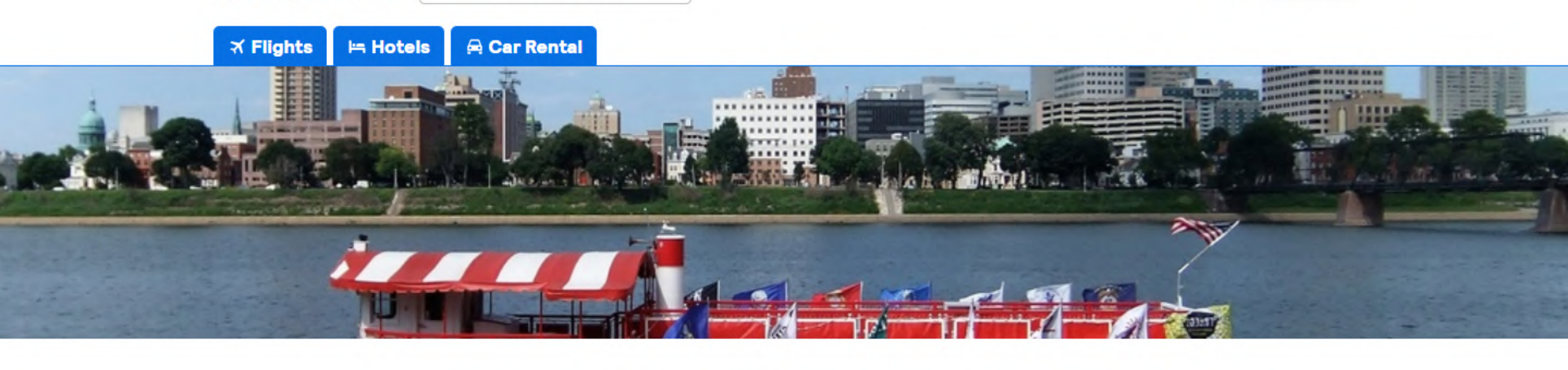

List view Map view

Dan Morey
Pennsylvania, USA

Writer, traveler, bon vivant.

Dan Morey's guides

Print this guide

Harrisburg and Hershey: A Central PA Getaway

Artsy History Foodies

Pennsylvania's capital city, Harrisburg, is home to one of the country's finest capitol buildings. Its glazed green terracotta dome gleams in the sunlight, and the ornate interior glimmers with gold leaf. There's natural beauty in Harrisburg, too: the Susquehanna River with its picturesque islands. Fifteen miles up the road you'll find "The Sweetest Place on Earth," Hershey. This model town was built for the employees of Milton Hershey's sprawling chocolate factory in 1903 and features gardens and amusements that are still popular today. This guide spotlights some of the best historical and architectural attractions in both cities, along with my favorite eateries.

Juno Kim Skyscanner

Pennsylvania State Capitol

501 N 3rd St, Harrisburg, PA 17120,

★★★★★

This building was my primary reason for visiting Harrisburg, and I wasn't disappointed. The capitol was designed by Philadelphia architect Joseph Miller Huston and completed in 1908. It was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt who declared it "the handsomest state capitol I have ever seen." After taking the free tour, which included stops in the Rotunda, Senate, House of Representatives and PA Supreme Court, I have to agree with him. From the 17-foot tall statue of "Commonwealth" atop the iconic green dome to the Rotunda floor with its rustic Moravian tiles, the entire building is simply magnificent.

See more

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State Museum of Pennsylvania

300 North Street, Harrisburg, PA 17120-0101

★★★★★

If you want a fantastic introduction to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, this is the place to go. You'll see exhibits on PA geology, wildlife, history, industry, transportation, art and more. Start on the top level with the taxidermied native animals and work your way down. Don't miss the giant bronze statue of Pennsylvania's founder, William Penn, on the first floor. I loved the PA Turnpike (nation's first superhighway) memorabilia collection and the robot that was used to clean up the meltdown at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant.

See more

Magus & David flickr

Grace United Methodist Church

216 State St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

You can't miss the tall, pointed spire of this Gothic Revival Methodist church on State Street. Architecturally, it's a stunner, but its role in Pennsylvania history is even more impressive. Prior to 1799, PA's capital city was Philadelphia. After a brief period in Lancaster, Harrisburg was chosen as the new capital in 1810. Philadelphia tried for a century to reclaim its status and almost succeeded in 1897 when the Capitol Building in Harrisburg burned. Fortunately for Harrisburg, the congregation of Grace Methodist allowed the State Legislature to meet in its sanctuary until a new Capitol Building could be built. If not for Grace Methodist, Pennsylvania's capital city might very well be Philadelphia today!

