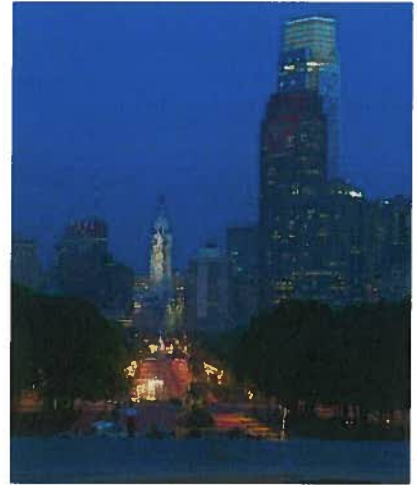


Philadelphia - History, Culture and Food

If you are thinking of a city break on America's Eastern Seaboard then why not consider Philadelphia? Peter Morrell has just been exploring the City and finds a vibrant metropolis with lots of history, art, culture and food.

I am at the top of a flight of 72 steps punching the air, shadow boxing and feeling on top of the world. Why? Because I am on a four-day trip to the City of Brotherly Love and, like just about every other tourist here, I have just re-enacted the scene from the Rocky movies where Sylvester Stallone runs up 'Rocky Steps' in front of the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#).



From the steps there is a bird's eye view of the city. A mixture of old and new, with towering skyscrapers framing the ornate City Hall that is proudly crowned by a statue of Philadelphia's founding father, William Penn.

To get a closer look I headed off down to the [Independence Centre](#), where the [Trolley Works Tour](#) starts. The ninety-minute ride was hosted by a guide who was a veritable mine of information, dispensing facts like gunfire. The tour passes all the major attractions in the city and if one is of special interest you can simply hop off the bus, take a look around and catch the next one.

The tour begins and ends at two of the most significant icons in the creation of modern America, Independence Hall, and the Liberty Bell – complete with the now famous crack. The Hall was the place where, on July 4, 1776, the Liberty Bell pealed out to call the citizens to hear the Declaration of Independence proclaimed and the rest, as they say, is history.

Apart from seeing the historic landmarks, I was also keen to check out the city's cultural scene and, being a self-confessed foodie, the local cuisine.



Breakfast on day one was at the [Reading Terminal Market](#), a bustling collection of 80 indoor stalls, dating back to 1893. It is the US equivalent of London's Borough Market and is a foodie's paradise with the local Amish community and traders selling a vast array of fresh and baked produce.

But this was merely the appetiser to what Philadelphia has on its culinary menu. Over the next few days I enjoyed some fabulous eating experiences. There was [Le Bec Fin](#), one of America's finest French restaurants where the dining salon is pure Parisian

A taste of colonial times, with staff in period costume, was the theme at [The City Tavern](#), established a few years before the Declaration of Independence. And, for the best seafood in town, there was the very popular and busy [Oyster House](#), where multi-sized clams vied for attention with sweet or salty oysters

But, the place where I really had my taste buds tickled was at the award winning [Lacroix Restaurant](#) in the [Rittenhouse Hotel](#), where the food was innovative, imaginative and intense. The Rittenhouse, which is probably the City's most luxurious hotel, was my 'home' for four days. Overlooking the charming square of the same name, it has a past guest list that ranges from Mikhail Gorbachev to the Rolling Stones. It has also played host to the stars in the numerous movies that have used Philadelphia as their backdrop. This is the place to really experience high end

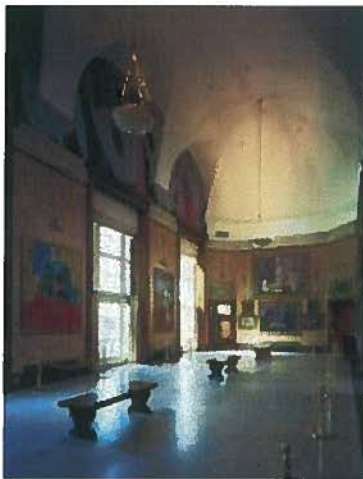


dining, with a resident Chocolatier who creates deserts to die for and a traditional afternoon tea that is pure civilisation.

To read more about the food in Philadelphia, click [here](#)...

A short walk from the hotel and clustered around Front, Third, Market and Vine Streets are around 40 art galleries and, on the first Friday of every month, between 5 and 9 pm, they throw their doors open and offer free glasses of wine.

And there's plenty of art on the streets too with something like 3000 murals adorning not just the sides of buildings but oil storage tanks and even rail side roofs, managed by the very worthy [Mural Arts Program](#). Another street art treat is the Gaudi-esque buildings decorated by mosaic artist Isiah Zagar.



