

HISTORICAL HOLIDAYS: GUIDEBOOKS FROM THE PAST

# PHILADELPHIA 1774

*Dan Cossins invites tourists to explore colonial Philadelphia, where attitudes towards Britain are less than favourable. Then he reveals what the city has to offer visitors in 2012*

ILLUSTRATION BY JONTY CLARK

**WHEN TO GO**

The cultural and political centre of the 13 American colonies welcomes visitors all year round. But keep in mind that winters are freezing, and summers get extremely hot and muggy. Far better to come in spring, when you'll get bright sunshine and cooler temperatures, or autumn, when the surrounding woodlands will be ablaze with colour.

**WHAT TO TAKE**

Most people here in Pennsylvania speak English in similar accents to those at home, so you won't need a phrase book. That said, you will hear some foreign tongues, too, as the city is home to colonists from Holland, the Habsburg empire and the Kingdom of Prussia. You may even hear

African languages, still used by some of the slaves.

**COSTS AND MONEY**

It's pounds, shillings and pence here. But be warned: Pennsylvania colonial coins are worth less than those from Britain. In fact, your coins will be very welcome here because there is a chronic shortage of hard currency. You'll also see the Spanish dollar, thanks to illicit trade with the West Indies. Shops are well-stocked with goods arriving at the dockyards on the Delaware river, though heavy British taxation makes imports from outside of the empire expensive.

**DANGERS AND ANNOYANCES**

You should be pretty safe. This is the City of Brotherly Love, after all. When night falls, the streets in the centre are well-lit with whale-oil lamps designed by Benjamin Franklin, one of Philadelphia's most dynamic citizens. A lasting peace was made with the native Lenape tribe almost a century ago, although relations have been more difficult lately. Still, you shouldn't get caught up in any violent raids.

**SIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES**

As the most populous city in colonial America, Philadelphia has plenty to see and do. Its founder, the Quaker William Penn, wanted to create a pleasant rural town rather than a cheek-by-jowl city, so he insisted on a grid system to ensure space and greenery. Today, even though many of the blocks have been carved up into smaller roads and alleys, it remains a pleasure to stroll around the well-ordered streets. Head east to experience the hustle and bustle around the shipyards on the Delaware.

To see an example of the confidence of the colony, stroll up to the impressive State House on Chestnut Street. You might encounter a gathering assembled in the yard to discuss the increasingly fractious relationship with Britain. It can get lively. Some colonists propose protesting about King George III's taxes, and a few even mention outright rebellion. A more unlikely scenario is hard to imagine.

As a place known for its religious tolerance, it's not surprising that Philadelphia



is graced with some fine churches. Perhaps most impressive is Christ Church, on Second Street. Founded by members of the Church of England, its 196-foot white steeple is the tallest building in North America. And don't miss John Bartram's garden on the banks of the Schuylkill river, where the botanist shows off hundreds of North American plant species.

**SLEEPING AND ACCOMMODATION**

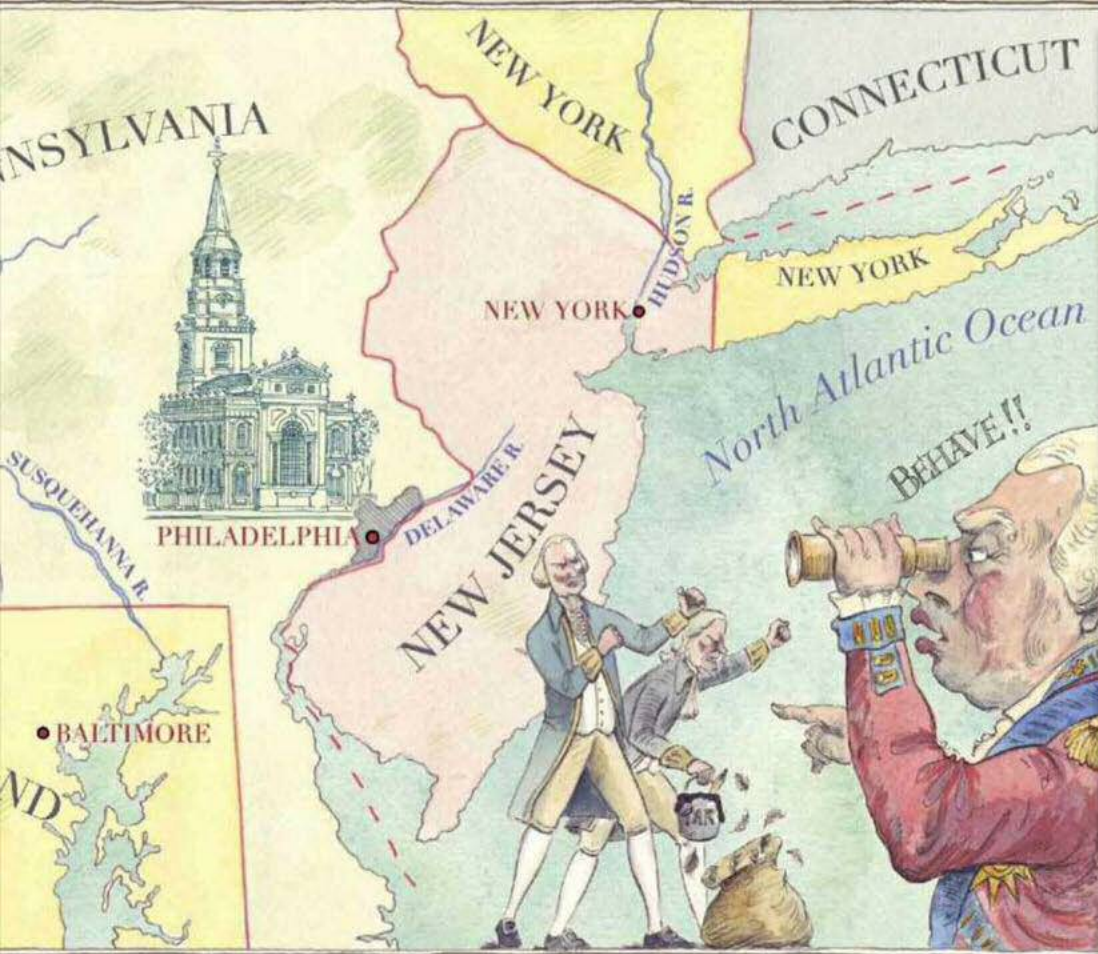
Expect a warm welcome at the city's modest inns, where simple comforts like a pipe, slippers and a tankard of ale are never far away. The beds can be hard and the linens coarse, but the room will be clean. Those run by Dutch innkeepers are the cleanest.

