

BEYOND THE NORM

Our urbanite correspondents track down essential stops in case you find yourself in a unlikely place.

CAMBRIDGE—Lilacs in bloom and the running of our nation's most storied marathon mark the month of April in Beantown, inspiring many a fluttering passion. But folks on the north side of the Charles River tend to remain more *dégagé*. Cambridge is a blend of blue-blood and bohemian, like the bad boy playing opposite blustery Boston. Pierced punks mingle with mohair hipsters, tweedy professors nod among black-clad grad students and fresh-scrubbed university youths, and foreign-born immigrants mix a linguistic symphony in 46 different tongues. Central Square anchors the entire metro area music scene at **The Middle East** (472-480 Massachusetts Ave., 617.492.9181), a bar and restaurant with three rooms of nightly live performances, and **T.T. the Bear's Place** (10 Brookline St., 617.492.0082), a smaller drinking spot with upwards of 40 live shows per week; both venues are gateways for young musicians aspiring to national prominence. One corner of The Middle East is reserved for free-admission acoustic, jazz, and experimental shows, while the restaurant and the corner also serve as art galleries, exhibiting local and international work on a monthly basis. Another stop further down the Red Line is Harvard Square, home of the famous ivory tower and repository of great cultural wealth. **The House of Blues** (96 Winthrop St., 617.491.2583) hosts live music every evening and is renowned for its outstanding Southern gospel brunch every Sunday. The casual crowd prefers happy hour at **Grendel's Den** (89 Winthrop St., 617.491.1160), where menu items cost as little as \$4, and the conversations run the gamut from learned to lowbrow. For a taste of international flavor, pop over to Lechmere/Kendall Square for dinner at **The Helmand** (143 First St., 617.492.4646), a warm-toned Afghani restaurant with style, a wall oven in the dining room, and a reputation for overall excellence.

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