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A sunny day in June brings crowds, including bicyclists, to the Franklin Fountain on Market Street in Philadelphia. The old-fashioned ice cream parlor is a few minutes' ride from Penn's Landing, a once-gritty Delaware River waterfront site whose surrounding area is the focus of a sweeping revitalization effort. A pop-up park with a roller skating rink and a two-level space where yoga is held are already in place.

Independence from the trodden path

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN
Special to The Washington Post

Across from Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square one morning in April, I waited for my breakfast at the cafe Parc. Street maps and highlighters covered the table, and my bike helmet sat on the bench next to me.

My go-to meal before a big ride is oatmeal. But when my order arrived, covered with a brittle, scorched-sugar topping and looking as though it had made a detour through the dessert cart, I wondered what other surprises this day would bring.

I folded my maps, vowed to read the menu more carefully next time, fueled up on my sweet oatmeal brulee and set off for a day of pedaling.

The week before I arrived in Philly, the city had launched its new bike-share, called Indego (named for sponsor Independence Blue Cross). The benefit of waiting for dozens of other cities to set up programs first was that Philadelphia could learn vicarious lessons (such as offering a pay-with-cash option, making the bikes accessible to more people) and, presumably, take time to im-

Philadelphia's come a long way since the Founding Fathers walked its streets — and the coolest new spaces are best cruised by bike



On the Schuylkill River side of the city, cyclists cross Benjamin Franklin Parkway near the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.

prove bike lanes and fix potholes.

Arriving as a bike-share novice, I thought this would be a groovy way to check out a few new city parks and public spaces along the Delaware River to the east, the Schuylkill River to the west and the 30-block Center City in between. I walked toward the row of electric-blue, two-basket bikes on the opposite side of Rittenhouse. Online, I'd signed up for a \$15 one-month membership, which bought me free rides for up to an hour. So all I had to do was swipe my credit card and tap a few buttons on the touch screen for the docking system to unlock a bike. I adjusted the seat, checked my watch and headed east toward the Delaware.

Flanked by the Walt Whitman and Benjamin Franklin bridges, the section of the Delaware River waterfront accessible to tourists is largely industrial. William Penn, who sailed up this river in 1682, might rub his eyes in disbelief if he saw the transformation underway today.

Spruce Street Harbor Park is one of the most popular new spots — a summer pop-up with a roller skating rink, hammock garden, floating barges, shuffleboard and boardwalk

PHILLY CONTINUED ON G4



PHOTOS BY TONI L. SANDYS/THE WASHINGTON POST

Along the Delaware River, cyclists ride to the end of Race Street Pier in Philadelphia. The project was designed by the same firm responsible for New York's High Line.

Get up to speed on Philly's waterfront revival

PHILLY FROM G1

concessions that converts into an equally charming ice skating park in the winter.

The master plan is to convert a six-mile stretch of this gritty waterfront into an extension of the bustling city, with parks every half-mile, a bike trail and a \$250 million redevelopment of Penn's Landing. Already, the city has opened Washington Avenue Pier (formerly Pier 53, home of the city's immigration station and the country's first navy yard) and Race Street Pier, a two-tiered park with free morning yoga, designed by the firm behind New York's High Line.

I biked up the river, hugging the water, past Moshulu, a tall ship that now houses a restaurant, and Independence Seaport Museum. At Race Street Pier, I dismounted and walked out over the water under the Ben Franklin Bridge, taking in the views. From there, I biked toward Market Street, returning my bike just before the hour expired.

After sampling house-made ice cream with teeny spoons at the Franklin Fountain (ginger and vegan coconut, both worth writing home about), I walked west, stopping in the cobblestone courtyard where Ben Franklin's house and print shop once sat. I couldn't help popping in to see the Liberty Bell, which seemed a miniature version of the one in my childhood memory.

Before I picked up my next bike, across from City Hall, I made a detour for a \$1 slice at Rosa's Pizza, where you can pay an extra buck to subsidize a slice for someone who is homeless. When you pay it forward, you can leave an adhesive note, and the walls are now covered with messages like "Peace, pot & pizza" and "Have a pizza my heart."

In preparation for my trip, I had consulted with a few local cyclists who offered riding tips. The grid layout makes getting around Philadelphia fairly easy, but the city's still not as bike-friendly as I hope it'll be down the road. Among the best bike lanes are those on Spring Garden Street, 13th and 22nd headed north, 10th south, Spruce Street west and Pine Street east. Cyclists also advised staying away from the streets with trolley tracks, such as 11th and 12th (too easy to catch your tire and take a spill) as well as busy Broad Street (where 14th should be, but naming the numeral will certainly reveal you as a tourist).

I headed north and cut across Spring Garden toward the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Schuylkill. En route, I pedaled through Matthias Baldwin and Sister Cities parks, around Logan Square



A quick pedal south of Race Street Pier, the Spruce Street Harbor Park and its hammock garden is a popular new spot along the riverfront after an extensive redevelopment. The master plan for the waterfront puts parks every half-mile.

and up tree-lined Benjamin Franklin Parkway, with heavenly wide, painted bike lanes. After passing the Barnes Foundation, I paused to consider "The Thinker" in front of the Rodin Museum and finally pedaled by the Rocky Balboa statue to return my bike near the steps of the art museum.

Compared with my lightweight, nimble bike at home, this Trek three-speed was like a tank — stable, safe and lumbering. It took a little more oomph to start it, brake to stop it and heft to lift it onto a curb. But my biggest handicap that day, zipping around without a smartphone, was using only a not-so-great printed map of the bike stations — and my limited knowledge of Philly streets — to get around. (Indego hadn't yet printed bigger brochures or added maps to the stations; both were said to be coming.)

