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Fact Sheet: 20+ Unusual Places to Explore in Philadelphia

Exploring everything from historical firsts and haunted attractions to medical oddities and vampire hunters in the city and region that breathed life into the American Revolution

PHILADELPHIA, April 8, 2026 – The words strange, weird and unusual have many polarizing definitions, ranging from the macabre to the mysterious. In Philadelphia, there are museums and attractions dedicated to eye-opening exhibits examining brain matter and decapitated remains to exorcism chairs and taxidermied animals.

Edgar Allan Poe, who lived in Philadelphia from 1834-1838, famously said: “There is no exquisite beauty ... without some strangeness in the proportion.” From his lips to our ears. Here are a few of the weirdest, quirkiest, strangest attractions to visit in the City of Brotherly Love:

Weird Philadelphia: Quick Hitters

- The statue of William Penn sitting atop City Hall – designed by Alexander Milne Calder, rising 37 feet and weighing 27 tons – is the tallest statue atop any building in the world.
- Philadelphia has four nationally recognized spots on the [List of Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks](#), including Frankford Avenue Bridge, Fairmount Water Works, William Penn’s Grid Plan and Philadelphia City Hall.
- The Port of Chester held the Philadelphia Tea Party on December 25, 1773, when 8,000 Philly protesters gathered and threw 697 chests of East India Company tea into the Delaware River.
- The [Library Company of Philadelphia](#) owns the oldest surviving painting of a North American city titled *South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia*, oil on canvas, circa 1720.
- The [Kelly Pools](#) lie hidden from view – in the catacombs underneath Fairmount Water Works – after Hurricane Agnes flooded the two Olympic-sized swimming pools in 1972.
- [Fort Mifflin](#) – an American stronghold on the Delaware River, sustaining more than 10,000 British cannonballs in 1777 – is considered one of the most haunted places in the U.S.
- At 10th and Reed streets in South Philly, an Acme supermarket now stands where Moyamensing Prison once did. [H.H. Holmes](#) – America’s first serial killer – was hanged at the prison on May 7, 1896. He is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in Yeadon, PA.
- Founded in 1892, [Wistar Institute](#) is the nation’s oldest, independent biomedical research institute; it was home to a weird “Brain Club,” which cataloged and compared the brains of super-intelligent people, like Walt Whitman and Sir William Osler, to those of common folks.
- The largest Tiffany glass mosaic in the world is on display in the Curtis Building; [The Dream Garden](#) (installed in 1916) is made up of 100,000 pieces of glass in over 250 color tones.

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- The [Wagner Free Institute of Science](#) is home to the first American saber-toothed tiger specimen, recovered by paleontologist Joseph Leidy during an 1886 trip to Florida.

What to See: Museums in Philadelphia

- [American Helicopter Museum](#) – one of the world’s largest collections of rotorcraft.
- [American Treasure Tour Museum](#) – the largest showcase of American pop culture and nostalgia.
- [Antique Ice Tool Museum](#) – the largest private collection of antique ice tools in the U.S.
- [Beyer Studio](#) – specializing in stained glass, their Sacred Window Rescue Project has restored artwork everywhere from Washington Memorial Chapel to Roman Catholic High School.
- [Laurel Hill Cemetery](#) – the most historic cemetery in Philadelphia boasts many famous graves, including General George Meade and the decapitated remains of [Martha Drennan](#).
- [Ministry of Awe](#) – the city’s newest immersive experience takes guests on a warped tour of the human spirit, doing it inside a 19th-century bank space.
- [Mount Moriah Cemetery](#) – historic cemetery from 1855 swallowed up by nature.
- [Museum for Art in Wood](#) – this non-profit museum in Old City celebrates all things wood, highlighted by a pioneering new collection called “Once Upon a Sandbank.”
- [Mummers Museum](#) – this South Philly gem celebrates the pageantry of a truly unique tradition: the Mummers Parade and its extravagant feather and sequin-adorned costumes.
- [Ryerss Museum & Library](#) – located in Burholme Park, this Victorian-style mansion contains a treasure trove of oddities, including a pet cemetery and Asian art gallery.
- [Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum](#) – a car lover’s dream, with 75 historically significant cars dating back to 1907: check their schedule for Demo Days.
- [The Rosenbach](#) – rare book aficionados flock here, looking for up-close views of first-edition manuscripts from James Joyce, Bram Stoker, along with Ben Franklin’s personal papers.
- [The Shoe Museum at Temple University](#) – located inside the School of Podiatric Medicine, the Shoe Museum houses thousands of shoes, from Dr. J’s sneakers to Nancy Reagan’s pumps.
- [The Stoogeum](#) – the world’s first and only museum dedicated to the Three Stooges.
- [The Yamatorium](#) – described as a sanctuary of trinkets and daydreams, artist Steven Erdman turned an underground bunker in West Philly into an uncanny art installation
- [VAMPA](#) – located in Doylestown, PA, this museum dedicated to vampire art and paranormal activity features vampire-hunting kits, an exorcism room and religious artifacts.
- [Weaver Dental Museum at Temple University](#) – hear the tale of “Painless Parker” and his weird wooden bucket of teeth; Edgar R.R. Parker was the P.T. Barnum of dentistry.
- [Wyck Historic House](#) – home to the nation’s oldest rose garden, dating back to the 1820s.

What to See: Philadelphia’s Most Unusual

- [Kelpius & Hermit’s Cave](#) – Fairmount Park
 - Johannes Kelpius led his religious followers here in 1694 to wait out the end of the world in the wilderness above Wissahickon Creek, near Hermit Lane.
- [Peter the Mint Eagle](#) – U.S. Mint Philadelphia
 - This bald eagle lived in the U.S. Mint from 1830 to 1836, flying in and out of vaults, eventually meeting his demise on a coining press.
- [Grip the Raven](#) – Free Library Rare Book Department

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- Grip was the favorite pet raven of famed author Charles Dickens, who had his dead bird stuffed and mounted around 1841; it also inspired Edgar Allan Poe.
- [Snapper the Alligator](#) – Ryerss Museum & Library
 - This antique stuffed alligator serves as the museum’s mascot and bears a calling card that reads: “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”
- [Maillardet’s Automation](#) – The Franklin Institute
 - Built by Swiss mechanic Henri Maillardet around 1800, this odd brass machine was the earliest iteration of a robot, featuring four drawings and three poems.
- [Holotype Specimen](#): *Baculites ovatus* – Wyck Historic House
 - Hidden in a drawer in the museum’s “Curiosity Cabinet” lies a fossil from a shallow-sea dwelling squid that lived 65 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period.
- [William Shakespeare’s Gloves](#) – Kislak Center at Penn Libraries
 - This pair of leather gloves is thought to be from the 1600s and may have belonged to William Shakespeare; the gloves carry a dubious curse for anyone wearing them.
- [FYNLRD](#) – Laurel Hill Cemetery
 - This 1947 Pontiac Superior hearse is decked out in deep purple paint and skeletal chrome, with the owner’s ashes on display inside a purple urn.
- [Albert Einstein’s Brain](#) – Mutter Museum
 - One of the unusual things housed inside Philly’s infamous medical history and science museum are 46 microscope slides containing slivers of Albert Einstein’s brain.
- [Original Exorcism Chair](#) – VAMPA
 - This Doylestown museum devoted to vampires and paranormal activity has a chair used for exorcisms from 18th-century Germany – it has “lingering demonic energy.”

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