*You might encounter a gathering assembled to discuss the fractious relationship with Britain*

# Philadelphia today



The Philadelphia Museum of Art in the foreground, flanked by the Schuylkill river



AS THE CRADLE of the American revolution and the first capital of the new nation, Philadelphia is the birthplace of the United States. Tourists flock to see **Independence Hall** (formerly the State House), where the founding fathers signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as well as the symbolic **Liberty Bell** and the **National Constitution Centre**. The historic district has much more to offer, though, so an organised walking tour or a ride in a horse-drawn carriage is recommended.

Today, Philadelphia has emerged as a confident and vibrant city, the fifth most populous in the States, with a skyline of shiny high-rises and plenty of handsome architecture. The renaissance hasn't solved all the problems, but it has transformed **Centre City** into an attractive urban hub that can feel distinctly European, with restaurants, coffee shops and bars spilling onto wide pavements, and cyclists zipping up and down the leafy streets. **Rittenhouse Square** boasts some of the ritziest places to eat and drink.

**The Philadelphia Museum of Art**, where Rocky sprinted up the famous steps in the film of the same name, houses an impressive permanent collection. **The Barnes Museum**, a recent addition, is a must-see for Impressionist fans. Beyond lies **Fairmount Park**, a vast green space featuring a traffic-free riverside path up to the **Wissahickon Valley**, a densely forested gorge.

### If you like this...

For more colonial and revolutionary history, **Boston** packs a punch. If you want a southern perspective, try **Charleston, South Carolina**, or **Savannah, Georgia**.

### EATING

Roast beef, leg of mutton or ham and cabbage will keep homesickness at bay. For something different, head to the Blue Anchor Inn and get stuck into a bowl of green turtle soup or squirrel stew, both local favourites. Eating on the move? Try the hot buckwheat cakes on the street or pick up a cinnamon bun, much loved by the Dutch.

### DRINKING

This is a city of more than a hundred taverns, so you're never far from cheap drink and convivial conversation. In fact, a tippling tour is among the best ways to get the flavour of the place. Start at City Tavern on 2nd and Walnut, favoured by John

Adams of Massachusetts and several other delegates sent here to discuss the 'British situation'. Alternatively, try one of the sailors' haunts around the wharves, where you're guaranteed ribaldry and, perhaps, a little danger.

Then sober up at the London Coffee House on High Street. Philadelphians are hooked on tea, though the king's reaction to recent events in Boston has led to a shortage.

### ENTERTAINMENT

Despite the city's Quaker beginnings, sports and gambling enthusiasts will not be disappointed. You won't have to search hard to see cock fighting or bull baiting, and the horse races may well find you, as impromptu dashes

through the streets sometimes result from idle boasts and bravado (much to the vexation of the city government). Follow Race Street to its western end for organised versions.

Sadly, a night at the theatre is harder to arrange. In years gone by there was a lively scene, but the Provincial Congress recently passed a motion to discourage such amusements.

### GETTING AROUND

Philadelphia rewards the pedestrian. You could always rent a horse from a friendly landlord, though, or splash out on a rented carriage to arrive somewhere in style. **H**

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