

Boston and beyond: fun in Boston

While some things in Boston leave more to be desired (as already mentioned in several other articles here), there are perks that the city has to offer. Boston on a budget can be tricky, but if you know where to look, there are fun things to do. Some require transportation outside of walking or public transit, but others can be reached pretty easily by bus or car! Below is just a partial list of fun things in Boston and the surrounding area divided by ways you can get there from our central hub at BWH.

Walking or city transit

Freedom Trail

Method of transit: Green line to Park Street.

For those of you who are new to Boston and have never experienced the Freedom Trail, I absolutely recommend it. It gives you the opportunity to travel through many neighborhoods in the Boston area and showcases a lot of the history that exists throughout the city. You can opt for a free self-guided tour starting at Faneuil Hall near the Quincy Market following the red brick line throughout the city, through the North End, and ending at Bunker Hill. You can also pay to do a tour that will explain many of the historic landmarks on the trail, as well as often dress up in period-accurate attire. Right off the beaten path of the Freedom Trail is my all-time favorite place in the city: Brattle Bookstore. It has what seems like an endless supply of old books in many languages covering topics like history, cooking, fiction books, art, and more. Other highlights include: The USS Constitution, the Old North Church (the path takes you past the two rival cannoli shops in the city) as well as the Boston Commons. If you enjoy walking and history, this is the perfect introduction to Boston, especially on a nice day.

Harvard Arboretum:

Method of transit: #39 bus to JP, walk from there. Also reachable by the bike path of the Emerald Necklace Parks with some riding on the street required.

The Harvard Arboretum is an expansive preserve of land within the city limits. It is a collection of trees, flowers, and bushes compiled by many prominent biologists and botanists over the history of Harvard and contains ongoing research. It has miles of walking and paved biking paths and is open year-round. The arboretum offers programming that explores different aspects of the facility including identifying trees, natural history of the location, and birding expeditions. The Arboretum also has plants that are constantly blooming regardless of the season.

Museum of Fine Arts:

Method of transit: Green line

The MFA is a short trip on the green line from the hospital and has a lot to offer. The museum itself is surprisingly large considering and covers a wide array of art from all periods of human history, as well as a wide variety of locations throughout the world. You can easily spend several hours there exploring several Asian art exhibits, Italian Renaissance paintings, mummies, and even some Monet's. Finally, the museum has a plethora of rotating exhibits, many of which leave in October so be sure to check them out!

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New England Aquarium

Method of transit: Green line to Government Center transfer to the Blue Line (outbound to Wonderland) and get off at the Aquarium stop. (Can also get out and walk if you prefer)

NOTE: One of the perks of working at BWH is access to discount tickets, and the Aquarium is included. The New England Aquarium houses a large number of African Penguins as well as a Sea Turtle that swims in a giant central tank. The aquarium is several stories high and has many floors of diverse fish, as well as some other aquatic life. There is also a touch tank with sharks and rays, which is a ton of fun, especially for kids. Depending on the speed that you decide to walk through, you could definitely spend a couple of hours admiring the colorful sea creatures and then buy lunch in the area.

Harvard Museum of Natural History

Method of transit: Take the green line to Park Street and transfer to the red line. Take the red line to Harvard.

Home to the “Glass Flowers” exhibit, this museum has a lot of really cool exhibits and often can get forgotten with all of the other activities to do in the city. It runs as a regular museum with exhibits focused on wildlife and natural habitats throughout the world. The museum also offers a variety of classes for adults and children including art and nature journaling classes and insect preservation classes. The other added benefit is the museum is free with a Harvard ID for you and one guest!

Commuter Rail/Ferry/Amtrack

Provincetown

Method of transit: Green Line to Park Street, Red line to South Station, and take the 7 and 4 bus and then take the ferry across the harbor.

Known for its colorful buildings, nightlife, and thriving LGBTQIA community, Provincetown (or P-town) has lots of small-town charm. It offers restaurants and bars off the main stretch of the road, as well as Race Point Beach, and during the late spring and summer whale watching tours. It also has an art museum (Provincetown Art Association and Museum or PAAM). Overall, it has a lot of beach town charm and can give you access to Cape Cod without needing a car. P-town makes for a great day trip in the spring and fall months while it is still warm, but not overly crowded.

Salem

Method of transit: From BWH, take the green line to North Station and transfer to the Newburyport/Rockport commuter rail line, exit at Salem

Salem is a cute little town known for its Halloween spirit and for Disney movies like Halloweentown and Hocus Pocus, as well as for its darker history in the execution of women accused of witchcraft. Salem treats the entire year like it is Halloween, so spooky museums and haunted tours are a year-round feature. Salem is also home to a shockingly vast art museum called the Peabody Essex Museum. The art museum is home to an entire house brought over

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from China and reassembled in the heart of the museum. It is also home to rotating exhibits as well as permanent works of art. It also has one of the oldest candy shops still in operation, which specializes in making classic candies from around the early 1800s. Finally, Salem embraces its history as a port town with some preserved land that is managed by the National Parks system for preservation. Beware of trying to go during the month of October as it becomes a popular tourist destination, but during the rest of the year, it has a lot of charm and fun things to do for a reasonable price.

Ipswich

Method of transit: From BWH, take the green line to North Station and transfer to the Newburyport/Rockport commuter rail line, exit at Ipswich

Ipswich is a quiet town with a lot of history. The town has a lot of cute shops that line the main road, as well as a pretty good brewery that has great food. The surrounding area has plenty of hiking, as well as apple orchards during the fall season. Ipswich is also home to the Crane Estate run by the Massachusetts Trustees organization, which manages a lot of historic land throughout the state. Castle Hill is an awesome time capsule of wealth and technological development during the early 1900s and is a great experience. I realistically could have spent a whole day just on the grounds of the estate walking around. There is a 2 mile or so walk from the house to the beach which is lined partially with marble statues. The Trustees also have a land preserve not far from the Crane Estate that has great bird watching and hiking. For a day trip, especially in the fall while the weather is still nice, Ipswich is a great place to visit.

