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Philly 101: The Essential Guide To Navigating Philadelphia

A primer on the city's layout, icons and accents.

PHILADELPHIA, May 26, 2023 – Every year, visitors to Philadelphia get to know the city's history, customs, cuisine, dialect and landscape during their visits. Both first-time travelers and returning natives discover and rediscover a diverse, neighborhood-based metropolis with a downtown that's easy to navigate on one's own or via public transit. Philly regularly receives raves in *The New York Times*, *Bon Appétit*, *Esquire*, *Travel + Leisure*, *USA TODAY*, *Condé Nast Traveler* and more (*in fact, USA TODAY just named Philly the most walkable city!*), yet the city doesn't stand one bit for pretense. Here are the basics any visitor to Philadelphia should know:

Well-Planned City:

Layout – Seventeenth-century city planner William Penn envisioned the grid of streets that comprise Philadelphia's downtown area called Center City. Perpendicular streets run north-south (they're numbered) and east-west (many named for trees: Walnut, Locust, Spruce). What would be 1st Street is named Front Street. What would be 14th Street is Broad Street. Two rivers, the Schuylkill and the Delaware (dividing Pennsylvania from New Jersey), form the western and eastern boundaries of Center City; Vine Street and South Street form north-south boundaries. Today, Penn continues to give direction to the city. His statue atop City Hall points northeast.

Exceptions to the Layout – The 101-year-old, mile-long Benjamin Franklin Parkway cuts diagonally through Center City's grid, stretching from near City Hall past the famous LOVE Park to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Modeled after Paris' Champs-Élysées, the parkway is home to the Barnes Foundation, The Franklin Institute, The Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, the Rodin Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. East Passyunk Avenue runs diagonally through South Philly, passing through a row of restaurants and shops, past cheesesteak rivals Geno Steaks and Pat's King of Steaks and ending at colorful South Street. Frankford Avenue begins near Delaware Avenue before heading northeast through Fishtown and Kensington, where Penn's grid transforms into more of a web.

Greene Country Towne – Penn also planned Center City's five main squares, part of his vision for a "greene countrie town." Today, these city-block parks are called Rittenhouse Square, in one of Philly's most desirable neighborhoods; Washington Square, home to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; Franklin

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Square, with a playground, fountain and carousel; Logan Square, now a circle along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway with the Swann Memorial Fountain; and Center Square, where City Hall and Dilworth Park now reside.

Getting Around:

By Foot or Wheelchair – Locals like to self-propel. It's the easiest way to get around. WalkScore ranks Philadelphia as the country's fifth most pedestrian-friendly large city.

Indego – Cyclists can traverse the city's hundreds of bike lanes by using this popular bike-share program. More than 140 docking stations have simple credit card machines that take less than a minute to use. A day pass is \$15 for unlimited 60-minute rides on any classic blue bike; any ride over the first hour is an additional 20 cents per minute. [Rideindego.com](https://rideindego.com)

Philly PHLASH Downtown Loop™ – Fast, convenient and affordable: That's the purple PHLASH bus. Riders pay \$2 per ride, \$5 for a one-day pass or \$9 for a two-day pass (good on consecutive days) to reach 20 stops along its attraction-heavy route. The PHLASH runs daily in the spring, summer and around the winter holiday season, and on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in the fall and winter. [Ridephillyplash.com](https://ridephillyplash.com)

SEPTA (Southeastern Public Transit Authority) – The region's public transit system includes subways, buses, trolleys and suburban rail lines. The Broad Street Line subway runs north and south along Broad Street and connects to the sports stadiums of South Philadelphia, with express service during games. The Market-Frankford Line (called "the El" for its above-ground portions) travels east and west beneath Market Street, connecting to northeastern neighborhoods Northern Liberties and Fishtown and to University City/West Philly in the other direction. Numbered bus lines cover nearly every other block of the city. For subways and buses, riders can pay \$2.50 in cash (exact change), or purchase a reloadable SEPTA Key Card, which offers several fare options. [Septa.org](https://septa.org), [Septakey.org](https://septakey.org)

Taxis – They're easy to flag down, especially in Center City. Look for the light on, on the top.

