a period of time after short-term disability insurance stops.

When reviewing your current coverage, be sure to take a look at how the monthly benefit is calculated and how long the benefits may continue. You may be able to replace a larger portion of your income or extend the benefit period by purchasing an individual policy to supplement the coverage you already have.

Protect your credit by watching for identity theft and fraud.

Check your credit reports at least once a year and report any errors or signs of fraud to the credit reporting agencies and the company where the error/fraud occurred. Also, review your financial statements and medical bills promptly.

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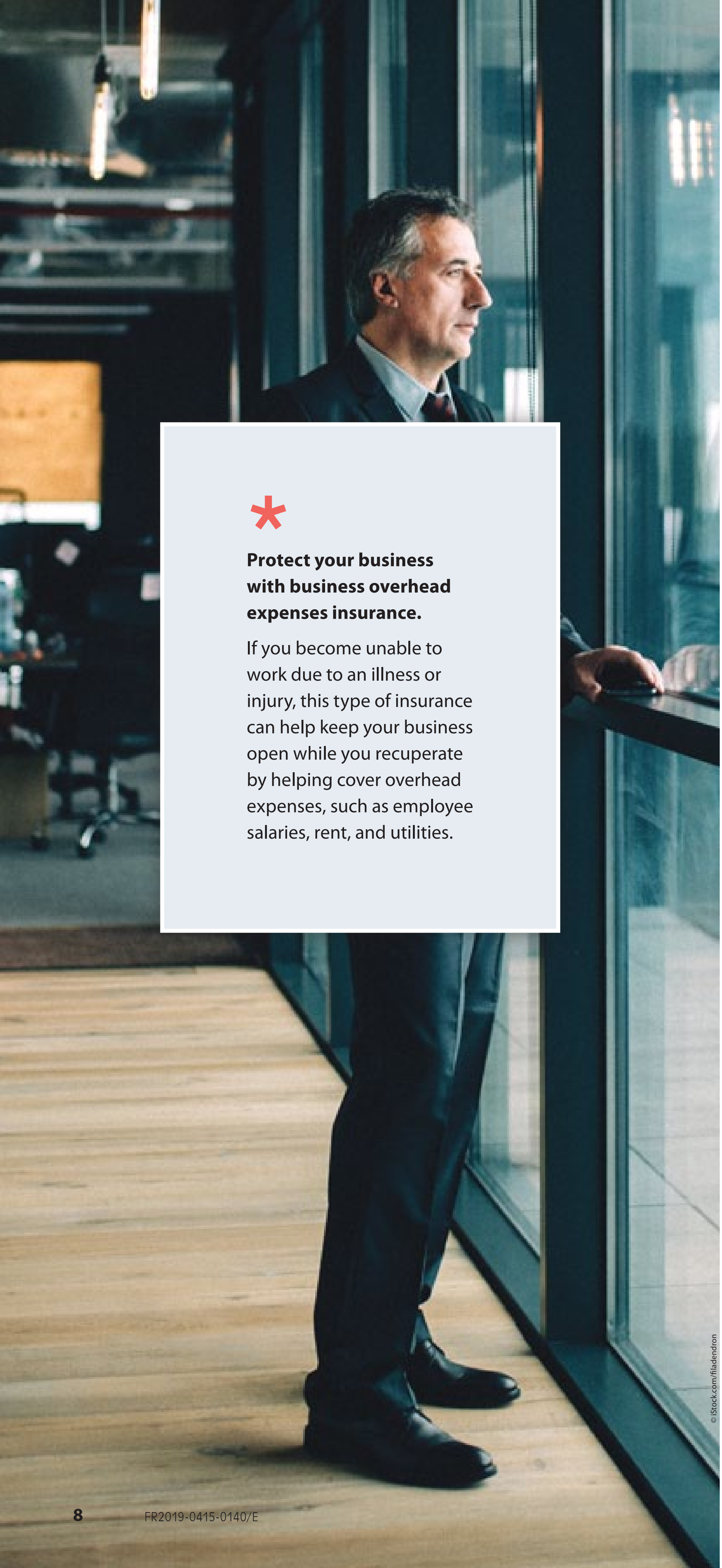

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Protect your business with business overhead expenses insurance.

If you become unable to work due to an illness or injury, this type of insurance can help keep your business open while you recuperate by helping cover overhead expenses, such as employee salaries, rent, and utilities.