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"Waiting" Statue

N Front St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

It's easy to walk past this man reading a newspaper without realizing he's a statue. Sculptor Seward Johnson achieved such incredible realism through a complicated process that begins with plastering a clay model. Clothing is added next and sprayed with hardening resin. Finally, the figure is cast in bronze. Shoes, socks, fabric patterns on the pants, jacket and hat...everything looks shockingly real. The sculpture, which dates to the early 1990s, underwent an $11,000 refurbishment at Seward's studio in 2017. Find it on North Front Street at the foot of State.

See more

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Riverfront Park

200 S Front St, Harrisburg, PA 17104, USA

★★★★★

This long, narrow park runs between Front Street and the east bank of the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg. It's part of the Capital Area Greenbelt, a 20 mile loop trail popular with joggers, bicyclists, dog-walkers and roller-bladers. There are great views across the river to the west bank and the Blue Mountain beyond. Lots of events are held here, including the Woofstock Dog Festival and the state's largest Fourth of July music festival, American MusicFest. A wonderful place for a stroll!

See more

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Aleco's Cafe and Restaurant

Tripoli - Zgharta Rd, Tripoli, Lebanon

★★★★☆

This restaurant is right across the street from the State Museum of Pennsylvania, where the St. Moritz Supper Club used to be. The St. Moritz specialized in Cajun food and you can still find some on Aleco's menu. I really enjoyed the New Orleans salad, with grilled chicken and sausage. Owner Jose "Chuy" Garcia used to run a smaller version of Aleco's on 2nd street, where his hoagies, pizza and wraps were very popular. All of that has carried over to the new location, along with an expanded menu of seafood and steaks.

See more

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Pine Street Presbyterian Church

310 N 3rd St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

I love this moody Gothic Revival cathedral on 3rd and Pine. The lancet windows and Gothic arches give it a distinct look in the largely neoclassical Capitol District. Pine Street Presbyterian has ministered to Harrisburg's homeless population since 1858. They provide a soup kitchen and programs like Downtown Daily Bread that offer counseling, lunch and other assistance. So if you stop in to see the amazing stained glass windows, be sure to leave a donation. An excellent concert series—Music at Pine Street—is held here.

See more

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East Shore YMCA

701 N Front St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

As I passed this building on Front Street in Harrisburg, I wondered if I'd taken a wrong turn and somehow ended up in Tuscany. The brickwork, tile roof and rich architectural detail are worthy of a Romanesque cathedral. But this is no church. The building is a YMCA, designed in a style that was common for Ys from around the turn of the century to the mid-1930s. The East Shore YMCA dates to 1933 and was one of the last to be built in this grand fashion.

See more

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Soldier's Grove

531-559 Commonwealth Ave, Harrisburg, PA 17120, USA

★★★★★

Soldier's Grove is located behind the East Wing of the PA Capitol between the Veterans' Memorial Fountain with its programmed water show and the towering twin pillars at the State Street Bridge. The pillars honor Pennsylvania's veterans, as does the grove, a quiet park comprised of a series of walkways representing America's wars. The memorial stones along the walks contain the names of PA's Medal of Honor Recipients. Tree-shaded Soldier's Grove is a peaceful retreat in the middle of the busy Capitol District.

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Magus & David flickr

City Island

1–99 Station Rd, Harrisburg, PA 17101, United States

★★★★★

City Island sits in the middle of the Susquehanna River, across from downtown Harrisburg. It's home to FNB Field, where the Harrisburg Senators minor league baseball team plays. You can also catch a professional soccer (Penn FC) game. If you'd rather participate in sports than watch them, batting cages and volleyball courts are available. There's a train that goes around the mile-long island, and a carousel and mini-golf for kids. I enjoyed the concrete beach and the Pride of the Susquehanna, a paddle-wheeler that offers river cruises. To get to the island by car take the Market Street Bridge. You can also walk or bike over the Walnut Street Bridge.

See more

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Cathedral Parish of Saint Patrick

212 State St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

A large amount of Irish immigrants showed up in central Pennsylvania during the 19th century to work on canals, but there weren't enough Catholic churches to accommodate them. So a new diocese was formed in Harrisburg with St. Patrick as its main cathedral. After PA's Capitol was built just up State Street in 1906, it was decided that a grander cathedral was needed. The result is this Renaissance Revival masterpiece (largest church in Harrisburg) with a green dome to complement the Capitol's. Its stained glass windows were imported from Munich, Germany.

See more

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Civic Club of Harrisburg

612 N Front St, Harrisburg, PA 17101

★★★★★

The Tudor Revival manor that houses the Civic Club of Harrisburg was once the home of William Reynolds Fleming, owner of Fleming's Foundry & Machine Works. It's known as "Overlook" due to its prime location on a bluff above the scenic Susquehanna River. Fleming's widow, Virginia, left the house to the Civic Club of Harrisburg in 1914 and it's been a popular venue for events ever since. Free historic programs with an optional luncheon ($16) are held in the ballroom, and tours of the house and English gardens are available.

