



36 HOURS

Philadelphia

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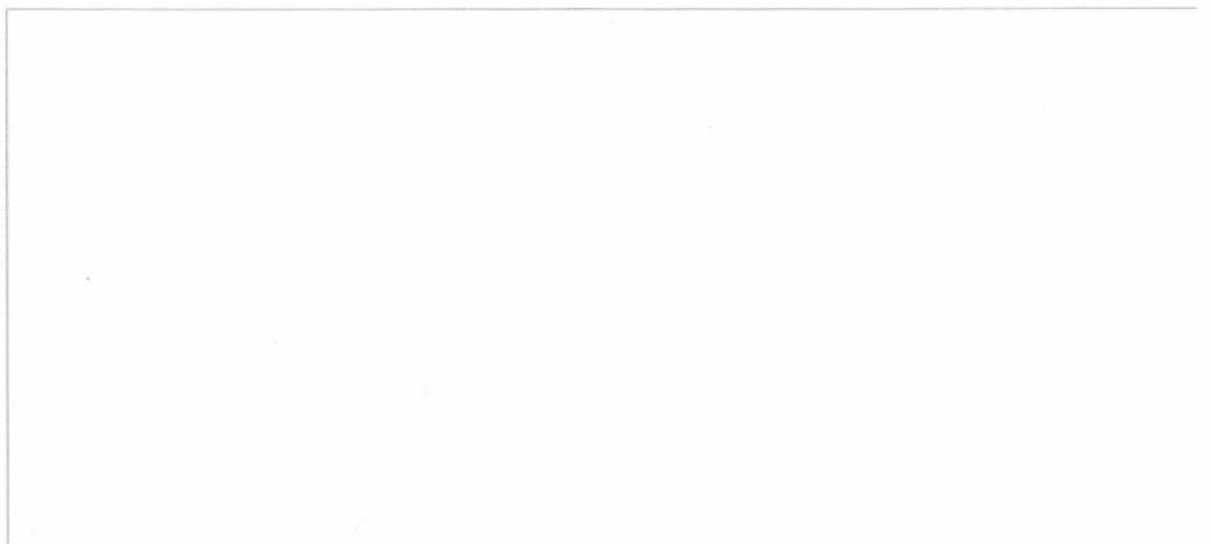
**By Ingrid K. Williams**

**Photographs by Caroline Gutman**

April 27, 2023

Philadelphians can be tough on their hometown, griping about the traffic, the crime, the long-suffering sports teams. But these quibbles are mere blips compared to the attractions that await visitors: the colonial charm of the Old City, a barbacoa breakfast in the historic Italian Market, glittering mosaics on South Street and the fine restaurants in Fishtown. Long known for its food, the city now takes its meals outdoors — a pandemic holdover — in leafy new courtyards and gardens. For those visiting soon, spring is synonymous with street festivals: There's the food-and-drink smorgasbord along East Passyunk Avenue; a wild homemade-vehicle race at the Kensington Derby and Arts Festival; a fashionable soiree with live music on Rittenhouse Square; and the annual greased pole climbing competition at the Italian Market Festival.

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# Recommendations

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## Key stops

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- The **Barnes Foundation** showcases an extraordinary collection of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modern art.
- **Suraya**, a restaurant in the Fishtown neighborhood, serves modern Lebanese cuisine and has a serene courtyard.
- The **Magic Gardens** is a glittering, mosaicked art environment created by the local artist Isaiah Zagar.
- The **Bok Building**, a decommissioned school, is today a creative workplace with a half-dozen shops, a bakery and a rooftop bar (among many other things).

## Museums and attractions

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- **Schuylkill River Trail** has an over-water boardwalk and riverside path.
- **Cherry Street Pier** is an old pier building that now houses artist studios in stacked shipping containers.
- **Independence Hall** offers tours of the building where the founding fathers signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- **Elfreth's Alley** is a cobblestone lane with 18th-century houses and colonial vibes.
- **Eastern State Penitentiary** offers audio tours through the former prison where inmates included the Chicago gangster Al Capone.
- **Wissahickon Valley Park**, in northwestern Philadelphia, has miles of trails winding through a wooded gorge.

