

## travel



## Shopping on in Boston

With its culture and history, Boston has always lured visitors from across the pond. **DAVID YOUNG** found yet another reason to pay a visit - the shopping.

Jet lag can have its perks, and standing on the banks of the Charles River, watching the sunrise over the Boston cityscape as wintry night gave way to crisp early morning made the trans-Atlantic insomnia a little easier to bear.

A band of hardy joggers and dog walkers were already well into their daily exercise routine around the non-tidal waterway that snakes its way between the north side of the port city and Cambridge, the college town home of Harvard and MIT.

But while the fitness fraternity had eyes firmly on the tree-lined paths provided for their exertions, my unscheduled dawn stroll across the Longfellow Bridge turned out to be the perfect way to soak up one of America's most historic cities, before venturing into its beating heart.

Tax was the key issue for Bostonians as the bitter dispute between Britain and her American colonies escalated into revolution in 1775, with the War of Independence. More than two centuries on, the city is again raising another matter of taxation with her cousins across the pond, albeit a rather less inflammatory one.

Boston is urging British and Irish shoppers to eschew New York's Fifth Avenue this winter and head to Massachusetts instead.

And the reason - you won't be subject to the same rates of sales tax applied in shops in many other US states. The proprietors of the designer outlets in the chic Newbury Street hope this financial incentive is enough to attract bargain hunters, and that perk - along with the promise of a city rich in culture - persuaded me to choose Boston for a winter break.

## Get Packing

David Young travelled with British Airways (0844 4930758, ba.com/boston) who offer three nights at the 5-star Mandarin Oriental (mandarinoriental.com/boston) in Boston from £859 per person, based on two people sharing, for travel between December and March. Includes return BA flights in economy from London Heathrow and room only accommodation. For more on Boston information visit: [www.bostonUSA.com](http://www.bostonUSA.com)

Dubbed the walking city, it is smaller than many of the US's major metropolises. Newbury Street cuts through the Back Bay and its brownstone facades makes it an experience whether you buy anything or not. My hotel was on the nearby Boylston Street - The Mandarin Oriental. The Mandarin's spa has a reputation as one of the finest in the state and, with the jetlag still raging, that was where I spent a long afternoon.

Linking the Back Bay and downtown is the picturesque Boston Common. It was a great place to start my second day. Navigating around the fearless geese that roam the 380-year-old park, it felt a bit like Central Park in miniature.

Just off the Common's north edge is the exclusive Beacon Hill, a beautiful neo-Georgian neighbourhood still

illuminated by gas lamps. A wander up its steep streets was hard on the calf muscles, but well worth it, just for the glimpse into the world of Boston's patrician elite.

Boston boasts a remarkable 57 different colleges and universities and some of the most prestigious now sit in Cambridge. Like England's

Cambridge and Oxford, Harvard and MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) have

become tourist attractions as well as revered seats of learning. The newly constructed Entrepreneurial Walk of Fame at MIT's Kendall Square is ample proof of that.

Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Thomas Edison are among those immortalised on this boulevard of notable Americans. A trip to Cambridge is not complete without a visit to Tory Row at Harvard, a street of colonial 18th century wooden mansions, where many British loyalists lived during the revolutionary war.

The Boston Celtics basketball team and Boston Bruins ice hockey franchise play at the TD Garden in the North End while across town the baseball players from the storied Boston Red Sox entertain at the game's oldest professional arena in the US, Fenway Park.

I took a 40-minute train ride south to Foxborough to sample an American football game at the home of the New England Patriots. And while baseball is a summer sport, a tour of the quaint 100-year-old Fenway Park was hard to resist. Its opening in April 1912 didn't make many headlines - it was the same week the Titanic sank. That is one anecdote among countless provided by the highly entertaining New York Yankee-hating guides. As arguably the crucible of the American revolution, modern

Boston makes much of its past. The Freedom Trail - an easy to navigate walking route around all the main sites of significance related to the War of Independence - can be completed in an afternoon and I found it a great way of taking in Boston's sights and sounds at the same time as learning about its past.

