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## A Snob's Guide to Boston

Where to eat, drink, sleep, and sightsee like a local in this great American city.

BY [ANDREW SESSA](#) PUBLISHED: JUN 21, 2025

Could [the Boston Brahmin](#) be the OG snob of the American experiment? Born out of the not-quite-our-kind-dear ethos of the 17th-century Puritans who fled the wild new ways of the Old World on the Mayflower, a certain nascent Yankee pride sallied forth from the witch-hunting Goodwives of Salem into the smoke- and scotch-filled back rooms of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay—and eventually into the private clubs (and private libraries and private museums) of the city in its modern incarnation. For proof of their continued hold here, consider this: *Boston Magazine* just named as Beantown's second most influential people the founders of the city's recently relaunched members-only club, [the 'Quin House](#).

Locals today would say they're not snobs, of course. (The locals always do, don't they?) We just have taste, and our taste—classic but with a wink, well worn but never shabby, apparent without being showy—is good taste. And we're right about that, at least to a point, with history to back us up: Native son Paul Revere was a silversmith, after all, John Hancock made penmanship chic again, Julia Child taught the country to master the art of French cooking from our PBS station, and, Harvard, well, Harvard all but invented cultural elitism in the first place.

These days, Boston snobs remain in full effect. Here, a highly curated, and very opinionated, list of where they congregate—or should, anyway.

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## Where to Stay





FOUR SEASONS HOTELS &amp; RESORTS

Four Seasons Hotel Boston.

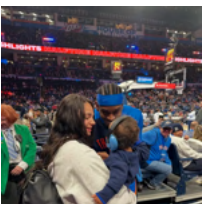
Forget the battle over lobster rolls hot and buttered vs. cold and celeried. The great debate among a certain set of locals is over a preference for the **Four Seasons Hotel Boston**—a decades-old, old-school redbrick favorite overlooking the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed Public Garden—or the sleek, relatively arriviste **Four Seasons Hotel One Dalton Street**, which occupies the first 21 stories of New England’s tallest residential tower, all from a perch on the edge of architect I.M. Pei’s Christian Science Plaza. Both have glass-walled indoor pools to recommend them, plus soothing spas available to guests and non-guests alike. The former impresses with recently redesigned public spaces by maximalist master Ken Fulk, while the latter tempts with a buzzing branch of London-based Japanese haute spot **Zuma**, which has become one of the sciniest spots in town.

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## What to Read Next



A Snob's Guide to Boston



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CHRISTIAN HORAN/FOUR SEASONS

Four Seasons Hotel One Dalton Street.

From the Four Seasons Boston, it's just a quick walk around the corner of the **Public Garden**—which itself is very much worth a wander, whatever the season—to the independently owned and operated **Newbury**, which opened in 2021 and enjoys pride of place in the neoclassical 1927 building that served as home to the very first Ritz-Carlton in the U.S. Alexandra Champalimaud handled the pitch-perfect, pied-à-terre-feeling rooms (some with working fireplaces), while Fulk imagined the Lake Como villa stylings of **Contessa**, the clubby rooftop northern Italian restaurant from NYC's Major Food Group (the maestros behind Carbone and the Grill Room, among others). Always hopping at dinner, it gets the best light in the city at breakfast and lunch.

The first **Raffles** in North America landed in a contemporary glass tower just off Copley Square in late 2023, and it's taken the city by storm, not least thanks to the travertine arches and garden terrace of its all-day Long Bar restaurant, the speakeasy feel of its Blind Duck bar, and the gourmetized stalwarts of la cucina Italiana at La Padrona, from local James Beard talent Jody Adams.



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On the smaller end of the spectrum, the **Beacon Hill Hotel** and the **Whitney**—both on Beacon Hill’s boutique- and cafe-line Charles Street—win raves. And, if it’s penthouse bragging rights you’re after, the sweeping water views from the 1,000-square-foot terrace of **Boston Harbor Hotel**’s nearly 5,000-square-foot, two-bedroom John Adams Presidential Suite will give you all you could possibly want.

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## Where to Eat



BRIAN SAMUELS

ZURITO.

The food scene here these days is so much more than oystahs, lobstah, and chowdah. And the city's chronically hardest-to-book restaurants remain that way for a reason, filled nightly with die-hard local fans who know precisely when to hop on Resy (sometimes in the middle of the night) to score a coveted table as soon as reservations open.

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For anchovy- and jamón-forward Spanish tapas, pintxos, and more, it's chef and restaurateur's Ken Oringer's **Toro**, in the South End, and his former partner Jamie Bissonnette's more recent opening, **ZURiTO**, in Beacon Hill, while the flavors of the Eastern Med come to the fore at the tip-top haute mezze spots **Oleana**, from Ana Sortun in Cambridge's Inman Square, and its sister, **Sarma**, from Cassie Piuma, in Somerville's Winter Hill; both are Beard honorees.



