

Understand Boston

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Boston today is on the cutting edge of art, architecture and urban design, but still recovering from the recent recession.

HISTORY 198

The history of Boston is the history of a nation, from the earliest settlement to the recent past.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE 207

Once dubbed the Athens of America, Boston is a cauldron of creativity, where art, architecture, music and literature continue to thrive.

COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES 210

From September to May, Boston overflows with the exuberance of the local student population – a renewable source of cultural energy.

BOSTON BIKES 213

Boston's efforts to become a world-class cycling city are showing results, making the city leaner, greener and even nicer.

FREEDOM TRAIL 215

For a sampler of Boston's revolutionary sites, follow the red brick road from the Boston Common to Bunker Hill.

Boston Today

Recalling its revolutionary roots, Boston continues to claim its place among the country's forward-thinking and barrier-breaking cities. This is most evident in the political sphere – controversial issues like same-sex marriage and universal healthcare are already old news here. Physically, the city's changing landscape showcases some of the country's most cutting-edge architecture and innovative urban planning projects. Culturally, Boston has shed its staid and stodgy reputation, becoming a focal point for contemporary art.

Best on Film

The Verdict (1982) Paul Newman as a Boston lawyer.

Good Will Hunting (1997) Put Southie on the Hollywood map.

Next Stop Wonderland (1997) A heartwarming independent film with a bossa nova soundtrack.

The Departed (2006) A suspense-filled mob movie that won Best Picture.

The Social Network (2009) The fictionalized drama of the founding of Facebook.

Best in Print

The Scarlet Letter (Nathaniel Hawthorne; 1850) Hypocrisy and malice in Puritan New England.

The Friends of Eddie Coyle (George Higgins, 1972) A crime novel that provides a crash course in the Boston dialect.

Infinite Jest (David Foster Wallace; 1996) A 1000-page tome that is at once philosophical and satirical.

Interpreter of the Maladies (Jhumpa Lahiri; 1999) A Pulitzer Prize-winner that addresses the challenges of migration and multiculturalism.

Mystic River (Dennis Lehane; 2001) The dark story of three childhood friends who are thrown together in adulthood.

Greening the City

Bostonians have had the great fortune to witness the literal greening of their city. The Central Artery roadway, now underground and out of sight, has been replaced by the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Like all good Boston public works projects, the Greenway is not without controversy. Many of the grand facilities that were promised – Boston Museum, YMCA, Garden under Glass, etc – do not exist, as investors have been forced to cancel their plans. The Greenway Conservancy has also come under fire for a lack of transparency in its finances.

Nonetheless, most Bostonians are pleased with the verdant thread that has successfully sutured its neighborhoods. And as more plans and plants come to fruition, the urban oasis keeps getting better. If all goes well, the future Rose Kennedy Greenway will be home to a local farmers' market, a custom-designed carousel and a newly conceived history museum.

The More Things Change...

Thanks to revitalization efforts, most of Boston is looking fantastic. Neighborhoods like the North End, West End and Waterfront have been rediscovered and reconnected to the rest of the city. Gentrification has transformed the South End and the Seaport District.

Unfortunately, other areas were left in the lurch by the recent recession. Downtown Crossing suffered from the closing of the iconic department store Filene's. Developers planned to preserve the historic facade and build a skyscraper behind it; the resulting building would be the centerpiece of the neighborhood's revitalization. But construction came to a standstill some time in 2008, leaving the Filene's facade teetering on the edge of a abyss – literally.