

Restaurant Recommendations in Philadelphia  
by Sally Gardner Reed, Executive Director, United for Libraries

Philadelphia's restaurant scene is second only to the history in being the highlight of a Philly visit. Honestly, you really can't miss. Please, please, please do not waste your time eating at any chain restaurants while you are here – I don't care how high end. You can do that when you get back home or on your next trip to some place that isn't here.

Below are some of my favorite restaurants, most of which are in walking distance of the conference center. Like New York and San Fran, Philadelphia is a great walking city. Here are a few notes about the dining and drinking experience. Many of Philly's restaurants are BYOB, which is great on the cost side of things – a couple are listed below. However, the Pennsylvania powers that be have kept in place the world's craziest liquor buying laws.

So . . . you can only buy six packs (or singles) of beer at either bars (most sell take-out six packs) or "delis" – convenience stores that will also sell you a sandwich. This means that in most places, you're going to pay a lot more than you're used to. There is, however, a place just south of the conference center (just below Walnut on 12<sup>th</sup> Street) called "Pac-a-Deli" that does sell beer at a fairly reasonable price. Beer distributors around the city can only sell cases – go figure.

Wine and liquor are sold only by state stores, called "Wine & Spirits Stores" – so quaint. There are two near the conference center. One is on Chestnut between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> streets. The other is behind (North) the Convention Center at 5 N. 12<sup>th</sup> street (smaller and not open on Sunday).

Also behind the Convention Center (north) is Chinatown where Chinese restaurants abound. I'm not a big fan so you're on your own here.

And now – my favorites!

\$=5-10

\$\$=10-20

\$\$\$=20-35

\$\$\$\$=35 or more

Kanella (BYOB)

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<http://kanellarestaurant.com>

1001 Spruce St.

This Cypriot Greek restaurant is one of my top two favorites in Philly (see Cucina Forte below). Chef Konstantinos is a James Beard Award-winning chef and he oversees everything in the kitchen. I rarely go when he's not there. Because his wife is a vegetarian, it is veggie-friendly, and many of the meats he serves are free range or wild game. The menu includes standards and many specials, depending on what he finds at the market. The food is simply exquisite. I've never had anything there that didn't make me

swoon. If you go, tell him Gardner's mom sent you and you might just score a free dessert (homemade always, and divine!).

Cucina Forte (BYOB)

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[www.cucinaforte.com](http://www.cucinaforte.com)

768 S. 8<sup>th</sup> St.

I think maybe Maria Forte invented "tender." Everything from the meats to the pasta will simply melt in your mouth. An authentic Italian restaurant (about an \$8 cab ride from the Convention Center and only 3 blocks from our famous South Street), this beats all the competition – which in South Philly is saying something. I often order her gnocchi, and if you don't think it's the best you've ever had, then you can't be my friend anymore. Also, though I'm a veggie, I often cheat here and order the stuffed Portobello with crab meat – YUM. Chef Maria, like Konstantinos (above), is almost always on site in the kitchen. Don't be surprised if she visits you at your table to make sure everything is all right. Okay, you'll have to excuse me now – I've got get over to Forte's, I've made myself hungry . . .

Race Street Café

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[www.racestreetcafe.net](http://www.racestreetcafe.net)

208 Race St.

Once a blacksmith's home and storefront (from the mid-1700s all the way to the 1970s!), this neighborhood favorite still retains the rustic feel of its 18th century roots. A lovely bar and a small seating area provide an intimate ambiance and a great place to eat great food and hold a nice conversation. Race Street always carries 15 carefully selected beers on tap along with its other full bar offerings. But don't think this is your usual pub grub; au contraire, the food is delicious, creative, and fairly priced. If you've got time on your hands Sunday morning, come for their very popular brunch, during which many of the selections include tater tots (you gotta love that, right?). Definitely not a tourist spot, this hidden treasure is a short eight block walk from the Convention Center. Bonus for late night revelers – the restaurant is open until 1 a.m. most nights!

Reading Terminal Market

\$-\$\$

[www.readingterminalmarket.org](http://www.readingterminalmarket.org)

12<sup>th</sup> and Arch streets

Situated right next door to the Convention Center, this is one of Philly's most adored places for tourists and locals alike. Hosting a wide range of food vendors, the RTM also includes a produce market, crafts, candy, florists, and a small biergarten. If you've never been, you really should take the short trip across the street and enjoy!

### El Vez

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[www.elvezrestaurant.com](http://www.elvezrestaurant.com)

121 S. 13<sup>th</sup> St.

Philadelphia has its share of award winning, internationally renowned restaurateurs, and Stephen Starr is one of them. El Vez presents his modern take on Mexican food and it's a winner. From a variety of guacamole concoctions to Mahi-Mahi tacos to hibiscus enchiladas, there's something for everyone. A popular place, you can count on it being fairly noisy – not the perfect place for that romantic retreat! This restaurant is about five blocks from the Convention Center.

### Opa

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[www.opaphiladelphia.com](http://www.opaphiladelphia.com)

1311 Sansom St.

Just a quick six blocks from the Convention Center, Opa's sleek interior underlines its fresh take on the traditional Greek menu. With a slim menu, you can bet that everything offered gets the TLC it deserves from the kitchen. Order up a variety of appetizers and plates and share the savory experience with your table mates. Note: don't let this street discourage you – while this entire area of Philly is quickly being gentrified, Sansom Street still presents with the back ends of businesses fronting on Chestnut or Walnut, and is definitely not too pretty – hopefully Opa is getting a break on rent for sprucing the street up a bit!

