

THE CITY YOU'RE MISSING

Cleveland

Clevelanders have always known their town is special. Now the rest of the country is catching on to its rock 'n' roll attitude and resilient character.

BY MILES HOWARD



The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

It's a broiling spring day, and I'm pedaling down Cleveland's wildflower-lined Towpath Trail, which follows an old pack mule route on the banks of the Cuyahoga River. In the 19th century, mules would pull ships along the river. Today, I'm fighting a different battle: I haven't been on a bike in two years. But as I wheeze my way up a sun-splashed hillside toward the archway of the Hope Memorial Bridge, I can't help but be spirited away by the scenery. Across the river, skyscrapers and brownstones bask in the sun. Through the arch, I see a verdant ocean of trees and—seeming to sprout from the greenery—smokestacks and industrial buildings.

Factories like these were the engines of prosperity that supercharged Cleveland into a vibrant metropolis. Gilded

Age tycoons like John D. Rockefeller made their fortunes in Cleveland and called the city home, walking in its parks and museums and funding some of its most stunning architecture. Those boom times came with a downside, with industry taking a toll on the natural landscape.

As the Cuyahoga became a major artery for industrial transport in the early 20th century, it earned a reputation for pollution and environmental degradation that culminated with a 1969 fire on the river—the last and most notorious of a number of blazes caused by the industrial waste.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID LEBEL/ISTOCK



That fire 50 years ago helped spark a massive cleanup program and an environmental movement; in some ways, it marked a major turning point for the city. As industry declined and Cleveland began to redefine itself, people reclaimed the Cuyahoga.

Water quality has dramatically improved, and on the banks of the river, abandoned industrial areas have been redeveloped into walkable destinations. The river itself has become a place for recreation and fun. From my bike, I spot a school of paddleboarders riding the current to Lake Erie. Just like me, pedaling in the footsteps of those old mules, the paddleboarders are drifting through a historic landscape into a new chapter of Cleveland's story.

The foliage hints of the area's wilder woodlands. And the buildings that tower nearby hold many treasures worth traveling for: daring artwork, sumptuous theaters, and kitchens full of savory characters. This is Cleveland. It's a city fueled by grit, loyalty, irreverence, and rock 'n' roll.

Walk This Way

Cleveland has long been associated with entrepreneurial ingenuity. Rockefeller launched Standard Oil here in 1870, and other titans followed, turning the city into a hub for industry and manufacturing. Some of the country's first automobiles came to life on the Winton factory floor. The first commercial electric rail streetcar took its inaugural ride in downtown Cleveland.

These days, the big economic players offer more experiential goods. Health care, technology, and tourism have driven the city into the 21st century. Cleveland remains home to household name brands, including Sherwin-Williams and Vitamix. Hopkins International Airport is decorated with posters honoring local business stalwarts.

Soon after landing, I also discover that Cleveland is not only pedestrian-friendly, it boasts a robust and easy-to-navigate public transit system. For just a few bucks, I can board the rapid transit rail right by the baggage claim area. Within minutes of getting my luggage, I'm on a train rumbling past fields and backyards toward downtown. Getting around Cleveland, I'll mostly use my own two feet, but the rail comes second.

Exploring on foot makes it easier to fall in love with the city's architectural beauty. When I reach Public Square, in the heart of downtown, the first thing I see is a tall monument decked out with



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bronze statues of sailors and soldiers. But the neighboring buildings are what really catch my eye. The Arcade, a gargantuan structure that served as the first indoor shopping center in the U.S., is an ode to Victorian-era opulence. I wander past the classically inspired Cleveland Public Library. Minutes later, I'm gawking at a giant chandelier suspended over the street—the defining landmark of the Playhouse Square theater district, where 11 venues make up the country's largest performing arts center outside of Manhattan.

Even the local Heinen's supermarket is tucked away in the magnificent Cleveland Trust Rotunda, a historic landmark that opened as a bank in 1908. The marble atrium where elites once managed their finances now offers sushi, salads, and coffee. The beer and wine coolers are on the second floor rotunda. Up there, you can enjoy a draft lager while gazing up at the green and gold skylight.