See more

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Pennsylvania State Archives

Corner of Third and Forster Streets, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, United States

★★★★★

British nobleman William Penn signed a charter in 1681 allowing him to found the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on land ceded to him by King Charles II. You can see a copy of this historic document in the State Museum of Pennsylvania, but the original resides here, in the Pennsylvania State Archives. Over 250 million documents are stored in the Archives, from vital statistics to personal letters from Civil War soldiers. The monumental stone tower that houses this incredible collection is located near the State Capitol and Museum. It's open Wednesday through Saturday.

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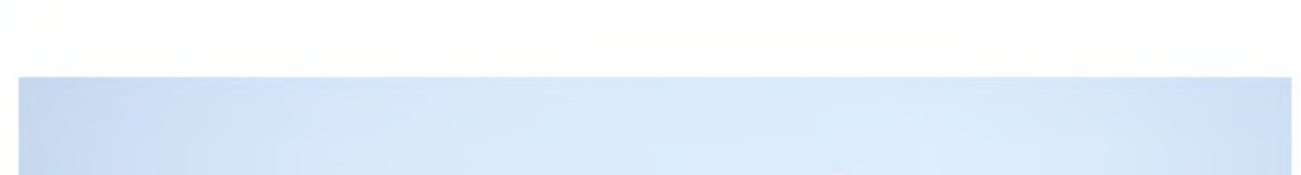

FULTON BANK

Dan Morey Skyscanner

Fulton Bank Building

200 N 3rd St, Harrisburg, PA 17101, USA

★★★★★

This building—a fine example of Art Deco architecture—was once the famous Hotel Harrisburger. The hotel opened in 1930 and was on the cutting edge of modernity and luxury. Politicians and reporters were known to frequent its lounge, the Caucus Room. At 257 feet (21 floors) it's the fifth tallest building in the city and is visible from just about anywhere. The Harrisburger closed in 1969 and the building now houses corporate office space for Fulton Bank and other tenants.

See more

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Pride of the Susquehanna

City Island, Harrisburg, PA 17101

★★★★★

This riverboat might look antique, but it was actually built in 1988. It's one of six true stern-driven paddle boats still in operation today. That means both propulsion and steering are done exclusively with the paddle wheels. The first thing I did in Harrisburg was take the Pride's public sightseeing tour, which runs about 45 minutes and includes narration that covers the area's history from the days of the Susquehannock tribe up to the present day. The ship has a small copper bar with beer, soda and snacks.

See more

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Rodeway Inn Wormleysburg - Harrisburg

860 N. Front St., US 15, 11, Wormleysburg, PA 17043, United States

★★★★☆

This motel is on the west shore of the Susquehanna River, just a bridge crossing away from downtown Harrisburg. Our room on the upper floor had great river views; we could even see the PA Capitol dome, all lit up at night. Breakfast was free, but not very exciting—just bread and jam and packaged muffins. Though it only takes a few minutes to drive into Harrisburg, don't overlook the great dining options (Duke's Riverside Grill, etc.) on the west shore. Service at the Rodeway was friendly and there's plenty of free parking.

See more

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Duke's Riverside Bar & Grille

313 S Front St, Wormleysburg, PA 17043, USA

★★★★★

I was surprised by the affordable prices at this large restaurant on the west bank of the Susquehanna River. Usually a table on a deck overlooking water means overpriced food and drinks, but that isn't the case at Duke's. I'm really into their new Stax dishes. You get fries (regular, waffle or sweet potato) topped with chicken, coleslaw, green onions, cheese, wontons or other goodies. My favorite is the Nashville Hot Stax. The chicken is hand-breaded, the sauce is spicy, and the coleslaw is perfect.

