

10 USA TODAY 10 BEST

Philadelphia's Best Museums: Your Opportunity to Explore, Learn and Share



By **Sharon Rigney** Philadelphia Local Expert 2/2/16

Heading out for a day in the city often means visiting a museum, especially if you're an out of townner or hosting such a guest. Fortunately, Philadelphia boasts a vibrant museum scene, with topics for all ages and interests. Got an art lover in your crowd? Make your way to the iconic Philadelphia Museum of Art for beauty inside and out of the building. You can also couple your visit with a trip to the neighboring **Rodin Museum** for a look at beautiful sculptures. Your group comprised of creature-loving kids? Nothing beats the **Academy of Natural Sciences** for the younger set. Philadelphia boasts the ability to entertain, educate and enrich the lives of all kinds of visitors through its many museum choices. Many are located in Center City, while others offer cultural experiences nearby. Some take most of the day to explore, or even multiple trips, while others can be explored quite well in an afternoon. None are the same, and all offer visitors a way to see the city, themselves, their world and their history in a new light. Take family, both young and old, as well as friends, coworkers, guests, and dates to somewhere new, or re-experience and old favorite for a step wonderful back into history.

National Museum of American Jewish History

Founded in 1976, this museum is devoted to preserving and sharing American Jewish history. An abundance of artifacts charts the more than 360 years of Jewish culture in the States, elucidating domestic and work lives, culture, immigration, sports, and much more. Photos and interactive exhibits present an encompassing experience, addressing politics, religion, Jewish institutions, and individual profiles of people who distinguished themselves and their heritage. The museum (a Smithsonian affiliate) moved to an expansive new building in late 2010, directly across from the Liberty Bell and welcomes tourists and locals alike to come in and experience American history from a unique and different vantage point. (215-923-3811)

Academy of Natural Sciences

This internationally-renowned museum dates back to 1812 and serves as a public forum for environmental research and education. Numerous interactive exhibits are particularly fun for children, and include live animals, dinosaurs, and insects. Greeting visitors when they enter are huge dinosaur skeletons, which are showstopping in their reconstructed size. Throughout the rest of the four floors of the building are exhibits and displays and interactive opportunities for kids to discover and learn about animals. Many are featured at times as part of live demonstrations so that children can see and hear and often touch the creatures that are being talked about. (215-299-1000)

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

With one of the best archeology and anthropology collections in the United States, this museum boasts over 30 galleries displaying items from around the world. Exhibits range from Egyptian mummies to Greek coins, from musical instruments from Africa to Native American totem poles. The collections were enhanced by expeditions run by the school to various areas, and even contain several world famous items. Hands-on exhibits appeal to the kids, and there's a museum shop just for youngsters, as well. The café, overlooking the courtyard garden, is a great place for lunch or a quick snack. The museum opened in 1899 and even its building is lovely to look at, both inside and out. (215-898-4000, 215-898-4890)

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

The building itself is a National Landmark and a worthy example of American architecture. The museum offers a variety of works by renowned American artists such as Andrew Wyeth, Mary Cassatt, and Thomas Eakins, as well as contemporary artists like Faith Ringgold and Richard Diebenkorn. The noteworthy collection features 18th through 21st century paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. Tours here are free with your paid admission. The museum is internationally known for its collections of 19th and 20th century art, including sculptures, paintings and works on paper. In its archives are housed important items related to the study of art history, museums and training. (215-972-7600, 215-972-2025)

Mutter Museum

Though it's officially called The College of Physicians of Philadelphia Mutter Museum, it's best known by its nicknames, the Mutter Museum or just the Museum of Medical Oddities. Whatever you choose to call it, this is not an attraction for the faint-of-stomach. Unborn fetuses in jars, petrified body parts, conjoined twins and, as part of an exhibition, Albert Einstein's brain, are just a few of the artifacts that chronicle the fascinating and sometimes gruesome story of medicine through the ages. One thing is for sure, however, you won't see anything like it anywhere else! Those interested in science and medicine will be especially fascinated. You

certainly won't forget this place once you've visited! (215-563-3737)

Rodin Museum

This museum, located on between the Barnes Foundation and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is known mostly as a sculpture museum. It is solely devoted to the works of Auguste Rodin and the largest collection of his works outside of Paris. It including bronzes, plaster studies, drawings, and prints. There are 124 sculptures, including bronze casts of "The Burghers of Calais," "Eternal Springtime," "The Gates of Hell," and Rodin's seminal work, "The Thinker." The museum is small, but powerful, and tours run regularly. Being small, it doesn't get lots of crowds, making it a great place to slow down and enjoy the works. (215-763-8100)

African — American Museum in Philadelphia

Built on the grounds of a historic black community, and just a few blocks from the Liberty Bell, this is the country's first museum devoted to African-American history and culture, with more than 400,000 items on display. Exhibits cover the arts, education, the Civil Rights Movement, family life, medicine, politics, sports, and technology as these issues relate to African-American culture. Frequent lectures, workshops, performances, and seminars take place at the museum, as well. Children may be interested in the section dedicated to how stars of the Negro leagues compared to white players of the time. Singers, artists and prominent city African Americans are featured. (215-574-0380)

Please Touch Museum

No "Do Not Touch" signs --a dream come true in a kid's museum setting! Designed to promote the arts, sciences, and humanities, exhibits here promise educational entertainment for the young and the young-at-heart. There is an incredible collection of toys and a 3D interactive playground based upon popular children's books. Art exhibits feature work from children in the Philadelphia area. On the bottom floor is a pretend grocery store where kids can "shop" and "pay", and a maze to explore. There are ample opportunities for role-playing and dress-up, as well as to try out all kinds of machines and tools and grown-up devices! (215-581-3181)

National Constitution Center

A visit to the National Constitution Center starts with a powerful multi-media theater presentation that describes the main points of our country's most important document. After the presentation,visitors are free to roam about the building exploring the hows and whys of the Constitution. As a family-oriented museum, the set-up is not heavy on reading plaques and boards. Instead, many of the exhibits are interactive, as guests may vote for their favorite president, or even take the presidential oath of office. Though it's possible to purchase walk-in tickets, you may also purchase timed tickets in advance, which is recommended during busy seasons. (215-409-6600, 866-917-1787)

Philadelphia Museum of Art

The Philadelphia Museum of Art offers a stellar collection from artists such as Van Gogh, Monet, Pissarro, Picasso, and Rodin. Surrealist art is well represented by Dali, De Chirico, Max Ernst, and Magritte, with pre-modernist work from the likes of Canaletto and Guardi. Numerous theme rooms display international art and artifacts, including Thomas Eakins's "Collection in the Country" furniture. A on-site restaurant and a cafe offer hungry guests sustenance and the gift shop is a great place to pick up a souvenir to remember your visit. Sunday is pay what you wish day. Check their website for featured guest artists and displays. (215-763-8100, 215-684-7500)