

Cambridge

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There's something magical about Harvard Square. I've hardly been all over the world, but I've been a bunch of places, and nothing can quite compare to the electricity I feel every time I visit this spot in the center of Cambridge.

On one side, the gates of Harvard University. On another, the campus book store. On the third, a pit where kids hang out and bands sometimes perform and street performers crowd around. On the fourth, a shopping district.

Cut down Dunster and you find yourself facing the Harvard Lampoon building. Follow the road a bit and you'll see the mix of shops and Harvard dorms. Keep going and you'll find the riverside. If it's a fall day, the trees will be turning brown and the sky and river will be blue and a couple boats will be rowing down the stream and you'll breathe in the air and wonder if there could ever be any paradise more perfect.

Across the river is the tree-lined campus of the Harvard Business School, but turn back up JFK Street and you'll see hotels and shops and cafes and parks and boulevards. Everything you'll ever need is there and cars and people intermingle, looking content.

Make a left on Brattle and follow it a ways and you'll see a little dip in the street. Another singer has set up shop there and kids are sitting on the stone slab in front, listening to the songs, lying on their backs, reading books.

Stop into the Coop or the Harvard Bookstore and you can pick up a book of your own. Or cross the street into the famed Harvard Yard, the tree-lined quad where college students sit and run and walk. The paths meander past the dorms and classrooms, open up in parks with cafe tables where vendors sell sandwiches, close up again to head towards the library.

The library, the big building right in the middle, a giant edifice in praise of collected knowledge, its big stone steps streaming down as if to say *you too may be elevated*. Inside, the soaring archways, the country's largest library (after the Library of Congress), the floors and floors of stacks, the underground additions, books seeping into the groundwater of the campus.

The knowledge infects everything. Kids in the street talk about the arrangement of bones, the politics of the economy, the topology of mathematical spaces. Even the service staff get into the act: as you sit in a cafe, the college dropout clerk argues with the immigrant cook about the political necessity of marriage and the status of its legality in various countries.

The seasons come here, just as you imagined: the sweltering heat of summer, the overpowering beauty of fall, the snow-capped vistas of winter, the budding excitement of spring. There is a city, an ocean, a river, a suburb, a harbor, and a bike path. There is a subway, but it's not strictly necessary. The city is small enough that it can be walked across, simple enough that it can all fit in your head. It's not a place that you can soon forget.