For those looking for a more formal art experience there is the [Rodin Museum](#), and the [Museum of Art](#), currently holding a Picasso exhibition.

However, one of the biggest surprises I discovered was in a village around a thirty minute drive from the city centre, the [Barnes Foundation](#). Nestling in a leafy residential area it houses a gem of a collection, with paintings bought by Albert C Barnes, a man who recognised, before anyone else, the importance of impressionist and post-impressionist art.

Although, not known for my green fingers I do enjoy looking at plants and gardens so I was pleased that my visit coincided with the world famous [Philadelphia International Flower Show](#) run by the [Pennsylvania Horticultural Society \(PHS\)](#) at the Convention Centre. Even non-gardeners could not fail to be impressed by the cornucopia of landscaped gardens and individual plants from both professional and amateur gardeners as well as the vast array of gardening gadgets and ornaments.

There are 27 formal gardens in the greater Philadelphia area and two places that horticulture fans must see are the [Morris Arboretum](#) and the internationally renowned [Longwood Gardens](#). The Morris is an enchanting garden featuring a log cabin, fern house and the new 'Out on a Limb' walkway, giving a treetop view of the gardens and surrounding area.

The World famous Longwood Gardens were the vision of the industrial chemist Pierre du Pont, who bought a small farm to save a stand of trees and ended up creating one of America's most spectacular gardens.

Entering the Conservatory at Longwood had a real the wow factor. Every sense was stimulated by the vibrant colours, the heady scents, the tinkle of water and the sheer size of the place. This is horticulture's cathedral and was a fitting place to finish my trip.



More about the art, culture and horticulture of Philadelphia can be found by clicking [here](#)...

There was just time to squeeze in a trip to [Macy's](#), the department store, not just to indulge in some retail therapy, but also to hear the Wanamaker Grand Organ, still going strong after 100 years.

So did I miss anything? You bet I did. There's, the zoo, the Eastern State Penitentiary - where inmates have included Al Capone - the Masonic Temples and the Aquarium to name but a few.

Philadelphia is, in my opinion, a great alternative to New York as an East Coast destination. It's a vibrant city, packed with historical interest, offering some great food and with world class art and cultural attractions.

Philadelphia Facts

New York or Washington can be visited for the day from Philadelphia, using the fast and efficient train service operated by Amtrak. For example the journey time to New York is less than 90 minutes. Bookings can be made from the UK, go to www.amtrak.com for more information.

Money can be saved on the entrance fee for many attractions with a City Pass, visit www.citypass.com

Getting to Philadelphia is easy, British Airways, who are still difficult to beat for service, are offering 5 nights at the 5* Rittenhouse Hotel (www.rittenhousehotel.com) in Philadelphia from £1,129 per person departing May 2010. Includes return BA flights from Heathrow, and accommodation only. Subject to availability, based on two sharing and includes all UK taxes. For reservations visit www.ba.com or call 0844 493 0758

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Philly Food - A Culinary Tour of Philadelphia

Spending a few days in Philadelphia, Peter Morrell was amazed by the sheer number of restaurants and the diversity of the food and local beers on offer. Here is he shares the best bits of his culinary voyage of discovery.



I enjoyed some of the best meals ever during a recent trip to the City of Brotherly Love, but more of that later. Let's start by dispelling a myth. Philadelphia cheese was, in fact, invented in New York in 1880 and named after Philadelphia in recognition of the city's reputation for producing good food. 130 years later that reputation is still alive and well.

My culinary journey started at one of the most exciting foodie destinations in the city, the [Reading Terminal Market](#). Jammed into a space under an elevated railway station, this bustling market is an eclectic mix of 80 stands selling fresh food and baked goods. And some stalls have been there since it was founded in 1893 – such as [Bassets](#), America's oldest ice cream company. Cinnamon, Butterscotch, Cookies and Cream, it's your choice from forty different flavours of ice cream

Soft pretzels are synonymous with Philadelphia and some of the finest are baked right in the Market by members of the Amish community who also cook the most delicious bread and Shoofly Pie, a fluffy concoction made with molasses

But the market is not just about food, it's also full of atmosphere. The simple breakfast of coffee and a prosciutto and mozzarella roll that I literally grabbed, was all the more memorable as I sat at a communal table with some of Philly's finest, the boys in blue. This was a genuine slice of everyday life in the city.



Lunch was at [Le Bec Fin](#), a Philadelphia institution and one of America's most renowned French restaurants. Chef Proprietor Georges Perrier has been serving exemplary French food in the restaurant since 1970 and the dining salon could have been transported straight from Paris.