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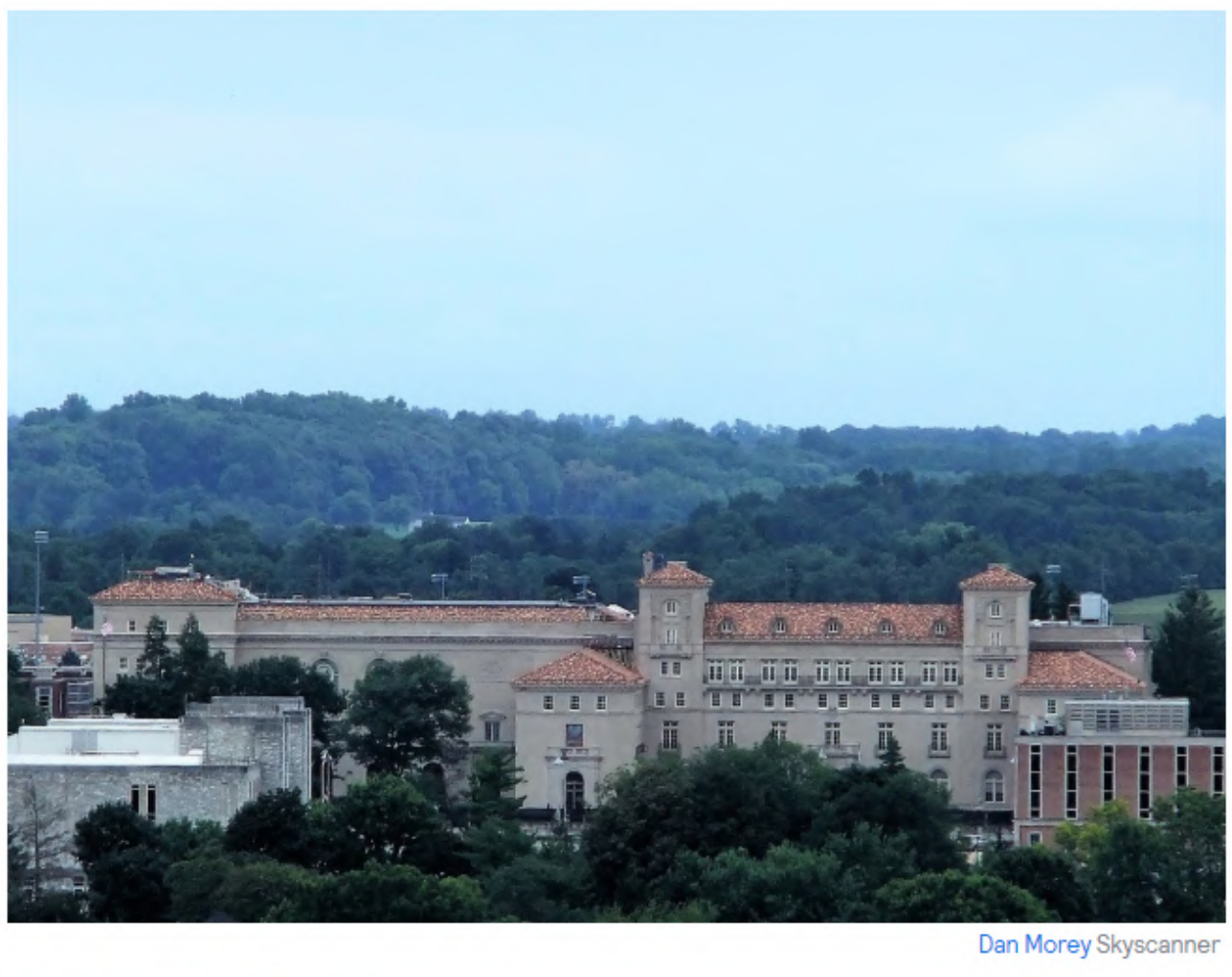

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Hershey Theatre

15 E Caracas Ave, Hershey, PA 17033-1412

★★★★★

During the Great Depression, as banks were failing and building projects were stalling, Milton Hershey did something daring. He began a development project in Hershey, PA called the "Great Building Campaign." The plan put a lot of people to work and resulted in some magnificent architecture. The Hotel Hershey, Hershey Stadium and Hershey Community Center were all built in the 1930s. The Community Center includes a library, swimming pool, gym and two theatres. The big one, Hershey Theatre, seats over 1900 spectators, and is wonderfully ornate. It's a popular stop for touring Broadway shows. If you get a chance to see something here, go for it!

See more

Juno Kim Skyscanner

The Hotel Hershey

100 Hotel Road, Hershey, PA 17033

★★★★★

The Hotel Hershey sits high atop Pat's Hill, overlooking downtown Hershey and Hersheypark. It was built by Milton Hershey during his Great Building Campaign of the 1930s. The design is based on a hotel he visited in the Mediterranean and includes an indoor fountain worthy of the Alhambra, a Spanish patio, Castilian ballroom and Iberian lounge. I spent a lot of time wandering the halls looking at the historic photos that decorate the walls. There are display cases as well, full of fascinating items from the hotel's early days. Like staying in a luxurious museum!

See more

HOTEL
HERSHEY
HERSHEY, PENNSYLVANIA

Michael Skyscanner

Harvest at the Hotel Hershey

100 Hotel Rd, Hershey, PA 17033

★★★★★

The historic Hotel Hershey has a number of food options, from fine dining at The Circular (the main dining room) to pub grub in the Iberian Lounge. Harvest is a casual option, located in a separate building behind the hotel. The focus at Harvest is on fresh, local ingredients. The beef comes from Bow Creek Farm, a few miles to the north, and Hershey brewed beer from Troegs is on tap. Had a very nice Sunday brunch here.

