

Please come to Boston..... by Milan Merhar

Odyssey 2010, the 30th International gathering of Lettering Artists, will be held on the campus of Stonehill College. Stonehill is located in Easton Massachusetts 20 miles from Boston. The campus is easily accessible from major highways, and is a short distance from several commuter rail lines. This makes it a great location for exploration of the region, either by your family while you're off at classes, or before or after the conference.

There are too many destinations to consider, from Newport and Providence RI, Cape Cod, and Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. In this article, we'll focus on the Boston/Cambridge area, with a few additional treats near to the Stonehill campus.

Boston's twisty streets can be tricky to navigate by car and cabs can be expensive, so you may want to travel as many of the locals do, by foot and on "the T". Check out mbta.com for deals on one-day or one-week passes that provide unlimited travel by subway, bus, and some harbor ferry and commuter rail routes. If you have a rental car, you may want to consider parking it at a MBTA station and ride the train in, rather than trying to find parking in the city.

Tours, Tours, and more Tours

The classic tourist trip through Boston/Cambridge is on a tour bus, be it old-time trolley or imported London double-decker. The advantage is of course you don't have to walk, and you'll get an enthusiastic (if not always accurate) running commentary on what you're seeing from the tour guide. Prices vary widely and can be expensive for a large family, so shop around. Several of the discount card packages include bus or boat tours.

Boat tours? Certainly. Choices range from romantic evening dinner cruises of Boston Harbor to Whale Watches and..... Duck Tours! What could be better than charging down the narrow streets of a historic American City in an amphibious vehicle, ending in a splashing plunge into the river? Actually, it's a lot of fun and the tour guides are particularly knowledgeable.

www.bostonharborcruises.com www.bostonducktours.com

Don't really want all the walking, but sitting on a bus seems too sedentary? How about a bike tour? Packages include bike, helmet, water bottle, and often a tour guide.

www.urbanadventours.com www.bostonbiketours.com Or, for the ne plus ultra of urban tourist chic, one can choose between the high tech of a Segway www.segwaysightseeing.com and the low tech of a Pedicab www.bostonpedicab.com

Finally, for the ultimate decadence we suggest a Chocolate Tour from www.tasteofchocolate.com

Families

Boston is a great destination for families. There's such a wide range of activities that there's sure to be something that will interest everyone.

If you've got kids in tow, the "big names" are Boston's **Children's Museum**, **Museum of Science**, and **Aquarium**. They're all excellent, but the admission fees can be expensive and the crowds can be large. To get your money's worth, you'll probably want to allow at least three or four hours for your visit to each of these big museums.

With small children, your “big museum” plans should include someplace for lunch and a nearby lower-key venue as fall-back, in case you have to deal with overstimulus meltdown -- ask for a readmission hand-stamp as you exit, in case you’d like to continue your visit after a break. As examples, the Children’s Museum is close to the Boston Tea Party ship and museum, the Museum of Science is next to the Esplanade, and the Aquarium is on the Boston Harbor walk.

To reduce the cost, consider a discount card such as Go Boston www.gobostoncard.com or Boston Citypass citypass.com/boston if you’re planning on hitting a lot of museums during your visit. Also check for special rates for Auto Club members, and courtesy discounts if you’re a museum member elsewhere.

For the Art Lover

The **Institute of Contemporary Art** has been the forgotten child among Boston’s Art Museums. But, with its move into an amazing new building on the Waterfront, the ICA finally has a venue large enough to present works from its amazing collection as they should be seen. Don’t look for paintings of the Renaissance masters here; the emphasis is on today’s artists in the visual arts, media, and performance art. Free admission on Thursday from 5-9 p.m. www.icaboston.com

The **Museum of Fine Arts** is the grand dame of Boston museums. Its 450,000 object collection is legendary, ranging from 5000-year-old mummies, to works of the great masters, to paintings, drawings, and films by today’s artists. “Pay what you wish” admission is available on Wednesdays after 4pm. mfa.org

The **Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum** is a tiny gem, representing the sometimes quirky but always beautiful vision Mrs. Gardner had for her museum/home. The Gardner Museum has remained essentially unchanged since its founder's death in 1924, with three floors of galleries surround a garden courtyard blooming in all seasons. There is a \$2 discount on admission with a MFA ticket stub (and vice versa at the MFA with a Gardner Museum ticket) or if you’re wearing Red Sox paraphernalia (Fenway Park is nearby, and Mrs. Gardner was an avid fan!) and the Go Boston card is accepted. Admission is also free on your birthday, and free forever if your name is Isabella. Quirky can be fun. www.gardnermuseum.org

The **Fuller Craft Museum** in Brockton features contemporary crafts and craft-making. Don’t miss the Joss Simpson exhibit of amazing planet-like glass globes! They will also be running a summer arts workshop for kids and teens, July 24-30th. www.fullercraft.org

Off the beaten path

The **MIT Museum** is a fun place. Family members fascinated with science and technology will love the exhibits of laboratory gear and robots, while both artists and whiz-bang lovers will enjoy the massive holography exhibit. Everyone will love the whimsical kinetic sculptures of Arthur Ganson. If you have a little extra time after your visit, walk down Mass Ave to the main MIT building 5 entrance, to see the extraordinary ship models in the Hart Nautical Gallery collection, or ask at the desk for information about other exhibits at MIT. Web.mit.edu/museum

