

Philly is Finer in Fall

Enjoy the history and savor the distinct culture of this unique city

Fall is a fine time for football, foliage, and Philadelphia.

Not too hot, not too cold, and not too crowded with summer vacationers, the City of Brotherly Love is a place to be savored and not gulped. History oozes from every nook and cranny.

Philly was famous long before the Ortons sang about South Street. It's the place where Benjamin Franklin flew his kite, Betsy Ross sewed her flag, and Thomas Jefferson drafted his declaration. The hometown of W.C. Fields and Dick Clark is also the home of America's most historic square mile.

There's no better place to mark the birth of the United States each summer. A week of fun, frolic, and fireworks marks the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. Independence Hall is just one of more than two-dozen significant sites in the area.

The Constitution was debated, amended, and approved at Congress Hall, home of Congress when Philadelphia was the nation's capital from 1790-1800. The wording on the nearby Liberty Bell echoes the freedom theme: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land upon all the inhabitants thereof."

Nearby neighbors include the National Constitution Center, the National Museum of American Jewish History, the Benjamin Franklin Museum, and the President's House where George Washington lived while Philadelphia enjoyed a short sojourn as the nation's capital.

The themes of liberty reverberate around every curve and corner. There's even a neon Liberty Bell atop 10-year-old Citizens Bank Park, a compact South Philadelphia ballpark where the Phillies clinched baseball's 2008 World Series.

There are six other pro sports venues, including Eagles football, Sixers basketball, and Flyers hockey. Participation sports range from roller-blading to rock-climbing, but also including rowing, hiking, biking, golf, and running — as Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone) did on the 99 front steps of the



Philadelphia's City Hall

By **DAN SCHLOSSBERG**
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Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Like Rocky, William Penn carved his niche in the city's history books. Penn designed Philadelphia as a "greene countrie towne" complete with trees, trails, and parks. Only two miles square, downtown Philadelphia is laid out in a simple grid stemming from the towering City Hall building at Broad & Market.

Overlooking Center City is "Billy Penn's hat," once considered one of the world's architectural wonders. It stands 37 feet high, 33 stories above the bustling world of Broad & Market. It was the tallest point in town for more than a century before the 62-story Liberty Place topped it in 1987.

Penn deserves his prominent and permanent place: he wanted Philadelphia to be the world's first planned city. Squeezed between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers on its east and west, the city embraces five parks within a short walk of every compass point.

European influences are evident everywhere. Greek Revival architecture is a hallmark of several prominent exhibition halls, while flag-lined Benjamin Franklin Boulevard, a broad diagonal avenue that links Center City with a myriad of museums, is called "the Champs Elysees of America" because it resembles the Parisian promenade.

Franklin's face, figure, and name are found all over the city. The Benjamin Franklin Life & Legacy Museum, a sweeping tribute to the inventor-diplomat, reopened in August after a two-year facelift. At the Franklin Institute, the domed Omnimax is one of three theaters (including the Fels planetarium and a smaller 3-D enclave) showing educational science fare. Part of the building's exterior was built around an enormous steam locomotive that rolled into place on a specially-built track in 1937.

Although such engines once rolled into Philadelphia with regularity, the city remains a transportation model. Amtrak's futuristic Acela Express glides through the glistening 30th Street Station, an Art Deco edifice shiny again after a loving restoration. So many subways, trolleys, and trains of all descriptions rumble underneath that nobody needs a car in Philadelphia.

Driving is a challenge anyway, with narrow streets, some covered in cobblestone, and many others designated for one-way traffic. Streets are especially clogged in Chinatown, a stone's throw from the Convention Center and Reading Marketplace.

The home of the world's largest flower show every March, the convention center has even housed national political conventions. Many conventioners stay across the street at the Philadelphia Downtown Marriott, which boasts 1,400 rooms, the fifth largest in the venerable chain.

Double-decked tourist buses park on the side of the Marriott, making it easy for spouses of busy convention delegates to see the sights. Those sights include the busy Delaware River port, where the array of working vessels include amphibious vehicles of 1940s



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Top photo: Philadelphia Downtown Marriott

Middle photo: Philadelphia Waterfront

Bottom photo: Roy Halladay on the cover of Sports Illustrated

vintage called the Philadelphia Ducks. Half their hour-long tour is spent on land, the other half in water.

Also on the Delaware is Penn's Landing, where the founder arrived in 1682. It includes a 37-acre park with a maritime museum, submarine, four-masted sailing ship, and even the U.S. flagship from the 1898 Spanish-American War.

Penn's promise of a haven for all obviously worked: there are 111 neighborhoods within the city limits of 129 square miles. The surrounding suburbs swell the metro area population to five million, making Philadelphia the fifth-largest city in the United States and second only to New York on the East Coast.

It has been a river town, a railroad town, and a manufacturing hub but has also established a reputation as a center for education and the arts. Philadelphia has more colleges than Boston and so many cultural venues along South Broad Street that the strip is also called Avenue of the Arts. The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, the city's cultural crown jewel, has a 2,500-seat concert hall and 650-seat recital theater.

When Washington and Jefferson walked the streets of Philadelphia, residents inhabited the compact townhouses that line Elfreth's Alley, the oldest continually occupied street in the United States. Artisans and blacksmiths once lived in the 33 Colonial and Federal-style homes, which feature plaques indicating which of several competing fire companies was paid to put out the flames. The three-story homes, as narrow as the street itself, have outside mirrors so that residents on the third floor can see who's knocking on their door below.

The restored City Tavern, where Washington once dined on West Indian pepper pot soup, was dubbed "the most genteel tavern in the colonies" by John Adams after its 1773 opening.

The city gave the nation many firsts: the first public school (1698), library (1731), fire company (1736), lightning rod (1752), flag (1777), bank (1780), daily newspaper (1784), circus (1793), and theater (the Walnut Street theater, founded in 1809, is still active today). Also introduced in the city were the ice-cream soda (1876), X-Ray (1890), and the air-conditioned building (1932).

Philadelphia has given the world Marian Anderson, Grace Kelly, Bill Cosby, Will Smith, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allen Poe, James A. Michener, and basketball legends Wilt Chamberlain and Julius Irving (Dr. J).

Neither colonial portrait painter Gilbert Stuart, who dubbed Philadelphia "the Athens of America," nor Alexander Graham Bell, who exhibited the telephone at the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition, would recognize the city today. Nor would the artists who created so many covers of the locally-produced *Saturday Evening Post*.

The evolving skyline continues to change, from the permanent lighting of the Penn statue to the illumination of the seven Schuylkill River bridges. The City of Brotherly Love has come a such a long way that even W.C. Fields wouldn't hesitate to spend time in his hometown. In fact, he'd be proud of it. ■

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