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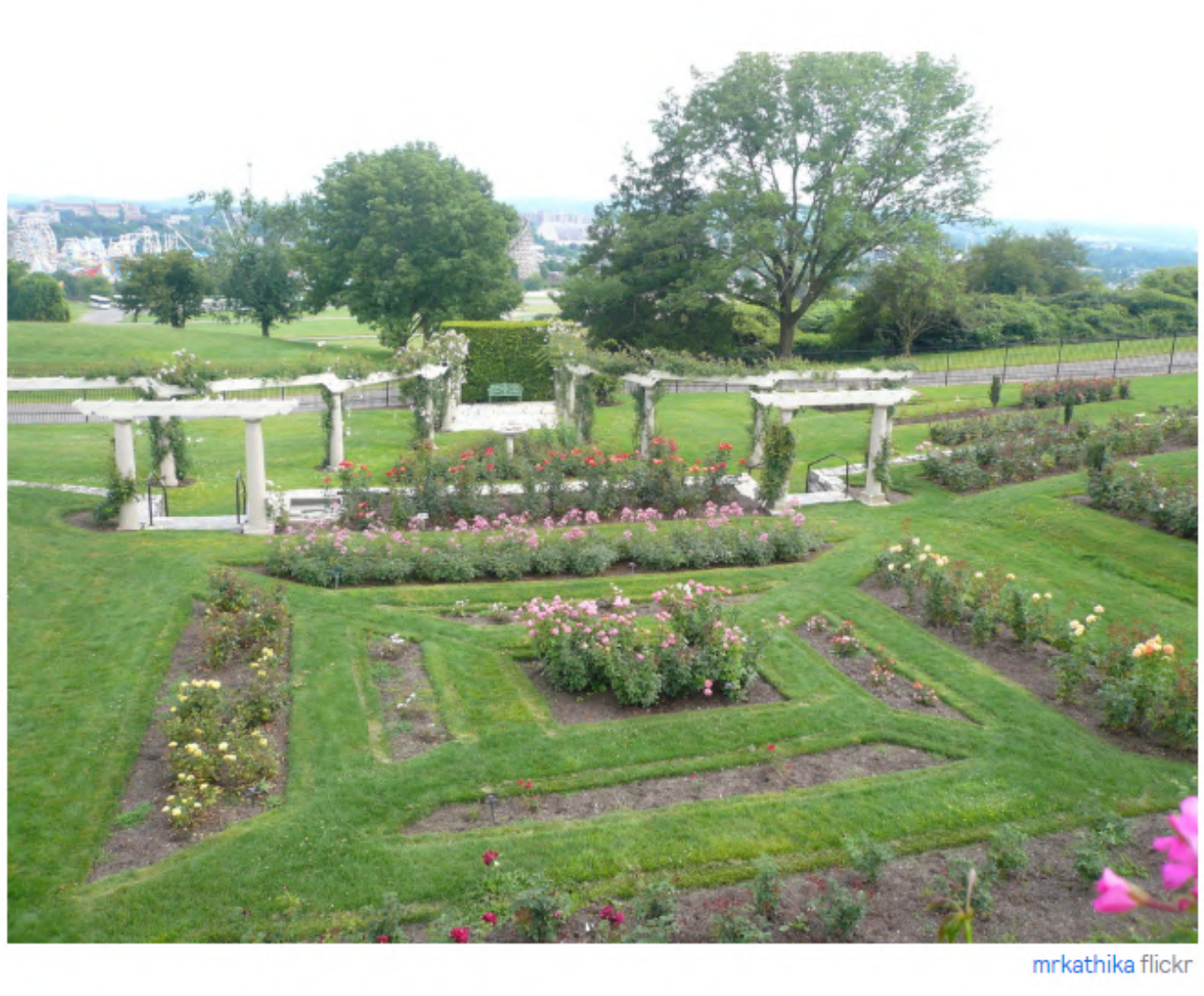

mrkathika flickr

Hershey Gardens

170 Hotel Rd, Hershey, PA 17033

★★★★★

When this 23-acre botanical garden opened in 1937 it was much smaller (3.5 acres) and only contained roses. The roses are still here and are still spectacular. Be sure to seek out the famous M. S. Hershey Rose, a red Hybrid Tea variety, reintroduced in 2012 to celebrate the garden's 75th anniversary. Admission includes entrance to the Butterfly Atrium, an indoor tropical garden populated with hundreds of butterflies. Even if you've done butterfly attractions before, this one is worth visiting for the exotic vegetation. I'd never seen a Golden Shrimp Plant before!

