

TRAVEL

> WEEKEND BREAKS TO LUXURY HOLIDAYS



JUST THE TICKET

French fancy

It might not be Glastonbury, but if you fancy something a little different for your summer festival this year, try Vieilles Charrues.

France's largest greenfield festival, Bruce Springsteen, Lenny Kravitz, The Killers, Moby, The Ting Tings and TV on the Radio headline from July 16-19 in Carhaix, Brittany. Now in its 18th year, around 170,000 fans flock to the festival every year which features more than 80 bands over three stages on the 100 acre site. For more info go to www.vieillescharrues.asso.fr

Time to go

Exit Festival in Serbia celebrates its 10th anniversary with a great line-up including Arctic Monkeys, Lily Allen, Moby, Manic Street Preachers and Kraftwerk.

Staged at Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad, Serbia from July 9-12, Exit also features the likes of Korn, Grandmaster Flash, Patti Smith and The Prodigy amongst the 600 performances on 25 stages throughout the fortress. Four day festival passes are £72 plus a small booking fee from www.exitfest.org

Hall of sound

Closer to home – Supergrass, Happy Mondays and Reverend and The Makers are just some of the bands heading to Ragley Hall this summer for the first ever Monarchy Live.

Staged at the Warwickshire stately home on July 4, the event also features Neville Staple, Rob Da Bank and a DJ set from Hot Chip. Tickets are £55; go to www.monarchy-live.com for more info.

Plane favourite

Their banking system may be in turmoil, but Icelanders have something to cheer about, with Keflavik International Airport named Europe's fourth best.

The quarterly survey of 127 airports the world over put Keflavik, near the capital Reykjavik, at number four in Europe (behind first place Zurich, Southampton and Porto in Portugal) and number eight in the world.

The Airports Council International survey asks passengers to rate the quality of some 30 different aspects of customer service, facilities and safety.

A new Iceland Express service from Gatwick to Keflavik began on May 1; prices start from £69 one way including taxes; for reservations go to www.icelandexpress.com or call 0870 240 5600.

Fill-adelphia

Jon Perks packs in plenty on a visit to the City of Brotherly Love, home to Rocky, American history – and the Philly Cheesesteak

Philadelphia has plenty to brag about – it was the birthplace of the US constitution, its baseball team, the Phillies, won last year's World Series... and it is home to the famous Philly Cheesesteak.

Never heard of it? You'd be excused for never coming across this city staple – it's hardly going to appear on the menu of your local Michelin starred restaurant but, like a hot dog in New York, a trip to Philly is incomplete without having tried one.

It's basically thinly sliced steak, cooked on a hotplate with onions and peppers, served on a long roll with melted cheese. Like I said, haute cuisine it ain't.

As with any US dining experience, there's a myriad choices and variations, notably with which kind of cheese you have on top – American, Provolone or Cheese Whiz – bright yellow processed goo from a can. Avoid that one is my advice.

For our cheesesteak experience, we visited a diner on bohemian South Street, a few blocks away from the famous Jim's Steaks – 'A Philadelphia Tradition Since 1939', where there was a queue round the corner. Quite what made their cheesesteaks so popular was a mystery I'm happy to have not solved. The other two South Philly meccas to this local favourite are Pat's King of Steaks and Geno's – but I reckon any one will do just to say you've tried it.

Steak in a bun aside, Philly has plenty of great restaurants – mostly thanks to Stephen Starr, restaurateur sans pareil. He now owns a dozen venues in the city (as well as a handful in New York and Atlantic City), most of which have sprung up in the last 10 years and offer something for most palates, from the steaks at Barclay Prime to meatloaf and mashed potato at Jones. We visited both Morimoto for superb sushi and the Continental Midtown for rooftop cocktails. Try the Buzz Aldrin and its fizzy Orang Tang rimmed glass.

Walking the streets of Philadelphia (© Bruce Springsteen) is a great way to not only walk off all that food but get one of the best views of the city.

Most attractions are well signposted on street corners and nothing is too far away, especially if you pick a central place to stay, such as our base, the Rittenhouse Hotel. Overlooking the square of the same name, it's not only a luxurious place to relax after all that sightseeing, but there's the chance to do some stargazing; Skumdog Millionaire star Dev Patel was a guest during our stay, while previous VIPs at the Rittenhouse include The Rolling Stones, Tom Hanks and Bruce Willis, who has been to Philly on several occasions to shoot films – The Sixth Sense, Unbreakable and Twelve Monkeys.



Above: The LOVE statue
Main: Al Capone's 'home from home' in the Eastern State Penitentiary

Philadelphia often stands in as New York on the big screen as it's cheaper to make movies there, but the city has plenty of its own famous locations to search out.

Head for the Philadelphia Museum of Art (which is staging a great Cézanne & Beyond exhibition until the end of May) and you too can run up the same steps as Rocky Balboa – you'll find his statue at the bottom, where tourists queue to pose, arms aloft.

Now a great museum, the nearby Eastern State Penitentiary doubled for the asylum in Twelve Monkeys. Walk along the peeling corridors and visit highlights such as Al Capone's 'luxurious' cell. It's two hours well spent, and at \$12 for adults is also good value.

Head into the centre of town and call in to Macy's

FACTFILE

From May 12 2009, US Airways will operate a new route to Philadelphia from Birmingham on a seasonal daily service. Customers will be able to book online on www.usairways.com.

The service is in addition to the airline's existing daily services to Philadelphia from London Gatwick, London Heathrow, Manchester and Glasgow (seasonal).

Jon stayed at the Rittenhouse Hotel (www.rittenhousehotel.com), 210 West Rittenhouse Square.

Prices from \$199 ("Last Minute Rate") per night in a Superior King Bedded room.

Useful links and contacts

Philadelphia Conventions and Visitors Bureau

www.philadelphiaUSA.travel

Tel: 0844 880 6853

Eastern State Penitentiary

www.easternstate.org

Philadelphia Museum of Art

www.philamuseum.org

Philadelphia Phillies

phillies.mlb.com

Starr Restaurants

www.starr-restaurant.com

Essential reading

Insight City Guide: Philadelphia, APA Publications £12.99

(which was the department store in Mannequin) for some shopping and to hear their organ (played twice a day), City Hall (which features in the new Transformers movie) and the 30th Street Station (location for the scene-setting murder in Witness).

That's also where you catch the train to Lancaster County, home to Pennsylvania's Dutch community and where most of Witness was filmed. The journey only costs about \$15 return and takes an hour, and makes for a nice day or half day, visiting the town of Lancaster and the surrounding countryside where you can visit Amish farms and go for a traditional buggy ride.

Back in Philly, and there's the likes of the National Constitutional Center, Franklin Institute (their 'ThinkTank' science museum) and Liberty Bell to visit, as well as a trip on one of the hop on, hop off trolley or open top bus tours. For sport fans (Philadelphia loves its sports teams), a seat to watch the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park, the 76ers play basketball, the Eagles (NFL), or Flyers (NHL ice hockey) is a must. Next year they also get their own MLS soccer team.

Bored in Philly? Never. Hungry? Not likely...

