

Well, you've decided to go to the Franklin Institute. Step 1: Get to where Benjamin Franklin Parkway and 20th Street meet. Next: Familiarize yourself with the finer points of what might be called the "Please Touch the Future" Museum. Here goes:

What's Open When The Futures Center starts up at 9:30 a.m. seven days a week and stays open late every day except Mondays (when it closes at 5 p.m.). On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays it's open until 8 p.m., and on Fridays and Saturdays visitors can stay until 9 p.m. Those later hours enable you to "make an evening of it" _ including having dinner at the restaurants described on Page 6.

At the 350-seat Omniverse Theater, screenings last about 50 minutes and always start on the hour. Mondays: hourly 12-4 p.m.; Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays: noon-4 p.m. and at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays: hourly 10 a.m.-9 p.m. (except 6 p.m.); and Sundays, hourly 10 a.m.-8 p.m. (except 6 p.m.).

The Science Center (the original part of the Franklin Institute) is open seven days a week from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Unlike the Futures Center, the Science Center does not stay open late.)

The Planetarium's feature shows begin at noon and 2 p.m. Monday-Friday and at noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Weekend-only specialty shows: The Sky Tonight, 1 p.m., and Children's shows, 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

(Beginning June 22, evening Planetarium shows will be available on Fridays and Saturdays.)

All-Purpose Phone Number

The Franklin Institute has a 24-hour information hotline: 448-1200.

Best Times to Visit

You say you like science and you like kids _ but not necessarily at the same time. Then you'll want to visit during off-peak hours, when school and/or camp groups are least likely to still be around. That means arriving in the late afternoon (visit the Science Center first because it closes at 5 p.m.) and then going to the Futures Center, which is open late every evening except Monday. On weekends, Sunday before noon is the best time to visit.

How Long You'll Stay

If you are the average visitor, you'll probably stay about four hours. That doesn't mean your pace will be like everyone else's. You or your child might spend 10 minutes at one exhibit, 20 at a special demonstration, 40 in a third area that is of particular interest. If you take in the Omniverse Theater show, add another 50 minutes to your stay. And you might carve out some time for a meal. The point is,

don't come expecting to be in and out in an hour. There's too much to see .:.:. and a quick visit simply is not a cost-effective way to spend time here.

Tickets

You may buy tickets for just one attraction, a combination of any two, or _ the best deal _ one that's good for all three (Science/Futures centers, Omniverse Theater and Planetarium). There are two price structures, one for adults and another (shown in parenthesis) for children and senior citizens. (For group rates, call 448-1150).

During the day (9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.)

& Futures centers combined, \$7.50 (\$6)

Omniverse Theater, \$6 (\$5)

Fels Planetarium, \$5 (\$4)

Any two attractions, \$9.50 (\$7.50)

Any three attractions, \$11.50 (\$9.50)

Evenings (5 p.m. to closing)

Science Center, closed

Futures Center, \$6 (\$5)

Omniverse Theater, \$6, (\$5)

* Fels Planetarium, \$5 (\$4)

Any two attractions, \$8 (\$7)

* Planetarium evening shows are available Friday and Saturdays only, starting June 22

Buying Tickets

You can wait until you arrive at the Institute to purchase tickets to all attractions, but that's not the best idea if you're planning to visit the Omniverse Theater. (If you don't order Omniverse tickets in advance, you may have to wait all day to get a seat _ or you may not get one at all. The Institute expects more than a million people to visit the theater during its first year, and that leaves only a few dozen seats per show for ``walk-in'' visitors.)

Advance tickets are available in person at Ticketron outlets and by Ticketron Phone Charge (1-800-233-4050). However, only combination tickets can be purchased through Ticketron. Franklin Institute members may reserve tickets in advance _ and avoid the \$1.50-a-ticket Ticketron service charge as well _ by calling 448-1254. (For other membership benefits, see ``Joining the Institute.") might want to add ``on facing page" or wherever that paragraph ends up)

Bathrooms

You're never too far from a restroom _ there's a set near every elevator _ but if you want a changing table to take care of baby's

diapers you're limited to the ``ladies rooms'' on the first and second floors of the Science Center. (As advanced as the Futures Center is, it doesn't have any facilities for doing the diaper deed. And fathers who take on that chore in any area of the complex will have to get by without a special table.

