

## PENNSYLVANIA

# Philadelphia's bright spirit

Meet the new Philly, brimming with energy and confidence, proud of its cultural and historical heritage.

BY ALISON SHORE

**PHILADELPHIA** — The last time a pope visited here, in 1979, iron-fisted Frank Rizzo was mayor, and a certain over-the-top sandwich and a cinematic underdog boxer semi-defined (for better or worse) the city.

Philadelphia, never short on personality but overshadowed by giant Gotham to the north and the nation's power center to the south, chugged along, fueled in no small part by its monumental role in American history.

The city that hosted Pope Francis this weekend is different now. The City of Brotherly Love, certainly spiffed up for the papal visit, has a new confidence and vitality. Restaurants abound, access to the city's two rivers is a priority and Philadelphia's legacy as a cultural and historical icon deepens.

Perhaps an uptick in the numbers of millennials and suburban empty-nesters moving to the city accounts for some of Philadelphia's refreshed spirit; certainly, the combination of youth and money hasn't hurt.

As a former resident (as was my husband, whom I met and married in Philadelphia), I can attest to the metamorphosis, one that my family happily embraced in July.

We chose as our base the classic Rittenhouse Hotel, for both sentimental reasons (in our old neighborhood) and location (central to many at-

tractions and restaurants).

Center City (bounded on the east by the Delaware River, the west by the Schuylkill River, the north by Spring Garden Street and the south by South Street) is a walker's dream, with flat, narrow streets set mostly in a grid.

Block after block of stately brick row houses and handsome brownstones, their window boxes cascading with flowers, and much-loved leafy squares (Rittenhouse, Washington, Filtler) serve as a gracefully aging backdrop to modern, invigorated street life.

This energy is at fever pitch on 13th Street: Midway between Washington and Rittenhouse squares, this once-lonely stretch is abuzz with restaurants, bars and independently owned shops.

Barbuzzo, an inventive Mediterranean eatery emphasizing seasonal cooking, is emblematic of the city's booming food and be-seen scene. On a warm evening, diners were cheek by jowl at outdoor tables enjoying the summer bounty of corn — pan-seared gnocchi with charred corn and blistered tomatoes or thin-crust pizza topped with corn, squash, burrata and basil. This was serious food, and we savored every bite.

When it comes to bike-friendly cities, Philadelphia walks the walk, so to speak. The Indego bike-share rental program has numerous stations throughout the city where bikes can be picked up and dropped off.

As the website ([www.rideindego.com](http://www.rideindego.com)) says, there are four easy steps: Sign up, get a bike, go for a ride, return the bike.

After fortifying ourselves with tasty vanilla spice and

lemon ricotta doughnuts from Federal Donuts, my husband and I strolled from our hotel to a station near an entrance to the Schuylkill River Trail. This multi-use path extends for 60 miles from Center City to points west.

Renting the bikes, using a credit card, took about a minute. We began our ride on a new segment cantilevered over the river; shortly after, we were on more solid ground, skirting around the back of the always-impressive Philadelphia Museum of Art and heading to scenic Kelly Drive, home to a story-book cluster of rowing clubs on the Schuylkill.

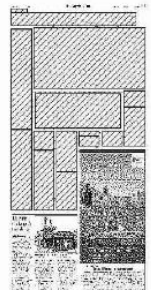
After an hour, we returned the bikes to a different station. Indego, ingenious.

Not far from the Museum of Art is the sublime Barnes Foundation, a repository for the treasure-trove of art (Post-Impressionist and Modernist paintings, African sculptures, decorative antiques, textiles) amassed by Albert C. Barnes, a chemist who made a fortune from drug development. The foundation's new museum opened to much fanfare three years ago and should be on every art lover's list.

A more casual experience, but no less enjoyable, is Carré d'artistes, a gallery-store on 13th Street that sells relatively affordable works by artists from around the globe. Philadelphia is one of three U.S. locations for this concept, which originated in France.