The best Italian has ventured afield from the traditional Little Italy of the North End, and dug in deep on the esoterica of handmade house pastas, many of them masterminded by more Beard-approved chefs: in the South End, there is the Venetian destination [\*\*SRV\*\*](#) and Douglas Williams's pan-Italian [\*\*MIDA\*\*](#); and in South Boston, Karen Akunowicz's [\*\*Fox & the Knife\*\*](#) and [\*\*Bar Volpe\*\*](#). In Cambridge, not far from Harvard Square, don't miss [\*\*Pammy's\*\*](#), as well as chef Michael Pagliarini's long-standing [\*\*Giulia\*\*](#) and his more fish-focused newer arrival, [\*\*Moëca\*\*](#). For pizza, head to [\*\*Si Cara\*\*](#), in Cambridge's Central Square, for perfect wood-oven-fired Napolitano-style pies by SRV founding chef Michael Lombardi.

Back in Boston, the summer 2024 opening of [\*\*the Red Fox\*\*](#), a subterranean red-sauce joint, has given folks reason to return to the North End. (Cannoli lovers won't leave the North End without a freshly filled pastry shell from [\*\*Mike's\*\*](#) or [\*\*Modern\*\*](#). Want to avoid the lines? Get them delivered via Uber Eats.)

The city's long, deep African-American and Afro-Caribbean roots are celebrated at Ghanaian-born chef Kwasi Kwaa's Beard-nominated [\*\*Comfort Kitchen\*\*](#), in the Dorchester neighborhood, and local culinary talent Nina Grace's [\*\*Grace by Nia\*\*](#), in the Seaport, while the plant-filled [\*\*Cafe Sauvage\*\*](#), owned by a Parisian couple and especially popular for brunch, blends the French with the Africaine.



MICHAEL HARLAN TURKELL

The lobster rolls are simple perfection at Row 34.

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Devotees of omakase should make plans well in advance to claim a seat at the bar at the long-established [O Ya](#) and [Uni](#) and two newer spots: [Three 1 One](#), set in a South End townhouse and from an alum of Manhattan's three-Michelin-starred Masa; and [Wa Shin](#), from a chef who did time at NYC's Sushi Nakazawa. For Korean, top marks go to [Somaek](#), chef Bisonette's love letter to his wife's and mother-in-law's cooking, and, in Chinatown, natives in-the-know know to hit [Hei La Moon](#) for dim sum and [Jumbo Seafood](#) for a fish- and crustacean-focused dinner.

But you're here for the New England seafood, too, we know. Out of towners still line up for the North End's no-reservations [Neptune Oyster Bar](#), but locals hit its former chef's [Select Oyster Bar](#), in the Back Bay, not far from Saltie Girl, where the clam chowder also stands out. The Seaport's [Row 34](#), where former First Lady Jill Biden



dined on a Boston trip, makes raw bar and the perfect lobster roll seem like the most elevated meal out there. The same can't be said of the nearby no-frills coastal seafood shack **Barking Crab**, set on stilts over Fort Point Channel, but it's winkingly tacky decor, and the fried goodies, are part of this kitsch-cool spot's many charms.

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## Where to Drink



BRIAN SAMUELS

Don't be fooled by the Wig Shop's exterior.

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Some of the best sips in town have gone underground, literally, to tip-top subterranean spots including the South End's tiki-tastic [Shore Leave](#), the Back Bay's Greek wine bar [Hecate](#), and cocktail spot [Bar Pallino](#); and Downtown Crossing's high-design Baz Luhrmann fever dream of a supper club, [Yvonne's](#).

More haute speakeasy style can be found behind the unmarked door of [Offsuit](#), in the Leather District, where you can spin vinyl; in a password-protected hidden room at the InterContinental's [Loyall Counting Room](#); at the [Wig Shop](#), disguised by its eponymous faux-hair storefront just east of Boston Common; and [Extra Dirty Cocktail Club](#) secreted away behind the Red Fox—it's the sister bar of [Farmacia](#), also in the North End, and both are book-ahead ticketed prix fixe cocktail menu spots.



Oenophiles especially keen for naturally made, small-production bottles head to wine bars from two of the area's top women sommeliers: Haley Fortier's [haley.henry](#) downtown and [nathálie](#) in the Fenway, and Lauren Friel's [Rebel Rebel](#), set amid the artisanal shops and food makers of Somerville Bow Market and [Dear Annie](#), between Cambridge's Harvard and Porter squares.

Ladies who lunch who are then looking to indulge a guiltier pleasure (or two) can park their Blahniks on a barstool at the [Sevens](#) in Beacon Hill for beers and hotdogs.

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## What to Do



COURTESY ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.



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Of all the areas in which Boston out-snobs cities ten times its size, one of the biggest may be its museums. Start by booking ahead for opening time tickets to wander through the idiosyncratic displays of Old Master paintings, European furniture, and Asian artifacts in the Venetian-style palazzo housing **the eponymous museum of** iconoclastic early-20th-century collector **Isabella Stewart Gardner**; build in extra time to gaze into in the glass-roofed courtyard garden from the surrounding multi-story loggia.

