

womenetics

LIFESTYLE

Destination Boston for History, Seafood, Witches

Written by Mary Welch

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Hotel Commonwealth

We chose to anchor our week-long stay at The Hotel Commonwealth, on Commonwealth Avenue a few blocks away from Fenway Park and right smack in the middle of Boston University. It is at most 50 steps to the Kenmore rail station, which is the main line.

The Hotel Commonwealth features 148 rooms that personify a generous sense of comfort, space, and relaxation. The linens are Frette, and the bath products are Fresh. The staff is professional but personal and they have a spot-on desire to please. For instance, on checking out, we mentioned we would have preferred having a coffee pot in the room. Upon our return visit several days later, we did. It's no wonder that Travel + Leisure magazine ranked it as the 13th best hotel for hotels with more than 100 rooms.

To get acclimated to Bean Town we went up to the 50th floor of the Prudential Center to the Skywalk Observatory for the 360-degree view. The exhibits give a feel for the town, and the displays highlighted immigrants who came and made it their own. For those who want to look at the view in comfort, go up two more flights to the Top of the Hub for a glass of wine or a meal. There is jazz every night, and although there is no cover charge there is a minimum order of \$24 per person. And, while the restaurant features gourmet New England dishes and suitable wines, it does get a bit carried away. Honestly, \$90 for a Luxury Rob Roy?

Recently, travelers wanted the newest, most exotic locations. But as we get back to basics and eschewing over-the-top experiences, it may be time to revisit one of the country's best cities – Boston. Yes, without the occasional Ben Affleck or Mark Wahlberg movie, this East Coast jewel doesn't get much attention, especially as a destination vacation spot.

And, that's a shame.

Boston has a lot of offer – history, shopping, culture, and food. The Big Four. Or, if you like sports, The Big Five. As with most big cities, trying to understand the city in order to book hotels and plan itineraries may be daunting. But don't worry. Boston is a walking city and has a terrific and safe public transportation system. You are literally minutes away from wherever you want to be.



Oysters, of course
Photo by Michael Piazza



Island Creek Oyster Bar
Photo by Michael Piazza

each year, but maybe as adults we need to do it, too. Yes, the Old North Church is still standing – just a few blocks from Paul Revere's house – and you can climb the 294 steps inside the Bunker Hill obelisk monument. Did you know that the Battle of Bunker Hill actually took place on Breed's Hill and the Revolutionary soldiers lost? As our tour guide said, "Only in Boston."

Be sure to time your trip to Faneuil Hall when you're hungry. Once the place of incendiary patriot speeches, it is now a food court. But what a food court. Dozens of small restaurants line the hall featuring all types of pizzas, seafood (incredible fried clams), lobsters, Chinese, ice cream, and sausage and peppers subs. Heaven!

If you want some modern history, take the red line out to the JFK Presidential Library. Overlooking the sea and shaped like a boat, the museum starts with a movie detailing his career up to the presidential election and then invites visitors to walk through rooms filled with his history, Jackie's contributions (as well as her clothes), and his unique relationships with his brother Robert and Martin Luther King Jr.

The other must-do is to book a trip on the Old Town Trolley Tours. The tours go throughout Boston, and it's a get-off, get-on deal where you can board at Beacon Hill to shop and then get back on and go to the *USS Constitution*. The trolley drivers are pure Bostonian – full of vigor, humor, and stories. They glibly switch from the, "No Taxation without Representation" speech to explaining Boston politics when passing a parking garage at the Government Center. "Well, the building inspector said the beams were too small and couldn't hold the weight, so the mayor fired him and got another inspector who said the beams were fine. And then they added two more floors."

Of course, it is an honor walking the two-and-a-half mile, 16-site Freedom Trail and reminding ourselves how fortunate we are – not only today – but also back when a group of men – and women – risked everything for an idea. Thousands of school children walk the Freedom Trail



Beacon Hill
Photo: Greater Boston
Convention & Visitors Bureau



Bunker Hill
Photo: Greater Boston
Convention & Visitors Bureau

Of course one can get any type of culinary splendor in Boston, but really, it's all about seafood and Italian food. Take the North Line to Haymarket, walk a few blocks and you are in the middle of Italy. Any of the restaurants on Salem and Hanover streets feature homemade pastas and seafood delights. We would recommend Il Villaggio and La Galleria. For cannoli and other treats, it's Mike's Pastry. The lines are long but the staff is efficient and quick.

And, of course, Boston is also home to the wonderful challenge of finding the best lobster roll and New England clam chowder (or chowda). Frankly, we need to go back and try some more places before we declare a winner. But one restaurant we loved was the Island Creek Oyster Bar next to the Hotel Commonwealth.

