



Lorraine Lavender-Sams

Philadelphia offers a wide variety of diverse places to explore...parks, museums, food trucks, and restaurants--to name a few. But, there's a hidden gem right in the heart of North Philadelphia. The Discovery Center is located in East Fairmount Park, at

3401 Reservoir Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19121.

In a unique partnership, the Philadelphia Outward Bound School and the National Audubon Society have joined to save and sustain a vital part of the city's natural heritage. Situated in The Discovery Center, just blocks from the neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion, a century-old reservoir has been transformed into a magical wildlife sanctuary--an important stopover location for birds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway.

The Discovery Center is the headquarters for the Philadelphia Outward Bound School and a Philadelphia-based education center for Audubon Pennsylvania. The Discovery Center's indoor and outdoor classrooms, trails, exhibitions, climbing walls, aerial teams challenge course, and observation decks will engage participants from adjacent neighborhoods, the city, and across the region. Visitors will find this space a must-see when visiting Philadelphia.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic, a merger of Audubon Pennsylvania and Audubon Maryland-DC, unites a robust network of 26 chapters and more than 150,000 members as advocates for Mid-Atlantic birds. Audubon Mid-Atlantic's efforts on the ground in Pennsylvania and Maryland catalyze a large-scale conservation vision that encompasses both states, which are critically important for bird species traveling along the Atlantic Flyway. Audubon Mid-Atlantic also protects and restores critical

bird habitats within coastal Maryland, the Delaware Watershed, and the forests of the Pennsylvania Wild through conservation and advocacy work.

Providing outdoor opportunities and educational programming, The Discovery Center makes the natural space accessible to and welcoming to nearby community members and visitors. The Discovery Center opened in 2018; but, due to the timing of the global pandemic, many members of the nearby community remain unaware of this hidden gem.

Prior to its present transformation, the East Park Reservoir was considered a modern marvel of its time. Built-in the 1890s, the reservoir served as Philadelphia's primary source of drinking water. The necessity for a large reservoir became evident following a drought that threatened to completely stop the water supply in Philadelphia. Construction began in November of 1871 and was completed in 1889.

This iconic space boasts a 14,000-foot Venue for hosting events, nature trails, exhibits, gardening workshops, bird watching, plant walks, and a 300-foot zip line. All activities are free and open to the public unless otherwise specified. The windows in the Center encircle the reservoir, giving the visitor a full view of the natural vegetation and native birds that inhabit the area.

"Discovery Days are a great way for community members to experience a taste of what Outward Bound and Audubon have to offer," said Chris Richter, Director of Marketing Communications for the Philadelphia Outward Bound School. "The free programs feature canoeing, zip-lining, rock climbing, as well as nature walks, film screenings, and bird tours—even bird meet and greets! It's a great way for the whole family to escape into nature and is just blocks away from the Strawberry Mansion and Brewerytown communities."

A priority for The Discovery Center has been and continues to be making its amenities accessible and welcoming. The space really hits its mark. It's easy to access, and it's serene and quiet. Whether your zip lin-

ing, rock climbing, bird watching, or just simply sitting on a bench by the water, this space offers a variety of different options and a quiet place to relax in nature right in the middle of the city. The Discovery Center is in close proximity to SEPTA bus routes and Indego Bike Stations, and there is parking available.

The Discovery Center has winter and summer hours. Summer hours run from April 15th to October 15th. Summer hours of operation are 10 am to 7 pm Tuesday through Friday, 10 am to 5 pm on Saturday, and from noon to 5 pm on Sunday. Winter hours run from October 16th to April 14th. Winter hours of operation are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm, and noon to 5 pm on Sunday. Phone: (610)-990-3431.

The Discovery Center is closed on Mondays during both the winter and summer seasons. For more information and upcoming events, check out The Discovery Center website at [www.discoverphila.org](http://www.discoverphila.org).

