



» The Old State House, left, is one of the stops on Boston's Freedom Trail. Above, a re-enactor leads a tour on the trail, which is marked by a red line and plaques, below.

FOOTPATH OF THE FREE

Walking the Freedom Trail in Boston

By Steve Jermanok

» **One of the finest purchases** I made upon arrival in Boston more than two decades ago was an inexpensive copy of Charles Bahne's *The Complete Guide to Boston's Freedom Trail*, found at the Boston Common Visitor Center. With this guidebook in hand, I walked the 2.5-mile trail—marked by a line of red bricks or paint on the pavement—and stopped in front of the 16 historic sites to read about each place's significance.

More recently, I decided to upgrade my experience with a tour offered by the Freedom Trail Foundation, a nonprofit organization that has helped promote and preserve the trail since 1964. A fellow dressed in Colonial garb and Ben Franklinesque spectacles sauntered up to start the tour, and then—firmly in character—delivered anecdotes at various sites as we walked (such as an explanation of the speech at the Old State House that proclaimed “Taxation

without representation is Tyranny!”) I was entranced. The foundation's Freedom Trail Players—dressed in historical costumes—guide a variety of tours on various aspects of Revolutionary-era history and beyond. The foundation offers maps, an app and an audio tour on its website.

The history of America's independence is woven into the fabric of present-day Boston. The final resting spots of John Hancock, Paul Revere and Samuel Adams are in the Granary Burying Ground, one of my favorite stops on the route. The Freedom Trail also takes you past such revered markers of American independence as the Old South Meeting House. On December 16, 1773, thousands came to the meeting house, spilling out into the streets to protest the Tea Act. There is the Old North

Church, where Paul Revere's friend Robert Newman was, according to Henry Longfellow's poem, instructed to hang lanterns in windows: “One, if by land, and two, if by sea.” (Details about the story remain in debate to this day.)

And there's Bunker Hill, where colonists were, at least according to legend, ordered not to fire on the British “'til you see the whites of their eyes.” The trail also leads to some of Boston's most cherished neighborhoods: Beacon Hill, with its centuries-old brick architecture and village squares; North End, with its winding streets and lively Italian community; and Charlestown, home to the celebrated ship *USS Constitution*, also known as Old Ironsides.

My advice: Take the trail slowly, in parts. And go with a good guide—especially if the guide wears breeches. Visit thefreedomtrail.org. ✈

