

Mass appeal

OK! checks into one of Boston's hippest hotels and enjoys a long weekend of sights, shopping, cocktails and celeb spotting...

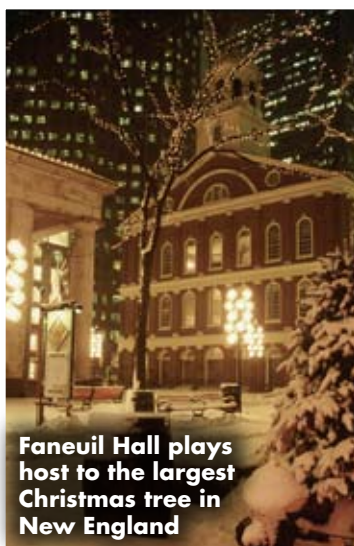


New England may be famous for its scenic autumnal colours, but the historic city of Boston looks picture perfect in winter too. With Christmas markets, carol singers, ice skating, beautifully decorated trees peeping out of the windows of the Beacon Hill brownstone townhouses and the possibility of a light dusting of snow, the city overflows with festive cheer. The compact, easy-to-walk East Coast city is a perfect long weekend destination, offering shops galore, stylish bars and museums, as well as being the perfect stepping off point to explore the wider region of New England.

When to go?

Boston's perfect at any time of year, but Christmas is particularly magical. Get in the festive spirit at Faneuil Hall, where the largest Christmas tree in New England is a sight to behold.

There's also a magnificent tree on Boston Common and an ice skating rink on Frog Pond. Over at the Opera House, the Boston Ballet performs *The Nutcracker*, while the Symphony Hall plays host to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's *Holiday Pops* Christmas spectacular. Or head across the Charles River for a wonderful Christmas crafts fair on Harvard University Square in Cambridge.



Faneuil Hall plays host to the largest Christmas tree in New England

Where should I stay?

A new breed of hip upscale boutique hotels are shaking up Boston's rather staid hotel scene. One of the latest to open its doors is the Ames Boston (www.ameshotel.com), from the same hotel stable as the trendy Delano in Miami and the Hudson in New York. Within walking distance of Faneuil Hall and Beacon Hill, the Ames Boston is the city's tallest skyscraper at 14 storeys when it was built in 1892. Although it's now been overtaken in the height stakes, it remains very much a city landmark, and some of the original features – such as the mosaic vaulted lobby ceiling – have been retained.

The hotel's classical facade belies its hip interior, where *OK!* was entranced by the whimsical touches such as the 'exploding chandelier' in the lobby. The 114 rooms are minimalist, with a charcoal and white colour palette and dark wood floors. You'll also find one of Boston's hippest eateries in the hotel. Woodward, with windows looking onto the Old State House, gives a modern take on a tavern, with bartenders wearing Prohibition-era vests. *OK!* dined on sweet potato and squash ravioli, while our companions devoured the steak and crispy ranch onion rings.

Last year the hotel held a series of intimate gigs with musicians including Marina & The Diamonds, Courtney Love and Florence And The Machine.



Check out the exploding chandelier at the Ames Boston

What stars will I see?

OK! was in town at the same time as Ryan Reynolds, who was filming his new movie *R.I.P.D* with Kevin Bacon and Jeff Bridges. We just missed Boston natives Mark and Donnie Wahlberg, who were in town for the opening of their new restaurant Wahlburgers in the suburb of Hingham, while Gisele Bündchen and hubby Tom Brady are currently selling their Boston penthouse overlooking the Charles River – a snip at £6.5 million!

Where can I shop?

The good news is there's no sales tax on clothing less than £110, so it's worth bringing an extra suitcase. First-timers often kick off by browsing the souvenirs stores at the quaint Covent Garden-style Faneuil Hall Marketplace. Another popular haunt is the Prudential Center, a vast shopping and entertainment mall, with American staples Barnes & Noble, Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord & Taylor. From there take the covered walkway to the swanky Copley Place mall for a host of designer stores including Tiffany & Co and Jimmy Choo, as well as less pricey labels and department store Barneys. *OK!* loved Williams-Sonoma and spent a small fortune in Bath & Body Works! If you want Bond



Main: The East Coast city of Boston is the perfect place for a long weekend getaway.
Below left: Dine on seafood at Legal Harborside. **Below centre:** If you're looking to make Boston a permanent base, you can buy Gisele's £6.5m home!

Street and Oxford Street all rolled into one, walk to nearby Newbury Street. One end is home to designer labels, while the other has plenty of one-off boutiques and quirky vintage clothing shops interspersed with cafes. Bargain hunters will love Filene's Basement. It might resemble a jumble sale, but its low prices keep the crowds coming!

Where should I eat?

You can't visit Boston without trying some of New England's famous seafood. Dine at Legal Harborside and order the generous shellfish platter washed down with a mug of clam chowder, or head to Union Oyster House, which claims to be America's oldest restaurant – President Kennedy was such a fan there's a plaque at his favourite booth. If gourmet cuisine is more your scene then take a seat at L'Espalier, where chef Frank McClelland sources many ingredients from his organic farm. Over at Blue Inc, chef Jay Santos is renowned for his molecular gastronomy and his blue hair – hence the restaurant name.

Gordon Ramsay paid a visit after working with him on *Hell's Kitchen*. You have to try one of his milkshakes – we absolutely loved the butterscotch and black truffle one.



Where can I drink?

OK! had great fun scrolling through the iPad menu listing more than 300 tequilas at the Temazcal bar on Liberty Wharf. Fans of American sitcom *Cheers* can pay homage either at Cheers Beacon Hill or Cheers Faneuil Hall, where there's a replica of the bar, Sam's Red Sox jacket and Cliff's mailman suit. For something a little different, visit Drink on Congress Street. There's no bar menu, you simply tell one of the mixologists what flavours you like and he'll whiz something up for you!

What must I see?

Get your bearings by zooming up to the 50th floor of the Skywalk Observatory at the Prudential Center and admire the 360° views of the city. The Freedom Trail is also a must. It's a self-guided 2.5 mile walking tour taking in 16 historical sites – just follow the red bricks along the pavement. Art lovers should visit the new Art Of The Americas Wing at the Museum Of Fine Arts as well as the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Sports fans should try and get a ticket to Fenway Park, the home of the Boston Red Sox where you'll probably spy diehard fan and Boston native Ben Affleck.

How to get there?

Virgin Atlantic (www.virgin-atlantic.com; 0844 209 2770) fly daily from London Heathrow to Boston. Fares start from £558 including tax for travel until December 16 and from December 25 to May 31, 2012. Rooms rates at the Ames Boston start at £141. For packages, including one for New Year's Eve and another that includes *Peter Pan* theatre tickets, visit www.morganshotelgroup.com. **OK!**

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Where is Boston?



FOR CITY TOURISM VISIT THE GREATER BOSTON CONVENTION & VISITORS' BUREAU WEBSITE AT WWW.BOSTONUSA.COM, FOR MASSACHUSETTS STATE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.MASSVACATION.COM AND FOR NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL NEWS, SEE WWW.DISCOVERNEWENGLAND.ORG.