

Philly for Families



Savoring cheese steaks and Colonial history in the City of Brotherly Love

BY LUISA FREY GAYNOR

AFTER READING the *American Girl* series, my ten-year-old daughter, Alex, became fascinated with Colonial history. So when I heard that Philadelphia was refurbishing its historic sites and adding a new state-of-the-art National Constitution

Center, I figured there was no time like the present to visit the birthplace of our nation.

Although Philadelphia's historic district is often called America's Most Historic Square Mile, don't expect a Colonial Williamsburg-like setting. The city is still a bustling metropolis with a maze of one-way streets and noisy traffic. Yet in spite of this modern-day backdrop, the historic district — with its tiny brick houses, landmark attractions, and reenactors in period garb — brought the Colonial period to life for us. We spent our days following in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin, sampling Liberty Bell-shaped chocolates at Shane Candies, the nation's



oldest sweet shop (110 Market Street; 215-922-1048), and enjoying hours of hands-on fun at The Franklin Institute. Had my two-year-old son, Ethan, been with us, we would have made our way to the kid-oriented Please Touch Museum. Instead, our companions were my childhood friend Janine and her nine-year-old daughter, Krissy.

Since neither Janine nor I are fans of city driving, we stayed at the no-frills Holiday Inn Historic District for the first two nights and explored the Colonial sites on foot. Then we moved to a Hampton Inn (for lodging, see "If You Go" on page 61) near Ben Franklin Parkway's museum row for easy access to The Franklin Institute and other nearby attractions.

Independence Visitor Center

We started our tour of Independence National Historic Park at the new visitors' center, where short movies, user-friendly computers, and costumed docents gave us an overview of the area (corner of Sixth and Market; 215-965-2305; www.independencevisitorcenter.com). We also picked up the required timed tickets for Independence Hall.

Independence Hall

The main attraction of this stately 1748 structure is the Assembly Room, where both the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution were signed, in 1776 and



In summer, reenactors in period garb wander the historic area

1787, respectively. After passing through security, we took a 30-minute guided tour of the building, which was interesting yet brief enough to keep kids entertained (Chestnut Street between 5th and 6th streets; admission is free; 215-965-2305; www.nps.gov/inde).

Liberty Bell Center

Now in their new location across from Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell and its interpretive displays showcase the history of the monument and how it became a symbol of American freedom. Kids can also touch a cast of the inscription "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Because this is a popular attraction, plan on arriving early to avoid long lines (Chestnut and Sixth streets; admission is free; 215-965-2305; www.nps.gov/inde).

National Constitution Center

"I could have spent all day here! It was so much fun," Alex said after a morning of "edutainment" at the new center. For a primer, start



at the Kimmel Theater's short multimedia presentation, "Freedom Rising," which dramatically portrays the history of the U.S. Constitution. We were all moved by the live narration and footage from various social movements in America. Alex and Krissy also liked the interactive exhibits, especially a voting booth where they cast ballots for former presidents and the re-created swearing-in ceremony. In Signers' Hall, they added their John Hancock to a pretend Constitution (525 Arch Street; adults, \$6; kids ages 4 to 12, \$5; 215-409-6600; www.constitutioncenter.org).

Betsy Ross House

Historical displays in this pint-size brick house highlight the tal-

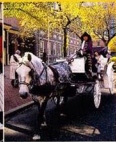
ents and ingenuity of the woman who, according to legend, made America's first flag. We also learned that Betsy Ross is rumored to have changed the original 13 stars from six points to five because they were easier to cut and faster to sew. Afterward, we watched a silly skit on Colonial manners in the courtyard (239 Arch Street; adults, \$3; kids ages 12 and under, \$2; 215-686-1254; www.betsyrosshouse.org).

Fireman's Hall Museum

Housed in a historic firehouse, this interactive museum features hand-operated fire trucks and other memorabilia. The girls also donned fire gear and pretended to slide down a pole (147 North 2nd Street; admission is by donation; 215-923-1438).

Franklin Court

Tucked between two busy streets, this small courtyard includes two Colonial buildings and a modern museum. Our first destination was the B. Franklin Post Office, the only place in the country that offers hand-stamped reproductions of Franklin's original postmark. Then we explored the steel-framed reconstruction of Benjamin Franklin's Colonial home. In the adjacent museum, we viewed some of Franklin's inventions and



From left: "Benjamin Franklin" shows off his printing press in Franklin Court; carriage drivers offer narrated tours of Society Hill

watched a film on the life of this multitalented statesman, inventor, and public advocate (316-318 Market Street; admission is free; 215-965-2305; www.nps.gov/inde).