In more recent times, the history of Boston is of course synonymous with that of the Kennedy family. A trip to the city would not be complete without a visit to John F. Kennedy's Presidential Library and Museum at Dorchester Bay. The I.M. Pei designed building on the waterfront houses a vast collection of artefacts from JFK's life before and during the White House years. Interestingly, the museum is also home to the papers of Ernest Hemingway.

His family donated the valuable collection in recognition of JFK's support in an audacious bid to recover it from the late author's home in Cuba using a shrimp boat. It is another intriguing story from a city brimful of them, and further proof that a short break in Boston has far more to offer than just tax breaks.



## Gambia is more than just sun

It's the quickest and probably the cheapest place to get to if you are searching for hot winter sun and it offers a holiday which could change your life. **DEREK JAMES** reports from The Gambia.

In a remote settlement on the banks of the mighty River Gambia a battered old television was showing a football game from France.

I was the only "tub" - a friendly nickname for visitors - for miles around and it was good to escape from the tourist strip on the coast for a few days.

This was real Africa. Miles from the coastal hotels, restaurants, bars and shops. We were sitting under a "magical" Baobab tree. I was drinking hot sweet tea, and grateful to be out of the mid-day sun for an hour or so.

As men watched the football, the women were preparing food for the day while the children were running around while keeping an eye on this strange looking visitor - me. Although they had nothing they welcomed me into their community like a long-lost friend. "English" shouted a man. "You support Manchester Utd?" he asked.

"Yes and No," I replied. "Norwich City." He smiled and without a second thought said: "I think you will survive. Hughton is a good man."

What! All of a sudden my thoughts returned to sitting in the River End on a freezing cold Saturday afternoon - waiting for Holly to bang in the winner.

It's a small world and one which is full of surprises. And that's just what you get if you decide to visit the smallest country on the African mainland. Plenty of surprises.

Less than six hours away from our shores on the west coast of Africa, wedged in the middle of French Senegal, is The Gambia, a little land where the people speak English - and love Great Britain.



Never underestimate a Gambian. You may have more money than they do but they have the wit and wisdom to survive in a country where the going can get very tough.

If you are a repeat visitor - and so many people get hooked on the country and return year after year - then you will know what I mean.

If you are thinking of going - for a blast of sunshine and plenty of adventure - then look up a company called The Gambia Experience.

It has been sending people there for 25 years. Has promoted and encouraged tourism and knows the country like the back of its hand. It also gives a lot of support to charities in the country

## Get Packing

Derek James stayed at the friendly African Village, a small 2\* hotel well away from the tourist areas. Don't expect luxury but you will get a warm welcome. This will give you a real taste of Africa. One week in January b&b in an African room will cost from £399. There are good deals for singles. One week in the plush 5\* Kaiyaba Hotel, costs from £749pp, b&b, and one week all-inclusive at the 4\* Sheraton also costs from £749.

You can book up a visit at Chimp Camp along with a stay at Mandina Lodges at Makasutu for a real African river safari. Makasutu is highly recommended. A number of options are available combining a stay at a hotel on the coast, the river lodges and chimp camp. Prices include Gatwick flights, inflight meals, transfers and airport taxes. To book or for more details of these and other holidays visit [Gambia.co.uk](http://Gambia.co.uk), call 0845 330 4567, or see a travel agent.

National Express offers an excellent 24-hour service from Norwich, Wymondham, Attleborough, Thetford and Mildenhall to Stansted, Heathrow and Gatwick. The coach takes you straight to the airport gate, saving the hassle of parking and the expense of petrol. For times and more information click on [nationalexpress.com](http://nationalexpress.com) or call 08717 818178.

The company has a range of hotels on its books, from basic 2\* establishments offering a slice of African life, to plush 5\* all-inclusive hotels offering luxury breaks.

You pay your money and takes your choice. But wherever you stay you will be surrounded by the extraordinary sights and sounds of Africa.

The company also has the best reps in the business.

They will greet you when you get through customs at Banjul Airport in the afternoon following a 9am flight from Gatwick where you will hear them say: "Welcome back," to almost every other new arrival.

To many they are more than just a rep, they are a friend. One who has helped them to get the best out of this fascinating strip of land bordering the awesome River Gambia.

If you are a first-time visitor then make sure you attend the welcome meeting. It isn't just a gathering to sell excursions, this an opportunity to discover what makes this country tick.

