

CITY INSIDER BOSTON'S NEW-FASHIONED FLAIR

BY JUDITH RITTER, BOSTON

Bostonians tend to be divinely loyal not only to their beloved baseball team, but also to centuries-old eateries and watering holes. Restaurants such as chop house Durgin Park and Locke-Ober are still as packed with locals as they were in 19th century.

But there is a new Boston, too, comprising hip restaurants and lounges, and a shiny signature bridge. The once working-class South Boston is now an up-and-coming area called SoBo. And in a city where old buildings are revered, Boston's Mayor Thomas Menino has just called for the construction of an 80-storey skyscraper.

One event that spans the old and the new: St. Patrick's Day. In a city that bills itself as the capital of Irish America, March 17 promises both traditional partying and hot new performances.

What's coming up

This year's week-long **St. Patrick's Day** celebration (www.irishmassachusetts.com) includes an exhibit of contemporary Irish painters (loricaartworks.com) and performances at various venues by the Pogues, the Chieftains and Irish tenor Ronan Tynan. At the **Kennedy Presidential Library** (1-866-535-1960; www.jfklibrary.org), a new exhibit on March 17 also looks at JFK's relationship to his family's homeland. And finally, the week of Gaelic gaiety is topped off on March 19 with the 105th **St. Patrick's Day Parade** (www.saintpatricksdaysparade.com) in South Boston.

Everyone everywhere talks base-

ball come spring. Catch the fever on April 12, **Red Sox** opening day (www.redsox.com), when they begin a three-game series with the Toronto Blue Jays. Single-game tickets will get you into Boston's most sacred space — 94-year-old Fenway Park — but be sure to reserve in advance.

Given the city's brainpower (showcased at both Harvard and M.I.T.), it's no surprise George Lucas chose to premiere Lucasfilms' futuristic **Star Wars Exhibition** at the Boston Museum of Science (Science Park; 617-723-2500; www.mos.org). The show features the science and technology of *Star Wars* until April 30.

Diversions

For a high-tech way to explore the Hub (as the city is called), snag a copy of the **Boston Audissey Tour** (www.audisseyguides.com) on CD or MP3. Or try the good old-fashioned **Freedom Trail** (www.thefreedomtrail.org), a four-kilometre walking route in downtown Boston marked by a painted red line. When you tire of strolling, sailing through Boston is another option. Just a 10-minute walk from the downtown area, the Charles River is one of Boston's favourite urban recreation areas. University rowing crews train there, the Boston Pops play on the riverbanks in summer — and locals and visitors can rent small sailboats from **Community Boating** (www.community-boating.org; 617-523-1038).

Heading indoors in Boston pays off too: A favourite stop for culture lovers is the **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum** (280 The Fenway; 617-566-1401; www.gardnermuseum.org). Housed in a replica of a

15th-century Venetian palazzo, it holds the private collection — including work by John Singer Sargent and James McNeil Whistler — of one of Boston's most eccentric socialites.

Where to stay

While not the toniest hotel in Boston, the **Omni Parker House** is the oldest and perhaps most storied (60 School St.; 617-725-1657; www.parkerhouseboston.com). After opening its doors in 1855, it was a home away from home for guests such as Sarah Bernhardt, Judy Garland, FDR and JFK. The bar there was also where local literati such as Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne hung their hats and the restaurant employed Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X. The legendary hotel was recently restored, with rates starting at \$182. Newer and edgier than the Parker is the small **Onyx Hotel** (155 Portland St.; 617-557-9955; www.onyxhotel.com). Though just over a year old, it's already on the radar of hip younger travellers — who are particularly attracted to the Britney Spears room, an exact replica of the pop diva's childhood bedroom in Louisiana. Rooms start at \$159.

Not quite distinctive enough? Try the **Golden Slipper** (Lewis Wharf; 781-545-2845; bbonline.com/ma/goldenslipper), a floating bed and breakfast. Tied up at one of Boston's historic wharfs, it offers accommodation aboard a vintage 1960 Chris Craft cabin cruiser. Double-occupancy rates start at \$200, with rooms available May to November.

Where to eat

Seafood restaurants come and go in



LISA POOLE/AP

Boston — except for the 180-year-old **Union Oyster House** (41 Union St.; www.unionoysterhouse.com), the oldest restaurant in the U.S. It is still a favourite among political insiders such as John Kerry and Ted Kennedy.

Stella (1525 Washington St.; 617-247-7747; www.bostonstella.com) is a decidedly newer hangout in a

gallery-drenched area of Boston. The Italian eatery, known almost exclusively by word-of-mouth, has been on the scene for only seven months, but it's already packed most nights. Meanwhile, in Beacon Hill, locals are flocking to **75 Chestnut Street** (617-227-2175; www.75chestnut.com) for elegant — but not stuffy — dining. Dark

Housed in a 15th-century-style palazzo, the collection at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum includes American and European masterpieces.

shiny wood, an old-fashioned tin ceiling and engravings give the decor here an unmistakably Bostonian flair, while chef Scott Ryan uses only local products for his menu.

After dark

Though not a late-night city like New York or Montreal, clubbers in Boston manage to make themselves known before 2 a.m. at A-list lounges such as the **Foundation Lounge** (500 Commonwealth Ave.; 617-859-9900; www.thefoundationlounge.com). Opened last April, it features 40 kinds of tequila and visiting celebs including Patriots quarterback Tom Brady.

28 Degrees (1 Appleton St.; 617-728-0728; www.28degrees-boston.com), which opened last November, is another lounge-of-the-moment. The name refers to the perfect temperature of a martini (Fahrenheit, naturally), but nothing is as cool as the beautiful people who hang here and take in Sunday-night drag shows.

Or there's the chic, grown-up **Bristol Lounge** (200 Boylston St.; 617-351-2037; www.fourseasons.com). Called "Boston's living room" for its soft red leather sofas and dark wood tables, it attracts older Bostonians who actually like to hear each other speak over a cognac or martini. .

Judith Ritter is a third-generation Bostonian.

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