



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

In 2025, Boston Irish Tourism Association (BITA) celebrates its 25th anniversary as a distinctive cultural tourism organization that promotes culture and travel year round. As we celebrate our quarter century in the months ahead, we take a moment to offer this retrospective.

When we first envisioned BITA in 1999, we had two goals in mind: connecting Massachusetts' hospitality and tourism industry with the state's vibrant Irish-American community; and strengthening travel ties between Boston and Ireland. When the US Census revealed that 26% of Massachusetts residents claimed Irish ancestry, we knew the idea had merit.

We formally launched BITA's marketing campaign in spring 2000 with the slogan, "Massachusetts: Where Irish America Begins." Our partners included Tourism Ireland, Aer Lingus, John F. Kennedy Library, Mass Office of Travel & Tourism, Live Nation, The Boston Pops, Glynn Hospitality Group and the Irish Cultural Centre. Our media partner, The Boston Globe, provided a dozen full page

advertisements and suddenly we were inundated with thousands of requests for information and travel advice about visiting both Massachusetts and Ireland. National media stories from *Associated Press* and others spread the BITA cultural tourism story across North America.

We could easily thank hundreds of people who got BITA started, but our most stalwart supporters in the early days included Orla Carey, Tom McNaught, Melissa Farrington, Helen Brady, Tom Flatley, Paul Wilson, Tom Butler, Dave Ritchie and Diane Russell.

We launched *IrishMassachusetts.com* that year, and it quickly became a portal of information. For the first few years we distributed oversized seasonal brochures,

then in 2005, began printing *Travel & Culture*, a free magazine issued three times a year in spring, summer and fall/winter. Since 2005 we have published 57 issues of *Travel & Culture*, missing just 3 issues due to the pandemic.

We produced a popular 24-page genealogy booklet called *Finding Your Irish Roots in Massachusetts* and launched the annual *Gaelic Gourmet Gala*, where we paired dozens of Irish and local chefs together each St. Patrick's day in Boston. As BITA grew, we began representing other parts of New England, especially Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

BITA's longest-running project is the *Irish Heritage Trail*, created in 1994

as a way to appreciate Boston's illustrious Irish history through public landmarks. Since launching *irishheritagetrail.com* in 2000, we've published multiple iterations of the trail as it developed from 16 sites to 40. In addition to stand-alone maps and colorful brochures, we began including the Trail map and descriptions in every issue of *Travel & Culture*. We estimate having distributed 300,000+ free copies to tourists, local residents, school classes, group tours and cultural organizations.

We have welcomed many changes in the tourism and publishing industries since we began 25 years ago. The advent of digital publishing and tourism marketing has given us additional ways to reach our audience. We know that visitors still prefer our print edition of *Travel & Culture*, since they can refer to it often without turning on their computers. And the printed map with descriptions of the Irish Heritage Trail in each edition offers a handy way for visitors taking a self-guided tour of the landmarks along the Trail.

In the next two years, we are expanding the Irish Heritage Trail across Massachusetts, with an estimated 140 landmarks that chronicle the Irish experience in the Bay State.

Massachusetts residents claiming Irish ancestry have decreased from 26% in 2000 to 19.1% in 2020. But yet, the demand for Irish culture remains high, a testament to our community. We are proud to note that our current followers include people from all backgrounds and ethnicities, not just Irish-Americans. A commitment to authentic and high quality cultural expression is a key to BITA's success.

We are grateful to the thousands of partners, members, advertisers and friends who have joined us over this past quarter century, we are delighted to share this journey with you!

MICHAEL & COLETTE QUINLIN
Boston Irish Tourism Association
irishboston.org

Awards

Millennium Award to Irish Heritage Trail, The White House

Best Events Management Award, Mass Office of Travel & Tourism

Top 100 Irish-Americans of the Year Award, *Irish America Magazine*

Top 50 Business Leaders (multiple years), *Irish Echo Newspaper*

Top Boston Irish Leaders, *Irish Voice Newspaper*

Edward Riley Award, Ancient Order of Hibernians

Alicia Monti Music Fellowship, Boston Public Library

National Finalist, Bushmills Twin Cities Competition

Golden Bridges Award for cultural tourism, *Irish Echo Newspaper*

Irish Famine Memorial Proclamation, Congressman Stephen Lynch

SPHINX AT MOUNT AUBURN CEMETERY
IRISHHERITAGETRAIL.COM

