

## The Best of Boston

**B**oston is one of the best-looking 375-year-olds around. It attracted the attention of the world in 2004 with a Super Bowl victory, a huge new convention center, a national political convention, and (of all things) a revolutionary new highway that incorporates a landmark bridge. In 2005, the city is ready to show off its new face.

Like Samuel Johnson's fabled noose, the impending Democratic convention focused the minds of city planners in 2004. The improvements introduced in time for the convention in late July, from street signs to landscaping, will enhance every visitor's Boston experience. The most prominent example of an improvement is the demolition of the elevated expressway that used to slash through downtown, separating the waterfront from the rest of the city and offending the sensibilities of those who had to pass over, under, or near it. That 15-year, \$14.6 billion project, known as the Big Dig, will be wrapping up when you visit, mending the scar left when traffic on Interstate 93 moved into an underground tunnel and the old highway came down.

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, there isn't 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 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 Frommer's Favorite Boston 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 Meal at Durgin-Park:** Dinner at this Boston institution (it opened in 1827) might start with oysters. It might also start with a waitress slinging a handful of napkins over your shoulder, dropping a pile of cutlery in front of you, and saying, "Here, give these out." The surly service usually seems to be an act, but it's so much a part of the legend that some people are

disappointed when the waitresses are nice (as they often are). See p. 116.

- **A Lunch Break with a Water View:** Head for the harbor or the river, perch on a park bench or a 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 6.
- **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. 184.
- **A “Ride” Indoors:** 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. 153 for the Mugar Omni Theater and p. 155 for the Simons IMAX Theatre.
- **A Few Hours (at Least) at the Museum of Fine Arts:** Whether you're into Egyptian art or contemporary photography, furniture and decorative arts or the Impressionists, you're sure to find something at the MFA that tickles your interest. See p. 151.
- **A Trip Back in Time at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum:** In an extremely unscientific poll conducted by me, this idiosyncratic museum tied for third-most-popular thing to do. Now you can't say that you've never heard of it—and it would be a shame to have to say that you missed your chance to visit it. See “The *Real* Inside Scoop,” later in this chapter, and p. 149.
- **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. The seats are uncomfortable and expensive, the Red Sox last won the World Series in 1918, and you won't care a whit as you soak up the atmosphere and bask in the sun. See p. 194.
- **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. 196.
- **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. 178.
- **A Spring Fling in the Public Garden:** Eight square blocks of paradise await you, filled with flowers, ornamental greenery, and flowering trees and shrubs. Pass through for a quick pick-me-up, take to the lagoon for a swan boat ride, or just enjoy the ducklings. They're on view in the flesh seasonally and in bronze year-round. See chapters 7 and 8.
- **A Newbury Street Safari:** From the genteel Arlington Street end to

## **Tips** The Real Inside Scoop

Just for fun, I asked a cross-section of the Boston hospitality community—hotel managers, restaurant owners, attraction publicity managers, merchants, and other travel experts—to tell me their two favorite things to do with out-of-towners who are new to the Boston area. (I asked for two to keep them from just naming their own establishments, but most of them were good sports about sharing the wealth.)

I received 160 responses, and I'm thrilled to report that no single activity or place drew more than 13 votes, or just over 8%. To me, that means that Boston is such a multifaceted destination that you can always find something wonderful to see or do.

The most popular answer was a **Boston Duck Tour**. Next came the **North End** (11 votes); **Newbury Street** (9); **Beacon Hill/Charles Street**, **Faneuil Hall/Quincy Market**, a **Red Sox game/Fenway Park**, **Harvard Square**, and a **trolley tour** (7 each); the **Freedom Trail** (6); and the **Museum of Fine Arts** (5). The dark horse was the **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum**, which isn't nearly as well known as most of the other top vote-getters but tied for third place with 9 votes.