It's a bit too early for beer (I guess), so I cross the street and drop off my luggage at the Kimpton Schofield Hotel. Within minutes, I'm zooming back into downtown—this time, on one of the hotel's complimentary bicycles.

Don't Stop Believing

My ride along the Towpath is the perfect orientation to central Cleveland. It also leaves me famished. Luckily, the trail delivers me to Sokolowski's University Inn. Savory aromas waft from the windows of the restaurant, an old-school dining hall with nourishing Polish comfort food.

Try the pierogies at Sokolowski's



As I wolf down pierogies under a stuffed deer head in the dining room, a multigenerational crowd applauds the piano player who's busy playing away in the corner. With a mouthful of potato and cheese, I scan the room. This collision of historical intrigue—Sokolowski's claims to be the city's oldest family-owned restaurant—and gluttonous joy is foreshadowing adventures to come.

Once the last morsel is gone, I take a stroll around Tremont, a historic, blue-collar part of town that is also one of Cleveland's fastest-growing neighborhoods. Postwar family cottages are the default here, but you'll also happen upon newer construction, a testament to the national interest Cleveland has lately been garnering from both homebuyers and tastemakers. It's a far cry from the days when a common (but inaccurate) outside perception of Cleveland was one of a city in decline. It's true the industrial boom that catalyzed the city's early growth came to end in the 1960s, when factory closings and a suburban exodus led to hard questions about Cleveland's future. Between 1970 and 2013, the city lost about half its population.

But what's missing from that narrative is the fact that the Clevelanders who stayed committed to creating a new future for themselves. Health care providers like University Hospitals and Cleveland Clinic, both affiliated with Case Western Reserve University, expanded their facilities and educational offerings. The city invested millions of dollars in creating and updating cultural institutions like the Rock &



West Side Market

Roll Hall of Fame and Cleveland Browns Stadium (today known as FirstEnergy Stadium). And a burgeoning tech startup scene has minted new local entrepreneurs. Cleveland's creativity is resilient.

On a leafy street away from the main drags, I find Forest City Brewery, which is housed in a 1915 timber-frame factory. The beer garden is decked out with colorful camp chairs and, just for good measure, the tallest mulberry tree in Ohio. I head inside and procure a flight of beers. I trade notes with a dude sitting at the bar near me. Next thing I know, I'm jotting down the names of other local purveyors as my new friend dictates a list. I scribble furiously—there are more than 30 microbreweries in Cleveland—and try to keep up with his recommendations: Market Garden, Fat Head's, Great Lakes, and more.

I eventually find myself sipping a clove-rich Hefeweizen on the outdoor riverside patio at Collision Bend Brewing Co. A tangerine sunset bathes the city

in diffuse light. Just outside the doors of the brewery, legions of young people are lining up outside the nightclubs and bars that constitute The Flats. Shipyards and iron furnaces used to be the main attractions here. Today, The Flats is one of Cleveland's premier nightlife districts. Here, you can slurp down oysters, play bocce ball, and dance to music from visiting DJs. (If you're feeling really saucy, you can even put a down payment on one of the new apartments being built here.) These are just a few ways that Clevelanders like to blow off steam.

It's Only Rock 'n' Roll

The next day, I take the train to the Ohio City neighborhood and spend the morning putzing around what's known as Hingetown, where a stretch of buildings is emblazoned with murals of wild animals, wilder cityscapes, and, in one instance, a slice of pepperoni pizza that's left a long greasy smear in its wake. These are the handiwork of local artists, but Cleveland's proximity to major cities like Chicago and New York also ensures a steady stream of visiting creatives. At Spaces, a working studio where visitors can admire work by rotating resident artists, I see two memorable video exhibits, including a visual ode to an abandoned country club in Cleveland and its secret history of joys and heartbreaks.

I have lunch down the street from Spaces at The Flying Fig, where chef Karen Small tells me about growing up in the suburb of Shaker Heights. (Her grandfather's backyard garden was her introduction to locally sourced cuisine, and her restaurant takes a similar farm-to-table approach.) I then head across the street to the West Side Market. There, dozens and dozens of vendors hawk cured meats and fish, artisan cheeses, and confectionary treats like the pizzelle waffle cookies that I'm soon nibbling.

