

# the best of boston



**An American jail that was once declared ‘unfit’ for its inmates is now playing hosts to such stars as Bruce Willis and Cameron Diaz.**

The Charles Street Jail in Boston was built to hold 140 prisoners and, when it was constructed in 1851, was an international model for prison architecture. At its ‘busiest’, 400 prisoners were crammed into its cells but, after protests by the ‘residents’, it was declared unfit and eventually closed in 1990. In September 2007, after a \$150-million makeover, it reopened as The Liberty Hotel and is now one of the city’s finest hotels. In the past couple of years it has seen Meg Ryan, Morgan Freeman, Paris Hilton, Bruce Willis, Mick Jagger and Cameron Diaz stay there, while Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes and Kate Hudson have been spotted



in various areas of the hotel. Certainly, a room on the 14th floor of the hotel gives you one of the best views in Boston, overlooking the James River and the city skyline. It’s also handy for sightseeing, being one stop on the ‘T’ subway from Boston Common and three from Harvard.

Boston is a great city for walking and, before setting out, you should arm yourself with either a Boston CityPass or Go Boston Card (depending on your interests), both of which give discounted entry to a range of attractions and tours.

One of the best ways of finding out about the city and its history is to follow the Freedom Trail, a 2.5-mile red line (or tiles, in some cases) on the pavement. Make for Boston Common – the common was the site of the British army’s HQ – where a costumed guide will start you off on the trek that highlights the history of the American Revolution.

En route, you will visit the Granary Burying Ground, where Paul Revere is buried (he alerted patriots in 1775 to the British Army’s movements from Boston towards Lexington during the War of Independence) and at the Old South Meeting House, your guide will tell you how some of the thousands of Bostonians, upset over the British-imposed tea tax, destroyed 342 crates of tea, which became known as the Boston Tea Party.

The balcony of the Old State House – the seat of the British Government before the Revolution – is where the Declaration of Independence was first read to the citizens of Boston in 1776 and where the Queen helped celebrate the bicentennial two centuries later. It was also the site of the Boston Massacre, when five men were killed in 1770 by British soldiers.

Your guide may well stop his narration near Faneuil Hall – also the scene of many protest meetings – but the Trail continues through Little Italy (past Paul Revere’s house) and on over the Charles River to the 221-ft tall Bunker Hill Monument,



which dominates the hill and commemorates a British victory, although there were heavy losses, while the colonists had few casualties.

Little Italy, as you'd imagine, is home to countless Italian restaurants – in Hanover Street – and if you're in Boston over a weekend, it makes sense to book in advance or head down early in the evening. It's also the home of Mike's Pastries, a long-standing Boston favourite bakery that is hugely popular with visitors and tourists alike, which explains the white boxes you see people carrying that have his name on the side.

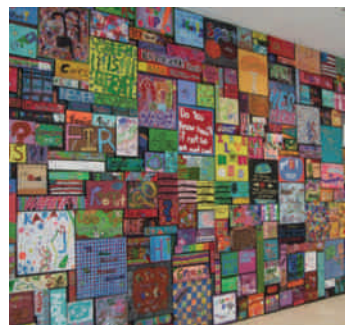
En route to Little Italy, you could pass the Faneuil Hall area, which, as well as being great shopping and dining area, is home to countless Irish pubs.

If walking the Freedom Trail is one way of finding your way around Boston, so, too, are the jump-on-jump-off trolley tours, of which there seems to be hundreds. Amphibious duck tours, which cruise the city and sail the Charles River, are numerous, too. Incidentally, if you'd like to combine a thrill ride with a river trip, try Codzilla!, a 40-minute, wet-and-wild, high-speed ride into the ocean.

On a more-sedate harbour cruise you will hear how the Brits landed at the Long Wharf in 1768 and left in 1776, how Boston was once the busiest and most prosperous seaport in the world, and how fishing boats head east out for 150 miles to fish. The cruise also gives you terrific views of Boston Harbour and, if you're lucky, you might see cormorants diving for fish, an indication of how the river has been cleaned up over the years.

