

New England Travel



PHOTOS BY NECÉE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Clockwise from top right: Centre Street in front of Cobwebs; hats at Salmagundi; Jamaica Pond is a pure glacial kettle hole; on draft at Brendan Behan Pub; hot chocolate at J. P. Licks; The Haven serves foods of and from Scotland; and manchego potato croquettes at Vee Vee restaurant on Centre Street.

BY NECÉE REGIS | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

JAMAICA PLAIN — There's nothing ordinary about Jamaica Plain, or "JP" as it's called, a dynamic Boston neighborhood located southwest of downtown.

The commercial district, along Centre and South streets, reflects Jamaica Plain's eclectic community of artists, writers, musicians, activists, young families, and indie-business owners. Fine dining and casual restaurants serve foods of Cuba, Scotland, India, Lebanon, Cambodia, Japan, and other international fare. Boutiques sell everything from kitchen gadgets to funky vintage attire to one-of-a-kind artisan crafts.

Easily accessible by car, bus, bike, or MBTA, this historic neighborhood is part of Frederick Law Olmsted's **Emerald Necklace**, a seven-mile series of contiguous parks designed in the late 19th century where residents and visitors enjoy

PLAIN IN NAME ONLY

Neighborhood mosaic of all things edible, collectible, doable, artisan

biking, walking, and running.

On a recent chilly day, the atmosphere was warm in **El Oriental de Cuba**, the go-to place for authentic Cuban cuisine, and an anchor of the surrounding Hispanic community. You'll hear as much Spanish as English spoken here, and the menu is printed in both languages. At the active take-out counter, owner Nobel Garcia joked with customers, showing photos on his smartphone as people picked up orders of roasted pork with black beans and rice, ropa vieja, and pressed Cuban sandwiches.

"I've been in Jamaica Plain almost 50 years," said Garcia, who came from Cuba as a young boy. "It's a wonderful neighborhood. I've seen a lot of changes — all for the better."

Patrick Byrne, who was born and raised in Galway, Ireland, opened his antiques shop **Cobwebs** 22 years ago. This two-level shop (don't miss the space downstairs) is crammed floor to ceiling with all manner of antiques, collectibles, jew-

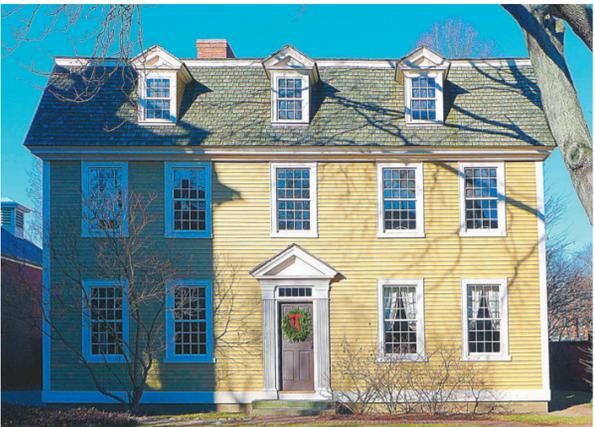
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THE ELIAS HASKET DERBY HOUSE
The oldest surviving brick house in the city was a gift from his father on the occasion of Elias's 1762 marriage. It overlooks wharves and warehouses from that time.



THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES
Built in 1668 for Captain John Turner near his wharf, it became famous in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel. It remained in the family for generations, undergoing many renovations.



THE CROWNINSHIELD-BENTLEY HOUSE
Built circa 1727-30 on another site for Captain John Crowninshield, it was moved and restored in 1959-60 and now is a property of the Peabody Essex Museum.

PHOTOS BY DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Salem's once unrivaled wealth now architectural and historical

By Patricia Harris and David Lyon
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

SALEM — The most famous house in town is probably the so-called "House of the Seven Gables" immortalized by Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1851 novel. Built in 1668 for Captain John Turner, it is "considered by many to be the oldest wood-frame mansion in the United States," according to tour guide David Moffat. If you're looking for a winter destination where you spend more time indoors than out, the manse makes a good place to start visiting some of Salem's do-

mestic gems.