Protect your assets with umbrella insurance.

The more you own or earn, the more you may have at risk if someone is injured on your property or by your car or boat. You can help protect your assets from a lawsuit with an umbrella insurance policy.

Umbrella insurance provides extra liability coverage beyond the limits of your homeowner's, auto, and boat insurance policies, whose limits may be as low as $100,000, $300,000, or $500,000.

Here's how umbrella insurance generally works. Let's say the maximum liability coverage on your auto insurance policy is $500,000 per accident and that you also have a $2 million personal umbrella insurance policy. If a person injured by your car is awarded, let's say, $800,000, your auto policy will cover the first $500,000, less any deductible you may owe. The umbrella policy will then cover the remaining $300,000. Without the umbrella policy, you may have to pay the remaining judgement from your assets and perhaps your future earnings.

Protect your retirement savings by planning for long-term care.

One of the greatest risks to your finances in retirement may be the cost of long-term care (LTC). It can be expensive and the odds of you needing it are high. About 70% of people turning age 65 are expected to need LTC services at some point in their lives, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Preparing for the cost of long-term care now may help you afford quality care in the future and reduce the risk of of LTC expenses draining your retirement savings prematurely. There are several ways to go about this.

One approach is to simply factor potential LTC costs into your financial plan and save enough money to cover LTC services on your own. The upside to this approach is that if you do not need LTC services, the money you set aside for LTC will eventually go to your heirs.

Or you can purchase a traditional LTC insurance policy that will help you cover the cost of care in your home, a nursing home, or certain other settings. If you decide to go this route, keep in mind that people generally buy this type of insurance in their fifties or sixties, while they are still in good health and premiums are still relatively low.

A hybrid LTC/life insurance policy may also be an option. A hybrid policy typically pays benefits for LTC services and a death benefit to your beneficiary when you pass away, reduced by any LTC benefits you received.

Adding an LTC rider to a life insurance policy may also be an option. LTC riders generally allow you to use part of the death benefit during your lifetime to pay LTC expenses with the remaining death benefit generally paid to your beneficiaries after you pass.

Protect your finances by naming someone to handle them when you cannot. At some point in your life, you may not be able to manage your own finances. To prepare for this possibility, it is important to get the legal documents in place that grant someone you trust the authority to manage your finances on your behalf.

One such document is a durable power of attorney. One feature of this document is that it remains in effect after you become incapacitated so the person you name in it can step in and handle the financial tasks outlined in the document. For example, a durable power of attorney might be used to grant someone the authority to handle your banking, manage your investments, pay your bills, and file your tax returns.

It's a good idea to check with your financial institutions ahead of time to make certain that they will honor your power of attorney. In some instances, the institutions may prefer that you use their own power-of-attorney forms.

Another way to quickly transfer management of certain assets is to create a revocable living trust. This type of trust allows the successor trustee you choose to step in and manage the assets in the trust if you become incapacitated.

Protect your family's financial security with life insurance.

If there are people in your life whose standard of living would suffer without your income, consider protecting their financial futures with a life insurance policy.

After your death, a life insurance policy pays cash to your beneficiaries that can help them tackle their day-to-day expenses, as well as larger expenses, such as paying off a mortgage or covering your children's college tuition. In other words, the influx of cash from a life insurance policy can help provide financial security to your spouse, children, parents, and other loved ones after you are gone.

Certain types of life insurance can also enhance your own financial security during your lifetime by allowing you to withdraw or borrow your policy's cash value—a feature that may come in handy if you ever need additional income for, say, retirement or emergencies. ■

Please consult your financial advisor for advice on what you can do to help protect your finances.

Summertime Tax Tips

Although taxes may be the furthest thing from your mind during the summer, it's good to know how certain things you do this summer may affect your taxes—and possibly result in a break on your tax bill for the year. Here are a few tips. Your tax advisor can help you determine how they apply to your situation.

NEWLY MARRIED

Let the Social Security Administration (SSA) know if you change your name. Your tax refund may be delayed if the names on your federal tax return do not match the names on file with SSA.

Review your tax withholding if you get married this summer (or any time this year). Getting married can change your tax situation and result in too much or too little federal income tax being withheld from your paycheck. The withholding calculator on the IRS's website (irs.gov/W4App) can help you determine whether you need to have your withholding adjusted.