Uber, Lyft, 215-Get-A-Cab – Need a ride? There are apps for that. uber.com, lyft.com, 215getacab.com

Historic Essentials:

Independence National Historical Park – America's most historic square mile is a must-see of America's origins. Visitors can pick up free, timed tickets to tour the esteemed Independence Hall, the UNESCO World Heritage Site where the Declaration of Independence was signed, the U.S. Constitution was created, and the Annual Reminders, the country's earliest organized and recurring LGBTQ rights demonstrations, took place. Nearby, the no-ticket-required Liberty Bell Center displays the beloved symbol of freedom, continuous inspiration for believers in civil rights. On the same block, the open-air

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President's House Site, where the permanent exhibit Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation tells of the nine Africans U.S. President George Washington enslaved there. (215) 965-2305, nps.gov/inde

Valley Forge National Historical Park – In the harsh winter of 1777-78, Washington's Continental Army encamped here. Today, the site honors the sacrifice and strength of those who helped secure freedom for the United States. Valley Forge National Historical Park offers a variety of programming throughout the year, including ranger programs, guided tours and living history demonstrations. 1400 N. Outer Line Drive, King of Prussia, (610) 783-1099, nps.gov/vafo

Art & Architecture:

Barnes Foundation – This world-renowned collection contains Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and early Modern paintings, along with Old Master works, Native American jewelry and African sculpture. 2025 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, (215) 278-7000, barnesfoundation.org

Boathouse Row – Ten charming, 19th-century crew clubhouses comprise this National Historical Landmark along the Schuylkill River. Still in use, the boathouses serve local colleges and universities. At night, lights frame the buildings, providing one of Philadelphia's most recognizable—and Instagram-worthy—landmarks. **Note:** Beginning March 20, 2023, the iconic [Boathouse Row went dark](#) for an expected eight months while the lighting system receives a major glow-up. Fairmount Park Conservancy is partnering with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to replace and upgrade the existing light system. 1 Boathouse Row

Mural Arts Philadelphia – Founded in 1984 as an anti-graffiti initiative, this world-renowned mural program uses art to ignite change in communities, transforming public spaces and individual lives. To date, the program has produced more than 4,000 murals, available to view on one's own or via a number of tours. 1727-29 Mt. Vernon St., (215) 925-3633, muralarts.org

Philadelphia City Hall – The Second Empire building at the intersection of Broad and Market streets has been home to Philadelphia city government since 1889. The elaborate, 14.5-acre masonry structure, once the tallest building in the U.S., remains the country's largest municipal building. The observation deck below the 37-foot bronze statue of William Penn atop the clock tower offers tours on weekdays and select Saturdays; the building hosts two-hour building tours once daily on weekdays. Broad & Market Streets, (267) 514-4757, phlvisitorcenter.com/CityHall

Philadelphia Museum of Art – The crown jewel of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway offers an astounding art collection spanning more than 2,000 years and includes sculpture, paintings, textiles, arms and armor, photography, prints and drawings. The site was also immortalized in the classic Rocky film franchise. To this day, visitors jog up the steps to reenact Stallone's famous scene. 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, (215) 763-8100, philamuseum.org

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African American Museum in Philadelphia (AAMP) – The very first museum funded by a major city to showcase and preserve African-American history and culture opened in 1976 and remains home to an extensive collection of artifacts and hosts a number of cutting-edge artistic and cultural events. 701 Arch Street, (215) 574-0380, aampmuseum.org

Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History– Also established in 1976 is the only U.S. museum dedicated exclusively to the American Jewish experience. More than 30,000 artifacts comprise the world’s largest collection of Jewish Americana; the venue hosts public and educational programs, events and lectures. 5th & Market Streets, (215) 923-3811, theweitzman.org

All About The Food:

Cheesesteaks – Born in South Philly, this meat-and-cheese (onion optional) sandwich is most frequently purchased at 24/7 operations Pat’s King of Steaks (where it was invented) and nearby Geno’s Steaks. Other popular spots include Pennsport’s neon-lit Tony & Nick’s, North Philly’s famed Max’s Steaks and Roxborough’s Dalessandro’s Steaks. Geno’s, 1219 S. 9th Street, (215) 389-0659, genosteaks.com; Pat’s, 1237 E. Passyunk Avenue, patskingofsteaks.com; Tony & Nick’s, 39 E. Oregon Avenue, (215) 551-5725, tonylukes.com; Max’s, 3653 Germantown Avenue, (215) 229-9048; Dalessandro’s Steaks, (215) 482-5407, dalessandros.com

Hoagies – Outside of the 215/267/484/445/610 area codes, these sandwiches often go by “subs” or “heroes.” Philly’s hoagie game is serious: The bread has to be just right—slightly crunchy on the outside yet soft enough to allow bites through to deli meat, cheese and toppings. South Philly spots such as Cosmi’s Deli are classic; places like Primo Hoagies are reliably omnipresent. Cosmi’s, 1501 S. 8th Street, (215) 468-6093, cosmisdeli.com, Primo, various locations, primohoagies.com

