

Clockwise from top left: the famous local pretzels; Race Street Pier; the elegant Society Hill neighbourhood; street art; an Amish girl prepares pretzels; hoagies are a fast-food staple; Spring Gardens; fine dining at R2L; time-honoured buildings

PHILADELPHIA

Known as the birthplace of America, the Pennsylvanian city is home to world-class museums and galleries and has a fine culinary scene to boot, says Esme Fox

Why go? Situated just a couple of hours away from New York, Philadelphia often gets overlooked in favour of the most famous of cities. However, it's well worth a detour for a couple of days to discover just what the 'City of Brotherly Love', as it is nicknamed, is all about. A city of firsts – Philadelphia was home to America's first theatre, its first zoo and the world's first computer – it's both refined and edgy, and in addition to enjoying the elegant facades, you'll find there's plenty to discover.

What to do Philadelphia is well known as the birthplace of America, so there are of course the must-sees – the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, as well as world-class museums such as The Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (penn.museum.org) and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (philamuseum.org) – America's first art museum. However, if you only have time to see one, then you should head to the Barnes Foundation (barnesfoundation.org) – a first-rate art collection, which re-opened in 2012 after moving to a new purpose-built \$150 million complex. As well as the historical and the classical, the city has its fair share of the quirky and the unusual, such as the Eastern State Penitentiary (easternstate.org), the Mütter Museum (collegeofphysicians.org/mutter-museum) of mysterious medical history, and unique vintage shops, which are mostly found along North 3rd Street.

Where to stay? Located right in the heart of the city in Rittenhouse Square is the historic Rittenhouse Hotel (00 1 215 546 9000, rittenhousehotel.com) with its *beaux-arts* style, cosy yet elegant lounges and famous afternoon teas. If you're after something a bit more contemporary, the centrally located Hotel Monaco (00 1 215 925 2111, monaco-philadelphia.com) is a stylish choice, with its eclectic, colourful guest rooms and rooftop lounge.

Where to eat and drink? Philadelphia's rapidly evolving restaurant scene is now attracting global attention, though many would still prefer to head straight for an old favourite, the Philly cheesesteak.

If you want to try Philly's most famous snack of crusty rolls filled with sautéed rib-eye steak, fried onions and melted cheese, then head to Pat's King of Steaks (00 1 215 468 1546, patskingofsteaks.com). Founded by brothers Pat and Harry Olivieri, said to have invented the steak sandwich back in 1930, it's one of the best places in town. The crown for best cheesesteak is hotly contested and many locals claim Geno's Steaks (00 1 215 389 0659, genosteaks.com) to be the top spot. For sophisticated, modern fare, it's hard to beat Serpico (00 1 215 925 3001, serpicoonsouth.com), with award-winning chef Peter Serpico at the helm, offering elegant, seasonal dishes – stand-outs include deep-fried duck leg served on a potato roll. Or try Fork (00 1 215 625 9425, forkrestaurant.com), a light-filled space with an open kitchen and a vibrant, inventive menu. For one of the best places in the city for brunch, head to Lacroix (00 1 215 790 2533, lacroixrestaurant.com). Think elegant buffet tables filled with oysters, sushi and fresh fruit smoothies. Head back into the kitchens and you'll find everything from peanut butter pancakes to freshly baked waffles, Applewood smoked bacon and chocolate fountains. Sounding more like a bank than a bar, Franklin Mortgage & Investment Co (00 1 267 467 3277, thefranklinbar.com) is a perfect venue for a cocktail – an underground speakeasy, where 1920s-style artwork adorns the walls and chandeliers light up the cosy booths.

Time running out? Philadelphia has more murals than any other city in the world thanks to its Mural Arts Program (muralarts.org/tour). Take the official tour, allowing you to step away from the tourist districts and discover different parts of Philly, as well as getting a glimpse of the world's largest outdoor art gallery.

Trip tip For the best views over the city, check out R2L (00 1 215 564 5337, r2restaurant.com) – a restaurant and cocktail bar that serves up elegant dishes such as roasted Atlantic skate wing with fettuccine and clams, and pork loin and pancetta stew with winter squash and polenta.

Travel information

Currency is the US dollar. Philadelphia is five hours behind GMT. Travel time is approximately eight hours.

Getting there

British Airways (ba.com) flies daily to Philadelphia, direct from London Heathrow.

US Airways (usairways.com) also flies daily, direct from London Heathrow.

Resources

Philadelphia CVB (discoverphl.com) provides detailed information on all aspects of visiting Philadelphia.

Further reading

Food Lovers' Guide to Philadelphia by Iris McCarthy (Globe Pequot, £9.11) is a comprehensive guide to the city's food scene, with the inside scoop on the best places to eat.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	-4	-3	1	7	12	18	21	20	16	9	4	-1
Max °C	5	7	12	18	23	28	31	30	26	19	13	7
mm	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3