So I found myself in that delightful

space of micro-disorientation, in which I teeter on a line between certainty of my whereabouts and utterly lost. Of course, one of the joys of being on a bike is exploring that which might be impractical on foot — meandering down an enchanting block or through a beckoning park. Time and again, I cycled just far enough off my planned route that I wasn't confident about finding my way back — or finding the blue glow of an Indego station. Time and again, usually with just minutes to spare before my hour was up, I did.

With a new bike and a new hour to ride, I headed behind the museum and through Fairmount Park on the Schuylkill River Trail; in this direction, one can bike another 23 miles north to Valley Forge. But after I passed the bathhouses, I turned around and headed a few miles south — and, agreeably, downhill — past skateboarders in Paine's

Park and along the new, four-block Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk. I exited at the South Street Bridge, hurried over my final potholes to find the Indego station near 17th and Delancey (near where I parked my car for the day) and returned my bike at the 57-minute mark.

Before I retrieved my car, I returned to Parc. I'm not sure which I was happier to see: the restroom or the bar. I visited the former and then cozied up to the latter, setting my helmet on the stool and stretching my calves. I downed three waters and then ordered a drink for the road — a stiff, refreshing, well-earned iced coffee. Then I strolled to the parking lot, trying vainly to play down a stride that conveyed, without question, how I'd spent my day.

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If you go

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Monaco Philadelphia

433 Chestnut St.
215-925-2111

www.monaco-philadelphia.com

A 268-room Kimpton hotel in Old City, across the street from the Liberty Bell. In-room spa treatments, complimentary bicycles and wine hour in the lobby. Pet-friendly. Rooms start at \$219; ask about free parking package.

The Independent Hotel

1234 Locust St.
215-772-1440

www.theindependenthotel.com

A boutique hotel in Midtown Village. Complimentary breakfast, neighborhood gym passes and weekday wine and cheese. Rooms start at \$149, 15 percent discount for advance purchase.

WHERE TO EAT

Parc Restaurant Bistro and Cafe

227 S. 18th St.
215-545-2262

www.parc-restaurant.com

French bistro with sidewalk seating on Rittenhouse Square. House-made baguettes and hearty breakfast options such as oatmeal brulee, \$7; smoked salmon tartine, \$15; and Bloody Mary, \$9.

High Street on Market

308 Market St.
215-625-0988

www.highstreetonmarket.com

Fresh breads, pastries, salads and sandwiches. Ancient-grains salad, \$12; tuna hoagie, \$13; white gazpacho, \$8.

Rosa's Pizza

25 S. 11th St.
215-627-6727

www.rosasfreshpizza.com

Rosa's motto is "Helping the needy, one slice at a time." Customers can buy \$1 slices and pay it forward for another dollar.

WHAT TO DO

Indego

844-446-3346

www.rideindegoo.com

New bike-share system for riders 16 and older. Free B-cycle Now app shows locations and bike availability. The Indego30 membership, at \$15 per month, includes free hour-long trips; walk-ups pay \$4 per half-hour; cash payments available at 7-Eleven or Family Dollar.

Spruce Street Harbor Park

Spruce Street and Columbus Blvd.
215-629-3200

www.sprucestreetharborpark.com

Open day and night through September, this free urban beach playground includes boardwalk concessions, floating barges, water gardens, fire pits, Adirondack chairs, shuffleboard, giant Jenga and 50 hammocks.

Schuylkill River Trail

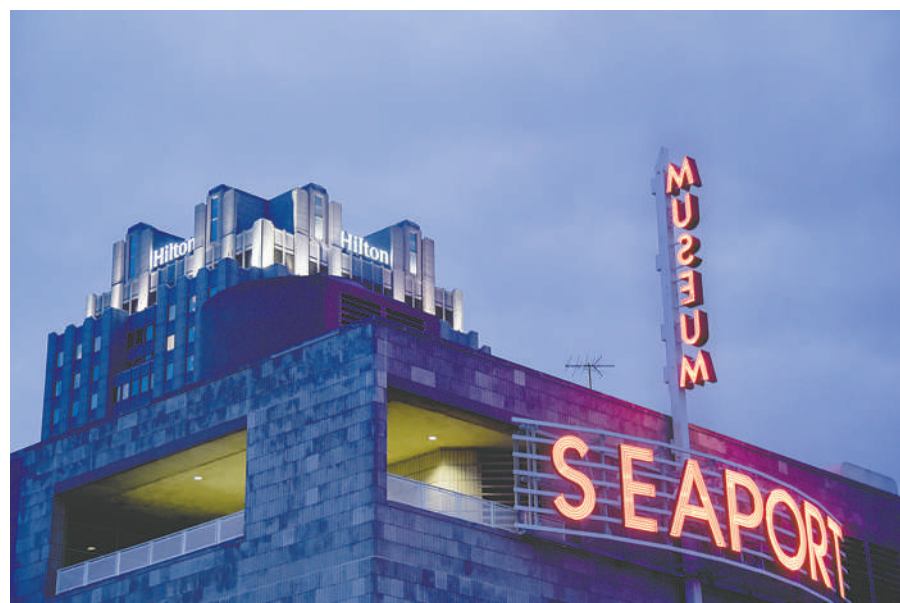
www.schuylkillrivertrail.com

The multi-use trail runs 26 miles along the river from downtown north to Valley Forge. A local favorite: the eight-mile loop down Kelly Drive, over Falls Bridge and back along MLK Drive, closed to traffic seasonally on weekends.

INFORMATION

www.visitphilly.com

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Far left, a woman makes a transaction at an Indego station, Philadelphia's new bike-sharing service. Patrons can pay for the electric-blue bikes by the month or the trip. Left, the Independence Seaport Museum and a Hilton hotel are part of the makeover taking place along the bikeable riverfront.