

# The Best of Boston

**B**ostonians are feeling good. They have lots of pretty things to admire, both old and new: World Series rings. Super Bowl trophies (three in 4 years). A picturesque river and a rejuvenated harbor. College campuses that incorporate buildings of all ages and styles, from colonial-era to Frank Gehry's latest brainstorm. A reconfigured interstate that passes over a landmark bridge. Acres of real estate that used to be trapped under a hideous highway.

In years to come, a footnote to the year 2004 will be the completion of the Big Dig, a highway-construction project that moved Interstate 93 into a new tunnel system and demolished the elevated expressway that used to blight downtown. It took 15 years and cost \$14.6 billion, and it's a footnote? Well, yes—2004 was the year the Red Sox won the World Series for the first time since 1918.

Footnote or no, the new highway runs beneath a modern metropolis that's also a relentlessly historic destination. An ongoing building boom may overshadow the famous 18th- and 19th-century architecture, but even rampant development can't change the colonial character of the central city.

It's not perfect, of course. Nightmarish traffic, daredevil drivers, and grating accents don't help any city's reputation. Although Boston is the biggest college town in the world, it doesn't have much of a late-night scene. And far from gone is the inferiority complex epitomized by the description "like New York, but smaller." Still, as it has for over 375 years, Boston offers cosmopolitan sophistication on a comfortable scale, balancing celebration of the past with pursuit of the future.

Here's hoping your experience is memorable and delightful.

## 1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **A Sky Full of Fireworks:** Twice during Independence Day festivities and again as the New Year begins, the firmament flashes in celebration. The Fourth of July fireworks are over the Charles River; the Harborfest display (in early July) and the First Night show explode above the Inner Harbor. See "Boston Calendar of Events," in chapter 2.
- **A Ride on a Duck:** A Duck Tour, that is. Board a reconditioned amphibious World War II landing craft (on Huntington Ave., near the Prudential Center) for a sightseeing ride that includes a dip in the river—for the Duck, not you. See p. 186.
- **An Afternoon Red Sox Game:** Since 1912, baseball fans have made pilgrimages to Fenway Park, the "lyric little bandbox of a ball park" (in John Updike's words) off Kenmore Square. Since 2004, they've come to share the excitement that accompanied the team's first World Series title in 86 years. The seats are uncomfortable and expensive, but you won't care a whit as you soak up the atmosphere and bask in the sun. See p. 197.

- **A Walk Around the North End:** Boston's Little Italy (but don't call it that!) has an old-world flavor you won't want to miss. Explore the shops on Salem Street, wander the narrow side streets, enjoy some pasta, and be sure to stop for coffee and a pastry at a Hanover Street *caffè*. See "Welcome to the North End," on p. 181.
- **An Off-Season Day Trip:** Destinations that abound with out-of-towners in the summer and fall become more manageable when the weather turns cold. Don't let the CLOSED FOR THE SEASON signs put you off: Under a cloudless sky, against the indigo Atlantic, an all-but-deserted suburban town has a unique appeal. See chapter 12.

## 2 The Best Splurge Hotels

- **Boston Harbor Hotel**, Rows Wharf, Waterfront (☎ 800/752-7077). Breathtaking water views and over-the-top luxury combine to make the Boston Harbor Hotel the best in downtown Boston. It's just close enough to the Financial District to allow you to walk to your meeting and just far enough away to guarantee some peace at the end of a busy day. See p. 82.
- **Charles Hotel**, 1 Bennett St., Cambridge (☎ 800/882-1818). Steps from the hubbub of Harvard Square, the Charles is a sanctuary of contemporary design and traditional pampering. Every element is elegant and tasteful, making the Charles a favorite with visiting celebrities. See p. 103.
- **Eliot Hotel**, 370 Commonwealth Ave., Back Bay (☎ 800/44-ELIOT). Everything from the location of the hotel to the layout of the suites makes the Eliot feel like a luxury apartment building. The business features and elegant traditional furnishings contribute to the atmosphere, a seamless blend of commerce and comfort. See p. 93.
- **Four Seasons Hotel**, 200 Boylston St., Back Bay (☎ 800/819-5053). The best hotel in New England has everything—and what it doesn't have on the premises, the incredible staff will track down. Superb service, plush accommodations, and lavish amenities make a stay here unforgettable. See p. 90.

