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VISIT PHILADELPHIA® CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY
Greater Philadelphia's Tourism Marketing Agency
Showcases Two Decades Of Results & Looks To The Future

PHILADELPHIA, September 12, 2016 – Twenty years ago, a few civic-minded leaders believed Philadelphia could become a competitive leisure destination and created the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC) to make that vision a reality. This year, the organization that began as a three-year experiment, now known as VISIT PHILADELPHIA®, celebrates its 20th anniversary with an [annual report](#) that validates the vision of 1996 and shows that 41 million people visited the region in 2015—a 54% increase over 1997.

For two decades now, VISIT PHILADELPHIA has built the brand of the region and driven visitation with memorable advertising campaigns such as **With Love, Philadelphia XOXO®**, which recently won a 2016 Destinations Council Destiny Award from the U.S. Travel Association. In addition, the tourism-marketing company's integrated marketing approach has long included a strong public relations push, two powerhouse websites—visitphilly.com and uwishunu.com—and 15 engaging social media channels.

“Many people and publications have called Philadelphia an overnight sensation,” said Meryl Levitz, president and CEO, VISIT PHILADELPHIA. “That’s wonderful, but the fact is that many people, organizations and businesses have worked for many years to make Philadelphia the must-visit destination it is today. The good news is: It’s worked. Just ask the 650 million people who have visited since 1997.”

How It All Began:

In 1996, then-Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, then-Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge and President and Chief Executive Officer of The Pew Charitable Trusts Rebecca Rimel saw promise in the Philadelphia region's travel potential and founded GPTMC.

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Rendell, Ridge and Rimel laid out their mission for the organization in a [*Philadelphia Inquirer*](#) op-ed. They called their vision of the Philadelphia region as a leisure destination a “golden promise” and detailed their goals of getting more people to stay overnight, building the region’s image and collecting data to learn from and adapt marketing strategies.

20 Years By The Numbers:

Here’s a look at how Philadelphia stacked up as a visitor destination then and now:

	1997	2015 (Last year for available data)	Percentage Growth
Visitors to the Five-county Region	26.7 million	41.0 million	54%
Leisure Room Nights in Center City Hotels	254,000	983,000	287%
Number of Center City Hotels	22 (6,701 rooms)	50 (11,185 rooms)	67% (increase in room supply)

Record Visitation & The Leisure Story:

A record 41 million people—88% of them here for a leisure purpose—visited the five-county region in 2015, the sixth consecutive year for record-breaking visitation in the region.

“Philadelphia went from stopover to sleepover,” said Levitz. “Visitors now choose to come here, stay overnight and infuse money into the region’s economy by touring museums, attending events, eating out and buying souvenirs. We know that when they stay in Philadelphia longer, they find more to fall in love with and more reasons to return over and over again.”

Overnight leisure proves to be the fastest-growing segment in Center City hotels. In 1997, when VISIT PHILADELPHIA started marketing the region as a leisure destination, leisure accounted for just 14% of all room nights. In 2015, one out of every three Center City hotel rooms—that’s 32%—was occupied by a leisure stay. (Sources for all stats: CBRE Hotels, Longwoods International and Econsult Solutions, Inc.)

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A Golden Promise, A Golden Future:

While any time is a good time for visitors to explore Philadelphia's legendary history, art, food, music and park scenes, new legends in the making will give people additional reasons to visit and give VISIT PHILADELPHIA additional stories to spotlight. Here's a look at what's on the horizon for 2017 and beyond: the **Museum of the American Revolution** (2017), a reimagined **LOVE Park** (2017), the **Comcast Innovation and Technology Center** (2017), **Fashion Outlets of Philadelphia at Market East** (2018) and many new hotels. Thanks to a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, VISIT PHILADELPHIA also plans to increase its promotional efforts around Historic Philadelphia over the next two years.

The following partners made VISIT PHILADELPHIA's annual report and anniversary celebration possible: PNC, SugarHouse Casino, KYW Newsradio, *Where Philadelphia*, Asher's Chocolate and Red Tettemer O'Connell + Partners. View VISIT PHILADELPHIA's 30-year Destination Timeline [here](#).

VISIT PHILADELPHIA® is our name and our mission. As the region's official tourism marketing agency, we build Greater Philadelphia's image, drive visitation and boost the economy.

On Greater Philadelphia's official visitor website and blog, visitphilly.com and uwishunu.com, visitors can explore things to do, upcoming events, themed itineraries and hotel packages. Compelling photography and videos, interactive maps and detailed visitor information make the sites effective trip-planning tools. Along with Visit Philly social media channels, the online platforms communicate directly with consumers. Travelers can also call and stop into the Independence Visitor Center for additional information and tickets.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos of Greater Philadelphia, visit the photo gallery of visitphilly.com/pressroom.