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A guidebook off the tourist track

A New York company has added Philadelphia to its series of city-living manuals.

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Back in 1990, Jane Pirone was driving around Manhattan at 3 a.m., low on gas and looking for an open service station. "What I need is a little book about New York that has this kind of information," Pirone, a resident of that city, thought. Ten years later, Pirone and business partner Rob Tallia turned her moment of anxiety into "Not For Tourists," a passport-size guide to living in New York City.

The guide spawned a series, and today Philadelphia gets its own guide with the distinctive NFT black-and-silver cover. "The concept of our guidebook is that it's completely location-driven," said Tallia, 38. "If I'm on South Street at Fourth and I need to get a cup of coffee before I die, or a bottle of gin to take to a party, this will tell me."

Despite the title, tourists too will likely find NFT Philadelphia invaluable, especially if they want to try to experience the "Fluffya" of the natives. Most Philadelphia guidebooks, for example, extol Reading Terminal Market. NFT says how to get there by car or mass transit and where to park, and it maps the terminal with the names and locations of all stores.

There is plenty of detail on Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the zoo and the region's other cultural sites. But the guide also gives an insider's view of living in the city's other neighborhoods, such as lower North Philadelphia, Southwark and Port Richmond, with such critical detail as neighborhood gas stations, hardware stores, and the best place to get a cheesesteak.

The guide features sections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender readers highlighting Center City businesses and organizations catering to the gay community. There is information on getting around by car, foot, bus, train or plane; profiles of college campuses; dining and entertainment; 27 four-color neighborhood maps and a foldout regional map - all packed into a 4-by-5 3/4-inch, 244-page softcover volume a half-inch thick that retails for \$14.95.

Tallia said he and Pirone began getting requests for a Philadelphia guide in 2002. Research and writing began a year ago. Philadelphia freelance writer Piers Marchant was hired as the city editor, Tallia said, to give a consistent tone to the neighborhood information and opinions of the researchers.

Neighborhood shopping and dining recommendations were based on what residents told researchers, not on advertising, Tallia said. Information was fact-checked and verified at Not For Tourists' New York office. Any guide is subjective and bound to omit someone's favorite place. NFT Philadelphia, for example, is noticeably light on detail about Northeast Philadelphia and such North Philly attractions as Ogontz Avenue in West Oak Lane.

Tallia said that is why Not For Tourists urges readers to tell them about errors and omissions through their Web site: www.notfortourists.com. The Web site features a PDF version of the Philadelphia guide to download and forms to order the book and wall-size versions of its maps.

Since the first New York City guide came out in 2000, NFT has put out guides for Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Washington and Atlanta. Tallia said each guide is updated annually; the 2006-07 Philadelphia book will be published in September 2006. "This is a living, growing thing," Tallia added. "We've had great user feedback. The first version is our pass at it. After that, the people who live here will be putting together the table of contents."