

CONTACTS: Cara Schneider
(215) 599-0789, cara@visitphilly.com
Jenea Robinson
(215) 599-2291, jenea@visitphilly.com
Tweet Us: [@visitphillyPR](https://twitter.com/visitphillyPR)

FACT SHEET

VISIT PHILADELPHIA's 22-Year Timeline (1996-2018)

- 1996:** Started as a three-year experiment by the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and The Pew Charitable Trusts, VISIT PHILADELPHIA® (then the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation) is founded to market the five-county region as a leisure destination. An op-ed published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* calls on the destination-marketing organization to fulfill the “**Golden Promise**” of a successful and economically vital travel and tourism industry in Philadelphia.
- 1997:** VISIT PHILADELPHIA advertises Philly on national TV for the first time in the city’s history. The advertising campaign, This Is My Philadelphia, positions the region as **The Place That Loves You Back**, a tagline people still use today.
- 1998:** Joining the ranks of the few forward-thinking destinations on the web, VISIT PHILADELPHIA debuts gophila.com (now **visitphilly.com**), Greater Philadelphia’s first and only official visitor website.
- 1999:** Philadelphia can count on a growing leisure travel segment. Lawmakers pass a 1% hotel tax increase—championed by Philadelphia hotels—to establish **permanent funding** for VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s tourism-marketing efforts.
- 2001:** Pajamas and slippers become iconic symbols when VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches **Philly’s More Fun When You Sleep Over®** and the **Philly Overnight® Hotel Package**, contributing to “the most successful hospitality recovery in the country” after the 9/11 attacks, according to STR. During a time of uncertainty, the simple message—it’s fun, so sleep over—resonates.
- 2002:** The Philadelphia region welcomes **30 million visitors** for the first time. (Tourism Economics, Longwoods International)
- 2004:** Philadelphia becomes the first destination in the world to launch an LGBT-themed television commercial, part of VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s **Philadelphia – Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay®** campaign.

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2005: *National Geographic Traveler* declares Philadelphia the “**Next Great City**” in October. The whole region celebrates the tremendous honor, and residents exude pride for their once cast-aside city. (Although, many good-humoredly question the word “next,” insisting that Philadelphia is already a great place.)

2007: Once again, VISIT PHILADELPHIA sees the beginnings of a trend and becomes an early adopter. Through its **uwishunu**[®] campaign, funded by then-Mayor John Street and Philadelphia City Council, in-the-know residents spread the word about Philly through a blog, uwishunu.com. Philadelphia is one of just a few destinations in the blogosphere, and social-media marketing becomes a main focus for the company.

Hotel revenue in the five-county region reaches **\$1 billion** for the first time. Increased visitation and the rising cost of hotel rooms contribute to this destination-defining milestone. (STR)

2008: The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania enables the City of Philadelphia to institute a **1.2% increase** in the Philadelphia County hotel room occupancy tax, which is shared among VISIT PHILADELPHIA, the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority.

2009: Proving that travelers choose value over discounts, VISIT PHILADELPHIA sells the **100,000th Philly Overnight Hotel Package**, representing 200,000 room nights and \$20 million in hotel revenue, plus another \$48 million in spending on food, retail, recreation and transportation. (PKF Consulting, Tourism Economics)

VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches **With Love, Philadelphia XOXO**[®]. In a time of economic uncertainty, people respond positively to the inviting and playful tone of Philadelphia's love letters.

2011: Philadelphia appears literally all over New York City's Penn Station, as VISIT PHILADELPHIA becomes the first U.S. destination to **dominate Penn Station** with advertising on all 225 displays through the station.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA gives even more leverage to partners at museums, attractions, hotels, restaurants and events with the launch of the company's **Joint Marketing Program (JMP)**, enabling attractions more access to ad placements in markets and mediums they couldn't afford on their own. Since 2011, 28 partners have invested \$2.9 million in the JMP.

2012: The City of Philadelphia, VISIT PHILADELPHIA and a group of civic and cultural partners launch **With Art Philadelphia**[®], the city's first-ever coordinated and sustained visual arts marketing campaign.

2013: After years of planning, VISIT PHILADELPHIA begins its **visitphilly.com advertising** program to give partners even more visibility on the valuable trip-planning website.

2014: VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches an evolution of the popular With Love, Philadelphia XOXO campaign. **Phillyosophy**[®] uses Philadelphia's familiar voice, spirit and attitude while reflecting the region's new confidence.

2015: Philadelphia takes #3 on the coveted *New York Times*' "**52 Places to Visit in 2015**" list.

