Independence from the trodden path

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A cross from Philadelphia’s Rittenhouse Square one morning in April, I waited for my breakfast at the cafe Parc. Street maps and highlighters covered the table, and my bike helmet sat on the bench next to me.

My go-to meal before a big ride is oatmeal. My order arrived, covered with a brettle, scorch-sugar topping and looking as though it had made a detour through the desert cart, I wondered what other surprises this day would bring.

I folded my maps, vowed to read the menu more carefully next time, fueled up on my sweet oatmeal brulee and set off for a day of pedaling.

The week before I arrived in Philly, the city had launched its new bike-share, called Indego (named for sponsor Independence Blue Cross). The benefit of waiting for dozens of other cities to set up programs first was that Philadelphia could learn vicarious lessons (such as offering a pay-with-cash option, making the bikes accessible to more people) and, presumably, take time to im-

prove bike lanes and fix potholes.

Arriving as a bike-share novice, I thought this would be a groovy way to check out a few new city parks and public spaces along the Delaware River to the east, the Schuylkill River to the west and the 30-block Center City in-between. I walked toward the row of electric-blue, two-basket bikes on the opposite side of Rittenhouse. Online, I’d signed up for a $15 one-month membership, which bought me free rides for up to an hour. So all I had to do was swipe my credit card and tap a few buttons on the touch screen for the docking system to unlock a bike. I adjusted the seat, checked my watch and headed east toward the Delaware.

Flanked by the Walt Whitman and Benjamin Franklin bridges, the section of the Delaware River waterfront accessible to tourists is largely industrial. William Penn, who sailed up this river in 1682, might rub his eyes in disbelief if he saw the transformation underway today.

Spruce Street Harbor Park is one of the most popular new spots — a summer pop-up with a roller skating rink, hammock garden, floating barges, shuffleboard and boardwalk.

Philadelphia’s come a long way since the Founding Fathers walked its streets — and the coolest new spaces are best cruised by bike.
Get up to speed on Philly’s waterfront revival

During my day downtown, I was happy to see theGarden that offers free admission. In the garden, a few local cyclists who rode the bike-share system. The new Indego system is one of the city’s greatest assets, and it’s about to get even better. In May, the city will begin the first phase of the Schuylkill River Trail’s expansion, with the addition of a new path between the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and the 40th Street Bridge. The trail will be open to the public for the first time, and it promises to be a beautiful addition to the city’s waterfront trail system.

For more information, visit www.rideindego.com or call 215-629-3200. If you’re interested in learning more about Philadelphia and the Schuylkill River Trail, visit www.schuylkillrivertrail.com.