

5 Historic Bars in Philadelphia to Grab a Drink

By Marla Cimini



As the birthplace of the United States of America, Philadelphia is home to a number of intriguing historical sites that date back several hundred years. But there's more to the city than the iconic Liberty Bell and the legendary monuments—there are several unique and impressive bars in town that were established over a century or two ago and reflect a bygone era. If you wish to experience some history while you're sipping a beer, wine, or cocktail, be sure to pull up a stool at these historical Philadelphia bars, located in several neighborhoods in and around Center City Philly.

City Tavern

This multi-floor restaurant is the optimal go-to destination if you want to feel like you've stepped back in time to the 1770s. Known as the “unofficial meeting place” of America's Founding Fathers, City Tavern is considered *the* top historical restaurant in the city, featuring wooden floors, tables, and décor from the colonial era.

It's also the only restaurant in the city with waitstaff dressed in costumes to reflect the early days of Philadelphia. Created by chef Walter Staib, the menu is inspired by 18th-century offerings, but features a number of more modern options as well. It's a great spot for a cocktail, too, as the cozy front bar includes recreations of beer and other libations from colonial times. After all, you can't leave Philly without tasting Thomas Jefferson's favorite brew.

McGillin's Old Ale House

Sip libations and snack on tasty house specialties as you soak in the history at McGillin's Old Ale House, the oldest “continually-operating tavern” in the entire country. This famous city landmark opened the same year that President Abraham Lincoln was elected, and has been featured on TV shows, news programs, and in a variety of media outlets over the years.

The bar features an eclectic crowd of locals and tourists who keep returning for the lively ambiance as well as the reasonably-priced classic pub food and beer. Not surprisingly, it gets jammed up during happy hour and most weekends, so plan your visit accordingly.

Cherry Street Tavern

Cherry Street Tavern is an unassuming Center City bar that is as old school as it gets. Situated in the Logan Square neighborhood, this local hangout has been a popular spot since the early 1900s. Grab a seat at the bar, and you're almost guaranteed to strike up a conversation with one of the Philly "regulars."

Make no mistake, though: the Cherry Street Tavern is not considered "quaint." In fact, it has the feel of a modern bar, with Wi-Fi, several big-screen TVs (usually broadcasting a local sporting event), and plenty of craft beer options on tap. If you're hungry, you're in luck. Although the menu is limited, it boasts a few fan favorites such as the generously-sized hoagies and roast beef sandwiches.

M Restaurant

Situated in the historic Morris House Hotel, the M restaurant serves up inventive, modern cuisine within a traditional setting. The building, dating back to the late 1700s, is similar in architectural style to the nation's first "white house," which used to be several blocks away. In fact, it has even been referred to as the "white house's twin."

In addition to the exquisite dining room, the restaurant has picturesque gardens that feature outdoor tables during the warmer months—perfect for sipping a cocktail or two. With happy hour "light bite" specials (Tuesday to Friday) and craft drinks, it's always a warm and welcoming Old City spot to unwind.

The Olde Bar

Located in the historic Bookbinders' building in the Old City district of Philadelphia, The Olde Bar is a landmark cocktail lounge and oyster bar. The warm ambiance is reminiscent of the city's early days, and it's a lovely destination to relax with a beverage or appetizer. Owned by award-winning chef Jose Garces (who heads up several other exceptional restaurants in town), The Olde Bar offers a great selection of creative and innovative dishes in a traditional setting. Several food favorites include fried shrimp, snapper turtle soup, crab cakes, and burgers. With a happy hour featuring \$1 oysters every day of the week, The Olde Bar is an ideal spot to hang out while exploring Philly.