

Family Travel, Day Trips and Places to Visit in Maryland

Destination: Philly

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Sometimes, you just need to get away. Philadelphia offers art, culture, history, great food, romantic parks and gorgeous city vistas. My inbox was overflowing. My husband's work seemed to be never-ending. School events in April and May came crashing down on us like an endless set of oceanic waves. Home repairs loomed, as did twelve weeks of endless summer with two tweens. I was one moment short of tapping out. And then I heard the wonderful words: "Let's Get Away. Just You and Me." But where to? We could only spare a long weekend, had to stay close to the children, and we needed things to do that we both enjoyed and that would take our hearts and minds off our everyday dramas. Romance and good food were also high on the list. A field trip to Philly fit the bill!

Philadelphia, known as the City of Brotherly Love and ground zero for cheesesteak sandwiches, is often overlooked as a cultured city and a romantic destination. Perhaps this is because folks in our area think of Philly in terms of elementary school history lessons or within the scope of a fierce sports rivalry. But whether you are seeking quiet strolls through leafy parks and long afternoons exploring Monet and Tiffany, or if you're looking for cosmopolitan restaurants and notable lounges, Philadelphia should be on your radar.

Getting There

Philadelphia is about a two-hour drive from Anne Arundel County, via Route 95. Commuter bus service Metrobus offers transportation from Rowe Boulevard in downtown Annapolis to the 30th Street Station in Philadelphia. There is also train service via Amtrak from BWI.

Where to Stay

Getting to Philadelphia is easy. But deciding where to stay is more complicated. Do you prefer the heart of American history, or would you prefer to be closer to cultural landmarks? Do you like a contemporary space with easy access to tourism, or do you prefer a sophisticated ambiance that puts romance at your fingertips? Two hotels fit the bill for either of these concerns.

[Loews Philadelphia Hotel](#) (1200 Market Street, Philadelphia) in City Center is close to Independence Hall (the Liberty Bell), Reading Terminal Market, the Delaware River waterfront and exclusive Rittenhouse Square. Although this hotel is best appreciated for its location in the heart of the historic area and for amenities like underground valet parking, proximity to public transportation, free WiFi and pet-friendly accommodations, Loews also offers some of the most romantic views in the city.



[The Logan](#) (One Logan Square, Philadelphia) is a restful and posh property characterized by a picture-perfect lobby, the Commons—a hip bar and lounge, a gorgeous grotto-like spa, and Assembly, a swank rooftop bar overlooking Logan Square’s tree-lined boulevards, parks and fountains. A member of the Hilton Curio Collection, the Logan is situated in the heart of Museum Mile and is across the street from cultural destinations like The Franklin Institute, Barnes Foundation, Free Library of Philadelphia, Rodin Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In an effort to be a destination for visitors and for locals alike, The Logan’s staff thought about how to bring Philadelphia’s culture and unique heritage to life inside the hotel. They achieved an authentic connection through art and education. A professional curator was hired to source more than 1,600 pieces of locally produced works of art that are exhibited in the lobby, meeting spaces, rooms and throughout all public spaces.

What To Do—Historic District

If you are a history buff, start in the historic district for a walkable tour of America’s most iconic landmarks: Benjamin Franklin’s home, the Betsy Ross House, Independence Hall, Independence National Historic Park (location of the Liberty Bell), and the recently opened Museum of the American Revolution.

After you’ve gotten your fix of American history, stroll through [Spruce Street Harbor Park](#). Named by Huffington Post as one of the World’s Best Urban Beaches, this warm-weather pop-up park boasts hammocks, twinkling lights, games, floating barges, food, beer gardens and a carnival-like atmosphere. If you get hungry, walk a few blocks to [Reading Terminal Market](#) for a plethora of great eats, including farm-fresh foods served diner-style, international foods, Amish specialties and plenty of picnic-worthy grab-and-go options. If you are dying for a cheesesteak, try Sonny’s, Jim’s Steaks, Pat’s King of Steaks, or Campo’s. Quiet nearby strolls include [Rittenhouse Square](#), one of the cities original five squares and the site of some of Philadelphia’s most exclusive homes, not to mention many top restaurants.