## Restaurants and bars

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- **Middle Child Clubhouse** is a rollicking new hangout with imaginative food and cocktails.
- **Bob and Barbara's Lounge** is a Center City dive bar with live music every weekend.

- **Mighty Bread Co.** is a South Philly bakery with a new side-street cafe and great breakfast sandwiches.
- **Korshak Bagels** is a popular new destination for sourdough bagels and special schmears.
- **South Philly Barbacoa**, in the historic Italian market, serves steaming bowls of consomé, a Mexican-style broth.
- **Essen Bakery** offers a densely swirled chocolate-halva babka.
- **Machine Shop** is a bakery that sells baguettes and orange-cardamom morning buns.
- **Bok Bar** is an open-air rooftop with food pop-ups, cultural events, live music and great views.
- **Eeva** is a new all-day cafe, bakery, wine shop and restaurant serving wood-fired pizzas.
- **Human Robot**, a Kensington craft brewery, offers classic European-style lagers and juicy American I.P.A.s.
- **Martha** is a cozy bar with a fireplace and a dreamy enclosed patio strung with lights.
- **Dalessandro's**, a steak shop in Roxborough, makes one of the best cheesesteaks in the city.

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## Shopping

- **Brickbat Books** is a used-book store with artist monographs, illustrated children's books, poetry and literature.
- **Moon + Arrow** is a serene home goods store in the Queen Village neighborhood.
- **Philly Vintage Bazaar** stocks vintage clothing, accessories and pieces made by local artisans.
- **Baby Tooth** is a shop with design pieces and illustrations made in the Bok building.
- **Rider Ceramics** is a studio and shop with glossy iridescent vases.
- **Greenly Plant Co.** is a plant store that also sells candy-colored planters.

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## Where to stay

- The **Lokal Hotel** is a beautifully renovated brick townhouse on a tree-lined street in the Old City. The six apartment-style lofts have peacock-blue kitchens, salvaged-oak floors and midcentury-modern furniture. Double rooms from \$297.
- In Center City, the **Guild House Hotel** opened in 2021 with 12 sumptuous guest rooms in a landmark rowhouse that was formerly home to the New Century Guild, a women's support organization founded in suffrage-era Philadelphia. Doubles from \$229.
- **La Reserve Bed and Breakfast**, near Rittenhouse Square, occupies a pair of 19th-century townhouses with a dozen guestrooms, some with shared bathrooms, and classic décor. Doubles from \$119 (with shared bath), breakfast included.
- For **short-term rentals**, consider the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, with its central location, beautiful brownstones and high-end shops. Or look in Bella Vista, a walkable residential area on the border of central and south Philly with great dining and the historic open-air Italian Market.

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## Getting around

- Having a car can be handy — despite traffic and the hassle of parking — but not necessary. Much of central Philadelphia is **walkable**, and SEPTA, the public transit system, has an extensive network of **train, subway, trolley** and **bus lines**. **Taxis** and **ride-hailing services** like Uber and Lyft are also plentiful.