Providence, RI

Method of transit: Commuter rail

Providence is a small city with still a lot to offer. Providence has its own zoo (Roger Williams Park Zoo), as well as some cute shopping centers and restaurants. It is also home to children's museum, Brown University, and an art museum. Providence also has lots of tours including ghost tours and boat tours of the city. There are also lots of small group walking tours around Providence. Not a bad day trip if you are looking for a way out of the big city, but don't quite want to escape into nature.

Portland, ME

Method of transit: Take the green line to North Station and walk to Amtrak station.

Portland is either an Amtrak trip or a 2-hour drive away from the city, and it has lots to offer. It has a lot of locally run small businesses and has restaurants that offer food with the famous Maine blueberries. Portland also has amazing food and breweries. There are also historic tours and lots of lighthouses nearby, as well as lots of opportunities for outdoor activities in the summer and early fall while the weather is still nice.

Car

If you have a car, the world, and especially the entirety of the Northeast is your oyster. However, I am highlighting two places within Massachusetts that are definitely worth a visit if you haven't been there already.

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Plymouth

The original landing site of the Mayflower, this historic tiny town has all of the appeal of a usual tourist town. Plymouth has several museums in the “downtown” area that describe the history of the town. During the spring and summer, there are lots to do with activities like whale watching, the Plimoth Patuxet Museum (would HIGHLY recommend it, especially if you have kids, but fun for adults as well), great food/ice cream, and lots of hiking/camping in the area (Miles Standish has great camping and biking, as well as good hiking). Plymouth Rock is also in the “downtown” proper area but can be underwhelming, so don’t go in with high expectations. There are also a few antique stores that have some really old and interesting stuff, and can be a great activity if antiquing is something that you enjoy. I actually was able to purchase a really old Hope Chest that was made from old ship parts from the 1800s at one of these stores. This is a really fun day trip and is only an hour from the city by car. Not far from Plymouth are some great state parks and beaches, as well as some incredible hole-in-the-wall seafood places that are open during the summer and early fall months.

Amherst

Amherst is a cute college town, home to the 5 colleges. It has a shockingly great natural history museum (Amherst College Museum of Natural History) and is home to the Emily Dickinson Museum. However, the real appeal of Amherst is the great hiking areas in and around the area. Amherst is home to the Kestrel Land Trust, which works to preserve natural habitats in the area. There is also the Amethyst Brook Conservation area with a 2-mile trail loop around a beautiful stream. The Kestrel Land Trust House also offers programming like mushroom IDing and seasonal yoga! This is the perfect day trip out of the city to enjoy nature and some cute college town atmosphere!

Bonus: MA beer run

If you enjoy beer, Massachusetts has a surprising number of good breweries (especially if you have a car to get there). I have experienced some good places in every town I’ve been to in MA. Many of these places are small microbreweries with the charm and personal touch of brewers in the business. While this is not something that is applicable to everyone, I wanted to just share a few favorites for those who like beer or are interested in finding something new to try.

Treehouse Brewing

Treehouse brewing is AN EXPERIENCE. This brewery is family-friendly as it has a massive outdoor component. There are food trucks on the property that rotate out, and the beer and cocktails here are some of the best I’ve had. They do have a unique system where you purchase drink tickets online and you receive a QR code that you scan at the bar. Because of this, the system feels a little like you are going to an amusement park, but they do make getting beer pretty efficient, despite the longer lines. There is ample parking and seating outside, and they do brew everything on-site. The key with Treehouse is that they barely ship anywhere so this is basically the only place to get their beer. There is also a covered pavilion where they often have live music. If you are looking for great beer and a relaxing time outdoors, this brewery is about a 1 hour drive from Boston.

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Trillium (North Shore)

The tasting room of Trillium right up the street from BWH is a great place to spend a Friday during the summer. The beer at Trillium is always good. The food is a little pricy, but the quality of both the beer and the food is worth it. They also have an extensive selection of cans to go, so if you don't feel like sticking around in the North Shore, make sure to get some beer to go.

Nightshift (Boston Proper or beer garden in Watertown in the summer months)

Nightshift has some really awesome seasonal beer and is a local favorite. They often have cans at the liquor stores around the city, so it is not completely necessary to go to their locations, but it is definitely worth it. They have a lot of good IPAs and regular ales that fit the summer season, as well as a few good porters once we hit fall.

Notch (Watertown)

I went to Notch when I actually did my interview for my current position. The location is not necessarily the most convenient, but it does have an open seating area and is close to a lot of really great food near Watertown. The beer was good, but not the best I've had in Boston. Still worth

Indie Ferm (Plymouth)

This small microbrewery has a wide variety of beers to choose from, and the staff there is always super friendly and ready to talk 'beer'. Started initially by some locals in the Plymouth area, it has started to ship cans to some of the local stores within Plymouth.

Second Wind

Second Wind is found in downtown Plymouth and has some shockingly good beer for its size. Fair warning that the seating area is kind of small but well worth it. Mostly serves IPAs and ales with a few darker beers later in the year.

Exhibit A (Framingham)

Exhibit A is a cute smaller brewery that I think often gets overshadowed by Jack's Abby (which is also good). The names of their beer often are pop culture references and are very punny which is a plus, especially because the beer lives up to the hype. They serve a variety of beers, but the brewery doesn't have a full kitchen, so make sure you bring something with you or eat beforehand.