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Milton Hershey School

711 Crest Ln, Hershey, PA

★★★★★

Chocolate baron Milton Hershey founded the Milton Hershey School for low-income children in 1909 and eventually bequeathed his entire fortune to it. Qualifying kids can start as early as preschool and continue through 12th grade, all at no cost to their families. Over 2000 students currently attend the school, and, thanks to small class sizes and plenty of personal attention, they all receive an excellent education. Catherine Hall, located on the hill overlooking Hersheypark, is an art deco wonder. The Hershey School's Visitors Center is located at Founders Hall on East Governor Road.

See more

HERSHEY
HERSHEY

Dan Morey Skyscanner

Old Hershey Chocolate Factory

Hershey, PA 17033, USA

★★★★☆

The town of Hershey used to smell like chocolate, but that famous scent disappeared in 2012 when the Hershey Company closed its factory and moved production to plants in West Hershey, Mexico and elsewhere. Of the 25 original factory buildings on East Chocolate Avenue, only five remain. They were repurposed into offices that retain much of the factory's heritage architecture and even incorporate vintage machinery into the interior design. The old power plant, with its twin brick chimneys, still inspires a bit of Willy Wonka wonder.

See more

Dan Morey Skyscanner

Hershey Press Building

27 W Chocolate Ave, Hershey, PA 17033, USA

★★★★★

The Hershey Press Building was designed by Lancaster architect C. Emlen Urban for Milton Hershey and completed in 1916. Urban built numerous structures for Hershey, including the chocolate tycoon's house, High Point. Over the years, the Press Building has housed a commercial printing company, laundry, bakery, the Hershey Department Store (1920-1973) and other retailers. These days, after a thorough restoration, it's one of the better places to go out to eat in Hershey. Devon, the seafood and steak restaurant, is here, along with Houlihan's, which has a nice deck for warm days.

See more

FENICCI'S
TUES
102 West Chocolate Avenue
Hershey, PA 17033
(717) 533-7159

Fenicci's Restaurant

102 W Chocolate Ave, Frnt, Hershey, PA 17033-1598

★★★★★

Fenicci's has been in business since 1935 and is the oldest freestanding restaurant in Hershey. Though the Fenice family no longer runs Fenicci's the current owners have kept their great Italian recipes alive. They do a lot of coupons and specials, so a meal here is always affordable. Happy Hour deals include 50-cent wings and meatballs, and half off apps and pizzas. Fenicci's most famous pie is the vintage 1947 Upside Down Pizza, with cheese on the bottom and sauce on the top.

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ChocolateTown Park

48 W Chocolate Ave, Hershey, PA 17033, USA

★★★★☆

This nicely landscaped park is right on Hershey's main drag, Chocolate Avenue. You can sit here, munching your Special Dark bar, watching the crowds walk by under Kiss-shaped streetlamps. The shade is very welcome on hot, sunny days. On Saturdays, a Farmer's Market is held here, and there are musical events throughout the year. New Year's Eve festivities also take place at Chocolate Town Park, with plenty of hot cocoa (Hershey's, of course) to go around.

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First United Methodist Church of Hershey

64 W Chocolate Ave, Hershey, PA 17033, USA

★★★★☆

This castle-like church on West Chocolate Avenue was built in 1928 for the United Brethren. When the Brethren merged with the Methodist Church in 1968, it became the First United Methodist Church of Hershey. There are some great stained glass windows inside and a 1957 Kilgen pipe organ. The church is known for its music, especially the adult and youth handbell choirs. Check out their concert series if you get a chance—they book some really talented musicians.

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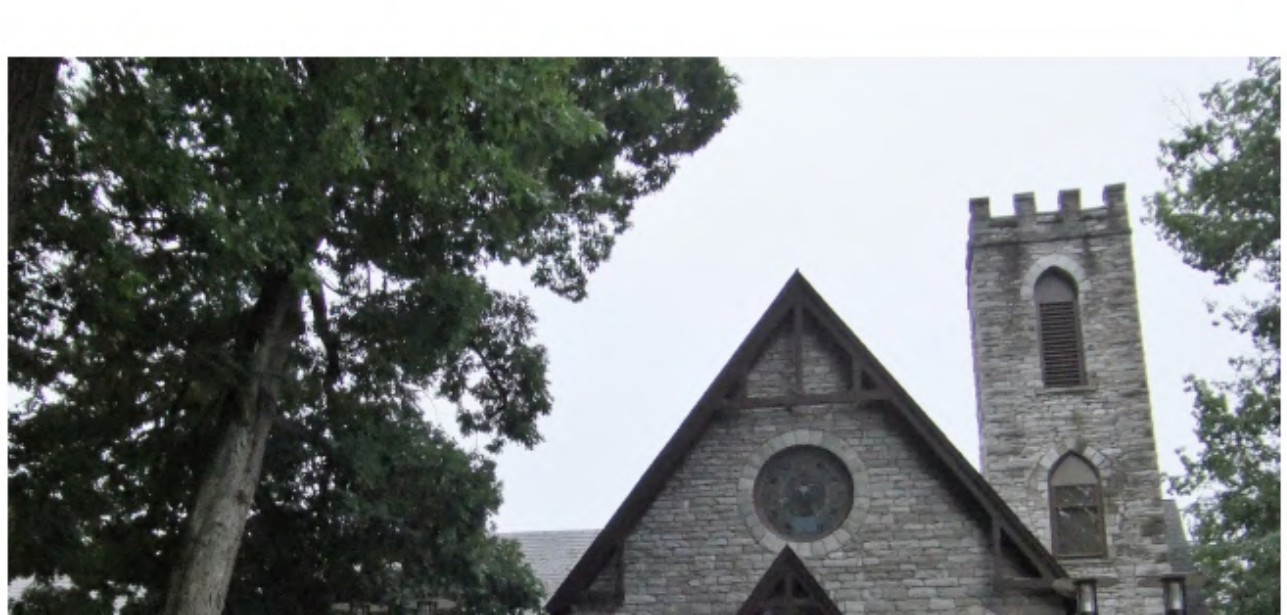