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## Itinerary

### Friday

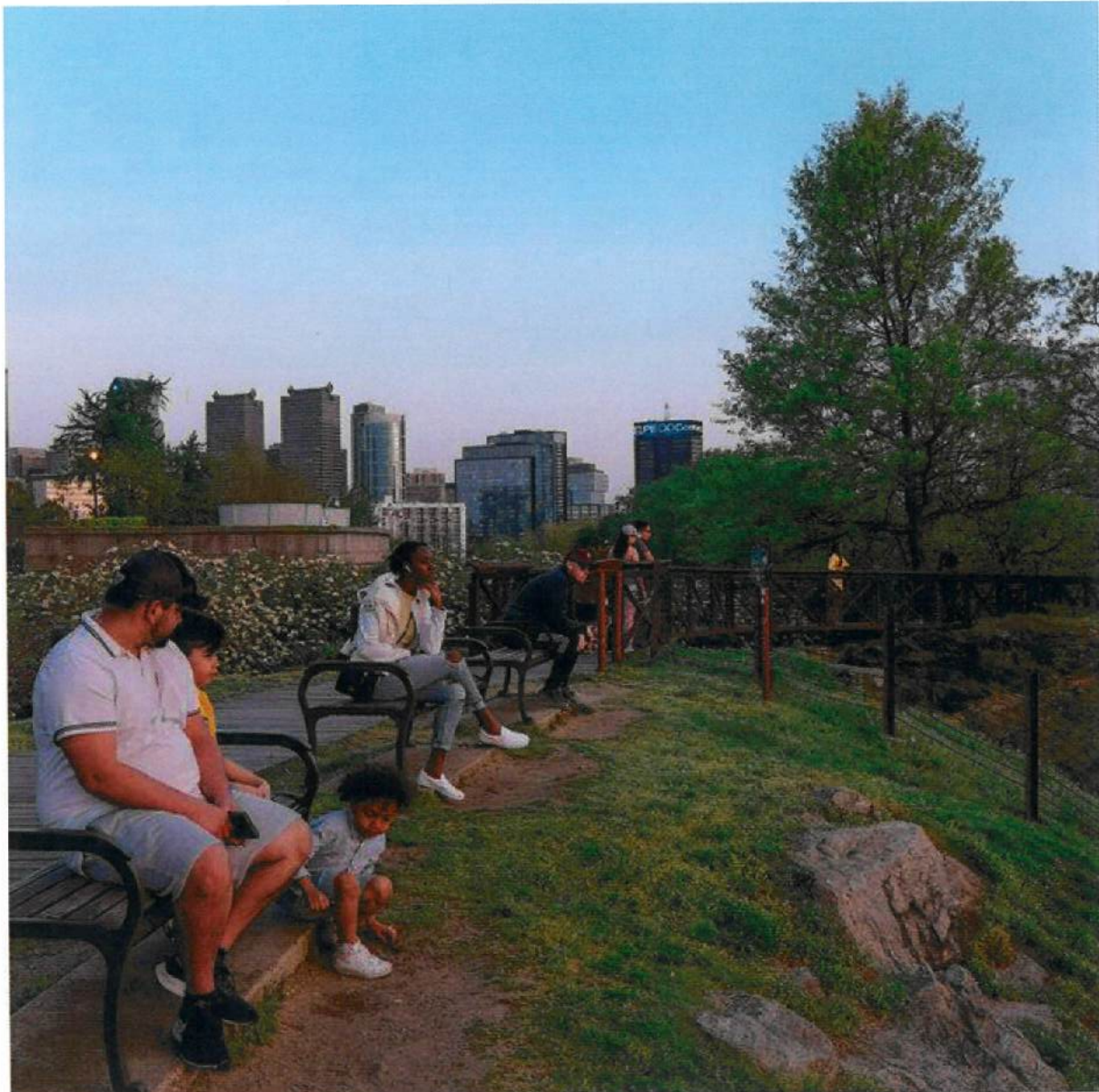
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2 p.m. **Walk the waterfront**

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Take in views of the city skyline on a sunny stroll along the Schuylkill River Trail. Start near the South Street Bridge and walk north on the over-water boardwalk and riverside path, past David McShane's enormous "The Phillies Mural" and the colonnaded Philadelphia Museum of Art, to Boathouse Row where crew teams launch from the bankside rowing clubs. Should it rain, head for the post-industrial Delaware riverfront with its

own (albeit less scenic) waterside path, and take cover at the repurposed Cherry Street Pier. Inside a cavernous old pier building, stacked shipping containers now house studios for photographers, painters, graphic designers and sculptors. Peek inside these workspaces (many are open to the public) and the back garden facing the Ben Franklin Bridge.



