



As a coffee-centric visitor to Boston in April this year, you could be forgiven for assuming the reason Boston was referred to as “beantown” is because **THE WORLDWIDE COFFEE COMMUNITY DESCENDED UPON THE CITY TO ATTEND “THE SCAA EVENT”** – comprising a coffee symposium and trade show, along with the U.S. Barista Championships.

A closer look at the beantown signage throughout the city, however, reveals the reason must be much older – steeped in the city’s history, perhaps.

Was it because the first shipment of coffee beans arrived in the American colonies via Boston? Was it because the event that turned Americans into a nation of coffee drinkers occurred in Boston? Known as The Boston Tea Party, this significant event was, in fact, a revolt against a tax that helped to spark a war.

In the mid 18th Century, King George in England increased the tax on tea imported into America. At a time when the American colonies were starting to become divided into pro and anti-independence factions, American colonists flexing their resistance to British rule decided they’d had enough of “taxation without representation”. As a sign of protest

against imposing taxes without having a say, on the night of 14th December 1773, a few dozen pro-independence locals (disguised as Indians to escape recognition) boarded three ships in Boston Harbour laden with tea that had arrived from England – and threw their entire cargoes into the sea. Following this, American patriots united in their protests against the king, the tea tax and anything English – with a declaration to never again drink tea and to drink coffee instead. This act of defiance was one of the events that ignited The American War of Independence that began in full force some years later.

Happily believing that we had identified the source of the beantown name, Paul and I set about locating the best specialty coffee Boston had to offer and are happy to share our coffee experiences with *Café Culture* readers. So if you find yourself with a few days in Boston, we can recommend the following.

Thinking Cup Coffee is centrally located in Downtown Boston at 165 Tremont Street. Having read it was voted the best coffee shop by *Boston Magazine* and that they use Portland’s Stumptown Coffee, voted best coffee in the world by the *New York Times Food and Wine Magazine*, we decided to start with the best. We ordered two single-origin pourovers. The coffee itself certainly lived up to reputation, but the experience fell short of our expectation because of the very large, thick-walled stoneware mugs they were served in. It brought back memories of the set of pottery mugs I had in the 1970s – and of drinking copious amounts of instant coffee while studying. Our American friend apologised and said this is what they like in the USA. And this was certainly evident, as the place was packed and there was a large line of customers waiting at the counter.



70. BOSTON



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Barrington's Coffee is a large café on the other side of the river, not far from the convention centre where the specialty coffee event was staged. It was on our way as we crossed the bridge, so we ducked in a couple of times for our morning coffees, to escape the chill wind that whistled along the river. There were no stoneware mugs there – so we enjoyed fabulous piccolos served exactly how we like them in smallish-sized glasses. We were to learn that anything “piccolo” or “small” could be a little hard to find in the land of “ventes” and “trentes”. In some places it seemed a total mystery to the barista why anyone would want something small when you can have big instead.

Flat Black on Broad Street is home to one of the U.S. regional barista champions. There are about five Flat Blacks dotted around Boston, and they have a large range of fine single-origins on offer. So I was puzzled to read on their website that they say “flat black” is the Australian name for an espresso. When challenged, it was revealed that the misrepresentation was some kind of quirky marketing ploy, as one of the owners had spent time as a barista in Melbourne. A kangaroo also features on their logo.

Espresso Love, also in Broad Street at number 33

serves not only a great coffee; it offers a selection of tasty lunchtime options, including gluten-free wraps. All the baked goods are lovingly made by the owner. There is another Espresso Love at Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast.

Over on the other side of town is an area of wide streets lined with Georgian-style buildings. Newbury Street runs right through the middle, and there you will find a few specialty coffee places among the boutiques and restaurants.

At 286 Newbury Street is Pavement Coffee. The inside is warm and inviting, and on a sunny day you would have the option of sitting outside. The barista clearly knew about the coffees, taking time to explain what we could expect from our choice in terms of flavour profile. Pavement also has a number of other cafés in the Boston area.

They were all once part of the Espresso Royale Caffe chain but have since become independent operations.

A bit further along is Wired Puppy, at 250 Newbury Street. Having won the award of Boston's Best Coffee Shop in 2010, they have attracted a loyal following of customers who have been going there for years to sip fine coffee – and to catch up on some work, as they offer free wi-fi. Wired Puppy attracts customers

with a conscience, as they advertise a commitment to organic, sustainable and eco-friendly practices. There is another Wired Coffee at Provincetown, Cape Cod.

L'Arma Café at 85 Newbury Street is one of two such cafés in Boston. If you are in the company of a tea lover, this is the place to go. Specialising in Sri Lankan tea, at the West Newtown store you can also participate in a two-hour tea seminar conducted by the very knowledgeable Afkham Salie, a tea expert. The coffee and baked treats are as exceptional as the tea and include a gluten-free range.

Equal Exchange at 226 Causeway Street in the historic North End precinct is perhaps Boston's most famous coffee company, being one of the first coffee companies to show the way in social and environmental responsibility.

Recently, the Mayor of Boston presented the Equal Exchange Café with a Green Business Award, stating, “In keeping with Equal Exchange's role as a leading importer and roaster of certified organic coffee, and purveyor of certified organic tea and chocolate, the café incorporates a number of environmentally responsible practices, ranging from the use of reclaimed wood in the café's furniture to a comprehensive recycling and composting program for both staff and patrons”.



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Boston Brewin’ is one of the most interesting places we found. Look out for this tiny “hole-in-the-wall” café located at 45 Bromfield Street. We stumbled upon Tom Barnes, the owner, on a nearby corner with a placard over his shoulders advertising his coffee – and his cause. Tom told us about his vision to open several more cafés in the Boston area and then give them away to employees dedicated to community service. He has collected strong support from other like-minded folk in the Boston community including the TD Bank, who are as keen as he is to help others in need.

In between our coffee experiences, we visited the Boston Tea Party Museum, The Green Dragon, where the idea of “The Tea Party” was born, and followed the Freedom Trail – all the historical places we thought were linked to the beantown name. In doing so, we stumbled upon the real reason for Boston’s “beantown” name ... on a tea towel in a tourist shop! To our surprise, we found the beantown name has nothing to do with coffee beans at all. It’s all about baked beans. Yes, like the tinned variety you sometimes have for breakfast. But the Boston variety is cooked with molasses, instead of tomatoes.

During the 17th Century, molasses was brought to Boston from the Caribbean in large quantities to supply Boston’s growing rum distilling industry. With molasses

readily available and beans being inexpensive, it became a popular dish for poor immigrant families. The recipe is believed to have been inspired by local American Indians who ate such beans cooked in maple syrup. Substituting the syrup for molasses, the dried beans were cooked slowly in a pot full of molasses over a fire for several hours. Sailors and traders who visited Boston were so intrigued by the unusual recipe, Boston quickly became known as “beantown”. Wealthy Bostonian citizens, however, disassociated themselves from both the name and the recipe.

Today, while the name “beantown” is prominently displayed on tourist buses and literature, the famous dish, known as Boston Baked Beans, is hard to find on menus in local pubs and cafés. Local Bostonians still shun the idea of eating such fare. Seems the remnants of this small part of Bostonian history have been left to survive on the souvenir tea towels tourists take into their kitchens all over the world!

CONTACTS

Christine Cottrell is the author of the *Barista Bible* and the *Perfect Espresso* training system. Go to www.perfectespresso.com.au for more information on her barista training resources and the consultancy and writing service she provides for cafés wanting to formalise their policies and procedures.