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36 Hours in Philadelphia



Diners at the Silk City Diner Bar & Lounge.

Mike Mergen for The New York Times

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PHILADELPHIA'S evolution from day trip to destination city is such that you can spend a long weekend there without visiting any 18th-century sites, and not even miss them. Restaurant openings reinforce the city's growing culinary reputation — though an obligatory **cheese** steak still hits the spot. Neighborhoods in transition provide hot spots for shopping and night life, while other areas keep dishing out some old-school Philly "attytood." The city is on a roll these days, from basking in last year's World Series title to exclusive museum exhibits this year featuring Cézanne and Galileo.

Friday

3:30 p.m.

1) ANOTHER FAMOUS BUILDING

Independence Hall belongs to the ages; City Hall (Broad and Market Streets; 215-686-2840; www.phila.gov/property) belongs to Philadelphia. This 548-foot-tall 19th-century building is more than just a big hunk of granite interrupting traffic in the heart of the city — it is topped by a 27-ton bronze statue of William Penn, one of 250 statues by Alexander Milne Calder ornamenting the building inside and out. Take the elevator to the top (\$5) for 35-mile views from the observation deck.



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Flavorful grilled chicken served over fluffy couscous at Zahav in Philadelphia.

5:30 p.m.

2) NO LEMON MERINGUE PIE

Silk City Diner Bar & Lounge (435 Spring Garden Street; 215-592-8838; www.silkcityphilly.com) is a twofer with a lower-level nightclub on one side, and a traditional diner car on the other with atmospheric, dim red lighting. Grab a counter seat at the diner and choose from a copious selection of bottled beer or a cocktail like the Pink Panther strawberry martini (\$7).

7:30 p.m.

3) ODD COUPLE

The Chinese-Peruvian fusion at **Chifa** (707 Chestnut Street; 215-925-5555; www.chifarestaurant.com) can kill two cravings with one dish. The chef and owner Jose Garces's fourth — and newest — Latin-flavored restaurant in town spotlights chifa, a cuisine influenced by Peru's 19th-century Chinese immigrants. Meals start with a bowl of yucca-flour bread balls, a warm, doughy treat dipped in tangy whipped guava butter. The small-plate menu is an amalgam of tastes — such as the chaufa, which blends stir-fried rice with a hint of spicy chorizo, topped with sweet soy-glazed scallops (\$9). Chupe is a succulent seafood chowder with mussels, a whole shrimp and purple potatoes (\$12).

10 p.m.

4) BOWLING AND MUNCHING

The Big Lebowski meets sleek lounge at **North Bowl** (909 North Second Street; 215-238-2695; www.northbowlphilly.com), a converted mechanics' garage where segments of original concrete floor and brick wall blend with brightly painted walls, abstract art and glow-in-the-dark pins. There are 13 lanes of bowling on the first floor, four lanes on the second, and bars on both floors. The soundtrack on a recent night included **Blondie** and Cuban rhythms; a menu offering fish tacos and thai beef skewers can cure a case of late-night munchies.

Saturday

10 a.m.

5) LABYRINTH OF ART

Some places can't be fully captured by just photos and words. That sums up **Philadelphia's Magic Gardens** (1020-1022 South Street; 215-733-0390; www.philadelphiasmagicgardens.org), an art center and endearingly bizarre outdoor maze of mortar, bicycle tires, bottles, textiles, artwork and tchotchkes. The Philadelphia mosaic muralist Isaiah Zagar's magnum opus is a multitextured, multilayered labyrinth that leaves visitors amused, if maybe puzzled. "I think it communicates something, but I don't know what that is," said Mr. Zagar, who frequently roams his creations and obligingly fields questions from visitors.

11 a.m.

6) SLICE OF LOCAL COLOR

Enticing aromas of homemade sausages, cheeses and pastries infuse the air along the **Ninth Street Italian Market** (Ninth Street, between Wharton and Fitzwater Streets; www.phillyitalianmarket.com). Produce vendors ply their wares under green-and-red awnings in front of shops selling Italian specialties and assorted merchandise at this century-old South Philadelphia outdoor market. Hungry? Lorenzo's **Pizza** (Ninth and Christian Streets; 215-922-2540) is an unpretentious corner shop serving one of the city's best pizza slices (\$1.50 to \$2). The secret: they don't skimp on spices.

1:30 p.m.

7) WELCOME, GALILEO

Noted for its giant two-story model of a human heart and other science-related displays, the **Franklin Institute** (222 North 20th Street; 215-448-1200; www2.fi.edu) is hosting "Galileo, the Medici and the Age of Astronomy" which runs through Sept. 7 (\$20.75 for adults, \$19.75 for seniors, \$14 for children ages 4 to 11). The exhibit spotlights Galileo's achievements and features some of his instruments, including one of his two surviving telescopes. Also on display are paintings, prints and manuscripts from the Medici collection.