Schuylkill River Trail

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4 p.m. **Seek art connections**

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Far more than a weekend is needed to explore the world-class cultural and scientific institutions lining the Benjamin Franklin Parkway — the city’s “Museum Mile” — which includes the Rodin Museum, the Franklin

Institute and the Philadelphia Museum of Art with its cinematic steps (and triumphant Rocky statue). For now, start at the Barnes Foundation and its singular collection of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modern art (admission \$25). Paul Cézanne watercolors hang above West African masks, a Henri Matisse masterpiece rests beneath an iron hasp, and works by Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee are grouped with various antique hinges and a surly cat painting, artist unknown — eclectic arrangements meant to highlight connections across different cultures and media. On the first Friday of the month, the museum hosts live music performances from chamber orchestras and jazz ensembles (from 6 p.m.).



Barnes Foundation



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7 p.m. **Feast in the northeast**

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The formerly working-class Fishtown neighborhood now has some of the city's most exciting restaurants. Modern Lebanese cuisine is the draw at Suraya, a beautiful space with patterned-tile floors, glowing pendant lamps and a leafy rear courtyard where celebratory groups gather around dipping bowls of hummus; crisp za'atar manoushe, a flatbread; and shareable plates of slow-roasted lamb and muhammara-brushed kebabs. (Set dinner only on weekends, \$75 per person.) The mood is even more festive at Middle Child Clubhouse, a rollicking new hangout where the imaginative food — "okonomiyaki-style" latkes with Kewpie mayo and bonito flakes (\$3), broiled oysters with 'nduja butter (\$15) and snickerdoodle crème brûlée (\$10) — is as fun as the cocktail list, with pitchers of grapefruit margaritas (\$65) to get the party started.



Middle Child Clubhouse

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9 p.m. **Jazz up the night**

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After dinner, head to Center City, downtown Philly, for some live music, and make it jazz, since this is the city where Billie Holiday was born, where John Coltrane studied music and where Dizzy Gillespie played the local clubs. Every Friday, Bob and Barbara's Lounge hosts the Crowd Pleasers, a long-standing band playing toe-tapping jazz and "liquor drinkin' music" from 9 p.m. (no cover). Arrive early to nab a table near the band and consider sampling "the Special": a shot of Jim Beam and a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon (\$4), a popular combo you can order at bars across the city (also called "the Citywide") that's said to have originated at this classic dive.



Get your bearings on the Schuylkill River Trail, which offers city skyline views and takes you past David McShane's enormous "Phillies Mural" and the colonnaded Philadelphia Museum of Art."

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## Saturday

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9 a.m. **Sample South Philly's smorgasbord**

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Whatever you wake up craving, South Philly's got it. Want an egg sandwich with sharp cheddar, arugula, bacon and peperonata on a soft sweet-potato bun (\$11)? Head to the new side-street cafe of the popular bakery Mighty Bread Co. Craving lox and a schmear? Join the queue waiting to be invited inside Korshak Bagels, opened in 2021 by the charmingly idiosyncratic baker and poet Phil Korshak, whose devoted followers come for long-fermented sourdough bagels (from \$2.25) and special schmears made with goat milk and mozzarella brine. For something soothing, nothing beats a steaming bowl of rich consomé, a Mexican-style broth, with rice and garbanzo beans (\$4) at South Philly Barbacoa. And for something sweet, approach the window at Essen Bakery for the densely swirled chocolate-halva babka (\$4).



A weekday egg sandwich at Mighty Bread Co.

