

February 21, 2011

Entertainment: 5 Multi-Faced Museums With More Than Art On Display

By Elizabeth Saucier



(Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum courtyard. Image from Boston Common Magazine)

The typical purpose of a museum is to view and learn about different art forms. However, today's museum usually offers more diverse events and services to attract larger audiences. Average museum-goers revel in viewing art, dining and going to events all in the same place. Not only do larger museums, like the MFA, embody a one-stop-shop, but less renowned museums also develop charming events in an effort to best engage their viewers. The following is a tour of 5 museums for the multi-taskers and social butterflies.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

The Gardner After Hours scheduled for 2012 will serve up live music, cocktails, and art in a social setting. In the meantime, the museum's regular after hours from 5 to 8 p.m. (the third Thursday of every month) allow for foodies to dine in the Gardner Café and bask in the stunning 15th-century Venetian-style three-story palace. Aside from the Italian

Renaissance and contemporary art collections, there are also Sunday classical concerts (cost is \$25.50 per person) in the ornamented tapestry room, lectures to enjoy, and a refreshing flower-filled courtyard to saunter through.

[Track the museum's after hours events.](#)

Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA)

Unlike any other museum in Boston, the ICA directly presents contemporary art in various media—visual art, music, film, video—to audiences. The museum's programming provokes and entertains viewers with exhibits of emerging artists' art, performances in the theater, film screenings and artist talks. There's even a free concert series each summer along the ICA's waterfront setting featuring talented musicians from the Berklee College of Music. Who can resist top-notch music and unparalleled scenery all in one place?

[Enjoy a Fort Point Restaurant brunch \(with prix-fixe menu\) before the ICA's Sunday performances.](#)

Historic New England

If you're at all interested in historical home design, Historic New England will awe you. This regional preservation organization, based in Boston, owns and operates historic sites-turned-museums, including buildings, homes, artifacts, and landscapes from the 17th-century to today. Touring sites like the Otis House and the Caper-Frost-Austin House in Boston, as well as other houses in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Maine, will enhance your understanding of New England life, culture, and domestic style. The month of March, in particular, will be a time to learn about the women of Beacon Hill with a stroll on the hill and a tour of the Otis Home.

[Map out your excursions throughout historic New England.](#)

Museum of Science

Since reopening its newly renovated Charles Hayden Planetarium, the Museum of Science has been getting a lot of recent buzz. The planetarium's show titled "Undiscovered Worlds" takes audiences to exotic planets outside our solar system with the help of a 57-foot dome, DigitalSky 2 software, Sony projection system, and animation to simulate space travel. While at the museum, you could also view the Omni film series shown on an IMAX Dome screen, which wraps audiences in immense images of ocean adventures and faraway places.

[The New York Times on the innovation of "Undiscovered Worlds."](#)

Museum of Fine Arts (MFA)

Film series, classical concerts, live music and cash bars (for free MFA First Fridays of every month), and Winesdays (to learn how to be an expert wine taster) are just a few of the goings-on at the MFA. In particular, the Art of the Americas wing opened last November, and showcases 53 galleries including period rooms, as well as the New American Café, perfect for recharging under a 63-foot-tall glass-enclosed courtyard.

[Take a look at the Art of Americas Collection floor by floor.](#)