Roast Pork – The Philly sandwich many locals consider to be the real hometown favorite consists of a quality long Italian roll, savory sliced pork, provolone cheese and broccoli rabe or garlicky spinach. Some people add long hots (peppers) for even more flavor. Two popular places people go for roast pork are the Reading Terminal Market’s Tommy DiNic’s and John’s Roast Pork, on the edge of South Philadelphia’s Pennsport neighborhood. DiNic’s, 12th & Arch Streets, (215) 923-6175, tommydinics.com; John’s, 14 Snyder Avenue, (215) 463-1951, johnsroastpork.com

Soft Pretzels – Early German settlers introduced this doughy delight. In the morning, locals can dip pretzels into cream cheese; typically, mustard is the condiment of choice. Soft pretzels are standard fare at food carts, can be found in Reading Terminal Market at Miller’s Twist and are available throughout the region at Philly Pretzel Factory franchises. Pretzel Factory, phillypretzelfactory.com; Miller’s Twist, readingterminalmarket.org/merchant/millers-twist

Water Ice – Erstwhile referred to as Italian ice, this smoother-than-a-snow cone, better-than-a-shaved ice has flavor mixed in, not poured on top. At South Philadelphia’s circa 1945 John’s Water Ice, lemon and cherry are the most-ordered flavors; at multiple Rita’s Italian Ice locations, mango wins the day, and West

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Philly's seasonal Siddiq's Real Fruit Water Ice stand keeps people cool with coconut, kiwi banana, mango berry and more real fruit water ices. John's, 701 Christian Street, (215) 925-6955, johnswaterice.com; Rita's, ritasice.com; Siddiq's, 264 S. 60th Street, (215) 410-6513, siddiqswaterice.com

Food Hubs – For these and more Philly flavors, the Reading Terminal Market and S. 9th Street Italian Market serve as culinary catchalls. The former houses more than 80 vendors of regional specialties and global cuisine in a historic one-time train terminal. The latter lines multiple South Philly blocks with merchants selling produce, cheeses, tacos, pasta, meats, spices and more. Reading Terminal, 12th & Arch Streets, (215) 922-2317, readingterminalmarket.org, South 9th Street Italian Market, S. 9th Street, between Christian & Federal Streets, (215) 278-2903, italianmarketphilly.org

The Dialect:

Pronunciations – Many Philadelphia natives have a distinctive way of pronouncing local names. Schuylkill, as in the river or the I-76 expressway, is skool-kil. Passyunk, the South Philadelphia avenue and neighborhood, is pash-shunk.

Philly Accent – Water is wooder. The Eagles are the Iggles. Many words that start with st- tend to get more of a sht- treatment, making street sound like schtreet. The pronoun “our” sounds like are, and “orange” gets the same sound at its start—are-ange. “Bagel” goes by beg-el (but soft pretzels are better; see above). And jeet? That's how caring Philadelphians ask if a person has eaten.

The Dictionary:

gravy /grey-vee/ noun: a South Philadelphia term for red Italian sauce. Villa Di Roma makes gravy like my grandmother's.

hoagie /hoh-gee/ noun: a hero or sub sandwich. The block party is sure to have hoagies, cheesesteaks and soft pretzels.

jawn /jawn/ noun: a thing, person or place; multi-purpose fill-in-the-blank word. Wave that jawn when the parade goes by.

the Linc /thə lingk/ noun: short for Lincoln Financial Field. “E-A-G-L-E-S: Eagles!” echoes, well, really, everywhere.

Mummers /muhm-er/ noun: costumed musicians and irreverent revelers who march up Broad Street on New Year's Day. You know Uncle Jimmie. He's a Mummer.

yo /yoh/ interjection: greeting; used to get someone's attention. Yo! Who's dat at the top of City Hall?

water ice /wood-er ahys/ noun: Italian ice treat. When it's August, lemon water ice hits the spot.

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Wawa /wah-wah/ noun: convenience store native to the Philadelphia region. Yo. Let's stop at Wawa for a hoagie and Tastykakes before the Birds game.

About Visit Philadelphia:

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, visitphilly.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 site an effective trip-planning tool. Visitors can also find loads of inspiration on Visit Philly's social media channels.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos and high-definition B-roll of Greater Philadelphia, visit the Photos & Video section of visitphilly.com/mediacenter.