## 3 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Charlesmark Hotel**, 655 Boylston St. (☎ 617/247-1212). The Charlesmark's thoughtful features—plush bedding, free local phone calls, friendly service, custom-designed everything—more than make up for the size of the rooms, which are on the snug side. Bonus: Units at the front of the building overlook the Boston Marathon finish line. See p. 97.
- **Doubletree Guest Suites**, 400 Soldiers Field Rd., Brighton (☎ 800/222-TREE). Prices at busy times are at the high end of the moderate range, but this hotel is still a great deal—every unit is a spacious two-room suite. The location, straddling Boston and Cambridge, is especially good if you're driving. See p. 99.
- **Harborside Inn**, 185 State St., downtown (☎ 888/723-7565). Rooms in this renovated 19th-century warehouse feel like little lofts, with hardwood floors and exposed-brick walls. A stone's throw from Faneuil Hall Marketplace and the New England Aquarium, it's also perfect if you have

business in the nearby Financial District. See p. 83.

- **MidTown Hotel**, 220 Huntington Ave., Back Bay (☎ 800/343-1177). A unique combination of comfortable, no-frills rooms and a handy location make this hotel the most motel-like lodging in central Boston. Best of all, the room rate includes parking for one

car—a savings of as much as \$35 per day. See p. 98.

- **Newbury Guest House**, 261 Newbury St., Back Bay (☎ 800/437-7668). This place would be a bargain even if it weren't ideally situated in the heart of Boston's best shopping. Room prices even include continental breakfast. See p. 98.

## 4 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences

- **Durgin-Park**, 340 Faneuil Hall Marketplace (☎ 617/227-2038). This Boston institution has packed 'em in since 1827. It serves classic New England fare in abundant portions at communal tables, delighting everyone from local tycoons to visiting toddlers. Well, almost everyone. The famously crotchety staff is so much a part of the legend that some people are disappointed when the waitresses are nice (as they often are). See p. 124.
- **Legal Sea Foods**, 800 Boylston St., in the Prudential Center (☎ 617/266-6800) and other locations. Like the culinary equivalent of a medical specialist, Legal's does one thing and does it exceptionally well. It's a chain for a great reason: People can't get enough of the freshest seafood around. See p. 138.
- **Mr. Bartley's Burger Cottage**, 1246 Mass. Ave., Cambridge (☎ 617/354-6559). Trends in food and fashion come and go, and this neighborhood sees them all. Luckily, Harvard Square has a place that puts the comfort in comfort food. Bartley's is famous for its juicy burgers, incredible onion

rings, and a down-to-earth atmosphere that's increasingly rare in these parts. See p. 146.

- **Pizzeria Regina**, 11½ Thacher St. (☎ 617/227-0765). My friend Matt kept looking around, insisting that a film crew had to be hiding somewhere. And with its red-and-white-checked tablecloths and fiery oven, Regina's does look like Hollywood's idea of a pizza joint. After one bite of that slightly smoky crust, you'll be sending Martin Scorsese to the back of the line. See p. 122.
- **Ye Olde Union Oyster House**, 41 Union St. (☎ 617/227-2750). Wise guys sneer about all the tourists, but the Union Oyster House is a local favorite for a reason—the locals eat there, too. The unbeatable combination of historic atmosphere and traditional food has drawn crowds since 1826. After just a few minutes of gobbling fresh seafood and being hypnotized by the shuckers, you might feel sorry for the people who wound up with the pearls instead of the oysters. See p. 124.

## 5 The Best Free (Or Almost Free) Things to Do

- **Picnic by the Water**. Head for the harbor or river, perch on a park bench or patch of grass, put away your watch, relax, and enjoy the spectacular scene. Whether it's sailboats

or ocean liners, seagulls or scullers, there's always something worth watching. My favorite spot is the end of Long Wharf, not far from Faneuil Hall Marketplace, but it's just one of

thousands of pleasant spots. See chapter 7.

- **Visit a Museum:** Schedule your visit to take advantage of free or reduced admission at certain times. The **USS Constitution Museum** is free all the time; the **Children's Museum** costs just \$1 after 5pm on Friday; the **Institute of Contemporary Art** is free after 5pm Wednesday; the **Harvard University Art Museums** are free before noon Saturday; and the **Harvard Natural History Museums** are free on Sunday morning year-round and from 3 to 5pm Wednesday during the academic year. The **Museum of Fine Arts** “suggests” that you pay the regular \$15 admission after 4pm Wednesday, but you don’t have to. See chapter 8.
- **Relish a Vicarious Thrill:** Without so much as lacing up a sneaker, you can participate in the world-famous Boston Marathon. Stretch a little.

Drink plenty of fluids. Stake out a slice of sidewalk on Commonwealth Avenue and cheer as the runners thunder past. Then put your feet up—you must be exhausted. See p. 199.

