

Road Trip Chronicles

Road Trip Chronicles: A stop in Philadelphia

CHARLENE PETERS Jul 3, 2022 0



'Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof' is the inscription on The Liberty Bell. This symbolic message served as inspiration to abolitionists, women's suffrage advocates and civil rights leaders throughout history.
Dreamstime photo

Editor's note: This is the latest installment in Charlene Peters' Road Trip Chronicles as the former St. Helena resident traveled across the country to a new home in Massachusetts.

By the time I arrived in the bucolic setting of Bernville in Berks County, Pennsylvania, I'd driven close to 3,000 miles. My cross-country trip from California to Boston was near completion.

For this stop, I stayed at a guest barn on a lakefront property. Outside the barn's front door, two horses grazed in the green pasture against the backdrop of a small lake surrounded by woods. Yes, nature is the best medicine, but a little help from local practitioners enhanced my efforts.

It took 20 minutes into my 90-minute full-body massage at Bell Tower Salon Spa in nearby Wyomissing before my breath slowed to deep, long inhales and exhales — a surefire sign that the massage was working to de-stress my body and mind.

My detox continued dockside off the lake with my body lying stomach-side down on an SUP (standu-p paddleboard). It was early morning under a sky darkening with the threat of a thunderstorm. My senses were heightened by the concerto of raindrops and circular ripples forming with each drop. I was here for a sound bowl meditation performed by Cheryl Corson, a certified wellness practitioner in the area. Beyond nature, I heard her voice above me as she stood in the water next to my paddleboard.

“If you put cheap wine in the (meditation sound) bowl, it’ll make it taste like fine wine,” she whispered.

I chortled at the concept before a sound bowl was placed on my backside and Corson began tapping the bowl with a wand to create a vibrating sound. This intriguing and magical symphony of healing continued on my upper back until the rain picked up and we were forced to conclude our session and huddle under the rooftop of a dockside outdoor living space.

This was when Cheryl reached into her bag and pulled out a kalimba, a wooden soundboard with a single row of steel keys — a seven-note diatonic scale, most notably used in traditional Western music. She began to tap on it with her thumbs — as if she were a millennial in the act of texting. The tranquil sound was bell-like and deeply relaxing as a complementary modality to clear my path for healing.

“Deep relaxation calms the central nervous system, which allows us to unwind and sleep well,” Cheryl explained. “The feeling of calm lasts well past the session itself.”

In addition to a better sleep that evening, my experience left me feeling more flexible throughout the day than I had felt in years.



With senses heightened, dinner at Dans at Green Hills Restaurant in nearby Reading was a palatable pleasure that began with sips of Champagne, a serving of watermelon steak salad, and a pretzel-dusted sweet potato soup. The owner shared a fun fact in that this was one of Joan Rivers' favorite places when she visited her nephew here.

Before I departed this farm country, I browsed through the larger-than-large Renninger's Antique and Farmers Market in Kutztown, and then headed for a wine tasting at Stony Run Winery in Breinigsville, where its glorious view of vineyards leads to a forest. Sips of a 2016 Pinot Noir and a 2018 Brut sparkling impressed, but the winning taste during my visit was a 2016 Reserve Chardonnay.

My road trip continued the next morning with a quick stop in downtown Reading to take in the magnificent view of the region from the perch of the Pagoda. This historic landmark of the city was built in 1908 and anchors the mountainside atop the south end of Mount Penn.

I bid adieu to Berks County and an hour later checked in at The Rittenhouse Hotel in Philadelphia. Not surprisingly, this was named the No. 1 Best Hotel in Pennsylvania by U.S. News & World Report. I wholeheartedly concurred, as the staff treated me like a VIP from check-in to check-out. Each time I passed the front desk, a cheery attendant would ask how my day was and if they could help me with anything. My spacious room included a vanity/makeup area and a workstation with a view of the park below.

Ten minutes from the time I checked in, I was out walking the Benjamin Franklin Parkway where this city of firsts held the nation's inaugural Thanksgiving Day parade in 1920, courtesy of Gimbels department store. My mission was to check out the Philadelphia Museum of Art to view the Frank Gehry redo of the interior. What I found were small bronze portraits of Marie de' Medici, Queen of France, made by Guillaume Dupré two years after her death in 1642, a painting of Benjamin Franklin, and in the McNeil American Presidential China gallery, the best painting I'd ever seen of President George Washington.

By dinnertime, I was ravenous and grateful for the quick walk through the park to take an outdoor seat at Parc, right in Rittenhouse Square. My first course was a refreshing sliced tomato tart, followed by a delicious plate of French-inspired lobster Thermidor with a side of frites. It was as if I were back in Paris, with bistro tables set up under a red awning that read “bières pressions.”

A plethora of restaurants are lined along or in the vicinity of 18th Street, including The Love, where I enjoyed lunch the next day, markedly one of the hottest and most humid days of summer. A frosé seemed a refreshing choice to start, and I kept it light with a superb sushi-grade tuna crudo salad with avocado and pieces of seeded rice crisps.

While in Philly, my goal was to view the authentic, historic Liberty Bell. What seemed like a 10-mile walk in the intense humidity was actually less than two miles before I arrived at the building in front of Independence Hall.

To my surprise, the bell was not on public display, so I stood in the queue for a security check before I walked the long hallway inside this sub-ground-level museum where the Liberty Bell was displayed.

Even at eye level, it was much smaller than I’d imagined, similar to my first experience in viewing the Mona Lisa in Paris. It took a hot minute to examine the 1846 crack caused by the brittle metal being struck one too many times, and then I waved goodbye to Philadelphia and hit the road for Boston.