CHILDREN

Hire your child. If you own a business, hiring your child for the summer can make good tax sense. You can deduct the amount you pay your child as a business expense. And the amount you pay your child is not subject to Social Security and Medicare taxes if your child is under age 18 and your business is a sole proprietorship or a partnership where the child's parents are the only partners.

Help your teen fund an IRA. If your teenage child or grandchild gets paid for working this summer, you may want to take this opportunity to help them get a jump on saving for retirement by giving them some seed money for a Roth IRA. For 2019, contributions generally cannot exceed the child's taxable compensation or $6,000, whichever is less.

YOUR HOME

Keep your home improvement receipts. They may help you avoid taxes when you sell your home. Amounts you spend on improvements to your home, such as installing a new heating system or remodeling your kitchen, increases your home's basis, which can help you minimize or avoid tax on the increase in your home's value when you sell it.

Claim a tax credit for adding alternative energy equipment. The federal government offers a 30% tax credit for installing qualified solar, geothermal, wind, and fuel cell equipment in your home. Your state may also offer tax incentives for adding energy-efficient equipment to your home.

Have a vacation home? You may be able to deduct the mortgage interest and real estate taxes you pay on it. If you itemize deductions on your federal tax return, you can generally deduct the interest you pay on up to $1 million of home acquisition debt ($500,000 if married filing separately), provided the loan is secured by your main home or second home. For homes purchased after December 15, 2017, the limit is reduced to $750,000 ($375,000 if married filing separately). Keep in mind that your second home does not need to be a house to qualify for this deduction. It can be a boat, RV, or other type of property that has sleeping, cooking, and toilet facilities.

You may also be able to deduct the real estate taxes you pay on your vacation home. However, the most you can deduct for all state and local taxes you pay, including real estate taxes, is limited to $10,000, or $5,000 if you are married and file separately.

Earn tax-free income by renting out your home. If you rent out your home for 14 days or less per year, you can pocket the rental income without having to pay tax on it. If you rent for more than 14 days per year, the rental income is taxable, but you can help offset it by deducting your rental expenses.

TRAVEL

Self-employed? Extend a business trip into a vacation. You can generally deduct your business-related travel expenses, including transportation to and from your business destination, as long as your trip is primarily for business. (Additional rules and limits may apply.)

Deduct a volunteer vacation. If you travel away from home this summer to provide services for a qualified charitable organization, you may be able to deduct your travel expenses if you itemize deductions, your duties are real and substantial, and the trip does not include a significant element of vacation, recreation, or pleasure. ■

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Claim a tax credit for day camp expenses.

You may be able to claim a federal tax credit for part of the cost of day camp if your child is under age 13 and attends camp so that you (and your spouse if you file a joint tax return) can work.

What to Know About Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs)

Retirement accounts offer great tax benefits, but your savings cannot remain in them forever. Beginning at age 70½*, you generally must withdraw at least a minimum amount each year from most types of retirement accounts and pay tax on the taxable portion of the withdrawals. These minimum withdrawals are known as required minimum distributions (RMDs). Here are a few things to know about them. Your tax and financial advisors can tell you more.

How are RMDs calculated?

Your IRA custodians and retirement plan administrators will generally calculate your RMDs for you each year, but it is a good idea to understand the math behind them.

RMDs are calculated by dividing your account balance on December 31 of the prior year by a life expectancy factor from the IRS. For example, let's say your IRA balance on December 31 last year was $1 million and you are age 71. According to the IRS's Uniform Lifetime Table, the life expectancy factor is 26.5 years for someone who is age 71. So $1 million is divided by 26.5 to arrive at a $37,736 RMD for that IRA for the year.

Other IRS tables will be used to look up your life expectancy factor if 1) your spouse is the sole beneficiary of your retirement account and is more than 10 years younger than you, or 2) you are the beneficiary of the account. Please note that this article focuses solely on the RMD rules that apply to original account owners. If you inherited a retirement account, please see your tax or financial advisor for the rules that apply to you.

Can you withdraw more than the RMD amount?

Yes. The RMD is simply the minimum amount that must be withdrawn each year.

Can you add up your RMDs and take them from one account?

If you own more than one IRA, you can add up the RMD amounts for each IRA and withdraw the total amount from one or more IRAs.