### Positano Coast

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[www.positanocoast.net](http://www.positanocoast.net)

212 Walnut St.

This higher end Italian restaurant is worth every penny you'll spend there, from the tender and house-made pastas to the delicious risottos, to the eggplant napoleon. This restaurant prides itself on its seafood offerings, as its name promises. The ambiance is wonderful and if you're a light eater, you'll be happy to know that most entrees and also be ordered as sides at nearly half the price. Eating at Positano will no doubt give you an evening to remember.

### Jim's Steaks

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[www.jimssteaks.com](http://www.jimssteaks.com)

400 South St.

Hey, you're going to go to South Street, right? While you're there you might want to grab a cheese steak at Jim's. Because it's a favorite of the locals, you'll have to wait in line a short while, but that's always a good sign. Of course you've probably heard of the great Philadelphia rivalry between Pat's Steaks and Geno's Steaks on South Passyunk Avenue. Local word has it that Jim's tops them both. But, if you feel you simply must visit one of these iconic steak vendors, please go to Pat's. You may recall that Geno's

made the national news by posting a sign that said “please order in English.” Yep, that was the owner of Geno’s (which, by the way, I think means John in ENGLISH!).

#### Campo’s

\$

[www.camposdeli.com](http://www.camposdeli.com)

214 Market St.

Campos offers everything you could want in a deli – an ice cold beer and a terrific hot sandwich. This is quintessentially Philly restaurant serves up terrific cheese steaks (including veggie and vegan steaks – delicious, I promise!), hoagies, salads and soups. The price is right, you won’t leave hungry and the leisurely six blocks back to the Convention Center is just right for helping this comfort food supreme to settle. While you’re in this neck of the woods, head a couple of blocks south and to stroll through the beautiful Philadelphia historic district.

#### Eulogy Belgian Tavern

\$\$\$ (food) \$\$ (beer – which is why you’re going, right?)

<http://eulogybar.com>

136 Chestnut St.

For a place that draws you in for the 100 or so beers on the menu, the food is actually quite good. Heavy on the meat side, there is a veggie burger on offer, as well as a number of appetizers that will satisfy the non-meat eaters in the group, including a fairly generous fruit and cheese plate and a brie puff (yum!). Just off Independence Hall this makes a terrific place to end of your tour of historic Philadelphia. A bonus here is that you get the chance to see the inside of one of our historic row houses in Old City.

#### Garces Trading Company

\$\$ (lunch) \$\$\$ (dinner)

<http://philadelphia.garcestradingcompany.com>

1111 Locust St.

Head about five blocks down to from the Convention Center and you’ll find this fine entry in the Philly foodie restaurant world. Developed by another award-winning chef, Jose Garces, this charming restaurant and take-out venue provides a much nicer take on “pub grub.” Soups, salads, pizza, and sandwiches are its main fare, with a fully stocked bar as well. A tad pricey for dinner, as the menu changes, but still, a great and close by opportunity to experience one of Garces’ many award-winning restaurants.

Fork

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[www.forkrestaurant.com](http://www.forkrestaurant.com)

306 Market St.

This high-end, multi-award winning restaurant has beautiful ambiance and a delicious gourmet menu. If you want to spend one special night eating at a slow, leisurely pace with impeccable food and service, this may be just the place for you. Since it's about six blocks from the Convention Center, you might justify the high prices by saving the cost of a cab. You'll find such delicacies as wild boar ragu and grilled quail on this meat- and fish-heavy menu.

Indeblue

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[www.indebluerestaurant.com/philadelphia-pa/menu/dinner](http://www.indebluerestaurant.com/philadelphia-pa/menu/dinner)

205 S. 13th St.

I'm one of those people who think even average Indian food is great, but this Indian restaurant is anything but average. Situated very close to the Convention Center (four to five blocks), it has a wonderful atmosphere and terrific (though costly) menu choices. There are lots of options for vegetarians (of course) and plenty of meat, chicken, and fish dishes as well. You might want to try this place at lunch, when the prices are a little more reasonable and you won't be tempted to purchase \$10 a pop drinks! If you go, you should know that they only accept two credit cards per table, so throwing down seven credit cards for the seven in your party won't work!

La Fournò

\$\$ (BYOB Tuesdays and Fridays as well as full bar)

[www.lafournò.com](http://www.lafournò.com)

636 South St.

I don't want to like this restaurant as much as I do. Why? Because it's on South Street and therefore should be more touristy. But, in fact, the food here is delicious, the ambiance is warm and friendly, and they play a lot of Sinatra. It's a great place to eat while visiting this iconic Philly street. This restaurant is just a few blocks from my house and I eat here often, even with all the other terrific choices – I guess that tells you something.

Zavino Wine Bar Pizzeria

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[www.zavino.com](http://www.zavino.com)

112 S. 13<sup>th</sup> St.

This cozy and charming pizzeria is across the street from United for Libraries offices, and a short walk from the Convention Center. The prices are good and the food is wonderful – great "Italian-ish" comfort

food. There's a nice wine list reasonably priced, along with a good selection of beers with a focus on those locally brewed. If you are looking for a casual and fun place to warm up after a cold conference day, this should do the trick. Zavino is open seven days a week for lunch and dinner.

Enjoy!