Romantic dining destinations include Bistrot La Minette on S. 6th St. Bistro Romano on Lombard Street, and [Moshulu](#), a four-masted ship docked on the Delaware River, but of course, there are many others for every palate and price-point.

What To Do—Cultural District

If you love architecture and art, be sure to stroll through down Market Street toward the Museum Mile. Start at Philadelphia City Hall on Market Street, then pass under the gorgeous arch of this enormous and ornate municipal building that is capped by a giant clock and the statue of William Penn. Just beyond is the first of many city fountains to be found in renovated public spaces.



Continue past the LOVE sculpture, then stop for a ride up to One Liberty Observation Deck, where you can canoodle while enjoying views across skyscrapers and down rivers. Take a right turn on

17th Street toward Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Logan Square, where you'll find many romantic green spaces, fountains and museums. While not necessarily a lengthy walk, there is much to be seen on this stroll. Be sure to stop to enjoy quiet places, pretty views, interesting works of art or architecture and perhaps a cappuccino or latte at any of the street-front cafes.

Other Romantic Destinations

It's nearly impossible to curate a list of all the romantic places you could visit in Philadelphia. But if romance to you means quiet moments of reflection, beautiful vistas, and the opportunity enjoy and reconnect with your partner, here are some other places to consider:

[Sister Cities Park](#), near Logan Square, has a café and benches under leafy trees perfect for a break before venturing into the museums. This park is near a Swann Memorial Fountain, the beautiful Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul and the AMOR statue, the quintessential selfie spot.



The [Azalea Garden](#) is opposite the Rocky steps of the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#). You can see over expansive landscaped gardens and down the river to Boathouse Row, a line of gloriously colored Victorian mansions along on the water. Boathouse Row is illuminated at night, an especially romantic sight.

The beautiful grounds of The Barnes Foundation are worthy of an amorous stroll, but once inside, you will be awestruck by the private collections of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and early Modern paintings. Since this is a private museum, the art is interspersed in eclectic ways that you won't find in a more typical space, an effect that makes a visit here even more special and unique.

An unusual destination that we enjoyed immensely is the [Eastern Penitentiary Historic Site](#). It's reasonable to overlook this attraction when planning a weekend for two, but believe me, you will be holding on to each other, laughing, and maybe even screaming. Eastern State Penitentiary was once the most famous and expensive prison in the world. Its vaulted cells, now in partial ruin and a not a little eerie, held many of America's most notorious criminals, including "Scarface" Al Capone. There is no doubt that Eastern is creepy—it's considered haunted, but it's also unusual, reasonably priced (\$12–\$14) entertainment that will give you memories to last a lifetime. Eastern is located near the Fairmount neighborhood, another area with plenty of bars, restaurants and tucked-away parks.

Race Street Pier on the Delaware River waterfront offers gorgeous sunset views and an opportunity to stroll hand-in-hand with a view of yoga in the park, occasional street music and fantastic people watching.

Fairmount Park is your chance to get away from it all, yet stay close to urban amenities. Much like Central Park in New York City, Fairmount offers frequent summer outdoors music and symphonic performances. A trolley runs through the park if you are too tired to walk.

Whispering Benches at Smith Memorial Park—Much like the Whispering Dishes on San Francisco's Embarcadero, your lover can sit on the stone bench near the Smith Memorial Arch while you sit on a bench across the street. When you whisper terms of endearment, it will magically be heard as if you were seated next to each other.

We've taken a field trip to Philadelphia twice, in our moments of need as a couple and as a parenting unit. Both visits have been enormously restorative; nevertheless, there is always more to see, to do and to learn.

—*Diana Love*