RMDs are required from:

- Traditional IRAs
- SEP IRAs
- SIMPLE IRAs
- 401(k) plans
- 403(b) plans
- 457(b) plans
- Profit-sharing plans
- Other defined contribution plans

RMDs are not required from Roth IRAs during the account owner's lifetime.

The same holds true for 403(b) accounts: You can withdraw your total 403(b) RMDs from one or more 403(b) accounts.

However, with other types of retirement plans, such as 401(k) plans, RMDs must be taken separately from each account. For example, if you have more than one 401(k) account, you must take a separate RMD from each of your 401(k) accounts.

How are RMDs taxed?

The taxable portion of your RMD will be added to your taxable income for the year and taxed as ordinary income. What portion of your RMD will be taxable?

With a tax-deferred account, the full amount of your RMD will be taxable if you made only pre-tax or deductible contributions. If you made any after-tax or nondeductible contributions, only part of your RMD will be taxable because amounts that were taxed before they entered the account can be withdrawn tax-free.

With a Roth account, the full amount of your RMD will generally be tax-free. (RMDs are required from Roth 401(k), 403(b), and 457(b) accounts, but not from Roth IRAs during the account owner's lifetime.)

At what age do RMDs begin?

RMDs generally must begin the year you reach age 70½. However, you may be able to delay the start of RMDs from a non-IRA retirement plan if you are still working for the company sponsoring the plan, the plan permits the delay, and you do not own 5% or more of the company.

What's the deadline for taking an RMD?

You generally have until December 31 each year to take an RMD for that year.

There is an exception to the December 31 deadline: You have until April 1 of the year following the year you reach age 70½ to take your first RMD.

Keep in mind, though, that if you delay taking your first RMD until the following year, you'll end up taking two RMDs that year—one by April 1 for the prior year and one by December 31 for the current year. Be sure to consider the impact this may have on your taxes. For example, taking two years of RMDs in one year may increase your taxable income enough to bump you into a higher tax bracket, resulting in your RMDs being taxed at a higher rate.

What happens if you miss the deadline?

The penalty for missing an RMD deadline is huge: You may have to pay a 50% excise tax on any amount not distributed as required. For example, if you are required to withdraw $50,000 this year and only withdraw $30,000, the penalty for the $20,000 shortfall would be an additional $10,000 in tax. Ouch!

If you can prove that the shortfall was the result of a reasonable error and that you have taken steps to correct it, the IRS may waive the penalty.

How do charitable distributions from an IRA work?

Using your IRA to fund your charitable gifts can be a smart tax move in some situations. Here's how it works.

As long as you are at least age 70½, you can have up to $100,000 per year distributed tax-free from your IRA directly to qualified charities. The distribution counts toward your IRA's RMD for the year, but it is not added to your gross income as the taxable portion of an RMD normally would be and so it escapes taxation. ■

** Please note that as this publication entered production in May 2019, Congress was working on legislation that may increase the starting age for RMDs.*

Please consult your tax and financial advisors about how to plan for and manage your RMDs.

THE IRS REQUIRES OWNERS OF MOST TYPES OF RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS TO WITHDRAW A MINIMUM AMOUNT EACH YEAR BEGINNING AT AGE 70½.

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9 Things You May Not Know About Health Savings Accounts

A Health Savings Account (HSA) is an account that people with a high-deductible health plan can use to save for their current and future medical expenses. Unlike regular savings and investment accounts, HSAs are generally tax-free as long as your withdrawals are used to pay qualified medical expenses incurred by you, your spouse, and your dependents.

1. Your savings roll over every year.
Unlike a flexible spending account, the unused money in your HSA is not lost at the end of the plan year. Instead, it rolls over from year to year, enabling you to save your unused funds for your future medical expenses.

2. HSAs offer more tax advantages than IRAs and 401(k) plans do.

Contributions are pre-tax or tax-deductible.

Interest and earnings grow tax-free.

Withdrawals for qualified medical expenses are tax-free.

That's one more tax advantage than offered by IRAs and 401(k) plans, which either tax your contributions on the way in or your withdrawals on the way out.

HSA withdrawals that are not used for qualified medical expenses are subject to income tax and, if made before age 65, generally a 20% tax penalty. Please consult your financial advisor about whether HSA contributions or earnings are taxed by your state.

**3.
The list of qualified medical expenses is extensive.**

In addition to a wide range of medical services, equipment, and supplies, qualified expenses include prescription drugs and dental and vision care.

