

CONTACTS:

Jenea Robinson
(215) 599-7432, jenea@visitphilly.com

Binh Nguyen
(267) 603-4512, binh@visitphilly.com

Visit Philadelphia Commemorates 30 Years of Driving Tourism Growth and Economic Impact Across Greater Philadelphia

Nearly 940 million leisure travelers have visited Philadelphia since the organization's founding, driven by strong industry partnerships throughout the region.

PHILADELPHIA, May 13, 2026 – Visit Philadelphia is celebrating three decades of elevating Greater Philadelphia's global profile and helping grow a thriving tourism and hospitality industry in partnership with the City of Philadelphia and stakeholders across the region.

Founded in 1996 under the leadership of former president and CEO Meryl Levitz during Mayor Edward G. Rendell's second term, the region's official tourism marketing organization was created to reposition the city as a go-to leisure destination strengthening its visitor economy. Then-Governor Tom Ridge and Rebecca Rimel, who helmed The Pew Charitable Trusts at the time, were also instrumental in shaping the vision for what they called the "golden promise" of Visit Philadelphia. Thirty years later, and coinciding with the epic semiquincentennial celebrations of 2026, the impact of that shared vision is clear.

"The results reflect decades of collaboration across our entire tourism and hospitality community," said Angela Val, president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia. "Visit Philadelphia's role has always been to tell our region's story and drive demand, but it's our partners at the hotels, restaurants, cultural institutions, neighborhood businesses and civic leaders who bring that story to life every day. Together, we've built a destination that people can't wait to experience."

Since tracking began in 1997, Philadelphia has welcomed more than 939.9 million leisure visitors, helping drive \$161 billion in direct visitor spending. In tandem with the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau's work focused on group and international travel, that activity has generated \$260 billion in total economic impact and \$18.8 billion in state and local tax revenue.

Today, the hospitality industry is the fifth-largest sector for working Philadelphians. Since 1997, \$83 billion in wages have been paid to local hospitality industry workers, speaking to the sector's wide reach.

Across the board, Philadelphia has experienced a 70% increase in leisure travelers since 1997. Hotels in the city have generated \$14.4 billion in revenue since 1996.

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“From the beginning, this was a collective effort,” said Meryl Levitz, founding president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia. “With incredible history, passionate people and diverse neighborhoods, we knew Philadelphia had everything it needed to succeed as a destination. The key was working together with our partners and the City of Philadelphia to tell that story in a way that resonated and grew momentum over time.”

The growth of Philadelphia’s tourism industry over the past three decades has been fueled by strong collaboration among public agencies, private partners and community organizations.

“Creating Visit Philadelphia was about aligning the city, the industry and the region around a shared goal,” said former Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell. “What we’re seeing today is the result of that alignment. We have a stronger economy, a more vibrant city and, ultimately, a destination that’s competitive on the global stage, as we see with the packed calendar for 2026.”

In the mid-1990s, Philadelphia was not widely viewed as a leisure travel destination. That perception has since evolved due to a combination of bold marketing, strategic investment and strong public-private partnership.

Visit Philadelphia’s community-oriented campaigns over the years helped reintroduce the city to the world, including:

- **(1997) The Place That Loves You Back** — Visit Philadelphia’s first-ever advertising campaign marketing the five-county region as a leisure destination.
- **(2001) Philly’s More Fun When You Sleep Over®** — Heavily featuring the Philly Overnight Hotel Package, this marketing campaign helped Philadelphia tourism recover in a post-9/11 world.
- **(2003) Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay** — a first-of-its-kind LGBTQ+ tourism campaign.
- **(2007) Uwishunu** — a campaign funded by the City of Philadelphia that gave in-the-know residents a chance to spread the word about the latest Philly happenings through the uwishunu.com blog.
- **(2009) Philly 360°** — designed to reach younger, tech-savvy travelers by highlighting music, design and culture.
- **(2009) With Love, Philadelphia XOXO®** — featuring love letters penned by Philadelphia that invited travelers to come visit.
- **(2023) Come For Philadelphia. Stay For Philly.** — Visit Philadelphia’s ongoing core campaign that juxtaposes inviting visitors and residents to explore the city’s hidden gems and lesser-known places alongside stalwart Philadelphia sites and attractions.
- **(2023) In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union** — Visit Philadelphia’s kicked off its ongoing campaign positioning the city as the nation’s most welcoming travel destination for people of all backgrounds and walks of life.
- **(2026) Indivisible** — A special campaign celebrating the cultural history of Philadelphia and the U.S. during the nation’s 250th anniversary.

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These efforts, combined with continued investment from the City of Philadelphia and the hospitality industry, helped shift Philadelphia's narrative into one defined by authenticity, culture and energy.

As Visit Philadelphia celebrates its 30th anniversary, the organization and its partners are once again in the midst of a defining period for the tourism and hospitality industry. With the nation's 250th anniversary, FIFA World Cup matches and other major events bringing global attention to the region in 2026, Greater Philadelphia is positioned to welcome visitors at an unprecedented scale.

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.

Visit Philadelphia's work is supported by multiple funding partners, including the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Learn more at VisitPA.com.

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