Lights of Liberty Show

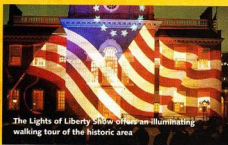
From May through October,

TRAVEL TIPS

- ★ For area information, call 800-537-7676. For lodging packages, go to www.gophila.com.
- ★ Philadelphia's compact historic area is easy to explore on foot. Stop by the Independence Visitor Center for a free map or download one online at www.gophila.com.
- ★ Check out Philadelphia CityPass for deals on tickets at six top attractions (adults, \$36; kids ages 3 to 11, \$23; 707-256-0490; www.citypass.com).
- ★ For a historical overview, take a narrated carriage tour of Society Hill (\$35 for up to four) or hop on the Philadelphia Trolley Works (adult daily pass, \$20; kids ages 6 to 12, \$5; 215-925-TOUR; www.phillytour.com).



Family Traveler City Guide



The Lights of Liberty Show offers an illuminating walking tour of the historic area

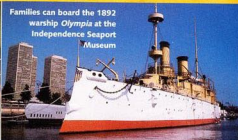
this audiovisual walking tour leads visitors past Colonial sites with images of paintings projected onto them. Headsets provide dramatic narration and sound, especially the kids' version, which is voiced by Whoopi Goldberg. According to Alex, "It made Philadelphia's Colonial history fun and easy to understand" (6th and Chestnut streets;

adults, \$17.76; kids under age 13, \$12; 877-462-1776; www.lightsofliberty.org).

Independence Seaport Museum

Although the maritime artifacts didn't interest the girls, the hands-on exhibits in the rest of the museum grabbed their attention. Their favorite was The Crane Game, which let them move

Families can board the 1892 warship *Olympia* at the Independence Seaport Museum



miniature cargo with the turn of a knob. Additional exhibits included a ship-welding simulator with a glove and "flying sparks" and a professional boat-building workshop. Outside on the Delaware River, we climbed aboard an 1892 warship and a World War II submarine (211 South Columbus Boulevard at Walnut Street; adults, \$9;

kids ages 3 to 12, \$6; 215-925-5439; www.phillysea.org).

The Franklin Institute/Fels Planetarium

Plan to spend at least half a day at this leading science museum complex. Our favorite exhibits, hands down, were those devoted to Franklin's inventions. We got to play a glass armonica,

LIVE THE FANTASY

Family Traveler City Guide

reach for books with an arm extender, and write *Mad Libs* à la Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*. We practically had to drag the girls away from the climbing wall and the virtual skiing and soccer in the Sports Challenge exhibit (20th Street and Ben Franklin Parkway; adults, \$12.75; kids ages 4 to 11, \$10; Imax shows are extra; Planetarium shows are free; 215-448-1200; www.fi.edu).

Before heading home, we drove through the historic district one last time to say "fare thee well" to a memorable trip filled with Colonial reenactments and hands-on fun.

Family travel writer Luisa Frey Gaynor is a columnist for Cruisemates.com.

IF YOU GO ...

WHERE TO STAY

Hampton Inn Center City Philadelphia: This well-situated hotel has a pool (1301 Race Street; nightly rates from \$109 for four; 215-665-9100; www.hamptoninn.com).

Holiday Inn Historic District: Although the hotel is slightly worn, the location can't be beat (400 Arch Street; nightly rates from \$129 for four; 215-923-8660; www.holiday-inn.com/philhistoric).

Residence Inn Center City: Nightly rates for rooms with kitchens include breakfast at this hotel near City Hall (1 East Penn Square; from \$150 for four; 215-557-0005; www.residenceinn.com).

WHERE TO EAT

Bourse Food Court: Enjoyable counter-service fare in a great location (111 South Independence Mall East; 215-625-0300; www.bourse-pa.com).

City Tavern: Waiters in period garb serve Colonial fare in a historic house (138 South 2nd Street; entrées from \$18; kids' menu from \$13; 215-413-1443; www.citytavern.com).

Down Home Diner: Arrive before 8 A.M. to avoid lines at this popular diner (Reading Terminal Market; breakfasts from \$3; cash only; 215-627-1955).

Geno's Steaks: A king of the cheese steak scene, Geno's

was a hit with our picky eaters (1219 South 9th Street; entrées from \$5.25; 215-389-0659; www.genosteaks.com).

Pizzicato: Dine in or take out at this brick-oven pizza place (248-50 Market Street; pizzas from \$8; 215-629-5527).

Reading Terminal Market: Set in a renovated train station, this lively market has a vast array of food stands selling everything from Asian dishes to Pennsylvania Dutch treats. The only thing harder than finding a place to sit during the busy lunch hour was deciding what to eat (12th and Arch streets; closed Sundays; 215-922-2317; www.readingterminalmarket.org).



IN NICE SMELLING CLOTHES

SUNKISSED BREEZE. FINE FRAGRANCE FOR LAUNDRY