

# A local's guide to Philadelphia



While Philadelphia offers a variety of authentic and top-notch attractions, exploring this vibrant city takes some planning — especially for first-time visitors. With so much to see, do and taste, it can be challenging for a novice to know where to begin.

And that's where we come in. This is our guide to most popular attractions in Philadelphia. From the historic Liberty Bell to the deliciously indulgent cheesesteak, below is our take at “Philly 101.”

Follow in the footsteps of our nation's forefathers at [Independence Hall](#), experience scientific wonders at [The Franklin Institute](#), run up the famed steps of the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) or just grab an [authentic Philly cheesesteak](#). And that's just a start.

Old City is my favorite part of Philadelphia and I make a point of taking out-of-town guests there. Not only is it steps from the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall and the National Constitution Center, but it's also the best place to get your bearings and plan your day. You can get information and purchase tickets to many of Philly's favorite attractions. Some of the attractions require “timed” tickets—free tickets used for crowd control. The [visitor center](#) is the place to pick those up as well. Everything is close by and all of a sudden you are at some historical site that you read about in 2nd grade.

Here are my favorites:

## [CHRIST CHURCH](#) 20 North American Street

This church is known as “The Nation's Church” because of the famous Revolutionary-era leaders who worshiped here. George Washington and Betsy Ross sat in the church's pews, and Benjamin Franklin's grave is in its burial ground, located just a few blocks from the church. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 9:00 am — 5:00 pm. Sundays, 9:00 am — 5:00 pm. The general tour is \$3 for adults and \$2 for students. Tickets may be purchased at the Visitor Center

## [BETSY ROSS HOUSE](#) 239 Arch Street

I've been in the house and it is faithfully restored. Frankly, I enjoy just walking past. It feels like the Fourth of July in the dead of winter. In late summer—early fall, everything is still in bloom. Betsy is buried in the garden courtyard. Hours are 10 am —5 pm daily March through November. Price for adults is \$5; everyone else pays \$4. [Tickets can be purchased online.](#)

## [ELFRETH'S ALLEY](#) –

This place is just cool. Dating from 1702, Elfreth's Alley is the oldest continually inhabited residential street in the country. It was founded a mere 20 years after William Penn founded Pennsylvania and chose Philadelphia as it's capital (Centrally located Harrisburg is the current capital of Pennsylvania). The existing homes were all built between 1728 and 1836. Several of the homes are open to the public. #124 is the museum shop. Guided tours are \$5 for adults and \$12 for families.



### [NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER](#) – 525 Arch Street

If you do nothing else in Philadelphia, go see Freedom Rising and visit Signer's Hall in the National Constitution Center. I'm at a loss to describe Freedom Rising, so I cribbed the description from their [website](#): "...Visit the Kimmel Theater and experience this award-winning production that takes you on a 17-minute multimedia journey through the story of the Constitution from its inception to today. Dramatic images, a 360° screen and a live actor will inspire you to become an active part of "We the People." The National Constitution Center sits on a rolling lawn. Built in 2003, this is the first-ever national museum to explain and document the Constitution of the United States. It includes interactive exhibits and a theater with live performances.

While you're there, stop by Signer's Hall. It's filled with full-scale statues of the signers (thankfully with name plates) arranged as if they may just be about to settle in and start discussing the founding of our country.

Originally called Northeast Square, [Franklin Square](#) was renamed after Benjamin Franklin in 1825. This kid-friendly square, located near the historic district, includes a carousel, miniature golf course, playground, and park.

There are also [Duck Tours](#) and [Ghost Tours](#) available, which will give you a decent rundown of the history of the area.

If history really isn't your thing, The Philadelphia Museum of Art is absolutely beautiful. You can run up the "Rocky" steps in the front. The famous movie PROP is at the bottom of the stairs and to the right if you are looking at the museum. The view of the city from the top of the steps down the Ben Franklin Parkway to City Hall is famous and worth the climb. If you walk around to the back, you can see the [Water Works](#) and Boathouse Row. There is a staircase and a steep path that takes you down the hill.

