

LEISURE & TRAVEL

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Bonding in Beantown

CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

■ Exploring Boston on a mother-daughter getaway

BY CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

My oldest daughter was gearing up to leave for her first year away at university and I was starting to have those about-to-lose-my-baby pangs.

Before she flies the coop, I decided, why not review all those tidbits of maternal knowledge during a mother-daughter holiday? And since it had been ages since we'd visited Boston, why not make Beantown our destination? The eight-plus-hour drive from Moncton would be a long haul but plenty of time to get that mom stuff out of the way, and there would certainly be tons of fun stuff to do once we arrived.

Turns out the good idea was an awesome one. (For parents who would rather stub their toe repeatedly than spend much time one-on-one with an older teen, I can attest that their were no screaming matches and no doors slammed. Really!)

After my daughter OK'ed the plan for the road trip to the Massachusetts state capitol, she told a friend headed to the same university about the idea. That friend and her mom – a good pal of mine – signed on as our travel buddies for the all-girl adventure.



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Boston Crossing in downtown Beantown.

With a few pit stops for snacks and the necessary coffee, an early-morning departure from Moncton had our foursome arriving in sunny Boston before rush hour that afternoon. My trusty GPS took us straight to the hotel I'd booked for our two-night stay, the Royal Sonesta Boston, located on the Cambridge side of the city, along the banks of the beautiful Charles River.

Upon checking in to the hotel, where rates start at \$139, I knew I'd picked the right spot for our junket. The stylish, modern lobby made it clear this was a place where the younger gals could soak up a little luxury before hitting not-so-chic dorm life and where the moms could also be treated to some pam-

pering.

From our room on the 10th floor of the 400-room Sonesta, we had a spectacular view of the Boston skyline and especially the Longfellow Bridge, a beautifully-arched railway and highway bridge that connects Boston's Beacon Hill neighbourhood with Cambridge's Kendall Square area.

Once we had sufficiently pinched ourselves that we were actually in Greater Boston – population of about 4.6 million – we headed where you might expect two moms and their daughters to go: the mall across the street. The Cambridge-Side Galleria, which features 120 shops, was the perfect way to work out the kinks from the drive.

The shopping excitement soon gave way to hunger. Luckily, we'd already made a reservation at Restaurant Dante in the Royal Sonesta. Here, I'd read in the hotel literature, we'd find fresh and creative cuisine with modern Italian influences, and an atmosphere that would refresh our minds, restore our spirits, and reinvigorate our taste buds.

One look at our young Italian waiter and we were instantly refreshed. (The riverside scenery wasn't bad either.) As handsome Gianni spent considerable time explaining the highlights of Dante's menu in his wonderfully thick accent, our craving for food subsided. We instead focused on how to entice the authentic Roman god back across the border with us.

Somehow, we found the strength to eat. In fact, we soon got our

The Boston skyline from the Cambridge side of the Charles River.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The Quincy Market.

second wind, gobbling down our delicious first courses of tender calamari, braised baby octopus and heirloom tomatoes with basil and buffalo mozzarella before devouring a mouth-watering array of pasta dishes, including a to-die-for three-cheese ravioli with wild mushroom ragu, a scrumptious strozzapreti complete with zucchini blossoms

and sun-dried tomatoes and an amazing tagliatelle – sort of a rabbit cacciatore with chanterelles and green olives.

Giddy with tastebud happiness, we eventually said "Ciao!" to Gianni and wobbled back to our room. The moms immediately

► See FANEUIL, G2



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Taking in the boutiques in the historic buildings along Newbury Street.

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Faneuil a fabulous place to eat, shop and people watch

▶ Continued From G1

donned plush hotel robes and collapsed into chairs (with a glass of wine in hand) while the girls quickly changed into swim gear and left for the gorgeous atrium pool.

The next morning we considered taking the hotel's free shuttle for some shopping in downtown Boston but, wanting to have our vehicle close by for potential package drops, decided to drive our own vehicle. Parking isn't cheap but luckily we found a parkade with an early-bird special.