The prix fixe lunch menu was a great showcase of the restaurant's repertoire, from which I chose the Snail Cassolette to start followed by the Signature Crab Cake. The snails were meaty, in a delicious hazelnut, champagne and garlic butter sauce, and the large chunks of succulent crab bound with a light egg batter were an absolute delight.

Other French favourites, like Coq au Vin and Steak Tartar, also proved popular with my dining companions, as did the home-made bread. I would have liked to have tried one of the evening Degustation menus but time did not allow. This is modern French cuisine at its best without having severed its classic roots.

There is a vibrant art scene in Philadelphia and after a stroll around a number of art galleries in the old town as part of the monthly 'First Friday' event, where free glasses of wine are dispensed by friendly gallery owners, it was time for dinner. And being in the older part of the city what better place to explore some of the history of Philadelphia and its food than the [City Tavern](#)?

This establishment first lit its ovens in 1773, a few years before the Declaration of Independence. The owner, Chef Walter Staib, has put together a typically eighteenth century menu, and with staff in period costume, and the candle-lit wooden tables, it all felt quite authentic.

Giant cornmeal fried oysters and mallard duck sausages featured as starters and the mains included venison,

rabbit and brook trout. To wash down all this fine fare there are four 'Ales of the Revolution' made by local brewers Yards. The most intriguing is the General Washington's Tavern Porter. Created from a genuine recipe, it is rich and dark with burnt, toasty flavours. For something a little lighter there's Poor Richard's Tavern Spruce that's dry with a hint of herbal pine.

Moving along our gastronomic trail, the following day I came across some of the best seafood in town. Serving oysters and other ultra fresh seafood is in the DNA of the Mink family and Sam, the third generation son, continues the tradition in one of Philadelphia's busiest restaurants, the Oyster House.



The freshness and the flavour of both the raw and the cooked food were excellent. The oysters are a spectrum of sweet and salty and the clams, either cooked or on the half shell, are meaty and flavoursome. There is an extensive beverage list and a good range of both draft and bottled craft beers including the Ommegang Witte, a Belgian style wheat beer brewed in the U.S.

My final destination in this gastronomic marathon was the Lacroix restaurant in the hotel where I was staying, the Rittenhouse. This is a fusion treat not to be missed, with a menu featuring dishes with intense flavours that have been put together with great flair and imagination. My starter was baby octopus, but this had been a tough choice against the Japanese Hamachi fish and the miso-cured Foie Gras.

The main course of diver-caught scallops was delicious but, again, a difficult choice, against the Branzino (bass), monkfish or the rib-eye beef. However the unusual surprise was the side dishes. These were a real innovation, including the likes of red beets with white chocolate, risotto with figs and chorizo and roasted wild mushrooms. Add a bottle of crisp Austrian Gruner Veltliner and the meal was a foodie's nirvana.



And what was I doing when not sightseeing? Well chilling out in great coffee houses like La Columbe on South 19th Street and Mugshots, opposite the East Pennsylvania State Penitentiary or drinking in friendly bars like Rouge in Rittenhouse Square.

Probably the most fun time was had at Jolly's Dueling Pianos bar on Chestnut Street. This concept hasn't reached the UK yet but two grand pianos, some singalong tunes and a few bottles of another Yard's brew, 'Brawler', made this THE late night venue in town.

Only thing was that 'Brawler' should be named 'Befriender' because the people in the City of Brotherly Love are the friendliest bunch you are ever likely to meet.

Apart from the culture, read more [here...](#) and the history, more of that [here...](#) , in Philadelphia you are never far away from a truly memorable foodie experience.

Philadelphia Facts

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A Cultural Tour of Philadelphia

Peter Morrell discovers a vibrant art and horticulture scene in Philadelphia that is good for both the visitor and the local community

Driving around Philadelphia, both in the suburbs and the centre of the city, one of the most striking sights is the huge murals covering entire sides of buildings, bridges, roofs and even oil storage tanks.



This is not graffiti but the result of the [Mural Arts Program](#), an initiative to give illegal graffiti artists an outlet for their talents and it appears to work. Now more than 3000 murals adorn the city. One of the most imaginative is called Love Letter, 50 rooftop murals that have been painted next to a railway line that chart the journey of a boy trying to meet a girl on the train.

These public works are just one example of a city that is brimming with art to suit every taste. And staying with the street art theme, no visit to Philadelphia is complete without seeing the incredible work of Isaiah Zagar. His Gaudi-esque decorated buildings and exhibits are covered with broken mirrors and tiles to create a kaleidoscope of colours and reflections. His most ambitious work, the [Philadelphia Magic Gardens](#) is one not to be missed.

