

December 18, 2005  
Going to

# Philadelphia

By TERRY TRUCCO

**WHY GO NOW** It's a sweet paradox that [Philadelphia](#), a city once populated by holiday-averse Quakers, embraces the Christmas season so exuberantly. But this year, Philadelphia has more reason to celebrate than in many years past.

Center City, more populous today than a decade ago, is Philadelphia's throbbing heart and bustles day and night with lively museums, theaters, restaurants and shops. Old City, the atmospheric thicket of low brick buildings and narrow streets near the Liberty Bell, buzzes with the city's trendiest restaurants, galleries and nightspots. But change is particularly pronounced in fringe neighborhoods like Northern Liberties, an enclave north of City Hall, where galleries and restaurants have reclaimed the rusting factories and musty warehouses.

Why the new energy? City planning, focused redevelopment and tax incentives have brought businesses, housing and hope. A generous inventory of old buildings ripe for recycling helped, too, as did the city's foot-friendly layout, plotted more than 300 years ago by William Penn.

And this winter, Philadelphia unfurls its pride in Benjamin Franklin, its illustrious founding father, with a yearlong salute to his 300th birthday. Though the red letter day is Jan. 17, exhibitions and events have already begun. Visit soon, and you'll see the best of wintertime Philadelphia, from the super colorful light display at City Hall to the 35-foot tree in Rittenhouse Square.

**WHERE TO STAY** Philadelphia doesn't have a trendy boutique hotel scene - yet. But older hotels are refurbishing, and the best have discovered style.

At the Sofitel, in the renovated stock exchange at 120 South 17th Street, 215-569-8300, [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com), "Shaker chic" is how the staff describes the quiet glamour of the lobby, with spare cherry woodwork and a marble-and-granite floor inspired by a traditional quilt. The 306 rooms have white duvets, shoji-inspired cherry-and-glass doors and soaking tubs and separate showers in the black and tan bathrooms. Surprise activity: celebrity spotting. The Dallas Cowboys and Elton John's band stayed recently. This winter, room rates start at \$199.

As befits a hotel built in 1904, the Park Hyatt Philadelphia at the Bellevue, Broad and Walnut Streets, 215-893-1234, [www.parkhyatt.com](http://www.parkhyatt.com), boasts the trappings of a grande dame, with Palladian windows and marble galore. But this historic hotel leaps into the 21st century in late February with two new adventurous restaurants and a wenge-paneled

bar. The 172 rooms artfully mix old (high ceilings, lavish moldings) and new (pillowtop mattresses, flat-screen TV's). Room rates start at \$250.

Guests at the Alexander Inn, a 48-room hotel with the feel of a town house at Spruce and 12th Streets, 877-253-9466 , [www.alexanderinn.com](http://www.alexanderinn.com), awaken to a buffet breakfast of granola, bagels, juice and coffee served in a light-filled sitting room adorned with local art. Though some rooms are teeny, clever built-ins and bay windows dressed with wooden Venetian blinds ramp up the comfort level. Rates start at \$99.

**WHERE TO EAT** At first glance, the low-key Washington Square, home to the Tomb of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier, seems a curious spot for the latest offering from the high-octane restaurant impresario Stephen Starr. But Washington Square, 215-592-7787; [www.washingtonsquare-restaurant.com](http://www.washingtonsquare-restaurant.com), lures crowds with its sleek, steel gray dining room and its eloquent American offerings, like Vidalia onion tart (\$13) and seared ahi tuna with olive-oil mashed potatoes and spinach (\$26). Open daily for dinner and for lunch Monday through Friday. Brunch served on Sunday.

On a recent night, locals jammed two-month-old Amada, 217-219 Chestnut Street, 215-625-2450; [www.amadarestaurant.com](http://www.amadarestaurant.com), for tapas in Old City. Under hanging cured Serano hams, diners sat at dark wood tables, downing house-made sangria and toy-size delicacies like artichokes wrapped in Parmesan (\$10) and Pamplona chorizo (\$7). Dinner served daily.

A martini, steak frites and a window table at Rouge, 205 South 18th Street, 215-732-6622, overlooking Rittenhouse Square's glittering holiday glow balls, is the perfect antidote to a gray winter day. This bijou of a bistro, with a fabric-swathed interior, is a haven for an impromptu meal (no reservations) or a late night drink. Entrees from \$12 to \$36. Open daily 11:30 a.m. to 2 a.m.

**WHAT TO DO DURING THE DAY** Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, but his stellar achievements as an inventor, writer, philosopher and patriot took place in Philadelphia, as "Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World," the centerpiece of the city's birthday celebration, illustrates at National Constitution Center, 525 Arch Street, Independence Mall, 215-409-6600; [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org). Franklin's walking stick, the odometer he invented and rare early versions of the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Treaty of Paris are on view in what is called the biggest exhibition of Franklin memorabilia ever assembled, through April 30. Open daily. Timed tickets are \$14, and \$12 for ages 4 to 12 are available from 215-409-6700.