## Key Facts - The Gambia

- It is the ideal place for first time visitors to Africa. Less than six hours flying time away, everyone speaks English, and the hotels are all within half an hour so from the airport.
- Leave a cold England at 9am and be sitting in the sun by the pool come tea-time.
- It is outside the Euro zone and offers good value for money. Food and drink is fairly cheap and if you want to treat yourself there are some extremely good, upmarket restaurants.
- Birding. Spot some of the 540 species. It is one of the best places in the world for birds.
- Chris Packham runs birdwatching trips and says: "I've lost count of how many times I have been to The Gambia."
- "The wonderful locals, the excellent hotels and food, the feeling of safety when out and about and of course the abundance of incredible birdlife, which never ceases to amaze me."
- Fishing. The River Gambia is a totally unspoilt, huge stretch of fresh water, untouched by commercialism while the off-shore waters of the Senegal coast offer great opportunities for big game fishing.
- For peace and tranquility spent some time at the magnificent floating and jungle lodges at Makasutu Forest run by Englishman Lawrence Williams. Then take a look at Wide Open Walls Art Project in the villages.
- For the trip of a lifetime head up 270km upriver to the Chimp Rehabilitation Project. You stay in a camp overlooking the islands, home to around 100 chimps. This is Africa's longest running project of its kind - it is a wonderful place to visit.
- The area is also home to various monkeys and both hippos and crocodiles live in the river. It's a long trip, but boy, is it worth it!

## Travel Notes

with Derek James



• Still thinking of getting away for Christmas? On the northern edge of Dartmoor, near Throwleigh with lovely rural views and five acres to wander is The Linhay, a smart barn conversion for four reduced by 20 per cent down to £343 for a week from Friday December 21. Pets welcome. For water lovers, an elegant and stylish furnished holiday home on the ground floor of cliff-top Prospect House has stunning sea views over Hallsands, South Devon. It's been reduced by 35 per cent, down to £725 for a five night stay from Friday December 21. If two guests stay is just £595. To book call helpful Holidays on 01647 434063 or visit [www.helpfulholidays.com](http://www.helpfulholidays.com) searching for refs A153 and L84.

• Fewer tourists, clement weather, bewitching rural landscapes and medieval towns - visit Alentejo in Portugal during low season and you'll find magic without interruption. New winter and spring breaks costs from £456pp including flights from Heathrow, car hire, four nights b&b at the 5\* Hotel Convento do Espinho in Evora, a three-course dinner, wine-tasting and a wine-therapy spa session. Call Sunvil Discovery on 020 87584722, [www.sunvil.co.uk](http://www.sunvil.co.uk).

• If you have young children and are looking for a good value holiday aboard next year how about Keycamp. Specially selected for its unrivalled facilities, Keycamp's St Avit Loisirs in the Dordogne is the perfect destination for families' first holiday abroad, located in the peaceful setting of rolling French countryside. A seven night family holiday on June 1, staying in a two bedroom mobile home (sleeping up to four adults and two children) costs from £417 per party, ferry crossings and fly-drive packages are available at a supplement. To book call 0844 406 0319 or visit [www.keycamp.co.uk](http://www.keycamp.co.uk)



• January and February are two of the best months of the year to enjoy Bamboo Travel's 13-day Highlights of Vietnam itinerary which covers all the principle sights in a short space of time. The holiday costs from £1,895pp (two sharing) which includes flights, 10-nights b&b in small hotels, some meals, one night on a junk cruise boat, private tours and guides. Call 020 7720 9285 or visit [www.bambootravel.co.uk](http://www.bambootravel.co.uk)

• Beat the January blues with a half price 5\* Maldives holiday. Hayes & Jarvis (0844 415 1918/ [www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk](http://www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk)) has slashed 51 per cent off a one-week trip to the Maldives. You will be staying at Vvanta by Taj - Coral Reef. Located in the North Male Atoll, the 5\* island resort has 62 villas, an infinity swimming pool, two restaurants, a spa, diving and water-sports. Leaving on January 30, the package costs £1,299pp (saving £1,356pp) including seven nights b&b accommodation, flights from Heathrow and speedboat transfers.