Later that afternoon at a laptop-filled espresso bar called Beviarno cafe, I think that hard times can inspire not only creativity, but also a healthy sense of rebellion. In Cleveland, whether you're having lunch or exploring a new neighborhood, there's friendly mischief in the air around you. It's a wonderfully scrappy and idiosyncratic contrast to the extravagant architecture I saw downtown. What makes Cleveland's creative and playful nature especially compelling is the feeling that Clevelanders aren't striving to blow your socks off. They're doing the things they love for themselves and for each other, first and foremost. You're just invited to the show.

All Tomorrow's Parties

As the sun disappears behind thunderheads, I catch a ride to Slavic Village, a suburban enclave with roots in Eastern Europe. In the 19th century, Cleveland took in thousands of immigrants. Today, the population of Slavic Village reflects the diversity of modern Cleveland, and the air here still seems to retain the hopeful, electric feeling of arriving in a new country.



CLEVELAND, THEN AND NOW

↑ 1796 / Connecticut lawyer and surveyor Moses Cleaveland founds the city and lends it his name. In 1831, the *Cleveland Advertiser* dropped the 'a,' reportedly to save space in the paper. The spelling stuck. Today, head to Public Square to pay a visit to the statue erected in Cleaveland's honor.

1869 / The Forest Citys, named for the city's abundant greenery, play the first professional baseball game in Cleveland. Today, take yourself out to the ballgame and cheer on the Indians at Progressive Field downtown.

1915 / Cleveland Play House, the first professional regional theater in the country, is founded. Today, see a show. The company remains active and has hosted millions of theatergoers over the years.

—Kristin Blake



Penny Barend of Saucisson

I step into Saucisson, a butcher shop and the brainchild of Cleveland restaurant veterans Melissa Khoury and Penny Barend. With an emphasis on local meat, the chefs have attracted national attention. They're flying to New York tomorrow for a Food Network taping, but they've generously made time to offer me samples of their beer brats and heavenly pork terrine with cinnamon and golden raisins. Creations like these have been dished out at the annual "Village Feast" that Saucisson caters for Slavic Village residents.

"We shut down the street outside the shop and put out communal tables, and it's a free community meal," Khoury says. "Food is a common denominator. We seat everybody family-style. We encourage people to break up and sit with someone they didn't arrive with, to interact with each other, and to make friends."

With the smoked meats and community-minded ethos of Saucisson lingering on my palate, I take a contemplative hike in nearby Garfield Park Reservation. This is one of Cleveland's century-old Metroparks, which make up an incredible 23,000-acre "Emerald Necklace" of nature reservations where you can jog, bike, and spot rare birds. As I wind through the maplewoods, I see the white-tailed rump of a deer disappearing into the bushes. I continue to Mill Creek Falls, a 48 foot-tall monster of a cascade. You could easily spend a week exploring the Metroparks, which speaks to their scale and accessibility. Imagine if



Ride the trails of Cleveland's Metroparks

every city operated on the idea that everyone deserves easy access to the beauty of the outdoors.

This idea of civic equity is the foundation of the restaurant where I have dinner reservations tonight. But "restaurant" is only half the story. Located in Shaker Square, a bustling hub that borders Cleveland and Shaker Heights, Edwins Leadership Institute & Restaurant is a nonprofit education program for formerly incarcerated adults who want to build careers in the culinary and hospitality industries. Founded by Brandon Chrostowski, Edwins provides free housing, legal services, job coaching to students in the program, and has a 95 percent employment rate for graduates. Students practice and hone their skill sets by running the restaurant, which offers fine dining in a welcoming atmosphere. Chrostowski, tall and wiry with silver hair, is waiting for me when I arrive. He explains the motivation behind the restaurant: Everyone, including the formerly incarcerated, deserves another chance.