Looking down the Parkway, there are tons of museums. In addition to the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#), the [Rodin](#), which is free and the [Franklin Institute](#), which is not — are both worth the time. The Franklin is great if you like science. The planetarium is an all-time favorite.

The [Philadelphia Zoo](#) recently celebrated its 150th birthday. Make sure to check out their new aviary, and ride the Zoo Balloon which gives you a wonderful view of the area.

Watch a play at The [Walnut Street Theatre](#), which is the oldest theatre in the country (currently celebrating its 205th Anniversary season) and is located on Walnut between 7th and 8th.

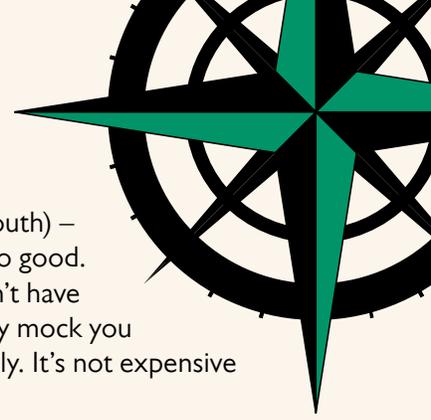
### And of course, because you need to eat and drink - there's FOOD.

[Warm Daddy's](#) is south on Columbus. Good Soul food, sketchy neighborhood. Definitely take a cab.

My favorite bar is the [Continental](#) on the corner of 2nd and Market in Old City—next to the site that was the building where the Declaration of Independence was printed. There is a plaque on the wall outside on the Market Street side.

[Buddakan](#) (get the edamame ravioli – its heaven!) is around the corner at 325 Chestnut. Both restaurants are owned by Steven Starr, who runs the BEST bars and restaurants in the city. [Alma de Cuba](#) is one of his, as well. His places are pricey (except for [Jones](#), which is a retro 70's restaurant with comfort food and shag carpet and is reasonably priced), but worth every penny. [Swanky Bubbles](#) is also in Old City off Market Street. The place is great fun with a broad menu.

There is an old-fashioned ice cream place a few doors down from the Continental, again, on Market Street on the same side of the street — the [Franklin Fountain](#).



If you want a cheese steak (a REAL one), [Jim's](#) is at 400 South Street (the corner of 4th and South) – a moderate walk from Independence Hall. The line is always long, but the steaks are so-oo-oo good. There's great local memorabilia all over the walls and you can also grab a beer there. You don't have to order "Whiz" if you don't want cheese, but don't order lettuce and tomato—the cook may mock you publicly. You can also a Hoagie there—same as a Hero or a Sub, but it's called a hoagie in Philly. It's not expensive and the hoagie line is always pretty short.

[Reading Terminal Market](#) is right across from your hotel. It's just packed with different stalls featuring all kinds of great food and dry goods—all local stuff, not quite like the Amish markets, but really, really good. [Termini Bros.](#) is a must if you like Italian pastry. [Flying Monkey](#) has wonderful cupcakes. [Carmen's](#) make wicked good cheese steaks if you don't have time to get to South Street. If you want a beer in a really old place, [McGillins](#) opened its doors in 1860.

Pizza. The BEST pizza in Philly is [Osteria](#). No question. It's pizza for foodies. This place was nominated for a James Beard awards for the best new restaurant in 2008 and Chef Jeff Michaud is a James Beard Foundation award winner for Best Chef Mid-Atlantic in 2010. And we're still talking about pizza. Light crusts, fantastic mix of cheeses and the best toppings.

If you are adventurous, try [Di Bruno Bros.](#) on Chestnut between 16th and 17th. At first, the fact that these pizzas come only as half-pies may seem troubling. But that's until you order and taste the prosciutto and fig pie with reduced balsamic vinegar. Sounds odd, but it's quite yummy.

If you're really stuck for something to do, [GoPhila.com](#) has great ideas and is a clearinghouse for all things Philly.

Please be careful and mind your surroundings. Philadelphia can be a very dangerous place if you wander off into an unknown area alone. If you are driving and in Old City, definitely park at the Visitor's Center. It's relatively cheap and very safe. The entrance is on 5th and Market.

Have a great time in [Philadelphia](#), the city of brotherly love.