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THE BEST

Best non-franchised destination neighborhood

Although Central Square remains a hot spot for lovers of live music, sitting in its center are the Gap and Starbucks, serving as reminders of how franchises can sap a neighborhood of much of its character.

Fortunately, the same cannot be said of Cambridge's off-the-beaten-path **Inman Square**, which continues to be "discovered"

as a unique dining, shopping, and entertainment district.

Christina's is home to what is arguably the world's best ice cream. Zeitgeist Gallery and Ryles Jazz Club court music and performance lovers, while ImprovBoston Theater draws those needing a laugh. Lovers of kitsch will find heaven at Buckaroo's Mercantile, home of custom T's and housewares. A few doors down, Absolutely Fabulous sells reasonably priced vintage finds alongside boutique-y gifts.

Then there are the countless eateries and watering holes, from hipster-haven Bukowski Tavern and nationally renowned East Coast Grill to soulful Magnolias. And no, there is no Starbucks. But there is the 1369 Coffee House.

Inman Square, Cambridge, www.inmansquare.com.