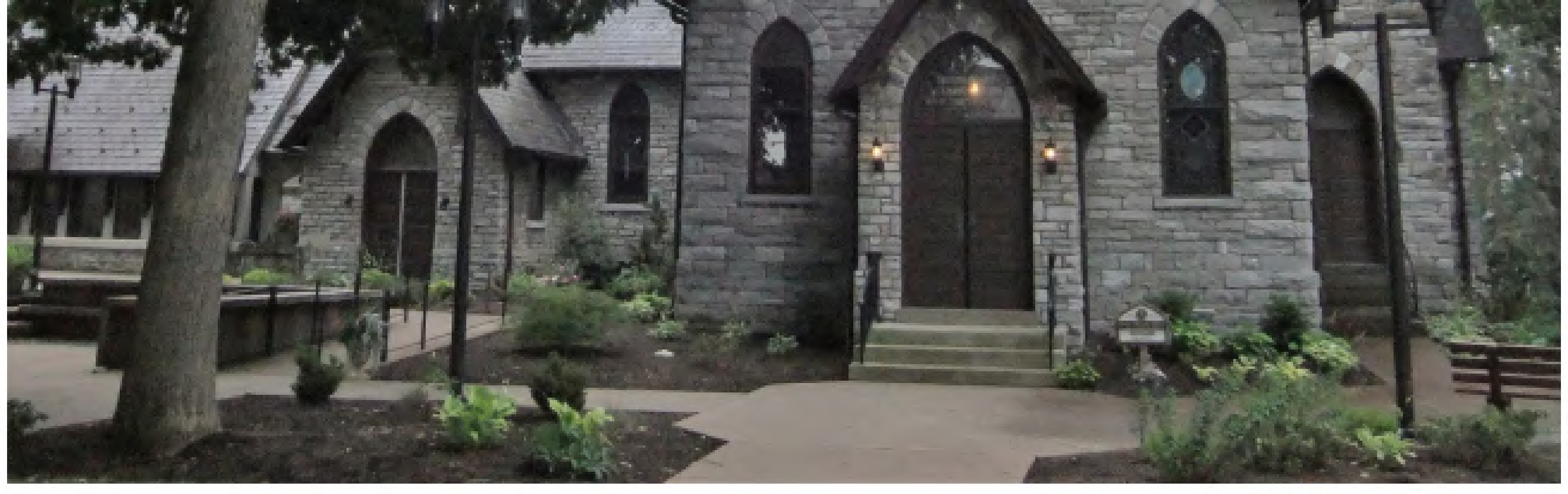

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Derry Presbyterian Church

248 E Derry Rd, Hershey, PA 17033, USA

★★★★★

This is a great place to go if you want to see what central Pennsylvania was like during Pioneer times. A Presbyterian church was founded here in 1729, followed by a school in 1732 and a cemetery in 1735. Incredibly, the old wooden Session House school has survived, and is protected from the elements by a glass enclosure. Be sure to check out the cemetery, as well. Over 200 pioneers (mostly Scots-Irish) are interred here, along with many Native Americans (buried four deep) who were killed in battles with the settlers.