The experts were gratifyingly miscellaneous—they listed nine museums and attractions, eight neighborhoods, seven restaurants, four walks, four drives, two cemeteries, and an astonishing 42 activities (from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to scorpion bowls—see p. 246) that got one vote each.

the cutting-edge Mass. Ave. end, Newbury Street—Boston's legendary shopping destination—is 8 blocks of pure temptation: galleries, boutiques, jewelry and gift shops, bookstores, and more. See chapter 9.

- **A Visit to Faneuil Hall Marketplace:** Specialty shops, an enormous food court, street performers, bars, restaurants, and crowds from all over the world make Faneuil Hall Marketplace (you'll also hear it called Quincy Market) Boston's most popular destination. See chapter 9.
- **A Free Friday Flick:** Families, film buffs, and impoverished culture hounds flock to the lawn in front of the Hatch Shell on the Esplanade for free movies (*The*

*Wizard of Oz* or *Tarzan*, for example) on Friday nights in the summer. Bring something to sit on, and maybe a sweater. See p. 251.

- **A Concert Alfresco:** Summer nights swing to the beat of outdoor music by amateurs and professionals. A great spot for free jazz is Christopher Columbus Park, on the waterfront, where performances take place Fridays at 7pm. See p. 242.
- **A Concert Indoors:** The lights go down, the crowd falls silent—you get a little thrill even if you're waiting for an Adam Sandler movie. If you're waiting for the Boston Symphony Orchestra (or another of the area's internationally renowned ensembles), the thrill is as big as the group's string section. See chapter 10.

- **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 albeit-deserted suburban town has a unique appeal. See chapter 11.

## 2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel: The Fairmont Copley Plaza,** 138 St. James Ave. (☎ 800/257-7544; [www.fairmont.com/copleyplaza](http://www.fairmont.com/copleyplaza)), opened in 1912 on the original site of the Museum of Fine Arts. Designed by Henry Janeway Hardenbergh (also the architect of the Plaza in New York), it has entertained presidents and celebrities since the day its magnificent gilded lobby opened. See p. 87.
- **Best for Business Travelers: The Boston Harbor Hotel,** Rowes Wharf (☎ 800/752-7077; [www.bhh.com](http://www.bhh.com)), is just far enough from the Financial District (across the street) to buy you some peace at the end of a busy day. And its rooms are so well outfitted that you may not have to go out at all. See p. 74.
- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** The intimate atmosphere and elegant furnishings make a suite at the **Eliot Hotel,** 370 Commonwealth Ave. (☎ 800/44-ELIOT; [www.eliothotel.com](http://www.eliothotel.com)), a great spot for a rendezvous. If you and your beloved need some time apart, close the French doors—you can be in separate rooms yet still maintain eye contact. See p. 87.
- **Best for Families: The Doubletree Guest Suites,** 400 Soldiers Field Rd. (☎ 800/222-TREE; [www.doubletree.com](http://www.doubletree.com)), offer two rooms for the price of one, with two TVs and a refrigerator, and a nice pool. The location, straddling Boston and Cambridge, is especially good if you're driving from the west—you leave the turnpike before downtown traffic shatters

the peace in the back of the minivan. See p. 94.

- **Best for Travelers with Disabilities: The Royal Sonesta Hotel,** 5 Cambridge Pkwy., Cambridge (☎ 800/SONESTA; [www.sonesta.com/boston](http://www.sonesta.com/boston)), trains its staff in disability awareness and offers 18 rooms (some of which adjoin standard units) equipped for the hearing, ambulatory, and vision impaired. A wheelchair ramp for use in conference rooms is available. See p. 97. Across the river, 48 fully accessible rooms at **The Westin Copley Place Boston,** 10 Huntington Ave. (☎ 800/WESTIN-1; [www.westin.com/copleyplace](http://www.westin.com/copleyplace)), adjoin standard units. See p. 91.
- **Best Value: The Newbury Guest House,** 261 Newbury St. (☎ 800/437-7668; [www.newburyguesthouse.com](http://www.newburyguesthouse.com)), would be a good deal even if it weren't ideally located in the heart of the Back Bay. Room prices even include continental breakfast. See p. 92.
- **Best Value for Motorists: Room rates at The MidTown Hotel,** 220 Huntington Ave. (☎ 800/343-1177; [www.midtownhotel.com](http://www.midtownhotel.com)), include parking for one car—a savings of as much as \$35 per day—in a handy location. See p. 91.
- **Best Lobby for Pretending That You're Rich: The Edwardian wonderland that is the street level of The Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel** (see the earlier entry "Best Historic Hotel"), is the perfect place for indulging your upper-crust fantasies. See p. 87.