4 p.m.

8) MORE THAN TEXTILES

Fabric Row (Fourth Street, between South and Catherine Streets) has long been the place to buy a bolt of fabric. Fabric shops still ply their trade, but they share the street with tattoo parlors and an eclectic mix of retailers in this energetic Queen Village neighborhood. **Armed & Dangerous** (623-25 South Fourth Street; 215-922-4525) sells wares in the "romantic gothic vein," along with a variety of imported Venetian ball masks (\$25 to \$300). **Bus Stop** (750 South Fourth Street; 215-627-2357; www.busstopboutique.com) specializes in designer shoes from **Europe** and **South America**, including the French-designed, Spanish-made Coclico brand and the eco-friendly brand Terra Plana.

8 p.m.

9) WHAT, NO CHICKEN SOUP?

Housed in a blocky, freestanding building in Society Hill and decked out in the dun colors of **Jerusalem** stone, **Zahav** (237 St. James Place; 215-625-8800; www.zahavrestaurant.com) features Israeli recipes and a healthy dose of North African and Middle Eastern fare, too. The ta'yim tasting menu is a good place to start for the uninitiated — first up is a bowl of creamy hummus and a large round of house-baked, earthy flat bread, followed by three small plates and then dessert (\$36). The Sabra is flavorful grilled chicken served over fluffy couscous; the salad is a potpourri of eight small dishes that include spicy Moroccan carrots seasoned in cumin and chilies that make your mouth zing.

10 p.m.
10) TAKE A TRIP

If absinthe is your thing, the second-floor lounge at **Time** (1315 Sansom Street; 215-985-4800; www.timerestaurant.net) dispenses five versions of the green concoction (\$11 to \$16.50) that was the drink of choice among 19th-century Parisian artists and, until recently, was banned in the **United States**. If it's not your thing, the downstairs whiskey bar features around 75 scotches and other whiskeys. On a recent late night in the dining room across the foyer, a freewheeling seven-piece jazz band played a raucous gig as some members took breaks in midtune to mingle with the crowd before jumping back in.

Sunday
9:30 a.m.
11) NO SNOOZE BUTTON

Three of life's certainties: death, taxes and a long table wait for brunch at **Sabrina's Cafe** (1804 Callowhill Street; 215-636-9061; www.sabrinascfe.com). An early start will mitigate the wait, though. Helpings are sizable, the coffee is good, and the wait staff is helpful. The Barking Chihuahua Breakfast Burrito (\$9) is a spicy mound of Mexican comfort food that will keep you satiated all day; Sabrina's even serves a vegetarian cheese steak, if such a thing can really exist (\$9). But seriously, get there early.

11 a.m.
12) RIVER RIDE

Head over to the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** (26th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway; 215-763-8100; www.philamuseum.org), take your picture with the Rocky statue out front, then enjoy the "Cézanne and Beyond" exhibit, which runs through May 31. Of course, the museum will also merit a visit after Cézanne bids adieu. From there, walk behind the museum to the **Breakaway Bikes** shed (215-568-6002; open weekends from April through October) to rent a bike (\$10 an hour, helmet and lock included), and ride along the path paralleling the Schuylkill. Watch the rowers in their shells as they glide along the river, and enjoy some of the park's 200 sculptures.

THE BASICS

Philadelphia is roughly a two-hour drive from **New York City** and less than three hours from **Washington**. Philadelphia International Airport is served by most major airlines. Most key sites are within walking distance or a quick taxi ride from downtown. **Amtrak** has frequent train service between New York's Penn Station and 30th Street Station in Philadelphia. A recent online search found round-trip fares for mid-May starting at \$90.

The Independent (1234 Locust Street; 215-772-1440; www.theindependenthotel.com) is a 24-room boutique hotel in a restored Georgian Revival building in Center City. Some rooms have fireplaces, others have brick walls and cathedral ceilings. Rooms start at \$169 a night.

The Alexander Inn (301 South 12th Street; 215-923-3535; www.alexanderinn.com) offers 48 designer rooms in a Deco motif. Rooms at this Center City hotel start at \$129 for a double. It's recommended to book a month ahead for a room.

Another Center City hotel, **Courtyard Philadelphia Downtown** (21 North Juniper Street; 215-496-3200; www.marriott.com) offers 498 rooms in a restored 1926 building. Rooms start at \$189 a night.