From June to September, **#visitphilly Photo Spots** give locals and visitors even more reasons to snap and share photos of the city. Structures around town include giant XOXOs and With Love chairs. Even after the summer season, some of the Photo Spots remain in place because of their popularity.

2015-2016: In two years, VISIT PHILADELPHIA promotes and plays a role in major news for the city: **World Meeting of Families** and **Pope Francis' visit** (September 2015), Philadelphia's designation as the country's first **World Heritage City** (November 2015) and the **Democratic National Convention** (July 2016).

2016: VISIT PHILADELPHIA works with the writers of two destination-defining media stories. In February, Philly takes the top spot on **Lonely Planet's "Best in the U.S."** list, and in April, *The New York Times*' "**36 Hours in Philadelphia**" highlights the city's vegan restaurants, bring-your-own-bottle culture and bike-share program, Indego.

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development and H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest, **Philadelphia's Historic District** campaign begins. The campaign increases VISIT PHILADELPHIA's promotion of Historic Philadelphia, encompassing the Delaware River waterfront, Old City, Society Hill and Independence National Historical Park.

At the U.S. Travel Association's Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO), VISIT PHILADELPHIA earns a Destiny Award—the organization's **76th industry award**—for Branding and Integrated Marketing Campaign (**With Love, Philadelphia XOXO**).

2017: Total U.S. visitation to Greater Philadelphia reaches a record **43.3 million**, 88% of whom are leisure visitors. (Econsult Solutions, Inc.) Since VISIT PHILADELPHIA starting marketing, Center City Philadelphia has seen a **334% increase in leisure hotel room nights**, while the five-county Philadelphia region has had a **107% increase in overnight leisure visitation**. (CBRE Hotels)

Started in earnest in 2007, VISIT PHILADELPHIA's award-winning social media program hits **1.5 million fans and followers**.

Alongside the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Greater Philadelphia Hotel Association, VISIT PHILADELPHIA advocates for the **Philadelphia Hospitality Improvement Levy (PHiL)**. Starting January 1, 2018, the PHiL collects funds to help fill hotel rooms by incentivizing conventions and large events to come to Philadelphia.

The **National Football League Draft** returns to its Philly roots for the first time in more than 50 years. Through social media, media outreach, web content and advertising, VISIT PHILADELPHIA plays a big part in amplifying the region's athletic pride and history. The 82nd annual event attracts 319,000 attendees and earns tons of positive national press for the city.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches its latest African-American marketing initiative—the key component of which is a **documentary-style travel video series, We Got You: Philly**. The travel industry (*Skift*) and national media (*The Boston Globe*) recognized the importance of the award-winning series, which reaches an underserved travel segment.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA collaborates with the City of Philadelphia and its Amazon HQ2 Coalition on the **bid for Amazon's second headquarters**. The strategy includes running an ad campaign near Amazon headquarters in Seattle. Concepted and designed in house at VISIT PHILADELPHIA, the ads feature bold photos and messages that play on the meaning of Philly's famed nickname—The City of Brotherly Love.

2017 marks a **74% increase in total available room nights** for Center City Philadelphia—from 2.4 million in 1997 to 4.2 million. **Nine new hotels**—plus several major renovations—are projected to unlock 1,902 new rooms to meet increasing visitor demand in 2018 and 2019.

2018: Strengthening its focus on food, VISIT PHILADELPHIA begins a **food marketing initiative** that includes a “Flavors of Philly” Facebook Live video series, three eating-around-town videos in partnership with *Bon Appétit*, sponsorship of the 2018 James Beard Awards Nominations Announcement in Philadelphia and more.

2018: VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches a **redesigned and reimagined visitphilly.com**, charged with inspiring people to visit Philadelphia, motivating them to stay longer and encouraging its more than one million monthly users to do more while in the region. A reimagined online media center provides media professionals with press releases, photos and B-roll in a more visual and easier-to-search format.

In June, VISIT PHILADELPHIA launches **Homesick Philly**[®]—a nostalgia marketing initiative that encourages former residents and students to reconnect with and rediscover Philadelphia's neighborhoods, food, arts, culture, history and sports.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA's **founding president and CEO, Meryl Levitz steps down** from her role in October. The board selects **President and CEO Jeff Guaracino** as her successor. With 20 years of experience in travel and organizational management, Guaracino has formerly served the company's communications team and worked on major campaigns, including Philly's More Fun When You Sleep Over[®], With Love, Philadelphia XOXO and Philadelphia – Get Your History Straight And Your Nightlife Gay[®].

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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 and high-definition B-roll of Greater Philadelphia, visit the Photos & Video section of visitphilly.com/mediacenter.