

PHILADELPHIA CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY 365 DAYS A YEAR

Events Really Heat Up In February, Giving Tourists Another Reason To Stay Overnight



Philadelphia celebrates African American history 365 days a year, but things really heat up in February when the region's museums, arts and cultural organizations and historic sites pull out all the stops for Black History Month. The 2006 celebration will be especially festive as the African American Museum in Philadelphia kicks off its 30th anniversary year and opera star Denyce

Graves performs in the East Coast premiere of Margaret Garner. Here are just a few of the month's highlights:

Performing Arts:

- Internationally renowned mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves stars in the East Coast premiere of Margaret Garner, the Opera Company of Philadelphia's powerful new work based on the true story of a fugitive slave who gave up everything to save her children from slavery. The all-star cast, featuring Rodney Gilfry and Angela Brown, performs the English libretto written by Nobel Prize-winner Toni Morrison at the Academy of Music. February 10-26. Broad & Locust Street, (215) 893-3600, www.operaphilly.com
- The Renaissance Artist Puppet Company turns the Southwestern African folk tale of Ananse and the Sky God into a full stage production at the Montgomery County Cultural Center. The performance weaves together puppets, music and dance. February 17-19. 208 DeKalb Street, Norristown, (610) 630-4259, www.renartpuppetco.com
- Ladysmith Black Mambazo, with Vusi Mahlasela, brings signature South African rhythms to The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts for the Long Walk to Freedom concert. February 19. 260 S. Broad Street, (215) 893-1999, www.kimmelcenter.org

Historical Happenings:

- Every Saturday and Sunday in February, the National Park Service (NPS) conducts presentations about the President's House and the slaves who served there during the

18th century. Each weekend rangers will also lead Slavery and the Underground Railroad, a walking tour of key sites. NPS programs and tours originate at Independence Visitor Center. 6th & Market Streets, (215) 965-2305, www.nps.gov/inde

- Pottsgrove Manor, the 1752 home of ironmaster John Potts, hosts Bound to Serve – A Look at Slavery in the 18th Century. The lecture will delve into the history of Pottsgrove and the slave trade. Free, but reservations are required. February 12. 100 W. King Street, Pottstown, (610) 326-4014, www.montcopa.org/historicsites/pottsgrove
- Visitors can experience history for themselves at Cliveden, site of the Battle of Germantown. Re-enactor Noah Lewis portrays Ned Hector, an African American artilleryman in the battles of Germantown and Brandywine. After touring the battlefield, kids can don an 18th-century soldier's uniform and then enjoy a reception in the carriage house. February 19. 6401 Germantown Avenue, (215) 848-1777, www.cliveden.org

Museum Hopping:

- There's no better time to explore the accomplishments of the African American heroes featured at the National Liberty Museum than during their popular Black History Month Celebrations. Not only will visitors have the chance to participate in arts and crafts activities, they can also take home a special activity book full of recipes, puzzles and fun things-to-do. 321 Chestnut Street, (215) 925-2800, www.libertymuseum.org
- The African American Museum of Philadelphia celebrates its 30th anniversary with a year of special events. Sundays during Black History Month are film days with such classics as *The Color Purple* (February 5), *Hotel Rwanda* (February 12), *Sankofa* (February 19) and *Four Little Girls* (February 26). Arts are on the agenda Tuesday through Saturday with African dance workshops, storytelling and interactive dramatic presentations presented by Mlanjeni Magical Theatre, Denise Valentine and others from Keepers of the Culture. Lectures and book readings by Haki Madhubuti (February 10), Carl Westmoreland (February 16) and Dr. Molefi Kete Asante (February 18) are also on tap. 701 Arch Street, (215) 574-0380, www.aampmuseum.org
- History lives at the Civil War and Underground Railroad Museum when a costumed African American Civil War soldier talks about his experiences in the Union Army (February 11) and when Harriet Tubman holds court with stories and memories (February 18). The Museum's Faith and Freedom kicks off on February 19 with a re-enactment of the famous "Thanksgiving Sermon" by Absalom Jones at the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. 1805 Pine Street, (215) 735-8196, www.cwurmuseum.org
- Actor/musician Joe Becton mixes facts with fun during his presentation of *The Black Soldier in the Civil War* at the Mercer Museum. Clad in authentic 19th-century garb, Becton exposes the conditions of camp life and reveals the reality of war from an African American perspective. February 12. 84 S. Pine Street, Doylestown, (215) 345-0210, www.mercermuseum.org

Out And About:

- During the Independence Visitor Center's Black History Month celebration, visitors can meet and chat with sports heroes (February 4-5); black inventors (February 11-12); blacks in the military, including surviving Buffalo Soldiers and Tuskegee Airmen (February 18-19); and visit the Commemorating Slavery exhibition (February 25-26). 6th & Market Streets, (800) 537-7676, www.independencevisitorcenter.com
- Discovery Day at Longwood Gardens is packed with activities for all ages. Families can visit the African Bead Plant display, hear storytelling by Mama Sandi, take part in a dance workshop by Dunya Performing Arts Company, enjoy a jazz concert, participate in the Pot-a-Plant activity or get creative at the kids' African beading workshop. February 4. US Route 1, Kennett Square, (610) 388-1000, www.longwoodgardens.org

Visitors can make the most of their Philadelphia visit with overnight packages offering value-added benefits and amenities. For a comprehensive listing of Black History Month events, hotel packages and to book accommodations, visit the newly redesigned www.gophila.com.

The Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC) builds the region's economy and image through destination marketing to increase the number of visitors, the number of nights they stay and the number of things they do in the five-county region. For more information about travel to Philadelphia, visit www.gophila.com or call the Independence Visitor Center, located in Independence National Historical Park, at (800) 537-7676.