For a full list, check out IRS Publication 502.

4. Insurance premiums are qualified expenses in some cases.
The money in an HSA can be used tax-free to pay deductibles and copayments, but generally not insurance premiums unless the premiums are for:

- Long-term care insurance
- Health care continuation coverage, such as under COBRA
- Health care coverage while receiving unemployment compensation
- Medicare (but not Medigap) and other health care coverage if you are age 65 or older

5. You can use your HSA funds for your spouse's and children's qualified expenses also.

Even if they are not on your health plan, the money in your HSA can be used tax-free to pay the qualified medical expenses of your spouse and your dependents.

6. Over-the-counter drugs require a prescription to be a qualified medical expense.

So if your doctor recommends an over-the-counter drug for you, consider asking for a prescription for it. Over-the-counter items, such as insulin, bandages, and catheters, are qualified medical expenses and do not require a prescription.

7. You can maximize an HSA's tax-free growth potential by paying out of pocket.

If your goal is to use your HSA to save for your medical expenses in retirement, consider paying your current medical expenses out of pocket so that all of your HSA contributions remain invested until retirement. This strategy maximizes the time your savings have to potentially grow, perhaps generating tax-free earnings for what may be decades.

8. You may be able to invest the money in your HSA.

HSAs generally offer an interest-bearing savings account. Some HSAs also offer an investment account with a selection of mutual funds and perhaps other types of investments.

While a savings account can be a good choice for those funds you may need soon, an investment account with stock and bond mutual funds offers the potential for greater returns over time. So if your goal is to save for your long-term medical expenses, such as those in retirement, consider choosing an HSA that offers an investment account in addition to a savings account.

PLEASE NOTE: Investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal. Before investing in mutual funds, investors should consider a fund's investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses. Contact your financial advisor for a prospectus containing this information. Please read it carefully before investing.

9. You can use the savings in your HSA to supplement your retirement income.

You can withdraw money from an HSA for any purpose, including your nonmedical retirement expenses. Withdrawals for anything other than qualified medical expenses are subject to income tax, but once you reach age 65, the additional 20% tax penalty on nonmedical withdrawals no longer applies. Of course, you will get more bang for your buck if you use your HSA funds tax-free for qualified medical expenses, but it is good to know that you can use the funds for other expenses as long as you pay the tax. ■

Please consult your financial advisor about HSAs and how to save for your medical expenses in retirement.

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FRENCH CONNECTION | Seine River, France

BY BRIAN JOHNSTON

If you're looking for a river cruise that encapsulates all that is French, then the Seine River will certainly seduce.

OH, WHAT A MIGHTY FINE MOOD you'll be in when you arrive in Paris. Your taxi from the airport will probably be a battered Peugeot whose driver gesticulates and speaks English with an outrageous accent. It will nip between lanes and hurtle you downtown, and suddenly you surge out of an underpass and the Eiffel Tower looms along the Seine River.

You pass cafés under striped awnings and local ladies dragging poodles. Clipped plane trees cast cinematographic shadows. Then you cross a bridge and your river-cruise ship waits in welcome. You can't help but think that your arrival could only be more French if an accordion player in a beret offered you a Pernod.

Sometimes the best of travel is realizing the foolishness of stereotypes but, on occasion, giving in to the clichés is rather marvelous. Being in Paris is like stepping into a movie: lights twinkle along the Champs-Élysées, couples canoodle on shadowy Seine promenades, policemen sport rakish navy-blue hats. And what could be more satisfying than boarding a cruise within sight of the Eiffel Tower, even if one critic on its opening denounced it as a 'truly tragic street lamp'?

Over the next week, sailing slowly northwards along the lazy, loopy Seine River through Normandy, there are plenty of other stereotypes and déjà-vu feelings to make you smile like a sugar addict in a patisserie. The river is central to French history and endlessly depicted in its art. As you sail into the countryside, you pass an Impressionist blur of poplar trees, shimmering water and cows standing knee-deep in grass. The Seine is soft grey, topped by marshmallow clouds scudding in a pale sky as your river-cruise ship sweeps in great hairpins through the heartland of France.

Happily, your ship is likely to dish up stereotypes too. You can sit in the restaurant and watch Normandy float by as you tuck into meat-and-bean cassoulet stew, quiche Lorraine, and (rather daring by cruise standards) perhaps escargots and frog's legs.

