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HOME RUN
A Boston escape
for fans of the
long ball **PAGE 4**

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SLEEPOVER HOTEL COMMONWEALTH

Boston gives baseball fans a home of their own

JUDITH RITTER BOSTON

Each year, throngs of baseball tourists head to Boston to see the grande dame of sports history, Fenway Park. Now, those baseball fanatics finally have a hotel to call their own. The newly renovated Hotel Commonwealth has been crowned the official digs of the Boston Red Sox. The updated 12-year-old hotel is stocked with treats for those besotted with baseball but the down-to-earth Hotel Commonwealth is anchored not only by Fenway Park but also by Boston University. So it's also got a charming, tweedy Boston academic feel where conversations in the hotel's Hawthorne lounge can lean more toward the latest exhibits at nearby Gardener and Boston Fine Arts museums rather than about



who slid dustily into home plate.

And if you're heading down to watch the Blue Jays final games of the regular season, as of press time, rooms are still available for Sunday night.

LOCATION, LOCATION

The hotel is in up-and-coming Kenmore Square just a few minutes walk from the banks of the Charles River, where visitors can rent kayaks and sailboats or picnic and watch university crew teams whoosh down the silvery river. It is also a neighbour to rows of stylish 19th- and early 20th-century brick and stone residences, where history and architecture buffs can take a walking tour with Boston by Foot, and continue to neighbouring Back Bay with its elegant homes and Newbury Street shopping. Of course, the big attraction is the baseball at Fenway not even a 10-minute walk away.

DESIGN

Like the jacket of a well-loved, pipe-smoking philosophy professor, the slightly preppy looking lobby and rooms will do nicely. Oddly, some of the same design elements that seem only moderately interesting in the lobby take flight in the Alison Sheffield designed hotel bar, the Hawthorne. There, the choice of zebra stripe and herringbone print fabrics seems stylish and the placement of carpets and furniture that divides the larger space into intimate conversation areas give the bar a sophisticated residential feel, something the lobby doesn't achieve.

Head up to the hotel's signature suites for clever thematic references to Boston traditions. One honours a now-defunct but legendary punk-rock bar and features recording memorabilia. But it's the Fenway Park Suite (starting at \$749 U.S.) that is the star of the show. It's replete with original ballpark seats,



The recently revamped Hotel Commonwealth in Boston is stocked with treats for those besotted with baseball, but those more interested in its proximity to Boston University rather than Fenway Park will enjoy the building's tweedy academic feel.

signed vintage Ted Williams and Dom DiMaggio baseball cards, an actual base, a glove and a sensational view of the landmark park itself.

EAT IN OR EAT OUT?

Hotel Commonwealth's brasserie-style Eastern Standard, surrounded by large-scale photomontages of old Boston images, is the city's cozy, go-to place for pre-Red Sox game dining ("You can hear the ballpark crowd when a home run is hit," one regular says). Locals never tire of its popular comfort food (think baked rigatoni and butterscotch bread pudding) and many boast of the number of times they have dined there over the years with extra points for using the same table each time. (Eight hundred meals is the record, and the former president of nearby Boston University is a runner up at 584 at Table 31.)

BEST AMENITY

The hotel hits a home run for baseball devotees with its insider tours of the storied Fenway Park and on-the-field access to batting practice. But the treat that knocks it out of the park (for guests who order the Red Sox-themed package) is a gift box with Cracker Jack, a Coke, an autographed baseball and a Red Sox cap.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

The Boston equivalent of having

a hotel room with a view of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome or the Al Haram Mosque in Mecca is a room overlooking Fenway Park. Hotel Commonwealth's revamp supplies baseball fans with 50 of them, two of which have walk-out balconies and room with a close-up view of the Green Monster. (For the uninitiated that is the more than 11-metre high left field wall. For the initiated, such as Yael Wexler of Ottawa, "It is just such a perfect Instagrammable moment.")

IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING

The Commonwealth pretty much delivers on its promises except for a stumbling Internet that logs out daily and refuses to remember you.

WHOM YOU'LL MEET

The real prize at this hotel is a lobby run-in with legends of the diamond such as Roger Clemens and Wade Boggs (We just missed Carlton Fisk). For fans looking for insider info of who the Sox are courting, the lobby and the lounge are haunts for younger players just called up.

Hotel Commonwealth, 500 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, hotelcommonwealth.com; 245 rooms from \$329 (U.S.).

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The writer was a guest of the hotel.