In the dining room, I meet Nickole Rivera, a student who hopes to travel and work as a chef after graduation. Rivera's quick to steer me toward a few dishes. I go for the pistachio-crust trout with haricots verts and black truffle beurre blanc. Every bite is heaven—rich, buttery, and finely balanced. I watch Chrostowski and the hosts welcome new diners and ask returning guests how they've been. (At one point, Chrostowski informs me that the

conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra is dining at a nearby table.) These gregarious touches imbue Edwins with the familial vibe that I experienced at Sokolowski's the other afternoon. Knowing that this generosity and kindness extend to these Edwins students who are forging new chapters of their lives is the most satisfying part of the meal.

This Must Be the Place

The next morning, I catch a bus to University Circle, where Case Western Reserve University just built a state-of-the-art Health Education Campus for medical and dental students. Health care, particularly nursing, is among the university's most prominent fields of study. Thousands of Cleveland residents avail themselves of the affordable services offered by the university's Cleveland Clinic. The other big attractions at University Circle are the museums and parks found here.

I meet up with Chris Ronayne, the president of University Circle Inc., the local community management organization. We walk to the Cleveland Museum of Art on the Nord Greenway, a 2,200-foot footpath that takes us by gardens, sculptures, and a lagoon accented by lounging sunbathers. We pass a tent stuffed with costumes and giant puppets for an upcoming parade, and suddenly, we're standing before the art museum itself. Nearby, I notice that a bronze cast of Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker" is missing its lower legs.

In 1970, in a climate of extreme political unrest, a bomb was detonated at the statue's base early one morning. No one was injured, and no one was ever arrested or charged for the bombing, but the statue was left damaged. "Instead of repairing it, the city, crazy as it was, decided to honor the history of what happened, so it tells a story unto itself," Ronayne says with a wry smile.

I spend the next few hours viewing storied artifacts in three neighboring institutions. I take in the Gordon Parks photography exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art, which offers free admission for its permanent collections. Then, I wander over to the Museum of Natural History. Next up is the Cleveland Botanical Gardens, where I visit a tropical biosphere and spy on some reptiles contentedly inhaling insects.

Before journeying back downtown, I peer into the luminous foyer of Severance Hall, where the Cleveland Orchestra plays. In the summer, the internationally acclaimed orchestra plays weekend concerts at the Blossom Music Center's beautiful and spacious outdoor venue. There's no show on the slate for tonight, so I'll have to return another time. But that's not to say my final day here will be lacking for musical accompaniment.

In Cleveland, all roads lead to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The building, featuring a glass pyramid structure designed by the legendary architect I.M. Pei, is perched next to Lake Erie. The museum collection features artifacts like Diana Ross' evening gowns, David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust jumpsuit, and a working Alice Cooper pinball



WHERE TO STAY

↑ **Kimpton Schofield Hotel** / Stay in and work on your cobra pose with the yoga mat provided in every room or rock out with a complimentary guitar rental.

Clifford House Bed & Breakfast / Wake up to the smell of breakfast at this cozy, Tuscan-style B&B in Ohio City. Owner Jim Miner cooks up a meal made with local ingredients every morning. Don't forget to give his cat and dog a nice scratch on the ears.

Hyatt Regency Cleveland at The Arcade / This historic location means a smorgasbord of shops and restaurants are only steps away. And with 24-hour room service, you might just decide to move in for the foreseeable future.

—K.B.

machine that I feed coins into for a solid 20 minutes. The rock hall offers multiple floors of exhibits, and at one point, I am invited to vote for its next inductee. I cast a ballot for Nine Inch Nails and imagine the band playing on the shores of the lake. I'd be sure to come back for that concert.

Whether it's your first time here or just your latest visit, you're guaranteed a show. Because this is a city that's long pushed at the limits of the imagination, through hell or high water. Along with the sound of crunching guitars and kick drums, there's a sense of innovation, team spirit, and shared triumph that you often find anywhere a rock band meets to perform—whether it's a dusty garage or an arena stage. It's the same feeling you get in Cleveland. Its current, as subtle and powerful as the Cuyahoga River, lifts you off your feet and whisks you away. Before you know it, someone's handing you a beer, and the next act is tuning up on stage.

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