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10 a.m. **Tour a magic garden**

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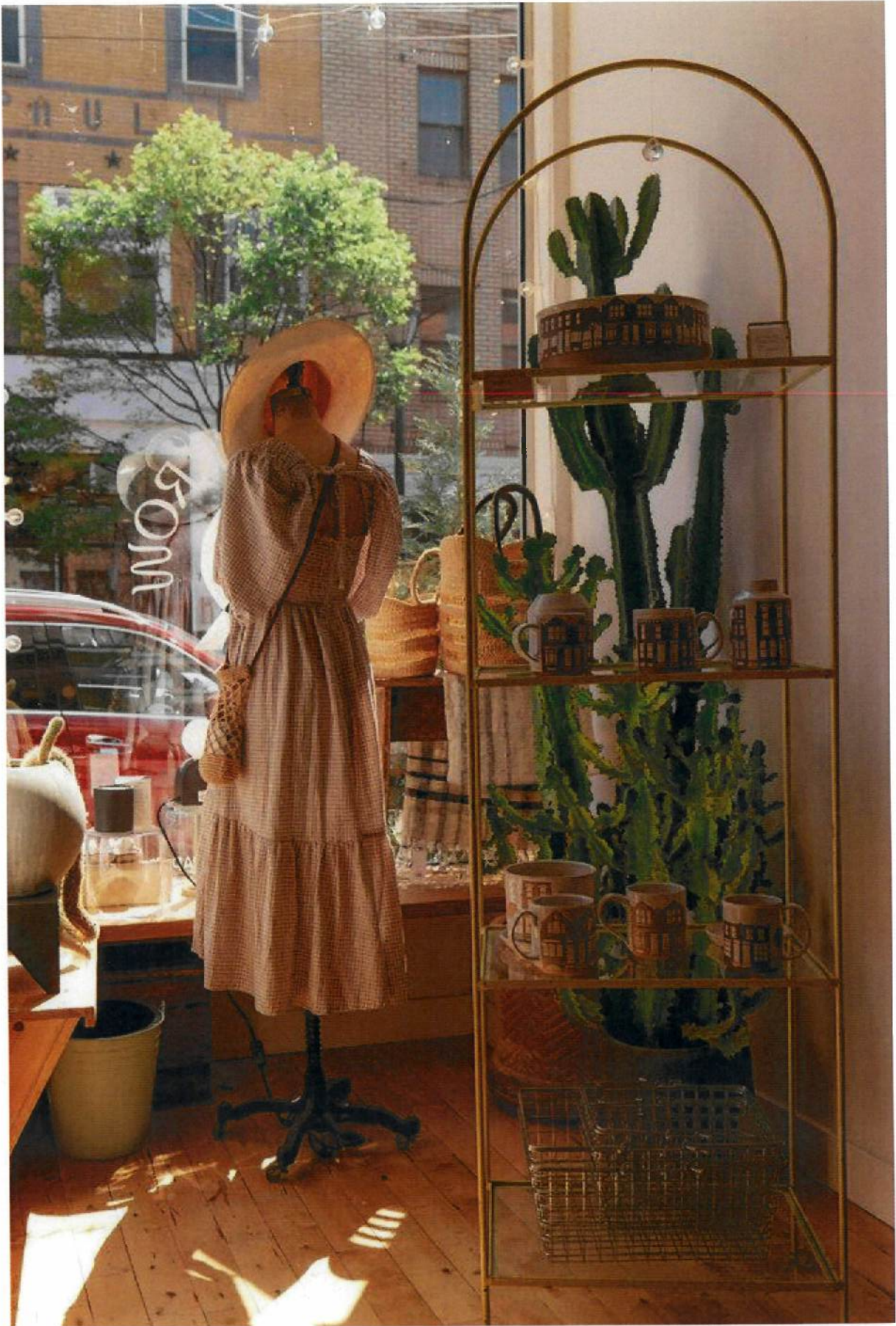
The local artist Isaiah Zagar has spent decades beautifying the streets of Philadelphia, installing glittering, kaleidoscopic mosaics on hundreds of facades, both private and public. His masterpiece, arguably, is the Magic Gardens, a formerly abandoned lot on South Street that is entirely encrusted with bits of mirror, crushed ceramics, glass bottles, bicycle wheels, found objects and original folk art. Explore this psychedelic art environment, with its maze of tunnels and excavated grottoes, on a guided group tour that highlights the artist's many recurring motifs and hidden messages. Morning tours (\$25) begin an hour before the site officially opens and include a visit to a mesmerizing mosaicked basement gallery that is otherwise closed to visitors.

