



TheCityTraveler.com

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Time to "manage your bookmarks?" We know there are at least a few sites in your browser you haven't looked at in ages. Clear them out to make room for TheCityTraveler.com. The site is described on its home page as, "An online magazine written and edited by experienced travel journalists for readers who love exploring the world's great urban places."

Philadelphia journalist JoAnn Greco, a travel writer who also covers architecture and planning issues for various magazines, said the site is active in a "soft launch" mode. She has partnered with two other local scribes, Robert DiGiacomo and Cathleen McCarthy, and started the site as a "natural outcome of my interests in urban places."

The site is not a blog, but allows readers to comment to stories. It has sections for urban travel books, deals and packages, a section that focuses on hotels, and another on specific neighborhoods. In the "Just Back From" section, Stacia Friedman posts from Galeries Lafayette, the oldest and largest department store in Paris. "You can walk in naked (with a credit card) and walk out in the height of fashion," Friedman posts. She also tells you the best time of year to go and how to get a 12 percent tax refund.

On Thursday, August 5, the above-the-fold had some local stuff stripped across the top: "Philadelphia: On Bike and Skate," by McCarthy. The post is written for an international audience, though, describing the city's "intimacy of scale," a phrase rarely uttered by morning commuters. And we think the city's tourism folks ought to seriously consider some adaptation of McCarthy's nicely turned thought that Philly has "a quirky beauty: part old-European elegance, part urban funk."

Full disclosure: Greco is a personal friend, and has invited me to contribute to the site. (Additional personal aside: Since last week marked 10 years to the month since I first made a living by writing for a Web-only audience – with a three-year dolphin dive back to newspapers in between – we at PlanPhilly are officially designating the term "soft launch" as retro, urban and chic.)

Those asides lead to another interesting aspect of the site: It is very 2009. Beneath the above-mentioned post are two promotions with staff bylines, for Loews Hotels (passes to museums, dining credits, parking) and for Park Hyatt (its new "Bicycle Valet" program, which launched worldwide Aug. 1). Call them what you will – both posts, which are polished versions of press releases, are clean, well-lighted spaces that are actually useful to travelers who dig on upscale hotels but wouldn't mind taking advantage of tips on cool, free and/or discounted stuff.

Clearly, DiGiacomo, McCarthy and Greco are journalists who want to establish an actual business model, rather than give away, willy-nilly, their talents and years of experience. If the promos get attention from big hotel groups or convention and visitor bureaus, they could result in income-producing "sponsored links" or just straight-up advertising. And wouldn't that be refreshing? (People who love cities tend to also have a fondness for reliable reporting, which, as we are all learning, doesn't come cheap.)

The official launch of The City Traveler (<http://www.thecitytraveler.com>) comes later this month.

"There are too many travel Web sites out there that salivate over spas and Caribbean beaches and nature walks," says Greco, recently back from Detroit, a decidedly grittier destination than the one before that – Zurich, Switzerland.

Greco says many travelers tend to look upon cities as prosaic, and pretty much all the same. "I think that's nuts!" she said.

-- Posted by Thomas J. Walsh

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