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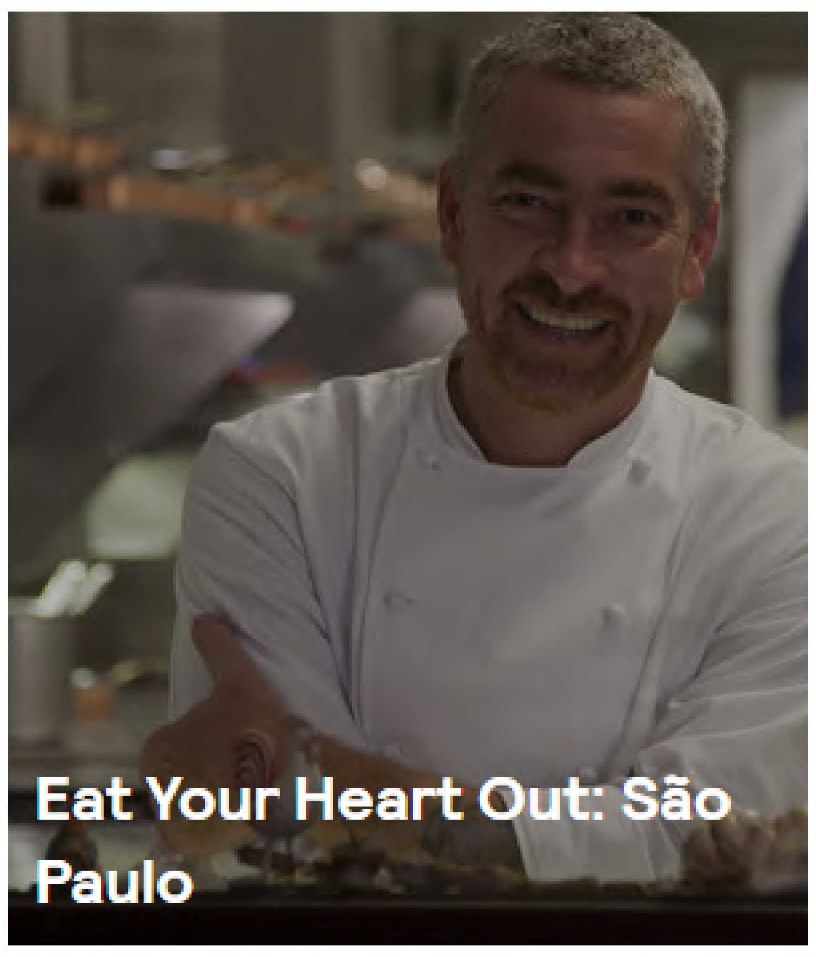

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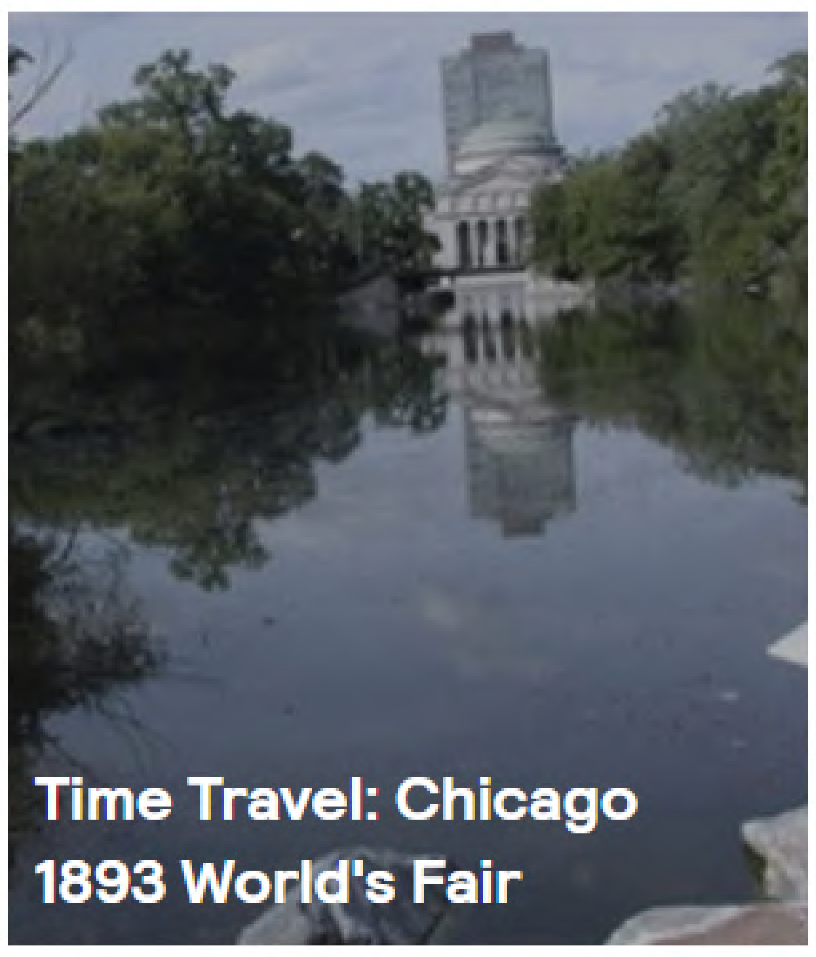

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