For added "Benergy" (to quote Philly's PR machine), download the one-hour historic district walking tour at [www.gophila.com/ben](http://www.gophila.com/ben) under Visitor Information and follow Franklin's footsteps to sites like Independence Hall and Christ Church Burial Ground, where Franklin and his wife lie.

It's hard not to be floored by the Gothic arches and gilded walls of Frank Furness's high Victorian Grand Stairhall at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 118 North Broad

Street, 215-972-7600; [www.pafa.org](http://www.pafa.org). You have until Jan. 8 to catch two superb shows celebrating the academy's 200th anniversary: "In Private Hands," a meticulously curated array of American paintings from the last two centuries, and "Mirror," Ellen Harvey's witty, mysterious rendering of the Academy Stairhall carved onto gigantic mirrors. Open Tuesday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday from 11 a.m. Admission is \$7, but "Private Hands" is \$15.

**WHAT TO DO AT NIGHT** There are no silent nights in Old City, where weekend revelers fill the bars, restaurants and, often, sidewalks. Second Street between Market and Chestnut is a great place to drink in the social scene, with more than a dozen nightspots, like the dimly lighted Continental Restaurant, 138 Market Street, 215-923-6069, [www.continentalmartinibar.com](http://www.continentalmartinibar.com), a sleeked-up 1960's diner and prototypical martini bar. Farther up Market, stylish folks gather for D.J.-spun hip-hop and house at Marmont Steakhouse, 222 Market Street, 215-923-1100, [www.marmont.net](http://www.marmont.net), a sassy, swanky little place.

Even Old City ice cream shops turn into nightspots: Franklin Fountain, 116 Market Street, 215-627-1899, [www.franklinfountain.com](http://www.franklinfountain.com), is a time-tripping soda saloon where a young George Bailey would feel at home under the white pressed-tin ceiling. Start the night, or cap it off (closing is 11 p.m. or midnight) with a banana split for two in an authentic period dish (\$10).

In the flourishing "Gayborhood" from Chestnut to Pine Streets between 11th and Broad, the rooftop deck at 12th Air Command, 254 South 12th Street, 215-545-8088, [www.12thair.com](http://www.12thair.com), buzzes at night, while Woody's, 222 South 13th Street, 215-545-1893, [www.woody'sbar.com](http://www.woody'sbar.com), serves up three lounges and a dance floor till 2 a.m.

**WHERE TO SHOP** For a taste of Philadelphia fashion, skip the chain stores - except Anthropologie, 1801 Walnut Street, which originated in the city in 1992 - and head for two wildly different emporia. No store meshes the city's patrician "Philadelphia Story" past with the high-tech present quite like Boyd's, 1818 Chestnut Street, 215-564-9000, [www.boydsphila.com](http://www.boydsphila.com). Yes, the clothing - Hickey Freeman and Dolce & Gabbana for him, Manolo Blahnik and Stella McCartney for her - is edited exquisitely. But half the fun is sampling the homemade ice cream (\$5) at the Brasserie Perrier Café under the 1907 Beaux Arts marble staircase.

At Smak Parlour, 219 Market Street, 215-625-4551, [www.smakparlour.com](http://www.smakparlour.com), vintage chandeliers hang from the ceiling and illuminate the creations of the owners, Abby Kessler and Katie Loftus - like ribbon-embellished silk-screened tanks and tees.

**YES, FREE** With its suspended glass dome and stages that disappear with the push of a button, the four-year-old Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, 260 South Broad Street, 215-790-5800, [www.kimmelcenter.org](http://www.kimmelcenter.org), home to the Philadelphia Orchestra, is the city's most spectacular new building. Its brow-raising statistics (a new organ will have 6,938 pipes) and eye-popping views from the rooftop garden are revealed daily during

free tours at 1 p.m. Bonus: tour takers receive a 10 percent discount on tickets for Kimmel Center Presents concerts.

**YOUR FIRST TIME OR YOUR 10TH** A blustery winter day is the perfect time to duck into the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 3260 South Street, 215-898-4000, [www.museum.upenn.edu](http://www.museum.upenn.edu), and get lost amid the archaeological finds from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica and Greece. Relax with a chardonnay or a coffee in the window-lined cafe, then roam among rarities like a 12-ton red granite sphinx and what the museum says are the world's largest cloisonné Foo lions. Closed Monday. Admission \$8 and \$5 ages 6 to 17.

**HOW TO STAY WIRED** If all goes according to plan, Philadelphia will have a citywide wireless Internet access system in place by late 2006. In the meantime, Internet cafes thrive. Near Rittenhouse Square, the ING Direct Cafe, 17th and Walnut Streets, 215-731-1410, [www.ingdirect.com](http://www.ingdirect.com), serves up Peet's Coffee (\$1.50 a cup) and free surfing. Open weekdays 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**HOW TO GET AROUND** Philadelphia is a superb walking city, but taxis are plentiful, and public transportation is excellent. A \$5.50 day pass for unlimited travel by bus, trolley or subway is a bargain (a one-way fare costs \$2). Passes can be bought at [www.buyphilly.com](http://www.buyphilly.com) under Travel.