This avant garde theme continues in the large cluster of art galleries around Market and Second streets. Here the vibrant art set is blooming and the First Friday event every month sees the gallery owners throw open their doors and invite the public in for a glass of wine. A mass of colourful characters throng the streets bringing a relaxed, almost carnival atmosphere to this older part of the city.



But for those who like their art in more formal surroundings there are a host of galleries showing some of the finest works by the World's most famous artists. The biggest by far is the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#). As well as being at the top of the iconic 'Rocky Steps', made famous by Sylvester Stallone's films, it is home to one of the biggest art collections in America with over 200,000 exhibits. The current feature exhibition is the works of Picasso.

The Museum stands in an elevated position at the end of Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the same boulevard where the [Rodin Museum](#) is situated. The Museum has largest collection of sculptures by the artist Auguste Rodin, including his most famous work, *The Thinker*.

However, the real jewel in the crown for many visitors is actually to be found about a thirty-minute drive outside the city. There, in a quiet residential street, in the village of Merion is the [Barnes Foundation](#) that houses what is probably the World's most important collection of Impressionist and Post-Impression works.

The collection was started by the pharmacy tycoon Albert C Barnes in 1922, who was one of the first people to recognise the importance of the impressionists. Barnes did all the hanging himself and the galleries have such an intimate feel that it's not difficult to imagine the man himself walking in to straighten a picture.

The collection is reputed to be worth more than \$25 billion and features works by Renoir, Cezanne, Matisse and many more. Some of the most notable paintings are *The Card Players* by Cezanne, *After the Concert* by Renoir, *The House Boat* by Monet and a specially commissioned Matisse



mural. The Foundation is very popular and only allows 400 visitors per day so an advance reservation, which you can do on their web site, is essential.

In 2012 the Barnes Foundation is being re-located to a much more convenient location in central Philadelphia and will become a neighbour of the Rodin Museum on Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

As well as the art gallery at the Foundation there is also an Arboretum. This is just one of 28 gardens open to the public in the Greater Philadelphia area and more information can be found by clicking [here](#)... There are two gardens in this group that are particularly notable.

The first is the [Gardens at the Morris Arboretum](#). These started life as "Compton", the summer home of siblings John and Lydia Morris., John created the garden that has distinctly homely feel with a log cabin, fern house, statues and grottos. It's a wonderfully peaceful place with a vast collection of plants from around the globe and the new Out on a Limb treetop adventure is great for kids.



The other is [Longwood Gardens](#), the biggest and one of the best places to visit if you are a keen gardener. Acquired by industrial chemist Pierre du Pont in 1906 to save a stand of trees, the 1000 plus acres turned into a life-long passion for him to re-create features that he had seen as he travelled the world. The fountains and the Italian water garden are of particular note.

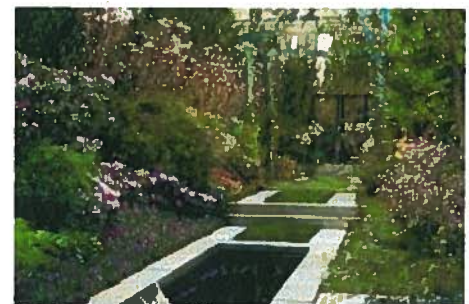
But the main attraction is the Conservatory, and nothing can prepare you for its sheer size (covering 4.5 acres) and the enormous diversity of plants it contains. The orchid collection is superb and there are zones

that are humid, dry and even steamy.

At the back of building are two salons and one contains the famous Longwood Organ, a massive musical instrument with more than 10,000 pipes. The gardens really are a 'must visit' place and to double the pleasure try the award winning mushroom soup in the restaurant.

Every March the Convention Centre, in downtown Philadelphia, plays host to the [International Flower Show](#). This is a feast for both the keen gardener and those who appreciate nature. Amateur and professional gardeners set an incredibly high standard to compete for the honour of winning the prize ribbons. Each year features a different theme and for 2011 it's Springtime in Paris.

A surprisingly large number of young people visit the show, probably through interest generated by The [Philadelphia Green](#) scheme run by the show organisers, the [Pennsylvania Horticultural Society](#). The scheme transforms derelict and neglected private and public land into areas that the residents can enjoy. Local people are heavily involved in keeping these spaces well tended which has in turn helped bind communities together.



So in summary Philadelphia has something to offer the art lover and the horticulturalist with world class museums and gardens. But it goes deeper than just exhibitions, with community spirited schemes like the Mural Arts Program, Philadelphia Green and the educational programs running at the Barnes, everyone can positively benefit from the vigorous art and horticulture scene in this City of Brotherly Love.

To read more about visiting Philadelphia click [here](#)... and more about its cuisine by clicking [here](#)...

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