

# The Boston Globe

## Places to find peace and quiet all over the region

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Our world gets smaller and louder in winter. We spend more time cooped up inside with a constant cacophony of blaring TVs and radios, ringing phones, shuffling shoppers, grinding treadmills, and restless children. It's maddening and potentially unhealthy — with recent studies suggesting that a steady diet of noise can increase blood pressure, stress, and sleep disorders. It's time to hit the mute button. Here are some places and ways to find a little peace and quiet.

### Unwind on a winding path

Labyrinths have been around for more than 4,000 years, ushering walkers into sessions of quiet reflection. Slow down and follow the winding passages of the **Harvard Divinity School** labyrinth, located near Andover and Rockefeller halls on the campus green. The design was modeled on the famous 13th-century labyrinth found on the floor in the nave of Chartres Cathedral in France ([www.hds.harvard.edu/life-at-hds/religious-and-spiritual-life/retreats-and-quiet-places](http://www.hds.harvard.edu/life-at-hds/religious-and-spiritual-life/retreats-and-quiet-places)). You'll likely have it to yourself, and simply walking the circuit in silence can be a soothing elixir for your racket-induced angst. Another Chartres-inspired installation can be found at **Boston College**. The Memorial Labyrinth ([www.bc.edu/sites/labyrinth](http://www.bc.edu/sites/labyrinth)), honoring 22 alumni lost in the 9/11 tragedy, is located behind Burns Library, and open weather permitting. You can also enjoy a moment or two of intentional contemplation as you walk the labyrinth at **Armenian Heritage Park on the Greenway**. Many people visit it daily, practicing walking meditation. ([www.armenianheritagepark.org](http://www.armenianheritagepark.org)).

### Please-be-quiet zones

There's no need for a librarian to shush you in the Bates Hall Reading Room at Boston Public Library (617-536-5400, [www.bpl.org](http://www.bpl.org)). The majestic space, with a high barreled ceiling, tall arched windows, English oak bookcases, and long wooden reading tables, commands hushed reverence. The Boston Athenaeum, one of the oldest private libraries in America (617-227-0270, [www.bostonathenaeum.org](http://www.bostonathenaeum.org)), is also glorious, housed in a handsome neo-Palladian building on Beacon Hill. It's filled with comfy chairs, original paintings, and cozy alcoves. Members have access to the silent fifth-floor reading room, but the Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery, the Bayard Henry Long Room, and the G. d'Andelot Belin Bow Room are open to the public. Are you a serious writer longing for a quiet place to work? The Writers' Room of Boston ([www.writersroomofboston.org](http://www.writersroomofboston.org)) is one of the quietest places in town, offering 24/7 access to 10 private work areas with large windows and lots of light.

### Rest in peace

You'll leave the din of Harvard Square behind as you enter the ornate main gate of Mount Auburn Cemetery (617-547-7105, [www.mountauburn.org](http://www.mountauburn.org)), considered one of the first garden cemeteries in the country. Winding paths travel through an arboretum, filled with monuments, sculptures, and more than 5,500 trees, shrubs, and other plants. It's particularly serene in winter, especially after a fresh snowfall when it turns into a soft, muted fairyland.

### The getaway

Silence, stillness, and solitude is what Mercy by the Sea in Madison, Conn., offers its guests (203-245-0401, [www.mercybythesea.org](http://www.mercybythesea.org)). If you need more than a few hours of calm to recharge, consider a stay at this retreat set on 33 picturesque acres on Long Island Sound. There are day and weekend programs and plenty of time to stroll the private beach, take a moonlight walk through the garden labyrinth overlooking the ocean, and attend workshops on a myriad of topics and practices, like mindfulness, second half of life, and creativity. Great vibe. Peaceful. Beautiful. That's what guests say about the Spirit Fire Retreat Center, located on the eastern edge of the Berkshires in Leyden. It's set on 95 acres of forest and meadows, crisscrossed by hiking trails. Book a small, private room, bundle up to walk the paths, return to dine on fresh organic meals, sit by a bonfire under a star-splashed winter sky, and return home restored and recharged.

### Soak in steamy silence

Imagine reclining on wooden planks in a steam room at the Finland Steam Baths in Quinc. It's silent except for the whoosh you hear when you pull the lever, dumping water on the hot furnace. You're hot and sweaty; your body sheds toxins; your mind empties; you relax. Repair to the private shower to cool down as the lights flicker, signaling the end of your session. The family-owned facility, which has been around since 1928, is basic — six private rooms — but gives you everything you need: a towel, washcloth, bucket of cold water, and one hour of nearly complete silence in the steam.