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12 p.m. **Shop for local treasures**

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A short walk east, the Queen Village neighborhood is home to small independent shops stocked with clothing, books and art that you're unlikely to find anywhere else. Browse the shelves of Brickbat Books, a used-book store with creaky wood-plank floors and a select mix of artist monographs, illustrated children's books, poetry and literature. Then stop at Moon + Arrow, a serene home goods store filled with soft knitwear, organic elixirs, wooden toys and jewelry handmade from recycled metals. Next door, Philly Vintage Bazaar is the place to find hand-painted leather jackets, 1950s pin-up-style dresses, bejeweled collar clips made by a local artisan or a 1980s Budweiser-print bikini.



Moon + Arrow

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2 p.m. **Revisit history**

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Historic monuments, colonial brick buildings and the spirit of democracy await on Independence Mall, home to the Liberty Bell and the National Constitution Center. Begin at Independence Hall, as the nation did, inside the steepled Georgian-style building where the founding fathers debated and signed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (and where the basement once served as the city dog pound). National park rangers lead regular tours; timed tickets required (\$1 processing fee). Afterward stroll through the adjacent Old City neighborhood in search of more colonial vibes, past the Betsy Ross House, where the first American flag was said to have been sewn, and down quaint cobblestone lanes, such as Elfreth's Alley, where 18th-century houses still fly the Revolution-era flag.





Independence Hall

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4 p.m. **Go back to school**

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The Bok Building, a 348,000-square-foot decommissioned school, is today the creative workplace for more than 200 designers, architects, artists, chefs, musicians, jewelers and entrepreneurs in South Philly. Early in the day, neighborhood folks swing by for fresh-baked baguettes and orange-cardamom morning buns from the award-winning Machine Shop bakery. But arrive in the afternoon to explore the wares inside the half-dozen first-floor shops: glass design pieces and illustrations made in the building at Baby Tooth, glossy iridescent vases at Rider Ceramics, and candy-colored planters at Greenly Plant Co. After 5 p.m., head to the eighth floor for a drink at Bok Bar, an open-air rooftop with food pop-ups, cultural events, live music and an unbeatable view across the city.

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7:30 p.m. **Try a pie**

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It should surprise no one that the pizza in Philly, home to one of the country's largest Italian-American communities, is excellent. These days, you're spoiled for choice, from the old-school margherita at Angelo's in South Philly, to the pillowy tomato pie at Pizzeria Beddia in Fishtown. A relative newcomer to the scene is Eeva, which opened in Kensington in 2020, first as a take-out-only operation. Today the light-filled space is an all-day cafe, bakery, wine shop and restaurant serving wood-fired pies made with naturally leavened dough. Highlights of a recent dinner included a fiery bowl of Italian butter beans and Calabrian chili atop a thick slice of house sourdough, and a perfectly blistered pepperoni pizza drizzled with local honey. Dinner for two, without drinks, about \$50.

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10 p.m. **Grab a neighborhood nightcap**

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Stay in the neighborhood for drinks, starting a few blocks north at Human Robot. This Kensington craft brewery produces both classic European-style lagers and juicy American I.P.A.s, which are poured in their taproom, an industrial space with a long wooden bar and exposed brick walls. Ask a bartender about the Milktube (\$3), a 10-ounce glass of chuggable, creamy

foam said to be inspired by a traditional Czech pour (it's surprisingly dense and smooth, like the steamed froth of a cappuccino). Or continue a bit farther north to Martha, a cozy bar with a crackling fireplace, old movies projected on the wall and a dreamy enclosed patio strung with lights. To drink, try the smoky lapsang-tea-infused Negroni (\$11) or choose from the selection of natural wines and craft beers on tap.