This historic port town became wealthy in the cod trade, then fabulously wealthy in international shipping. Its merchants were not shy about puffing their chests and even in the 17th century, nothing said "wealth" like a trophy house. Not that everyone was rich: "The majority of houses in Salem wouldn't have been bigger than this kitchen," Moffat said as we stood in the low-ceilinged cooking room, its massive fireplace hung with iron pots.

The fireplace and chimney were constructed

first in early Colonial houses, and the rooms built around them. The original downstairs parlor of the Seven Gables eventually became the dining room, and John Turner II had it grandly remodeled, making it one of the earliest Georgian interiors in the country. The formal wooden paneling remains and the room features the hallmarks of the Salem merchant class: blue and white china from Canton (now Guangzhou) and paintings of Chinese harbor scenes.

The "new" parlor, in the 1676 addition, reflects the Federal period, when the Ingersoll fam-

ily remade the home to suit their taste. Susanna Ingersoll, one of the most powerful businesswomen of 19th-century Salem, would have entertained her cousin Nathaniel in this spacious room with bold floral wallpaper and verdigris-green trim. The stories that passed between them over afternoon tea or evening brandy (from the hidden liquor cabinet) remain sealed, but she may have persuaded him to set his new novel in the venerable manse.

Rare for early Colonial houses, the Seven Gables is a property of the Peabody Essex Museum.

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elry, watches, chandeliers, armoires, paintings, and even fresh flowers.

“The great thing about Jamaica Plain is its community,” said Byrne. “The only reason I leave is to go to the movies.”

Steve Murakishi and his wife, Sue Stein, have been operating **Fire Opal** — selling “new American handmade” jewelry, clothing, and home goods — for 14 years. Known as a destination for unusual gifts made by US artisans, as well as clothing by young designers, Fire Opal is a staple on Centre Street.

“People like being in JP. There’s an investment in place,” said Murakishi. “There’s a good coexistence between folks in their 60s and folks in their 20s. I like to say that JP was settled by old hippies, and now the kids are here because they want a community.”

To experience a retro-hippie vibe, stop by the **Centre Street Cafe**, a neighborhood institution that served locally sourced food before it was fashionable. Locals stand in line for brunch that features organic eggs, sourdough French toast, and crispy raised waffles with fresh fruit and real maple syrup.

Caramelo Clothing Co. sells an eclectic collection of men’s wear, including classic and trendy jeans, ties, wallets, belts, sweaters, grooming accessories, and more. Curated by sisters Carolina and Tatiana Trejedor, the new-boutique-on-the-block (open since June) embraces its Jamaica Plain identity.

“The community is amazing. They tend to be risk takers in terms of dressing up,” said Carolina, adding, “Maybe it’s the artsy community. Our clients



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

are extremely fun.”

Hat aficionados love **Salma-gundi**, a full-service shop offering a selection of about 9,000 hats handpicked by the owners, the husband and wife team Andria Rapagnola and Jessen Fitzpatrick. They also offer a selection of accessories, including jewelry, handbags, dresses, ties, and gloves.

For bargain shopping, locals flock to **Boomerangs**, a thrift shop benefiting the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts. Sift through aisles of used clothing, as well as jewelry, handbags, furniture, toys, housewares, and more. The bargains continue one block away, at the **Goodwill Store**.

For all-vintage clothing, visit **40 South Street**, a small space crammed floor to ceiling with jackets, dresses, sweater, boots, shoes, hats, and accessories, owned by Hilken Mancini.

“It’s not fancy vintage. It’s funky rock ‘n’ roll vintage,” said Mancini.

IF YOU GO . . .

How to get there

By MBTA: Orange Line to Stony Brook and walk up Boylston Street (for upper Centre Street); to Green Street and walk up Green to Centre (for central Jamaica Plain); or to Forest Hills and walk up South Street for shops, restaurants, and Monument area.

By bus: Numbers 38, 39, 41, 42, and 48 all stop throughout JP.

By car: Storrow Drive to Fenway exit. Jamaica way to Arborway. Exit left on any street to intersect Centre and South streets.