- **Best for Serious Runners:** Brush up on your visualization techniques before checking into the **Charlesmark Hotel**, 655 Boylston St. (☎ 617/247-1212; www.thecharlesmark.com), which overlooks the Boston Marathon finish line. See p. 91.
- **Best Service:** Hands down, the **Four Seasons Hotel**, 200 Boylston St. (☎ 800/819-5053; www.fourseasons.com). The chain's standards are sky-high, and the friendly and efficient staff here meets and exceeds them. See p. 84.
- **Best Pool:** The **Sheraton Boston Hotel**, 39 Dalton St. (☎ 800/325-3535; www.sheraton.com/boston), has a great indoor-outdoor pool with a retractable dome. See p. 90.
- **Best Views:** Several hotels offer impressive views of their immediate surroundings, but for a picture-postcard panorama of Boston and Cambridge, head to the upper floors of **The Westin Copley Place Boston** (see the earlier entry "Best for Travelers with Disabilities"). See p. 91.

### 3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best, Period:** If you have only one meal during your visit, make it dinner at Mediterranean **Rialto**, in the Charles Hotel, 1 Bennett St., Cambridge (☎ 617/661-5050; www.rialto-restaurant.com). See p. 133.
- **Best Seafood: Legal Sea Foods**, 800 Boylston St., in the Prudential Center (☎ 617/266-6800; www.legalseafoods.com), and other locations, 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. 129.
- **Best Spot for Romance:** Soaring ceilings, colorful decor, and (seasonally) a roaring fire make the atmosphere in the Monday Club Bar at **Upstairs on the Square**, 91 Winthrop St., Cambridge (☎ 617/864-1933; www.upstairsonthesquare.com), perfect for a rendezvous. See p. 136.
- **Best Spot for a Business Lunch:** Plenty of deals go down at private clubs and formal restaurants, but that can take hours. Leave an impression with your no-nonsense approach and a quick but delicious meal at **Cosí Sandwich Bar**, 53 State St. (☎ 617/723-4447), 14 Milk St. (☎ 617/426-7565), or 133 Federal St. (☎ 617/292-2674). See p. 117.
- **Best Spot for a Celebration:** Cool your heels at the bar at **Dali**, 415 Washington St., Somerville (☎ 617/661-3254; www.dali-restaurant.com), and toast your good news with sangria while you wait for a table. (Finally, a restaurant that makes you glad it doesn't take reservations.) The dishes on the tapas menu are perfect for sharing, and the atmosphere is lively and festive. See p. 139.
- **Best Decor:** The luxurious banquettes, gorgeous paintings and flowers, and picture windows overlooking the Public Garden make **Aujourd'hui**, in the Four Seasons Hotel, 200 Boylston St. (☎ 617/351-2037), feel like an extremely elegant treehouse. See p. 125.
- **Best Wine List:** Organized by characteristics (from light to rich) rather than by vintage or provenance, the excellent offerings at **The Blue Room**, 1 Kendall Sq., Cambridge (☎ 617/494-9034; www.theblueroom.net), are arranged in the most user-friendly way imaginable. See p. 138.