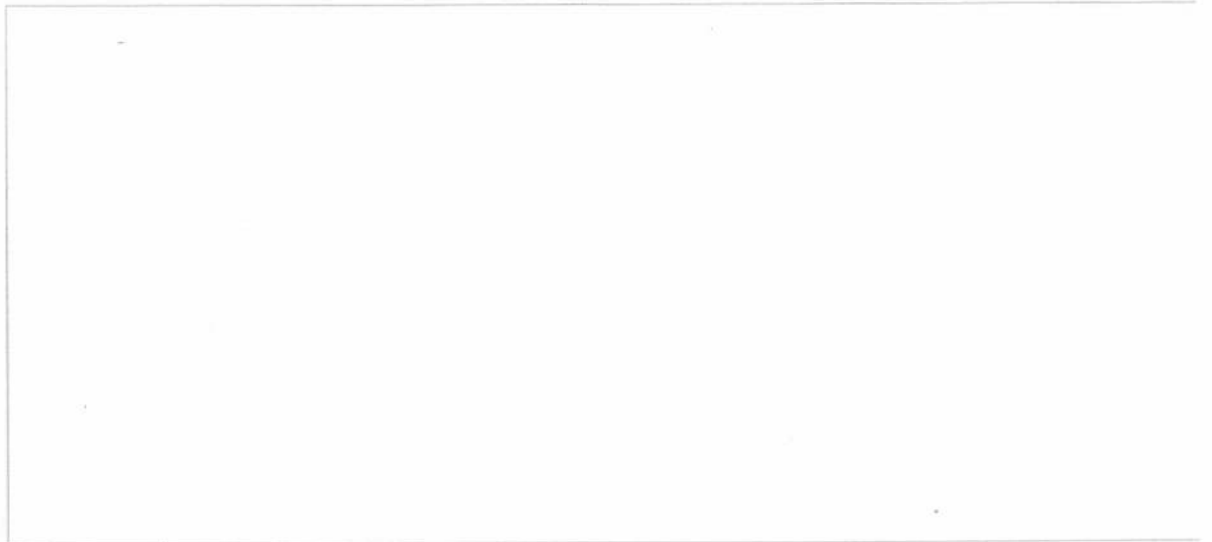


Martha



People relax in Cira Green, an urban park that opened along the Schuylkill River in 2015.