Need a pick-me-up after shopping? **Monumental Cupcakes** serves a changing selection of cookies and cupcakes — some made with Belgian chocolate — as well as fruit smoothies, juice, coffee, tea, and vegan and gluten-free items. Or sit near the fireplace at **J. P. Licks**, located in a former

Victorian fire house, and enjoy homemade ice cream, fair trade house-roasted coffee, hot chocolate, and baked goods.

The Haven, a restaurant on Perkins Street, serves Scottish fare with a New England twist.

“We serve a modern take on Scottish pub food,” said Joshua Loomis, who described his job as “henchman.” (“You can also refer to me as the bartender,” said Loomis.)

The Haven serves Scotland’s national dish, haggis, every evening (minced lamb offal with oats, onion, and spices) as well as items such as clam and sausage stew and vegetarian bubble and squeak. Live local music on certain weeknight evenings varies from traditional to British pop to singer-songwriter and jazz.

For American fare, **Vee Vee** is a cozy 30-seat restaurant owned by Dan and Kristen Valachovic. Its seasonally changing menu features creative bites, appetizers, and entrees,

► **SALEM**
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bles remains on its original site, where the merchant owners could watch over their wharf and ships. Other houses have been moved to the property, including the 1750 red Georgian structure where Hawthorne was born in 1804. Among the displays is the Chippendale-style fall-top desk where the author wrote.

A few blocks west on Derby Street, the Elias Hasket Derby House, owned by the National Park Service, is the oldest surviving brick house in Salem. When Derby married Elizabeth Crowninshield in 1762, his father gave him the home as a wedding gift. Derby repaid the generosity by parlaying the family fortune from the sugar trade into the first great China Trade wealth. During the American Revolution his privateers preyed on British shipping. “It was a way to make a lot of money really fast,” said Park Service ranger Martin Fucio. “Derby was the richest man in Salem after the Revolution,” and one of the country’s first millionaires.

Although the Park Service isn’t sure how the Derbys furnished their home, the period pieces reflect the taste and style of upper-class Salem circa 1790. The kitchen even has an Indonesian tin spice cabinet emblematic of the lucrative peppercorn trade. Like other Salem manses, the house is replete with tales as dramatic as the plot twists in Hawthorne’s fiction. The old-money Derbys looked down on the upstart Crowninshields, who were moving from cod-fishing into the more lucrative mercantile trade. The two clans met at least once in court, and when Elizabeth died in 1799, her Crowninshield relatives refused to attend her funeral.

Elizabeth was born in the Georgian home that her father, Captain John Crowninshield, had built in 1727. Now known as the Crowninshield-Bentley House, it’s owned by the Peabody Essex Museum. When John died without a will, the home was divided between his widow (who also inherited his debts) and children. Our tour group was appalled at the differences in their circumstances. A son lived in fine style on one side of the house, while his mother lived more modestly on the other. “No rugs,” we all muttered. “No wallpaper.” The widow’s side became a boarding house; its most famous tenant was William Bentley, a brilliant polymath and Salem minister. His study overlooked Salem Common, and his observations of the conduct of Salem towns-

IF YOU GO . . .

Not all the houses are heated. Dress warmly.

House of the Seven Gables

115 Derby St.
978-744-0991
www.7gables.org
Adults \$12.50, seniors \$11.50, 5-12 \$7.50. Daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tours continuously.

Salem Maritime National Historic Site

2 New Liberty St.
978-740-1650
www.nps.gov/sama
Free tours of Derby House and nearby Narbonne House on Thu 2:30 p.m., Sun 11 a.m.

Peabody Essex Museum

East India Square, 161 Essex St.
978-745-9500
www.pem.org
Museum admission \$18, seniors \$15, students \$10, under 16 free. Yin Yu Tang House half-hour timed-ticket audio tour additional \$5 except under 16. Other house tours included in cost of admission; call for schedule.

folk often provided fodder for his sermons. Privacy was apparently an issue even in the early decades of the republic.

Steps away on the Peabody Essex Museum campus, the Gardner-Pingree House was built in 1804-05 for merchant John Gardner, a nephew of Elias Hasket Derby. Designed

by noted Salem architect Samuel McIntire, it represents the apogee of Federal style in Salem. This is Salem at its wealthiest — right down to the stunning Salem-crafted furniture, the pink kitchen with its new-fangled Rumford oven, and the luxuriously canopied bedrooms, two parlors were separated by pocket doors. The women would converse and sew in one, while the men drank and smoked in the other.

