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- [front page](#)
- [archives](#)
- [about](#)
- [around town](#)
- [contact](#)

[Previous Post](#) [Next Post](#)

Audio walking tours of Salem Massachusetts

Written by Glen Hughes on October 20th, 2008 [No Comments](#)

Recently a new website has been promoting itself here in Salem. [Iseesalem.com](#) claims to offer “free walking tour podcasts” which allow you to “enjoy learning about Salem’s history at your pace”.

The Salem start-up isn’t the only walking tour available, [Untravel Media](#) a Boston based company offers a variety of tours one of them being [Seeking Sanctuary in Salem](#). This walking tour was written and mapped out by Salem filmmaker Mike Boudo.

Already in the tours business for the past 92 years is the [National Parks Service](#). They offer “[audio tours](#)” of various Salem sites owned or run by the NPS.

We decided to check out these downloadable tours and give you the low down.

Format

All of these tour providers offer MP3 download formats. Seeing as though Apple has sold over 100 million ipods (1 in 3 Americans own an ipod or mp3 player) formats other than mp3 are not needed. However Untravel Media goes the extra mile and offers not only audio downloads but M4V video as well and has a windows mobile OS download option for people with Crackberrys and the like.

Cost

Tourists are already spending money getting to their destination and especially these days every penny counts. Iseesalem.com and the NPS have free downloads of their tours while at Untravel Media you will fork out \$6.99 for any of their three versions of the tour.

Narration & production quality

If I’m going to listen to someone talk to me about Salem I want it to be a pleasant experience. If you’ve ever been to a National Park and used one of their “press this button” features to hear or see some multimedia about whatever you’re looking at you know this is nothing short of professional, one might say the industry standard. The Salem audio tours are cut from the same cloth, professional voice actors with clear elocution, good use of ambient sounds, clean consistent sound and volume featuring male narration.

Iseesalem.com does a good job with a clean recording although it does feel as if it were recorded in a small room. The female narrator does a fine job reading an informative script. These tours offer no actor portrayals and ambient sounds limited only to royalty free music when directions are given to the next location on the tour, keeping the emphasis on the narration.

Untravel Media sits on the other end of the spectrum offering ambient sounds, background music, actor portrayals, interviews, and narration. The male narrator is not as polished as the NPS narrator but offers much more enthusiasm and character. Recording quality of the different segments changes widely in some places the audio noise and background sound shows the user that many of the interviews must have been done on location, it's not distracting but it is noticeable. They do go above board with a nice selection of photographs from interiors, exteriors and of the people talking during the audio tour. They do a great job instructing you where to walk but the photographic cues are a true bonus for users of video ipods.

Do they deliver what they promise?

The National Park Services says of their Audio Tour of Salem Maritime:

The tour takes about an hour to complete, and consists of ten stops within the nine acre site. The stops are marked on the map, which is available here in pdf format

Each of the 10 downloadable files are between 2:45 and 7:04 minutes long and quite informative. Using the accompanying map you move from place to place and once there listen to a new file. This is truly an audio tour as opposed to a walking tour as there are no walking directions or comments on what you see as you walk from one location to the next.

When we did the tour with four adults and two children it took us just over an hour. This tour delivers exactly what they claim.

Iseesalem.com says of their tours:

Download these free walking tour podcasts and enjoy learning about Salem's history at your pace. You will discover tales of Salem's famous residents, long nautical history, haunted sites, witch history, and more!

Currently they offer 3 downloadable files with two "coming soon" (we need to add a special section for "coming soon" to our [web site post](#)) ranging in length from 6:28 to 6:52 minutes and walking from location to location took us about 45 minutes for the Revolutionary War tour and slightly less for the other tours.

While not as leisurely as the NPS tour these tours did offer directions to the next location. Unlike the NPS tours their "click here (*ahem*)" to download a map" doesn't actually download a map, it opens up google maps with points plotted.

These tours are free to download, they offer directions and you can take it at your own pace so once again their claims true.

Untravel Media says of their tour:

The first part of the tour highlights buildings that are on the grounds of the Peabody Essex Museum. Through their foresight, some of Salem's oldest and grandest architecture is being preserved.

The last part of the tour takes you to the Salem Maritime Historical Site which has preserved a number of waterfront buildings including the Narbonne House and oversaw the building of the 1797 replica "Friendship" merchant vessel.

While Untravel Media offers a bunch of tours only one is devoted to Salem. They go above and beyond by being concerned with your safety and pointing out facts that only insiders know. You get much more from this tour than you would from reading books or any of the available tourist literature. I would like to see better photography (only applies to video ipod downloads) and some info is a tad dated (no more horse drawn carriages, sorry).

The format holds true to the description as the tour takes you from downtown by the PEM and Visitors Center through some of the PEM grounds, across the common and down to the Wharf.

Is it worth it?

The NPS tours give you some good info in a professional manor but having been at some of the houses I have to say that your best bet is a tour given by one of the Park Rangers. If the Rangers are not available these tours are a fine substitute. And since they are free you have nothing to loose.

As for iseesalem.com's tours you might want to listen to them before you head out. They do offer some good facts to know but as for a walking tour they don't hold up to our other two options. Once again they are free so judge for yourself.

Untravel Media is exceptional and exactly what I want out of an audio walking tour. As I said earlier, they are the only tour offered by these three companys that you have to purchase but, I think its worth it. If you don't want to be bothered with other tourists, set your own walking pace and still see some sites and learn some tid-bits, spending \$7 for a tour you can enjoy over and over again is a bargain as compaired to some of the guided tours of Salem costing \$10 or more.

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