Once downtown, the options for checking out stores and a multitude of great attractions was mind-boggling. With so much to do, Boston is an ideal getaway for moms and teen daughters or families with offspring of all ages.

An earlier visit to the city had my family stopping by the New England Aquarium, the Museum of Science and trying a Boston Duck Tour, a guided excursion of the city via a renovated World War II amphibious landing vehicle.

Our mother-daughter group wasn't quite as keen on museums and tours but more focused on good eats, cool sights and shopping.

After a decent dose of retail therapy on the city's trendy Newbury Street, we took the quick, clean and safe subway (better known as "The T") to visit more shops in the Downtown Crossing area before heading to the Faneuil Hall Marketplace, near the Boston waterfront.

When it opened in 1742, Faneuil Hall served as both a market and



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT
Waiter Dante was a charming addition to the trip.

meeting place. About 80 years later, the city unveiled Quincy Market, flanked by its North and South Market buildings, to better accommodate merchants and shoppers.

Today, the area – set around a cobblestone promenade – is a fabulous place to eat, shop and people-watch. We did all three.

By late afternoon, we noticed a growing number of people sporting Red Sox shirts and hats, obviously en route to an evening ball game featuring the hometown faves. Instead of trekking to Fenway Park, our team of four took a stroll past the Boston Common, the oldest park in the United States. The enormous green space is the anchor for a system of connected parks that winds



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

The Boston waterfront.

through many of the city's neighbourhoods.

A small crowd gathered in one corner of the park to hear a jazz band play. We would have stayed to hear more but continued on to the historic Back Bay area and The Fairmont Copley Plaza, where we had a pending dinner reservation.

When it comes to locales for mother-daughter dining, the Copley's new Oak Long Bar and Kitchen Restaurant should be at the top of any list. After meandering through the dazzling hotel itself, past the lobby's sparkling crystal chandeliers and dramatic Italian marble floors, we found the newly-

renovated restaurant, formerly known as the Oak Room.

The elegant space, which has retained its beautiful pre-reno architectural details, is dominated by a long, copper-topped bar and massive oven, the latter of which is used to prepare yummy flatbreads.

Dressed up for our special girls' night out, the daughters sat opposite the moms, soaking up the laid-back vibe of the attractive room as we all tried to decide what to pick on the menu of modern American cuisine prepared with ingredients from regional farms. Despite the sumptuous décor and outstanding service, the menu is moderately priced, with main courses in the teens up to \$40.

Based on the recommendation of our fun server, Mary Ann, we chose to start with a charcuterie board, an impressive array of meats and cheeses. After making short work of the prosciutto Americano, Berkshire blue and other goodies, we shared our mains, which varied from exquisite grilled lamb chops and Nova Scotia halibut to a wonderful New England clam bake and a beyond-belief burger.

Neither mom nor daughter could resist dessert so we each shared a different one, including panna cotta, a crème fraiche cheesecake, an over-the-top whoopee pie ice cream sandwich and a warm peach-summer berry crisp. We were (almost literally) exploding with joy.

Back to the car we shuffled with – I kid you not – a motherly hug here or there. Quick! Someone take a picture!

At the start of day two, we scaled back our eating rampage and hung out in Cambridge, driving around the breathtaking campus of Harvard University. Greater Boston has become known as a centre for higher education with its many colleges and universities, including Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It's also considered one of the most culturally significant regions in the U.S., a major centre for health care, as well as a hub for banking and finance.

Before the girls decided to have second thoughts about their current university, it was time to check out of our incredible hotel, take a swing by the IKEA store about 30 minutes from downtown and then, sadly, make our way back home.

Our adventure to Boston was short but sensational and definitely made the transition for this mom to the next stage of parenthood a whole lot easier. Now I just need to start planning for the next mother-daughter getaway, when child two leaves the nest in a couple of years.

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