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Instant Guide to Philadelphia Independence Square

4 hours on the go

Fodor's



Philadelphia has a good claim to being the birthplace of the country: it is here that the Declaration of Independence was written and adopted, the Liberty Bell was rung, the Constitution was framed, the capital of the United States was established, and the nation's flag was sewn by Betsy Ross. Nowhere

is the spirit of those miraculous early days more palpable than along the cobbled streets of the city's most historic district, the area around Independence Square. *Everything* here is a highlight. Our top picks will give you the best Independence Square experience.

GET HERE FAST

Your best bet is to walk to the historic area, take a taxi, or hop on a SEPTA bus (Route 9 is particularly convenient). From May through October, purple Phlash trolleys stop at 27 downtown sights, including many listed here.

DON'T MISS

■ **Liberty Bell:** One of the country's most powerful symbols of freedom, the bell, replete with its famous crack, now sits in a dedicated center and still hangs from its original yoke. The bell beckoned Philadelphians to the State House yard to hear the first reading of the Declaration of Independence.

■ **Independence Hall:** In this relatively unimposing brick building on Chestnut Street both the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were composed, argued over, and eventually signed. Here, too, George Washington was appointed commander in chief.

■ **Betsy Ross House:** Whether Betsy Ross actually sewed the first Stars and Stripes flag is up for debate, but her house is undeniably one of the city's most popular attractions. Built in 1760, it's a great example of a Colonial house, and the rooms overflow with interesting artifacts, including Betsy's reading glasses and family Bible.



■ **Lights of Liberty:** The hour-long nighttime show dramatizes the events that led up to the American Revolution, culminating at Independence Hall on July 8, 1776, with the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. Wearing a wireless headset, take a half-mile walk and view high-definition five-story projections on the area's historic buildings.

QUICK HITS

■ **Once Upon a Nation Storytellers:** In summer, look for storytellers who set up camp at 13 benches throughout Philadelphia's historic area. Stroll from bench to bench for a free, interactive tour during which stories of colonial Philadelphia are related by actors in character.

■ **The Dream Garden:** The lobby of the Curtis Center has a great treasure: a 15-by-50-foot glass mosaic mural, the *Dream Garden*, based on a Maxfield Parrish painting and executed by the Louis C. Tiffany Studios in 1916. The work's 260

colors and 100,000 pieces of opalescent hand-fired glass laced with gold leaf make it perhaps the finest Tiffany mural in the world.

SHOPPING BLITZ

■ **AKA Music:** The largest independent record store in the city stands opposite a church where George and Martha Washington once worshipped. If CDs and vinyl had been invented, you can bet the First Couple would have shopped here.

■ **Bourse:** Across the street from the Liberty Bell is this elegantly restored 1895 commodities-exchange building. Get your souvenir fix at Best of Philadelphia inside, with more than 100 items from Ben Franklin key chains to miniature Liberty Bells.

■ **Viv Pickle:** This make-your-own-hand-bag boutique offers such a huge menu of shapes, sizes, handles, and fabrics for exteriors and linings, it's hard to walk away with just one. There's something for everyone from prep to hipster.

IN-THE-KNOW

From March through December, free, timed tickets from the Independence Visitor Center are required for entry to **Independence Hall**. Tickets can also be reserved by calling 877/444-6777 or by logging on to www.recreation.gov.