- **Prowl Newbury Street:** From the genteel Arlington Street end to the cutting-edge Mass. Avenue end, Newbury Street—Boston’s legendary shopping destination—is 8 blocks of pure temptation: galleries, boutiques, jewelry and gift shops, bookstores, and more. Fortunately, window-shopping is free. See chapter 10.
- **Check Out a College Concert or Show:** Countless local student groups just want an attentive audience, and the free or minimal admission can pay off in the long run. Imagine the credit card commercial: “Ability to say you recognized the talent of [insert name of big star] in a student production? Priceless.” See chapter 11.

## 6 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **A Ride Across the Harbor:** The ferry that connects Long Wharf and the Charlestown Navy Yard is a treasure hidden in plain sight. You might notice the boat traffic on the Inner Harbor as you make your way around downtown; for just \$1.50, you can be part of it. See chapter 5.
- **An Interlude at a Cafe:** When it comes to good ideas, outdoor seating in a place with great people-watching is right up there with fire and the wheel. A passing parade of shoppers and students (on Newbury St. and in Harvard Sq.) is more interesting than suits and ties (downtown and the rest of the Back Bay), but if the breeze and the iced cappuccino are cool, what’s not to like? See chapter 7.

- **A Free Concert:** The Boston area’s cultural scene has no real off season. During the summer, many musicians and musical groups take their acts outside—to parks, plazas, and even a barge (behind the Boston Harbor Hotel). Plan well, and you can enjoy music alfresco almost every night. See chapter 11.
- **A Stroll (or Jog) along the River:** The bike path that hugs both shores of the Charles accommodates pedestrians, runners, and rollerbladers, as well as cyclists. The Esplanade (along one side of the Back Bay) offers an unbeatable combination of people-watching and gorgeous trees and shrubs; the Cambridge side has abundant seating and fabulous views of the Boston skyline. See chapter 8.

## 7 The Best Museums

- **The Concord Museum:** I think of this suburban treasure as a Goldilocks museum—it's not too big, it's not too small, it's just right. Always informative, never overwhelming, it shows and tells visitors enough about the town's history to help them make the most of a visit to this fascinating community. See p. 260.
- **The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum:** In an extremely unscientific poll of local travel experts conducted by me, this idiosyncratic museum tied for third-most-popular thing to do. The Gardner is a magnificent repository of art and nature in a building that's as impressive as anything hanging on the walls. See p. 156.
- **The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum:** Calling a presidential library unique is both obvious and a bit of a cop-out—of course it's unique; they're all unique. This one captures the personality of its namesake as well as the spirit that continues to make the Camelot era so compelling, even 4 decades later. See p. 156.
- **The Museum of Fine Arts:** The phrase “one of the best in the world” starts to lose its meaning with overuse, which happens all the time in the Boston area. Consider the colleges, the Symphony, the drivers (just kidding), the sports teams. The MFA truly is world-class—and all over the place, you'll stumble on masterpieces so familiar that seeing them is like running into an old friend on the street. See p. 157.

## 8 The Best Activities for Families

- **A Visit to Faneuil Hall Marketplace:** Kids can't decide where to look first. Street performers, crowds from all over the world, an enormous food court, restaurants, bars, and shops make Faneuil Hall Marketplace (you'll also hear it called Quincy Market) Boston's most popular destination. It's conveniently located across the street from the harbor, where a stroll along the water can help your crew decompress. See p. 151.
- **An Exploration of the Museum of Science:** Children's natural curiosity takes over as they troll the displays and exhibits that cram this enormous institution. Every branch of science and field of inquiry comes into play, but always in the most accessible way imaginable. It's so much fun that your youngsters probably won't even notice it's (shh!) educational. See p. 158.
- **An Excursion to the Public Garden:** Low-tech pleasures abound in this lovely park, the perfect retreat during or after a busy day of sightseeing. Ride a Swan Boat, feed the birds, and visit with the Mallard family of *Make Way for Ducklings* fame. Marvel as the whole family starts to unwind. See p. 175.
- **A Trip to the Children's Museum:** Younger kids (under 10 or so) practically vibrate with excitement as they approach Museum Wharf. The hands-on exhibits, noisy galleries, and overall air of discovery and excitement make the Children's Museum catnip for the elementary-school set. See p. 185.
- **A Thrill “Ride”:** The Mugar Omni Theater (at the Museum of Science) and the 3-D Simons IMAX Theatre (at the New England Aquarium) offer intrepid visitors hair-raising experiences in the safety of a comfortable auditorium. Most of the large-format films concentrate on the natural world. See p. 158 for the Mugar Omni Theater and p. 159 for the Simons IMAX Theatre.