At the nearby **Museum of Fine Arts**, make a beeline for the ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman objects; **the Sargent portraits**; the most impressive Impressionist holdings; and the priceless jewels—not least **a famed René Boivin starfish** brooch once owned by Claudette Colbert. At the **Institute of Contemporary Art**, in a Diller,

Scofidio & Renfro building that practically projects out over Boston Harbor from the Seaport, an ever-changing array of often-feminist and political art rules the day. Across the river in Cambridge, the Renzo Piano–redesigned [Harvard Art Museums](#) provide more encyclopedic holdings.

For literary pursuits, take in the allegorical Sargent murals adorning the walls of the grand staircase in the neoclassical McKim, Mead & White–designed central branch of the [Boston Public Library](#) on Copley Square. Then head to Beacon Hill for [an insider's architecture tour](#) of the membership-based [Boston Athenaeum](#), stopping after to browse the shelves and have a bite at [Beacon Hill Books & Cafe](#), which is in a charming old townhouse newly decked out in Sister Parish prints and patterns. Harvard's Widener Library is off limits to the public (natch), but the university's rare book [Houghton Library](#) lets in the hoi polloi.



ROBERT POLIDORI

The Boston Athenaeum.

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High design-minded modernists won't mind at all the concrete mega-buildings built in Boston at the height of the late-20th-century Brutalist movement, taking in the impressive structures not only of Pei (the campus surrounding the Christian Science Plaza), but also Paul Khan (the Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center), Le Corbusier (Harvard's Carpenter Center), and more. Local professors wrote the book on the topic, literally, and also helped author a handy map pinpointing the greatest hits. A masterwork from an earlier modernist era can be found just outside the city, in Lincoln, at the **Walter Gropius House**.



When it comes to the performing arts, Brahmins swear by their season tickets to the [Boston Ballet](#), [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#), and the [Boston Pops](#) (the latter two of which decamp to the Tanglewood Music Festival [in the Berkshires come summer](#)), while those with more cutting-edge tastes take to the South End's [Huntington Theatre Company](#) and Cambridge's Harvard-affiliated [American Repertory Theater](#), which originated the Broadway-bound new musical *Gatsby*, among many others before it. Aficionados of bebop and beyond should book a table at [Wally's Café Jazz Club](#), a South End institution—and one of the first integrated venues in New England—that has been owned by the family of its Barbadian-born founder, Joseph L. Walcott, for more than 75 years.

On the spa side of things, [the Mandarin Oriental](#), now in partnership with Natura Bissé, has been the go-to for nearly two decades. It's now getting some very local competition from the country's first [Biologique Recherche Ambassade](#), which specializes in facials and opened only a few blocks away in late 2024. New in the Seaport is an outpost of [Remedy Place](#), a high-design, holistic, tech-focused wellness center—founded by an expert in chiropractic and alternative medicine—that aims to make self-care a social activity.

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## Where to Shop

While we're all still mourning the 2015 loss of our dearly departed Louis Boston—the platonic ideal of an urban, urbane, ever-so-eclectic boutique luxury shop for women, men, and home—we're somehow making do. The Tiffany concept shop at Copley Place and the ultra-haute international brands on the easternmost block of the Back Bay's Newbury Street—from Armani to Zegna—help fill the void, as does the nearby, tightly curated multi-brand men's and women's haute contemporary outfitter [Riccardi](#), and the Beacon Hill ladies-only spots [French + Italian](#), [December Thieves](#), and [Dress Boston](#). In Brookline, there is [Remy](#), for everything you need for a Nantucket idyll or brunch at the club. In the South End, don't miss the appointment-only [Viola Lovely](#) for more indie style.

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Historic high prep gets its masculine moment at Cambridge's [Andover Shop](#), the answer to New Haven's J. Press, while a more 21st-century take on the style can be found at the South End's [Sault New England](#). On the domestic front, the South End's once-industrial [SoWa](#) offers the modernist style of [Lekker Home](#) and more transitional aesthetics of [Modern Relik](#) and [Artefact](#), while [Hudson](#) keeps true-blue New England charm contemporary. Niche as it may be, the Beacon Hill luxe home hardware shop [E.R. Butler & Co.](#)—in a space designed by architect Gil Shafer—has devoted devotees, not just for its cabinet pulls and door handles but interior design accessories and even jewelry by the likes of [Ted Muehling](#) and David Yurman alum [Mary MacGill](#). Looking for flowers for a host or hostess? Current favorites for precious petals are [Table & Tulip](#) and [Rouvalis](#).



ANDOVER SHOP

Andover Shop.

And, finally, when it comes to jewelry, **Shreve, Crump & Low** is traditional go-to (since 1796!), **M. Flynn** masters the cool girl luxe look, and **Mayk Cimen** is an under-the-radar favorite for custom pieces.





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