The Seine River flows past the Conciergerie, a medieval palace in Paris (left). Rouen's Rue de Gros Horloge (below) is lined with half-timbered houses and straddled by an arch bearing one of the oldest working clocks in Europe.

On day two you might be docked at Vernon, a riverside town fringed by limestone cliffs. Giverny is across the river. Claude Monet lived here in a pink house, planted himself a Japanese garden, and immortalized it all on canvas. Wandering past his flowerbeds and lily ponds is thrilling despite the crowds. Inside the house, it's as if the painter has just left to buy a baguette. Monet's studio is scattered with crockery, canvases, and flowers in jars.

Soon you're back on the shimmering river that reflects castle-topped towns and a pointillist blur of trees. You're now in Normandy, and the silvery northern light demonstrates why all those painters came here. A couple of days later, you're in Honfleur, an English Channel port town at the Seine's mouth also repeatedly painted by Impressionists such as Monet, Sisley, and Corot. It has, though, been around since the eleventh century, and has churches devoted to sailors and shipbuilders, lovely wooden houses reflected in water, chattering seagulls, and fresh Normandy breezes.

A Seine River itinerary will vary from company to company, but most cruise ships call at the same ports. Given the short length of the Seine, cruises are a round-trip affair from Paris but, since the riverbanks are dense with history, the return trip will feel entirely different.

Dock at either Caudebec or Rouen and you get an opportunity to opt for shore excursions to destinations associated with both World Wars. Some trace the events of D-Day and visit the important sites and beaches associated with the June 1944 landings, such as Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc monument, and the American Cemetery. Others head further afield by road to the Somme, site of the infamous 1916 battle. The white gravestones, manicured lawns, and roses of the military cemeteries in places such as Villers-Bretonneux are a beautiful but sad reminder of lives lost during World War I.

Rouen was all but destroyed by bombing in World War II. The cathedral exhibits compelling photos of war damage, but the old town has been impeccably restored and the cathedral façade is a cascade of grinning saints and squirming sinners. Monet painted the cathedral over 40 times, a homage to the changing light on its outrageous architecture. He sat at a window of a lingerie shop across the square—now the tourist office—with his easel screened off from half-dressed ladies in the changing rooms.

Rouen is a charming city whose residents shop under half-timbered houses and drink coffee under a town clock centuries old. At its heart is a church rich in stained glass and dedicated to Joan of Arc, burnt at the stake by the English in Rouen in 1431. Touchingly, people still lay bouquets of drooping jonquils below the cross outside that marks the spot where France's patron saint met her end.

Even here, delightful stereotypes thrive: right outside the church, the city's market bursts with foie gras, Rouen duck, and pear tarts. You certainly won't go hungry in this part of France. Normandy is a rich agricultural region noted for its salted butter, soft cheeses (most notably Camembert), and whipped or Chantilly cream, said to have first been created in the mid-seventeenth century at the Château de Chantilly. Other regional specialties are apple cider, Calvados brandy, and fresh mussels cooked in cider, cream, and white wine.

Back on board you might be tucking into Normandy lamb shanks for lunch as the ship docks in Les Andelys, a gorgeously snug country town straight from a Flaubert novel. Walk off your dining excesses with a hike up the hill to ruined Château Gaillard, twelfth-century fortress of Richard the Lionheart. Views over a sweeping bend of the Seine River, town chimneypots, and the surrounding cow-chewed countryside would gladden the most doleful of hearts.

You could no doubt sail this river for another week, but it's hard to complain about the journey's end when that end is Paris. Cruise itineraries usually provide a day or two to explore, with side benefits such as skipping the huge queues at the Eiffel Tower or Louvre.

On the final evening, you could celebrate your last night with newfound shipboard mates on a shore-excursion outing to the Moulin Rouge. And yes, that too seems like a wonderful cliché. The waiters are grumpy, the champagne flows, dancers in sequins and feathers shimmer. You feel as if you've fallen into a Toulouse-Lautrec poster, or a set for a Baz Luhrmann movie. The cancan explodes in high kicks and ruffles, the crowd cheers. For a finale to a French holiday, it couldn't be better. ■

Summer Music Festivals 2019

From Mozart, Gershwin, and Copland to Blige, Marsalis, and Glass, the summer is alive with the sound of music!