The good times didn’t last. Gardner went bankrupt near the end of the War of 1812. The house changed hands several times and was the site of a famous 1830 murder for which prosecutor Daniel Webster managed with impassioned rhetoric to win convictions. In 1834 the house was purchased by the Pingree family, who inhabited it without apparent drama for 99 years, when they donated it to the forerunner of the Peabody Essex.

The war that ruined Gardner also spelled the end of Salem’s mercantile dominance. Yet during the shipping heyday, Salem vessels were such a presence in the ports of Canton and Macau that some Chinese thought that Salem was an independent country.

Salem’s trading activities gave the city a broad worldview, and the Peabody Essex has carried on that legacy with the acquisition of the Yin Yu Tang House, which evokes the life of

the Huang family of wealthy Chinese merchants. The wooden house was built about the same time as the Gardner-Pingree house, yet literally on the far side of the globe. Eight successive generations of Huangs occupied the 16-bedroom village home until the 1980s. Recorded recollections of family members, included on the audiotour, seem to fill the empty house with the bustle of daily life.

Salem merchants were lords of their community, but Confucian teaching accorded their Chinese counterparts a much lower rung on the social ladder — below government officials, peasants, and artisans. Yet the house presents a picture of domestic harmony and relative prosperity. Up to three generations of the family lived at Yin Yu Tang at a time, making it truly the ancestral home. Yin Yu Tang has no exterior windows. All rooms turn toward the central courtyard, or “sky well,” where carved lattice screens let light into the bedrooms and, at the ground level, bright koi swim in the pool-like cisterns.

Yin Yu Tang may not have been as outwardly grand as the mansions of Salem’s merchant princes, but it looked inward to family, not outward to the world.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon can be reached at harris.lyon@verizon.net.

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El Cuba de Oriental has a Spanish-English menu and clientele. **Owner Nobel Garcia** has been in JP for almost 50 years.

including gluten-free and vegan options. Red walls and wood tables add to the ambience, enhancing dishes such as Man-chego potato croquettes, and Sardinian couscous with mushroom Bolognese.

Another local favorite is **Tres Gatos**, a tapas-style restaurant that also sells books and CDs. Sit at the bar or a large communal table to enjoy favorites such as patatas bravas, and lamb bocadillo.

In addition to dining and shopping venues, Jamaica Plain has many parks and places to enjoy nature. At the **Arnold Arboretum**, stroll through 281 acres of meadows, forest, and ponds, and see its collection of more than 15,000 plants. In the **Hunnewell Building** at the Arborway Gate you’ll find a visitors center, changing art exhibitions, and a horticultural library. Or join the bikers, joggers, and walkers circumnavigating the 1.5-mile path around **Jamaica Pond**, a pure glacial kettle hole. A boathouse provides facilities for sailing and rowing.

For a sense of Jamaica Plain’s rich history, dating to Colonial times, the **Loring-Greenough House** (circa 1760)

features American furniture and decorative arts from the 18th through the early 20th centuries, and historic archival material. Or stroll through the 275-acre **Forest Hills Cemetery**, an open-air museum with Victorian architecture, a bronze angel created by sculptor Daniel Chester French, and burial sites of prominent Americans such as abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, playwright Eugene O’Neill, and poets Anne Sexton and E. E. Cummings.

At the end of a busy day, you’ll find a pint and camaraderie at many establishments. Grab a seat at the bar at **Brendan Behan Pub** to sample one of 30 draft beers on tap.

“This place is the neighborhood living room for a lot of people,” said bartender Adam Wells.

At **James’s Gate**, an Irish pub, enjoy shepherd’s pie or fish and chips near the welcoming fireplace. Or step back in time at **Doyle’s Cafe**, an institution in town since 1882. Sample Irish brews Guinness and Smithwicks while dining on everything from chowder to burgers, meatloaf to pizza, and standards like broiled scallops, sauteed scrod, and steak tips.

It’s challenging to experience all that Jamaica Plain has to offer in one visit or even two. It’s a neighborhood made to return to again and again.

Necce Regis can be reached at necceeregis@gmail.com.

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