Center City may be the most overt display of Philadelphia's resurgence, but it has always owed much of its energy to myriad neighborhoods outside its core.

In South Philly, a bastion



of working-class Italians and a relatively recent draw for affordable-housing hunters, pride is strong, traditions matter and food matters more. A place such as Brigantessa, highlighting southern Italian food in a two-story restaurant with rooftop views, invigorates an entrenched neighborhood.

Our 12-year-old daughter declared its wood-fired, Neapolitan-style Margherita pizza — light and slightly chewy and made with sweet San Marzano tomatoes from the slopes of Vesuvius — the best she'd ever had, and our shared appetizer of perfectly grilled octopus with a chickpea ragu and bread crumbs was a taste of *la dolce vita*.

After leaving Brigantessa,

we decided to keep it real and walk by the two longtime rivals in Philadelphia's cheese steak wars: Pat's and Geno's. Young boys in baseball uniforms, smooching couples, families, girls teetering on dangerously high heels — who doesn't love a dripping, carb-laden delight available at both joints 'round the clock? Certain customs should not be discarded.

That includes visiting Philadelphia's historical sites, which through careful preservation and smart modernization continue to impress upon generation after generation the significance of our nation's narrative.

Restoration a few years ago of the tower atop mighty Independence Hall spruced

up this landmark of the American Revolution, where the Declaration of Independence and later the Constitution were signed. Updates to Independence Visitor Center will begin in February.

Spring 2017 will see the opening of the Museum of the American Revolution, a private institution within the park grounds.

In a chance meeting with Clark DeLeon, a park tour guide, legendary Philadelphia Inquirer columnist and arguably the city's biggest fan, he extolled its transformation: "Philadelphia isn't as great as Philadelphians think it is. It's better."

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## If you go

### THE BEST WAY TO PHILADELPHIA

From LAX, US Airways and American offer nonstop service to Philadelphia, and American, US Airways, Southwest, Delta and United offer connecting service (change of planes). Restricted round-trip airfares from \$428, including taxes and fees.

### GETTING AROUND

**Indego**, [www.rideindego.com](http://www.rideindego.com). Rent a bike at one of many stations throughout the city; return it to any station. Single

rides or flexible memberships (requiring a simple advance sign-up) are available.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Loews Philadelphia Hotel**, 1200 Market St.; (215) 627-1200, [www.loewshotels.com/philadelphia-hotel](http://www.loewshotels.com/philadelphia-hotel). Comfortable high-rise hotel with expansive city views close to historic area and 13th Street. Doubles from \$379.

**Rittenhouse Hotel**, 210 W. Rittenhouse Square; (215) 546-9000, [www.rittenhousehotel.com](http://www.rittenhousehotel.com). Understated luxury and terrific service.

Doubles from \$389. Seasonal and event specials and packages available.

### WHERE TO EAT

**Barbuzzo**, 110 S. 13th St.; (215) 546-9300, [www.barbuzzo.com](http://www.barbuzzo.com). Salad and veggie small plates, pasta, pizza, meat and cheese boards, and meat/seafood plates. Dishes \$6-\$18.

**Brigantessa**, 1520 E. Passyunk Ave.; (267) 318-7341, [www.brigantessaphila.com](http://www.brigantessaphila.com). Small plates, pizzas, pastas, wood-grilled meats, roasted chicken

and fish. Dishes \$6-\$28.

**Federal Donuts**, 1632 Sansom St.; (215) 665-1101, [www.federaldonuts.com](http://www.federaldonuts.com). Famous for its fried chicken and doughnuts.

### TO LEARN MORE

**Visit Philadelphia**, [www.visitphilly.com](http://www.visitphilly.com)

**Schuylkill River Trail** ([www.schuylkillrivertrail.com](http://www.schuylkillrivertrail.com)). Sixty-plus-mile bike/walking path in southeastern Pennsylvania managed by a coalition of groups along the length.