CUYAHOGA FALLS

Blossom Music Festival *June 29–September 1, 2019*

The Cleveland Orchestra's Blossom Music Festival will present a varied slate of artists and programs this summer at the Blossom Music Center in Northeast Ohio. Programs range from beloved favorites, such as Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Brahms's *Symphony No. 1* to rarely heard masterpieces from composers like Zemlinsky and Ives. Music legends Brian Wilson, Peter Yarrow, and Paul Stookey will perform. Vocalist Capathia Jenkins returns to the Blossom stage for a tribute to the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin. Rogers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* will be performed in concert.

ASPEN

Aspen Music Festival and School *June 27–August 18, 2019*

Celebrating its 70th anniversary this summer, this classical music festival will offer more than 400 musical events during its eight-week season in Aspen. "Being American" is 2019's theme and will feature music by Gershwin, Ives, Barber, Bernstein, and Copland, as well as contemporary composers, such as Wynton Marsalis, Stephen Sondheim, and Philip Glass. The musicians performing the works will include visiting artists and members of the School's faculty, as well as nearly 700 of the world's best music students.

NEW ORLEANS

ESSENCE Festival *July 4–7, 2019*

The 2019 ESSENCE Festival's three-night concert series at the Louisiana Superdome will showcase nearly 30 artists per night, including Missy Elliott, Mary J. Blige, NAS, H.E.R., Anthony Hamilton, Big Freedia, Davido, Doug E. Fresh, Frankie Beverly, Jermaine Dupri, Ledisi, and MC Lyte.

NEW YORK

Mostly Mozart Festival *July 10–August 10, 2019*

Harnessing Mozart's innovative spirit as its inspiration, the 2019 Mostly Mozart Festival will present an array of premieres, concert performances, and acclaimed staged productions at venues across the Lincoln Center campus and beyond. Highlighting the 2019 season will be a production of Mozart's beloved comedic opera *The Magic Flute*, a world premiere from Mark Morris Dance Group, and the U.S. premiere of *Under Siege*, a Chinese dance-theatre work from Yang Liping Contemporary Dance.

VAIL

Bravo! Vail Music Festival *June 20–August 4, 2019*

Now in its 32nd season, the Bravo! Vail Music Festival brings world-renowned musicians to venues throughout the Vail Valley for nearly seven weeks each summer. Highlights of the 2019 season will include the Festival's first-ever staged opera (*Tosca*), the North American debut of Chamber Orchestra Vienna – Berlin, premieres of new works by Philip Glass and Edgar Meyer, performances by Anne-Sophie Mutter and Yefim Bronfman, and an array of concerts by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic.

NEWPORT

Newport Jazz Festival *August 2–4, 2019*

The Newport Jazz Festival will celebrate its 65th anniversary this summer with performances by more than 50 jazz ensembles, including many award-winning artists. The event will be held at Fort Adam State Park, located at the picturesque entrance to Newport Harbor in Rhode Island. ■

QUIZ

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE YOU?

1. If you are cruising amongst the more than 1600 islands and islets that dot Ha Long Bay (above), you are in:

A. Thailand
B. Vietnam

2. If you are wandering through the world's largest concentration of hoodoos (tall spires of eroded rock), you are in:

A. Bryce Canyon
B. Yosemite

3. If you are exploring the ruins of the Minoan Palace of Knossos, you are in:

A. Crete
B. Sicily

4. If you are watching orca whales breach off the coast of the San Juan Islands, you are in:

A. Puerto Rico
B. Washington State

5. If you are touring the 14th-century Papal Palace in Avignon, you are in:

A. Italy
B. France

6. If you are climbing up to where the Buddhist monastery, Taktsang (Tiger's Nest), clings to the cliffside above the Paro Valley, you are in:

A. India
B. Bhutan

7. If you are keeping an eye out for bears as you raft down the Kenai River, you are in:

A. Alaska
B. Maine

8. If you are cruising from Vienna to Budapest, you are on the:

A. Danube River
B. Rhine River

9. If you are sailing the Dalmatian Coast between Split and Dubrovnik, you are on the:

A. Arabian Sea
B. Adriatic Sea

10. If you are boarding a train at St Pancras International station, you are in:

A. London
B. Edinburgh

ANSWERS: 1-B, 2–A, 3–A, 4–B, 5–B, 6–B, 7–A, 8–A, 9–B, 10–A

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