

The Fill of Philly...

Makansutra

December 10, 2015

Words and Pictures by KF Seetoh, Makansutra

Other than those historical places and facts about this place, where the Declaration of Independence was inked and where Rocky ran up the stairs and punched the air (cue music), I had little reason to look forward to Philadelphia except to take a quieter hiatus from that hectic week in New York. I initially suspected it could be a place where food goes to die and it's only about a 60 minutes train commute from the moreish Big Apple (and this just in, a U\$28.8 million bullet train funding from the federal government is set cut the time to just 15 minutes). The first time I was there some six years back, my local minders pointed me to the usual cheesy touristy places, like the Reading Terminal Market and some chain restaurants. I suppose they didn't truly knew what a Singaporean foodie is. So, this time, I was back. Don't ask if it was masochistic.

And this round, (yes, wait for it....) I was wrong about Philadelphia. For starters, I had a map and a lot of curious questions for the very helpful tourism folks there who helped fix a stay for us at the uber central Loews Hotel, (where, 200 metres either side, takes you to the historic landmark City Hall and the iconic Reading Terminal Market) and some friends living in the city, plus very friendly strangers on the street. I learnt long ago- that before you open your heart to any new place, first open your mouth, and ask, ask, ask. It seems they waited a year after I left the last time, to transform and insert deliciousness to the city. Second, was just how walkable the place is. The mandated healthy good-for-you 10,000 steps a day is more than enough to take you to the famous spots in the city and even to their charming little Italy town, from its city central. Philadelphia has transformed, especially over the last five years. For starters, I saw a burgeoning food truck and restaurant culture that hawked way more than falafel and hotdogs.

As a foodie, I sense Philly is set to have a culinary revolution on its own, and although it's early days yet, you can feel the tsunami of deliciousness coming on, consuming this little city of about 1.5 million, with its own brand of culinary experiences. If I could only insert sniff and smell features to the images I had taken here...

The Philadelphia City Hall, right in the heart of the city, with founder William Penn overlooking the city from atop. For a while (1894 -1908) it was the tallest habitual building in the city.



This bold slab of pork chops at the historic City Tavern restaurant is one of the best in Philadelphia. It has an alluringly smooth, firmly soft texture and is juicy texture. No sauce needed.



It has all the charms and attendant stories that go bump in the night. But this replica of City Tavern(junction of Second and Walnut Street) is where the first Fourth of July independence celebration was held in 1777. Many founding fathers of America and members of the First Continental Congress once gathered for meetings here. Ask for, and the wait staff will gladly take you for a little tour of the building after your meal there.



Yes, take a 2km comfortable hike from the town Centre and head on to irritate the locals here... by running up the steps (if you can run up all 72 steps, leading up the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and still breathe normally), punching the air and doing the complete Rocky Balboa- Sylvester Stallone thing (Spring Garden, St Logan Square).

One of the must-sins, Federal Donuts (1632 Sansom Street). What's not to love about fresh and hot donuts teaming up with ridiculously moreish buttermilk ranch fried chicken dusted with sugar, beckoning you?

Reading Terminal Market (12th and Arch Street), this former railway train shed was converted into a market space in the 1860s, after the city cleaned up its street vendor off the roads to ease traffic woes and address public concerns about hygiene. The range of food and atmosphere is electric, from burgers to Chinese and Kosher fare, this place is a must-stop.



One of the most famous item offered at the Reading Terminal Market is the Hot Apple Dumpling- a very comforting sweet sour, creamy , doughy and hot apple dumpling that yearns for a cup of coffee to pair it with, at The Dutch Eating Place stall.



A insanely moreish idea of a progressive modern Italian fare.. Carbonara Pasta with Bacon Ice Cream at Gran Caffè L'Aquila (1716, Chestnut Street) , regarded as one of the best Italian coffee roasters and culinary traditions in Philadelphia.



Mid-Eastern and Mediterranean food at Dizengoff (1625 Sansom Street) has found favour with the Philly folks. This humble culinary award winner sees a long queue for their fare daily. I am no big fan of Mid-East food, but this one, I had to polish off every morsel.



Modern Chinese food is taking this city by storm and it's not just the domain of Chinese cooks. Chef entrepreneur Michael Schulson delivers with his take on Bok Choy Scallops seared with a spicy savoury glaze..at his very hip and buzzy Sampan Restaurant (124 S, 13th Street)



The uber chic and hip Sampan Restaurant by Michael Schulson. Where Asian fusion is delivered mindfully and agreeably so.



This is the city of Love, as in the monument dedicated to it, at Love Park (1599 John F Kennedy Boulevard). You know you just have to do the compulsory selfies and wefies here. Then mosey around for the few food trucks (some famous ones) that ply the area.



Love for life can also mean love for food, as there's nothing more sincere than that, so says George Bernard Shaw, so these row of food trucks sited beside the Love Park, are there to serve just that purpose.



You can sense the artistry and energy of the city. Walks around the town Centre, even at night, isn't all that boring.



So, is it Pat's or Geno's, arguably the two most famous Philly Cheesesteaks in the city. Ask the locals and friends there, and you'll get a "Nah! None of the above"... and everyone will have their theory about why their hidden gem of a

choice is the best. It's just like how Singaporeans will tell you Tian Tian Chicken Rice, ain't the best no more, sorry Bourdain.



If you ask me, I think both Pat's and Geno's are careful not to be too different from each other. But if you have sensitive gums, one will please you with softer bread. The liquid cheese, chopped steaks and onions... same.



The compulsory stop, while digesting the Federal Donuts.. A guided tour to the place the Declaration Of Independence was ironed out and inked (Independence National Historical Park, the area bounded by Walnut, Chestnut, 2nd and 6th Street)



The Taste4Travel (Taste4Travel.net) folks will among others, organise walking food tours to Little Italy, one of the most honestly delicious areas in Philadelphia. This one took us to this old DiBruno Brothers gourmet grocery and even an old family Italian Kitchen ware shop Fantès (fantès.com).



My ideas of a perfect, almost vegetarian burger..The Forager at High Street Café (308 Market Street), with king oyster mushroom, braised kale, farm eggs, green meadow young Swiss black trumpet mayo.



This one caught my attention, a little thought provoking installation show at the National Museum of American Jewish History (5th and Market Street), because food has the power to bring all people closer.



When in Philadelphia.... your calling is written on the streets.