Island Creek Oyster Bar features daily oysters from both the East and West coasts. Oysters and other seafood are harvested or caught by farmers the owners know and approve of – not only the product but also their philosophy of sustainability. The lobster is caught by the chef's cousin, for instance. The menu – whether it's scallops, lobster roll, or cod – is fresh and prepared in a modern twist of old classics. We highly recommend this new addition to Boston's culinary scene.

Boston is a town that has something for everyone, but a word of caution. If you intend on seeing a sports event – either professional or college – get your tickets early. Most events sell out. Bostonians take their sports very seriously.

So why go to Boston? Well, take the Big Five – history, shopping, culture, food, and sports. But really, it's as American as apple pie and maybe it's time to remember how – and why – the United States got its start. Well, maybe it's not as American as apple pie. How about as American as New England clam chowder?



Quincy Market
Photo: Greater Boston
Convention & Visitors Bureau

Witches Predominate in Salem



The actual House of Seven Gables
Photo: Destination Salem

When a small town is home to some of the best fiction ever written as well as one of the most horrible episodes in American history, well, it's worth a visit. So it was off to Salem, Mass., to see what inspired Nathaniel Hawthorne as well as the men and women who went on a literal witch hunt resulting in the deaths of 27 men and (mostly) women.

Salem is a 30-minute \$10 train ride or ferry ride from Boston. The town is an architectural wonder with a majority of the homes dating back to the 1700s and 1800s. Salem native Samuel McIntire is credited with being one of the first designers of the Federal style architect and his work is found throughout.

Salem is a great place to explore and meander around. There are statues to find – including one of *Bewitched's* Samantha Stevens (played by Elizabeth Montgomery in the TV show), a wink at its more morbid history – and shops to peruse and museums to see. Go to the Salem Maritime National Historic Site, which is comprised of three wharves, the tall ship *Friendship*, the Custom House (where Hawthorne worked), the Derby House (home to the country's first millionaire, Elias Haskettt Derby), and the 17th century Narbonne House.

But frankly, the main attraction of Salem is Hawthorne and the ghosts of its Witch Trials of 1692. Hawthorne's legacy is evident throughout the town. In fact, his great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the judges who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. Maybe that is why the author added a "w" to his name when he was in his 20s. It's hard to walk Salem without thinking of Hester Prynne in the *Scarlet Letter* and the Puritan guilt that permeated Salem and Massachusetts during this time, which led to the hysteria of the witch trials.

But it is the *House of Seven Gables* that helps to define Hawthorne, and the house, which indeed has seven gables, is still standing, and is now a museum near the waterfront district, a few blocks away from the author's home.

Only more prevalent than Hawthorne in Salem are witches. The town is not immune to the commercial aspect of its sordid history. There are witch's shops where everything from broomsticks to spell kits can be found. Real witches like Lori Bruno who will do readings. Add to that candlelit ghost tours and shops that sell anything and everything with a witch's picture on it.

But there are the real, hurtful aspects of the witch trials that are also in Salem. The Salem Witch Village features wax models, dungeons, and tours of practicing witches who confront the madness and superstitions that took hold of Salem. Be sure to visit the Witch House on Essex Street, the town's only building with direct ties to the trials as it was the home Jonathan Corwin, one of the judges in the witch trials.



Witchy History
Photo: Destination Salem



Original travel documents housed here
Photo: Robert Deschene

The Witch Dungeon offers a re-enactment of a witch trial based on the original transcripts and offers a tour of a real dungeon. One can also see a performance of "Cry Innocent: The People versus Bridget Bishop," which re-enacts her trial that took place on June 2, 1692, and her hanging eight days later. The most visited museum is the Salem Witch Museum, which tells a complete story of the hysteria that resulted in 180 men and women being accused of being witches, ending with 19 persons being hung, one crushed to death, and seven dying in prison. The original documents from the trials are housed there as well.

Although there are a number of fine dining establishments, we recommend two: Adriatic Restaurant on Washington Street, which features Turkish and Italian fare with a wood-burning oven, and the Regatta Pub located at the Salem Waterfront Hotel. Obviously seafood dishes are the specialty so try the macaroni and cheese with lobster or the fish and chips.

Salem is the perfect place to get lost in history, but we're not promising that you'll find any answers.



Mary Welch is Atlanta city editor of **Womenetics**; and a freelance writer for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Dawson Times*, *Plan Your Meeting* magazine, and *Atlanta Business* magazine. She was editor-in-chief of *Atlanta Woman* magazine and editor of *Business to Business* and *Catalyst* magazines.

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