- **Best Service:** The waitstaff at **Troquet**, 140 Boylston St. (☎ 617/695-9463), answers more questions than the parents of a toddler. Your server will graciously walk you through the wine-oriented menu or graciously leave you to your own devices. See p. 120.
- **Best Value:** At the **Midwest Grill**, 1124 Cambridge St., Cambridge (☎ 617/354-7536), the hits just keep on coming. The sword-wielding waiters bring succulent grilled meats until you ask (or beg) them to stop. Arrive hungry and you'll definitely get your money's worth. See p. 141.
- **Best for Kids:** The wood-fired brick ovens of the **Bertucci's** chain are magnets for little eyes, and the pizza that comes out of them is equally enthralling. Picky parents will be happy here, too. Try the locations at Faneuil Hall Marketplace (☎ 617/227-7889); 43 Stanhope St., Back Bay (☎ 617/247-6161); 533 Commonwealth Ave., Kenmore Square (☎ 617/236-1030); 21 Brattle St., Harvard Square, Cambridge (☎ 617/864-4748); and 799 Main St., Cambridge (☎ 617/661-8356). See p. 128.
- **Best Raw Bar:** After just a few minutes of gobbling fresh seafood and being hypnotized by the shuckers at **Ye Olde Union Oyster House**, 41 Union St. (☎ 617/227-2750; www.unionoysterhouse.com), you might feel sorry for the people who wound up with the pearls instead of the oysters. See p. 116.
- **Best Place for a Classic Boston Experience:** **Durgin-Park**, 340 Faneuil Hall Marketplace (☎ 617/227-2038; www.durgin-park.com), has packed 'em in since 1827. From tycoon to out-of-towner, everyone is happy here except the famously crotchety waitresses. It's a classic, not a relic. See p. 116.
- **Best American Cuisine:** It's not quite "cuisine," but what's more American than a burger? **Mr. Bartley's Burger Cottage**, 1246 Mass. Ave. (☎ 617/354-6559; www.mrbartleys.com), is famous for its burgers, its onion rings, and a down-to-earth atmosphere that's increasingly rare in Harvard Square. See p. 138.
- **Best French Cuisine:** **Sel de la Terre**, 255 State St. (☎ 617/720-1300; www.seldelaterre.com). Technically, it's Provençal. Not so technically, it's delicious. Fresh New England ingredients go into the thoroughly French end product. Try as many different breads as you can without ruining your meal. See p. 109.
- **Best Bistro:** A friend who knows both Paris and Boston swears by **Les Zygomates**, 129 South St. (☎ 617/542-5108; www.winebar.com), where you can enjoy the flavor of the Left Bank in a congenial American setting. See p. 116.
- **Best Italian Cuisine:** By far the best restaurant in the North End, **Mamma Maria**, 3 North Sq. (☎ 617/523-0077), is one of the best in town. In a lovely setting, it offers remarkable regional Italian fare in a spaghetti-and-meatballs neighborhood. See p. 109.
- **Best Pizza:** Considering how well pizza travels, it's surprising that the branches of **Pizzeria Regina** can't seem to get it quite right. For the real thing, head to the North End original, at 11½ Thacher St. (☎ 617/227-0765; www.pizzeria-regina.com). See p. 115.
- **Best Investment (of Time & Money):** Dinner at **L'Espalier**, 30 Gloucester St. (☎ 617/262-3023; www.lespalier.com), is an event.

For your event, whatever the occasion, the grand cuisine and solicitous service will make it unforgettable. See p. 126.

- **Best Outdoor Dining: Oleana**, 134 Hampshire St., Cambridge (☎ 617/661-0505; [www.oleana-restaurant.com](http://www.oleana-restaurant.com)), offers a fantastic combination of food and setting. The superb Mediterranean cuisine makes a good match for the peaceful patio. See p. 140.
- **Best Brunch:** The insane displays at many top hotels are well worth the monetary and caloric compromises. If you're looking for a delicious meal that won't destroy your budget and waistline, join the throng at the **S&S Restaurant**, 1334 Cambridge St., Cambridge (☎ 617/354-0777; [www.sandsrestaurant.com](http://www.sandsrestaurant.com)). See p. 142.
- **Best for Preheater Dinner:** Snappy service is the rule all over Chinatown. Start your evening at **Grand Chau Chow**, 45 Beach St. (☎ 617/292-5166), and you'll be both prompt and well fed when you arrive at the theater. See p. 121.