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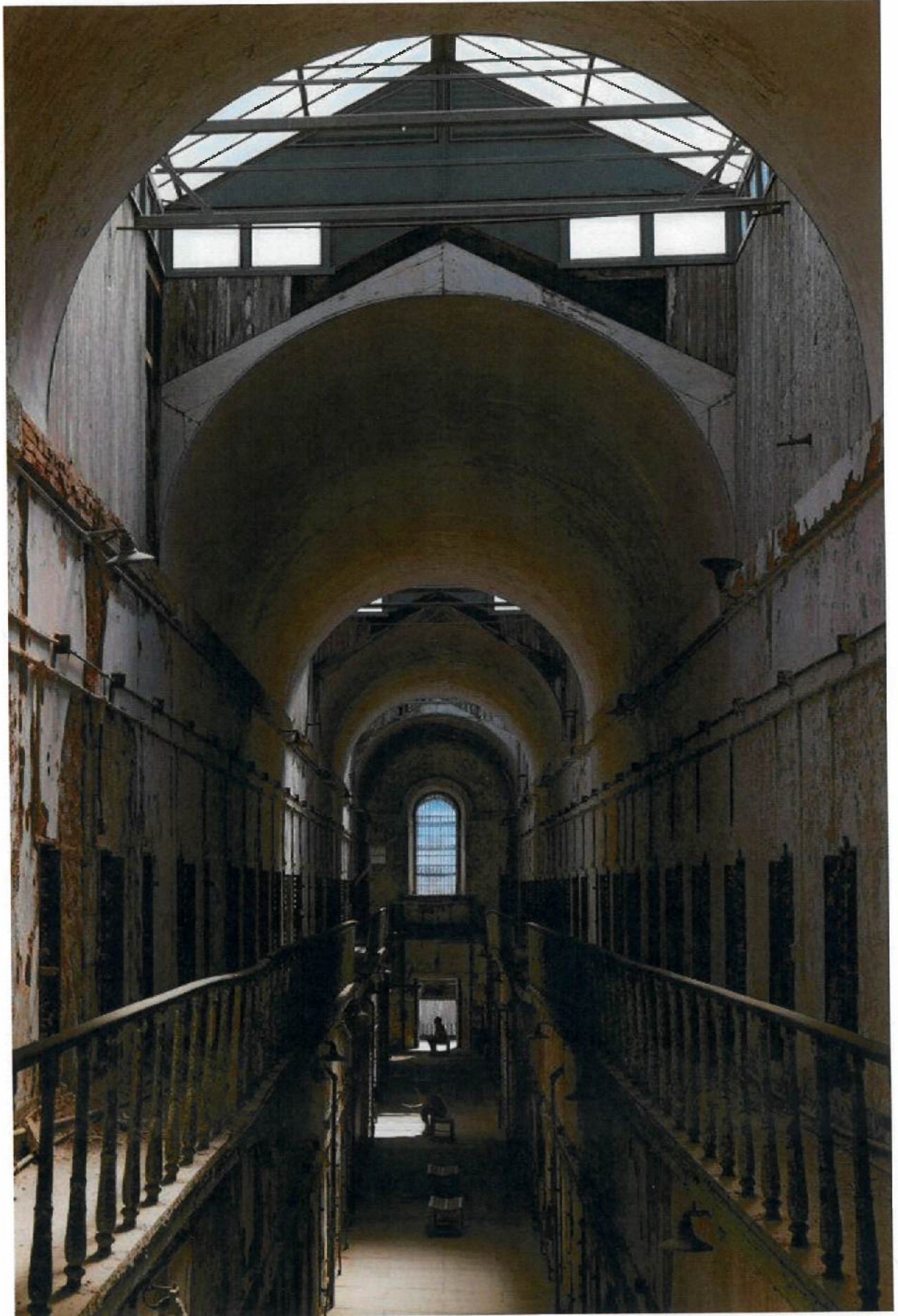
## Sunday

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10 a.m. **Spend time in the pen**

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It's hard to fathom that Eastern State Penitentiary, a crumbling, neo-Gothic compound occupying a full city block in the Fairmount neighborhood, was founded on progressive principles of prison reform when it opened in 1829. The now-dilapidated prison, which closed in 1971, pioneered solitary confinement cells (intended to rehabilitate prisoners) and radial floor plans, both copied by prisons worldwide. Today, the site is better known for its (supposed) paranormal activity and infamous former inmates, including the Chicago gangster Al Capone. On a 40-minute audio tour, step inside eerie cells and hear the stories of those who served time in the overcrowded cell blocks. Don't miss the video installation #BlackGirlhood, by the filmmaker Dehanza Rogers, which examines the criminalization of young Black girls, along with other exhibits exploring the fraught, compounding issues of the criminal justice system today. Admission, \$21.



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12:30 p.m. **Get the best steak**

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Every Philadelphian has an opinion about where to get the best cheesesteak, and those of us with family roots in northwestern Roxborough are loyal to Dalessandro's. Not much has changed at this steak shop since it opened on this corner in 1961, but the pandemic did force a pivot to take-out only, which is still in place. Luckily the steaks are as good as ever. Instead of the usual thinly sliced meat, Dalessandro's ribeye is finely chopped and suffused with molten cheese (American is standard), and the roll is soft but never soggy. (I like mine topped with marinara.) Call ahead to avoid the long lines. Take your steak to the leafy Wissahickon Valley Park, a short drive away, where you can eat on a bench beside the creek, then hike on miles of trails winding through the wooded gorge.