

The Complete Guide to Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square

By Marla Cimini for Trip Savvy



In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a section of the Center City district is home to the historical and picturesque Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, known for its elegant townhomes, exclusive hotels, luxury high-rise apartment buildings, and an assortment of local businesses, stylish boutiques, and trendy restaurants.

History

As one of the prettiest neighborhoods in the city, Rittenhouse Square is situated on the west side of Broad Street. Anyone who has spent time here knows that the real heart of this area is a leafy green public park, also called Rittenhouse Square, that stretches between Walnut Street and Rittenhouse Square South and is bordered by 16th and 18th Streets to the East and West.

Considered one of the first urban parks in the United States, the picturesque Rittenhouse Square park is one of the original five green spaces throughout the city that were planned by the founder of Philadelphia, William Penn, in the 17th century. (His statue is currently perched atop the City Hall building nearby on Broad Street). Early on, this park was called "Southwest Square," and the name was later changed to honor David Rittenhouse, a notable astronomer, instrument maker, and leader in the country's revolutionary efforts.

However, since it was a distance from Old City, the park remained a somewhat neglected area until the 19th century, when the neighborhood began expanding. It started to attract an affluent crowd, and homes began springing up around Rittenhouse Square, which became known as a fashionable address.

Over the years, the park itself has become a popular destination for locals as well as visitors. The central area is circular, and the walkways are adorned with ornate lampposts, along with a reflecting pool with colorful tile and a variety of flower beds. During the warmer months, the park comes alive with children playing, picnickers, sunbathers, dog walkers, and plenty of people just relaxing on the many shaded benches that line the walkways. It's also a fun place to hang out and enjoy a coffee or snack and a tranquil spot to enjoy some breezy solitude and read or admire the shady trees, foliage, and natural surroundings.

What to See and Do

Within Rittenhouse Square park itself, there's much to see and do while meandering along the diagonal and circular pathways. You can stroll around the park and see an abundance of lovely sculptures and beautiful fountains, including the famous "Lion Crushing a Serpent," a piece created by renowned French artist Antoine-Louis Barye in the 1800s; and "Duck Girl," a 1911 sculpture by Paulanship. On the southwestern corner of the park, Children love the tiny, two-foot "Billy Goat" statue by Albert Laessle and the "Giant Frog" by Cornelia Van Chapin, a granite sculpture that's situated in the central plaza area of the park.

Outside of the park, there's much to see and do as well. The Mutter Museum at the College of the Physicians at Philadelphia is a must-see destination that's was the first medical museum in the United States. It's known worldwide for

its well-preserved collection of permanent and temporary exhibits that showcase antique medical instruments and an assortment of anatomical specimens—even pieces of Albert Einstein's brain. But be prepared: what might be gruesome or shocking to some, may be fascinating to others.

Another noteworthy nearby destination is [The Rosenbach](#), a haven for literary enthusiasts and art lovers. This unique museum provides exclusive access to rare artwork, books, and manuscripts. With several on-going exhibitions, The Rosenbach gives visitors a glimpse into classic works by many famous authors, such as James Joyce, Herman Melville, Bram Stoker, and Marianne Moore, to name a few. The museum also offers several programs and supports research. Other important displays here include jewelry, furniture, maps, textiles, ceramic, glass, and more.

In this neighborhood, you will also find a few cultural associations, such as the [Curtis Institute of Music](#), with its unique tuition-free program that encourages many talented musicians to study with world-class professors. Previous graduates have included such greats as Leonard Bernstein and Samuel Barber. The institute hosts many classical performances throughout the year, so be sure to check out their website for upcoming concerts.

Where to Shop and Eat

This neighborhood is a great place to visit in the city, as it's walkable, scenic, and home to several museums, galleries, and shops. A few of the favorite shops include the massive, multi-level Barnes and Noble Flagship store that

includes a café overlooking the park and an incredible Anthropologie store that's housed in a former mansion with a circular marble staircase in the center. Nearby, along Walnut street, is every national brand store you can think of, such as Apple, H&M, Vans, Lululemon, Athleta, and many others.

Rittenhouse Square has been a lively and fun dining destination for locals as well as visitors, and it's easy to find a multitude of excellent restaurants around the neighborhood, offering an array of diverse and innovative cuisine at many price points.

Although there are no food options inside the actual park, around the perimeter is a different story. If you wish to dine on the square and soak in the scenery from across the street, you're in luck, as there are several excellent restaurants featuring al fresco dining with a lovely view of the park. The most popular places to score a table are: Parc, a Parisian-style bistro with classic and modern French offerings and a robust wine list; Rouge, which offers a variety of small and large plates and considered a place to "see and be seen," and Devin Seafood Grill, all feature expansive indoor-outdoor dining rooms.

Recently, a brand new restaurant, [Via Locusta](#), by award-winning local chef Michael Schulson, opened just off the square. As the new kid on the block, it's been attracting a great deal of attention with its delectable homemade Italian dishes and a relaxed, stylish vibe.

Events and Activities

Throughout the year, the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood hosts many fun annual events, such as the Spring Festival that features live music, food, entertainment, and activities for children. Art lovers are guaranteed to enjoy the Fine Arts Show that attracts talented artists from across the United States who display and sell their unique pieces throughout the park during an entire weekend. It's great to stroll around the square, chat with artists, and admire paintings, sculptures, and other creative pieces.

During the holiday season, the neighborhood is brilliantly glowing with thousands of lights, and locals, as well as visitors, gather for the annual festive Christmas Tree lighting ceremony in December.