What You Can Do for Free

It's possible to spend time at the Franklin Institute without paying a penny admission. Because access to the Future Center's Atrium is free, you can stay there and just watch the crowd _ or enter one of the Institute's restaurants or shops. In addition, free evening programs _ concerts and such _ are scheduled for most Wednesday-through-Saturday evenings. Music presentations are the usual fare on Friday and Saturday nights. On Wednesday nights expect a Benjamin Franklin-themed program. And on Thursday nights you'll see versions of some of the Institute's most popular science demonstrations, but upgraded a bit to appeal to adults.

Taking Pictures

Photography _ both still and video _ is permitted everywhere except the Omniverse Theater and Fels Planetarium (where it would disturb others). The Institute asks only that you not bring elaborate set-ups (such as tripods or special lighting).

No Smoking

Cigarette, cigar and pipe smoking are prohibited throughout the entire Franklin Institute, including the restrooms and restaurants.

Handicapped Facilities

Handicapped visitors should enter using the ramp on Winter Street _ the small street between the Parkway and the museum _ or the garage elevator in the Atrium Lobby. All bathrooms have wheelchair-accessible facilities, and ramps throughout the Futures Center all are at the recommended 12-to-1 wheelchair grade, with horizontal rest stops every 30 feet.

Getting Around

There's a lot of walking here (the new Futures Center alone is about 90,000 square feet), and a number of different floor surfaces _ marble, tile and carpeting _ so wear whatever is most comfortable for you under those varying conditions.

The Institute doesn't offer stroller rentals, but there are a few wheelchairs available for those who might find them necessary after arriving.

And wear clothing that will feel comfortable in 68-: to 72-degree temperatures. That's what you'll find indoors _ no matter what it's like outside.

Coat:&:Package Checkroom

If you do wear a coat, you might want to check it in the coatroom, which is next to the Futures Store in the Futures Center Atrium. There's a 50-cent-a-coat charge, or you can bunch all your gear together and pay \$2 to store the entire parcel.

Souvenirs and Gifts

The Institute operates three stores:

The I.Q. Store _ on the main floor of the Science Center _ sells science-related books and specialty items for the adult shopper.

The Discovery Store (formerly called the Museum Store) _ on the ground floor of the Science Center _ aimed at kids, carries gifts and souvenirs priced under \$15.

Future Store _ in the Atrium of the Futures Center _ offers unusual, high-tech and futuristic merchandise.

If You Have a Question

Staff members wearing white T-shirts with the word "Explainer" in bright red, will be on hand to answer your questions about the Futures Center exhibits.

Joining the Institute

Individual and family memberships are sold in the lobby. Depending on how many people are in your group _ and how many times you plan to visit each year _ joining could prove to be a big savings. The staff at the membership booth can help you make the decision before you buy your admission tickets.

Among general membership benefits: free unlimited admission to the Science Center, Futures Center and Fels Planetarium; 10 percent discount on Omniverse Theater tickets and gift-store purchases, and reduced parking fees. More information on membership types and benefits is available at 448-1231.

Where to Dine

You have a number of choices:

If you brought your lunch you may eat it in the Lunch Box _ a table-filled room with a number of vending machines. It caters mostly to groups of visiting school children. Another option: If the weather cooperates, you can dine in the outdoor picnic area on 20th street.

The ground-floor WaWa Lunchroomcq carries a limited menu of fast foods costing from \$4 to \$8 a person.

Ben's Restaurant _ off the 20th Street lobby _ serves hot dogs, burgers, sandwiches, salads, soups and snacks and is open daily for breakfast and lunch. You'll spend from \$4 to \$8 a person.

The Omni Cafe, in the Futures Center Atrium, has a liquor license and offers a more sophisticated fare. It's open every day for lunch and every evening for dinner. Meals cost from \$6 to \$10 a person. Hours

are: Monday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tues.-Thurs. and on Sunday; and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Fri. and Sat.

The Computer Connection

A museum-wide computer system _ the first of its kind in the nation _ helps to guide ticketholders to the exhibits that interest them most and also makes it possible to order printouts of selected material at the end of the visit. (For more information, see page 7.)

Lost Children

Someone missing? Head for one of the three information kiosks (Lobby, Atrium, Hall of Honor) and you'll get immediate help.

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