

Boston: City of Firsts



We Southern Californians tend to enjoy the sun, so if we're going on vacation, we're likely bound one set of islands or another; if we do aim for the East Coast, New York and D.C. tend to top our list of places to visit. But contrasted against the everything-modern SoCal surroundings, Boston is the ideal domestic destination for an encounter with the crossroads of recreation, refinement and remembrance.

Boston is a city of oldests and firsts. Walk for five minutes among its many sloping streets and you can't avoid bumping into an oldest this or the first of that. The city hosted America's first public school, the first public park, the first World Series, the first clothing store, and (Orange County residents, tip your hats) the very first homeowner's association...and, of course, the first call for liberty. It's the home of the oldest restaurant in the country; the Union Oyster House just celebrated its 180th anniversary, and claims to be the incubator of the very first toothpick! Boston and its surrounding areas also boast America's oldest continuously operating hotel (the Omni Parker), America's oldest uni-

versity (Harvard), the oldest Major League Baseball stadium (the great Fenway Park) and the world's oldest actively commissioned warship (the USS Constitution). And trust me when I say we've only scratched the surface.

With its clean streets, surprisingly clear air, warm and candid people, and its depth of history and culture, Boston is a destination that any traveler will enjoy and, I suspect, will want to visit again and again. There is something to engage and entertain for all ages.

Singles enjoy an endless variety of buzzing pubs and clubs. There is a nightly congregation of brew lovers and Sox fans at any and all of the city's many bars. The openness of the street pubs make this major American city feel like an intimate community.

Couples appreciate the finest of art, theatre, shopping and dining. Faneuil Hall, the "Cradle of Liberty," since 1742 has been host to the cause of freedom, and now presides over Boston's most frequented markets and gathering places (referred to jointly as Faneuil Hall Marketplace). Street performers amuse you as you duck into shop after shop sell-



The Langham Boston overlooks the gardens of Post Office Square.

ing everything from unique New England wares to tourist trappings.

But singles and couples aren't the only visitors who will find Boston charming. Boston is arguably the best big city vacation destination in the country for families. Children delight in the great diversity of activities and experiences that Boston has to offer. The New England Aquarium (www.neaq.org) is Boston's most visited tourist attraction; the centerpiece is its four-story, 200,000-gallon Giant Ocean Tank that replicates a Caribbean coral reef where, amazingly, sea turtles and sharks



(among countless other fish species) peacefully coexist for the enjoyment of all visitors, especially the young ones.

Regardless of age, every Boston visitor will find themselves in simple awe of our country's passionate, if not unruly, beginnings.

Many of the most significant sites of our nation's history are stops along Boston's Freedom Trail, a path laid in brick or red paint that guides you through the city. Following the Freedom Trail, you'll see those momentous buildings and places you've read of since you were a child, including the site of the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party, the graves of Samuel Adams, John Hancock and Paul Revere, the Boston Common (where it's still legal to graze your cow, by the way), the upscale neighborhood of Beacon Hill (many houses of which were stops on

Underground Railroad), the Old State House where John Otis made the "first act of opposition" in 1761 when he spoke out against the British writs of assistance, the Old North Church at the top of which were hung two lanterns to alert the Minutemen to the movement of the British regulars ("One, if by land, two, if by sea!"), and many, many other points of interest that will connect you to your roots and reignite your appreciation for the U.S.

Boston visitors can take advantage of sundry guided tours, including the Boston Duck Tour (www.bostonducktours.com), where you get to see Boston by land and by sea, without even leaving your seat. Some enlightened Boston tour guide had the brilliant idea to convert amphibious

Accommodation of Distinction: The Langham Hotel

Situated in the heart of downtown Boston, the Langham combines its rich history with all the features of a contemporary luxury hotel in Boston. Occupying the space that was once the granite and limestone Federal Reserve Bank dating back to 1922, this AAA four-diamond accommodation is a national architectural landmark offering a unique blend of Old World charm and urban sophistication.

Overlooking the gardens of Norman B. Leventhal Park in Post Office Square, this 318-room establishment is steps from Boston's shops, restaurants and attractions, including Faneuil Hall, the Freedom Trail, the North End, financial district, the New England Aquarium and the waterfront.



Decadent desserts on display at the Chocolate Bar each Saturday.

The Langham is also home to what is arguably one of the city's best restaurants: the Café Fleuri inside the hotel serves breakfast, lunch, an extensive afternoon tea (a Langham signature at all of its hotels), and dinner, but draws capacity crowds every Sunday for its famous Saturday Chocolate Bar (featuring fresh fruit, waffles and made-to-order chocolate crepes) and an award-winning Sunday Jazz Brunch. For more info, visit www.langhamhotels.com.

WWII vehicles (the DUKW) into tourist-mobiles. The wacky humor of the "ConDUCKtors" is worth the price of admission alone - I'd ask for Red Auerquack - the self-professed "No. 1 Boston Celtics Fan" is absolutely hysterical.

For another unique tour option (particularly if you enjoy all things culinary), check out the North End Market Tour, a walking tour through "Little Italy" that's like a cooking class on foot. Participants glean insider cooking tips in an area rife with history, ethnic heritage and authentic Italian food. During this European-style tour, you will not be eating your way through the neighborhood - the goal is to provide you with an understanding of the Mediterranean diet and methods of identifying and buying authentic Italian ingredients.

Historic New England ([www.historic-](http://www.historic-newengland.org)

www.historic-newengland.org) is the oldest regional preservation organization in the country, offering a unique opportunity to experience the lives and stories of New Englanders through their homes and possessions. Take a tour or two with Historic New England if you are one to appreciate the easily-missed details that make Boston the rich cultural place that it is.

While you're there, consider renting a car for the day and take a pleasant drive down to Plymouth. Meander through an expansive recreation of Plimoth



Plantation, where the "residents" toil at their daily tasks of mending thatched roofs and grazing livestock (all in period garb) and converse with you entirely in character and with well-practiced "old world" accents. Drive up along the coast a few miles and visit a seaworthy replica of the Mayflower, where you realize that the Pilgrims really did squeeze their entire families into spaces the size of postage stamps! Talk about a great place to visit with the kids!

No matter what itinerary you lay out for yourself - whether your trip to the Birthplace of Liberty is planned minute-by-minute or not at all - you'll find that your time in Boston will be packed with fun and fascination because everywhere you turn there is a friend to make or an icon to honor. What more could you ask for in any destination? **OM**

All guestrooms have a double turndown service, broadband access (for a \$10 daily fee) and signature "Blissful Bed."



Go to Boston for the history, the shopping, the sightseeing...but mostly go for the FOOD! Apparently, restaurants in Boston take no prisoners. Fare from the sea is brought in each day and served that day, or not at all. Here are some recommendations for the overwhelming delight of palates of every order.

The Union Oyster House

www.unionoysterhouse.com

Where: On the Freedom Trail!

Fare: Oysters...and other fare from land and sea

Service: Warm, friendly and full of good Boston humor

Atmosphere: Rustic, rich and intimate

To Die For

Appetizer: Hot Oyster House Sampler

Entrée: Lobster Ravioli

Dessert: Indian Pudding (unique and delicious)

Eastern Standard Kitchen

www.easternstandardboston.com

Where: Kenmore Square

Fare: European and New England cuisine

Service: Attentive and unobtrusive

Atmosphere: Crusty rolls and carafes of wine share the table with pristine New England oysters and local artisanal cheeses. Need I say more?

Menu highlights: Veal Schnitzel, Beef Wellington, Mussels & Frites

Fun fact: The burners on the stoves here are never turned off. As the city slumbers, the overnight staff prepares for the following day.