

# Philadelphia: Rated a Good Place to Visit, Live and Enjoy

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Philadelphia has been named one of the top cities in the U.S. by a popular guidebook as well as recent surveys of visitors and residents. *Lonely Planet*, the world's number one travel guide publisher, has announced that Philadelphia is ranked fourth among U.S. travel destinations for 2013. The primary attractor is our art scene including the new Barnes Foundation, along with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and smaller neighborhood galleries and art events. According to *Lonely Planet*, "Philadelphia is becoming known as an art capital." Cities are ranked by a team of several hundred expert authors and editors.

Another source, *Travel and Leisure* reported that in its 2012 survey, "America's Favorite Cities," Philadelphia ranks high in many categories. We placed among the top five cities as a cultural getaway and as a destination for historical sites, monuments, museums and galleries, and we're among the top cities for the best pizza, street food and food trucks. Other categories in which Philadelphia ranks high are public parks, music scene, shopping amenities and other food categories. Not surprisingly, Philadelphia rated number one in being sports-crazed. Philadelphians rank our city equal to or higher than visitors did in 19 out of 66 categories. The survey was conducted online from June 1 to September 1, 2012, and 35 cities were included. For the full list of rankings, visit <http://www.travelandleisure.com/americas-favorite-cities/2011/city/philadelphia>.

Another indication that we are moving forward is that *Sperling's Best Places* survey, "Best Places to Live" (May 2011), reported that Philadelphia ranked among the top

10 cities poised for greatness. Categories included sports, arts, music, culture, LEED certifications, health resources, stable housing and population growth. Our city scored sixth for producing homegrown sports heroes. [http://www.bestplaces.net/docs/studies/cities\\_on\\_the\\_edge.aspx](http://www.bestplaces.net/docs/studies/cities_on_the_edge.aspx)

Walkability is important to both visitors and residents, and a website called *WalkScore* currently ranks Philadelphia the fifth most walkable city in the U.S. Of all the neighborhoods, Center City West was ranked number one, followed by Center City East, and University City. <http://www.walkscore.com/PA/Philadelphia>

Specific places in Center City Philadelphia have won awards. In 2010, the American Planning Association named Rittenhouse Square one of the top 10 Great Public Spaces in the U.S. because "it is a beautiful, inviting public space that anchors a very vibrant neighborhood, and for the long-standing willingness of community members to fight to keep it that way." Philadelphia won in two other categories in 2008, when Society Hill was named a Great Neighborhood and the Avenue of the Arts (South Broad Street) was named a Great Street.

Philadelphia residents' love for our city is correlated with economic gain according to a three-year study conducted by Gallup World Poll for the Knight Foundation's *Soul of the Community* study, which was released in 2010. Three factors — social offerings (entertainment and places to meet), openness (how welcoming) and beauty (aesthetics and green spaces) — were rated most important in creating an emotional bond between residents



Rittenhouse Square is a great public space for people of all ages.

and their community. Philadelphia was one of 26 cities with the highest levels of resident attachment to their community, and it also had one of the highest rates of local GDP growth.

In *Sperling's Best Places* Philadelphia also made the top 20 in several other categories: best airports to make a connection, best cities for seniors, best cities for telework, best places for military retirees, most competitive private colleges, best cities for Thanksgiving, "manliest" cities, most romantic cities for boomers, most playful cities and best block party cities.

To see a video showing more accolades about Philadelphia, visit <http://press.visitphilly.com/media/show/id/3777/indice/2>

Some categories in which we made the top 20 cities that we would rather not have are sleepless, irritation prone, congested and respiratory infections. We're not perfect!

## Pedestrian Zones: Another View

By Virginia K. Nalencz

The pedestrian zone is a species that can flourish only in certain rarefied climates, according to a growing band of planners. "The proper response to obesity is not to stop eating, and most stores need car traffic to survive," says Jeff Speck, co-author of *Suburban Nation*, a seminal work on city and regional planning. In *Walkable City*, his 2012 study of urban design, Speck reports that as director of the National Endowment for the Arts, he reviewed the

fates of pedestrian malls in America over four decades. Of more than 200 malls created, only 30 or so survived, almost all in college towns.

Speck and other city planners, notably Jan Gehl who advised New York City on the recent pedestrian park where Broadway crosses Times Square, counsel incremental change when a city contemplates a pedestrian zone. Instead of

the complete ban on cars that transformed Philadelphia's Chestnut Street in the 70s (but not in a good way), these planners say: forget the expensive paving and street furniture, just bring in temporary barriers, a few potted trees and folding chairs for a weekend and see how it goes. If the right confluence of location, demographics and organization occurs, the city will be "in the zone." If not, take away the barriers, and no harm done, little money wasted.