Back on land, there are enough museums in Boston to keep you occupied for a week. On a short break, however, make for the hugely-impressive Museum of Fine Arts, which has a collection of 450,000 objects that range from Egyptian mummies and Asian Buddhas to musical instruments from Europe and Africa. And the Art of the Americas is due to open in November.

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Nearby, the Isabella Gardner Museum is based in a 15th-century-styled Venetian palazzo, with three galleries that look down on a flower-filled courtyard. The exhibits include works by Rembrandt, Titian and Botticelli.

On the harbour-front, the Institute of Contemporary Art is a dramatic, three-year-old building that overlooks the Charles River. Inside, time it right and you could get a free, enthusiastic guided tour of the building and the art that is currently on display.

Walk back along the harbour-front and you eventually reach the New England Aquarium. Inside, its circular display highlights African penguins, Sand Tiger sharks, Green Sea turtles and a Giant Pacific octopus, as well as sea-dragons, coral reefs and jellyfish.

But if that visit takes you into the deep, the Skywalk Observatory in the Prudential Centre has you soaring into the skies, with a 360-degree view of Boston from the 50th floor of the building. Two floors farther up, the Top of the Hub is a superb place to take in the view as you relax over a drink or one of the restaurant's award-winning meals.

As so many things/events/attractions/walks, start around Boston Common, the Nine Zero Hotel is another terrific place to make your base. A block away from the common, it featured in Travel + Leisure magazine's Best 500 Hotels in the World for 2009 and is a swish, modern hotel that is handy for Beacon Hill, Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market as well as the common.

It's also next to the famous Omni Parker House Hotel, which is said to be the longest continuously-operating hotel in the US. It can count Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X among its former employees and was where John F Kennedy announced his candidacy for the US Presidency, proposed to Jackie, and held his bachelor party.

Famous names, indeed. ■

Neil Murray



#### HOW TO GET THERE

- American Airlines ([www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com), 0844 499 7300) flies up to three times a day from Heathrow to Boston, as well as daily from Manchester to Chicago for onward connections to Boston. Return prices start at £413.97 from Heathrow and at £458.37 from Manchester. Prices subject to availability and/or change. Best fares available mid-week and including a Saturday night stay.
- American Airlines' refurbished Admirals Club at Heathrow's Terminal Three now offers seating for 237 customers. Facilities at the club include private showers, HP computers with high-speed internet access and complimentary food and drinks. Access is available based on ticket type, membership or on purchase of a day pass.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Check out [www.libertyhotel.com](http://www.libertyhotel.com), 001 (617) 224 400 for more information, rates and reservations at the Liberty Hotel. For rates and availability at the Nine Zero Hotel, contact [www.ninezero.com](http://www.ninezero.com), 001 (617) 772 5800.

#### FACTFILE

- For more info on Boston, check out [www.bostonusa.com](http://www.bostonusa.com)
- First time in Boston? Then make sure you get a copy of the excellent Insight Smart Guide to Boston (£6.99, [www.insightguides.com](http://www.insightguides.com)).
- For more information about the Boston CityPass, log on to [www.citypass.com](http://www.citypass.com). To find out about the Go Boston card, check out [www.smartdestinations.com/boston](http://www.smartdestinations.com/boston)
- There's free entry to the Isabella Gardner Museum if you are called 'Isabella' or \$2 off the entry fee if you are wearing Red Sox paraphernalia. [www.gardnermuseum.org](http://www.gardnermuseum.org)
- Fancy a brewery tour? Then take your pick from the Samuel Adams Brewery Tours ([www.samueladams.com](http://www.samueladams.com)) and a visit to the Harpoon Brewery ([www.harpoonbrewery.com](http://www.harpoonbrewery.com)) on the harbour-front.
- When it comes to shopping, Faneuil Hall Marketplace has almost 50 shops, with 'a unique selection of jewellery, formal and casual clothing, accessories, and giftware'. [www.FaneuilHallMarketplace.com](http://www.FaneuilHallMarketplace.com)