Although primarily known for, well, being *Harvard*, the **other large University in Cambridge** also runs a number of interesting museums. The Harvard Natural History museum has a Hall of Mammals, an extensive Mineral collection, and of course the famous Glass Flowers exhibit. www.hmnh.harvard.edu

Due to building reconstruction, only one of the three Harvard Art museums is currently open, with exhibits representing the finest works from all three collections: the Busch-Reisinger collection of German Art; the Fogg collection of European and American classical and contemporary art; and the Arthur M. Sackler collection of Byzantine, Asian, and Islamic art. www.harvardartmuseum.org

Harvard's Department of the History of Science holds one of the largest collections of scientific instruments in the world. Exhibitions drawn from this collection are displayed in a gallery inside the Harvard Science Center. www.fas.harvard.edu/~hsdept/chsi.html

Harvard Medical School library hosts the Warren Anatomical Museum, an exhibit of 300 items from its 15,000 item collection of anatomical and pathological specimens, models, drawings, and medical instruments. The exhibit is located on the fifth floor of the Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard Medical School (in Boston's Longwood medical area) and admission is free. www.countway.harvard.edu

Brockton Rox is a minor league professional baseball team in Brockton, just a few miles from the Stonehill College campus. Hey, they're not the Red Sox, but it will probably be a lot less hassle to get tickets for the family. www.brocktonrox.com
Unfortunately The Red Sox and The Pawtucket Red Sox are away the week of the conference.

Things to do in Boston for free or almost free

What could be better? A free tour of the **Sam Adams Brewery**, with free samples (for those of legal age) afterwards. Get there early, especially on Saturday, as tickets are first-come, first-served. http://www.samueladams.com/contact_tour.aspx

Yes, there really is a **Museum of Bad Art**. In fact, there are two: the original venue conveniently located just outside the restroom in the basement of the Dedham Community Theatre, and another at the Somerville Theatre. They are "dedicated to the collection, preservation, exhibition, and celebration of bad art in all its forms and in all its glory." Obviously there's some tongue-in-cheek going on here, but if you find yourself nearby, you might want to stop in – imagine the gift shop! Museumofbadart.org

Let's not forget strolling along **the Esplanade**, 17 miles of walking paths that stretch along the Charles River from Boston's Museum of Science to Fenway Park and beyond. There are free evening concerts at the Esplanade's Hatch Shell, including the Beach Boys on July 25th and the Youth Orchestra of the Americas on July 29th, as well as free Friday Night movies. www.celebrateboston.com/events/hatch-shell.htm The **Boston Harbor walk** provides an equally pleasant walking path all along the waterfront, from Charlestown to the North End and the downtown area.

Boston Commons is the grand-daddy of the American town commons (sadly, residents can no longer freely graze cattle there) and the adjacent **Public Gardens** a classic example of decorative public landscaping. The Public Gardens are also home to the beloved "Make way for ducklings" statues and the Swan Boats.

If you're a secret "people watcher", keep walking west from the Public Gardens down the tree-lined boulevard of Commonwealth Avenue or the trendy stores of Newbury St in the **Back Bay**. Either way, you'll be near the **Boston Public Library**, where free tours are available focusing on its classic architectural features and decorative paintings.

Or, you could follow the route that Robert McCloskey imagined for his storybook duckling's walk from the Esplanade to the Public Gardens, which will take you through Boston's **Beacon Hill** area with its narrow streets, gas lights, and classically beautiful townhouses. There are trendy stores and Restaurants galore on Charles St, and multi-million dollar Greek Revival homes in Louisburg Square, on the way up Mount Vernon St. to a free tour of the historic **State House**.

You're coming to Boston, and you aren't walking the **Freedom Trail**? For all of its staid Brahmin attitudes, Boston can't deny its firebrand revolutionary past as recorded by this 2½ mile red-brick walking trail. The Freedom trail officially starts at the Visitor's Center on Boston Commons, and snakes through downtown Boston past sixteen nationally significant historical sites. But, feel free to start the trail anywhere, and walk as little or as much of it as you'd like. Download information about free building tours and a map at www.thefreedomtrail.org

The other end of the Freedom Trail is the USS Constitution or "**Old Ironsides**", in its berth at the Charlestown Naval Yards. Tours of the Naval Yard are free, and of the ship and its museum by donation. www.usconstitutionmuseum.org

Sick of being indoors after a few days of museums? Try a relaxing hike in the Blue Hills. Located half way between Stonehill College and downtown Boston, the **Blue Hills Reservation**'s 7000 acres provides a green oasis with walking and climbing trails galore. General information and trail maps may be found at www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/metroboston/blue.htm For a few dollar's admission, you can also stop in at the Blue Hills Trailside Museum to see its live animal and interpretive exhibits. (Fun Fact: Odyssey 2010 Co-Director Elissa Barr's first job was as a Trailside Museum naturalist and exhibit designer.)

There's also hiking, birding, and fishing at **Borderland State Park** in North Easton, at the border between Sharon and Mansfield Massachusetts. Admission is \$2 per car, with trail maps and information at www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/borderland