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Why Not Cleveland?

By [Trishna Patel](#)

“Are they over Lebron yet?” or “Isn’t that where the Cuyahoga River caught fire?” Those are the questions people asked when I told them I was taking a trip to Cleveland. Known more so for its controversy than as a tourist destination, I admit that before my trip I may have said something similar.

Turns out the joke’s on us. I discovered Cleveland to be a vibrant city that shed itself of any old, nagging perceptions a long time ago (the Lebron situation is debatable). But I was quickly won over by the city’s perfect blend of grit and charm.



Gateway District- Downtown Cleveland, Photo by: Trishna Patel

Downtown Cleveland is a perfect example; it's a microcosm of the entire city that is deep-rooted in tradition and yet eager to attract and cater to a new generation. The slated developments for just next year — \$2 billion in visitor related infrastructure — will undoubtedly bring a surge in job growth (the travel industry currently sustains one of every 11 jobs).

The Northeast draws nearly 30 million visitors a year, which in part can be attributed to Cleveland's eclectic cultural districts all located in a concentrated area. From the architecture to the parks and world-class attractions – each of the unique districts are all a part of what makes C-town a great place to visit and live.

For example, there's the historic Tower City District, considered the city's center for business. Much of its appeal revolves around Tower City, a beautifully restored train station as well as a Public Square – a space for monuments and fountains, both dating back to Cleveland's founding.



Photo by: Trishna Patel

Just east is the Gateway District, home to the Cleveland Indians, Cleveland Cavaliers and East 4th Street, a brick lane with live music, eateries and happy hour enthusiasts. (Nearby trendy Ohio City was named to the [10 Great Places To Bar-Hop 'Round The World](#)).

[The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) sits on Lake Erie in The North Coast District, literally just a few steps from the Cleveland Browns Stadium and Burke Airport. (As a Los Angeles native and sports fan, this is unbelievable to me. A professional sports stadium overlooking one of The Great Lakes?) Just southeast of that is the Theatre District's Playhouse Square, the second largest performing arts center in the country. And *just 5 miles east* is the breathtaking [Lakeview Cemetery](#) – a burial ground so scenic that it also hosts 5k runs and music concerts.

There's also the westside and The Flats – an older, evolving district, known for its repurposed buildings (i.e. [The Greater Cleveland Aquarium](#)), the view of downtown's skyline, and the slew of gastropubs, hotels, and residential housing – all walking distance from one another.

There you have it. You *can* enjoy a great scene with arts, sports, and entertainment (without spending half your paycheck). The city showed me it's possible to “live the dream” in cities other than L.A., N.Y, or Chicago. For those young professionals looking to experience “city life” without a “city budget,” ask yourself why not Cleveland?

Here's what else I learned:

1. Expect the unexpected.

Cleveland may not scream “hip or funky” but I can vouch otherwise. From experiences at [The Duct Tape Festival](#) (yes, you read correctly – it’s a festival devoted entirely to duct tape) and [The Museum Of Divine Statues](#)..., I’ve learned the city and its inhabitants are far from ordinary. What’s refreshing is the locals are enthusiastic to embrace what most may consider wacky or even mistake as unremarkable. Pack an open mind and you’ll see it’s well worth it.



Photo by: Trishna Patel

More off-beat spots include: [Big Fun](#), [The Christmas House](#), and [The Dittrick Medical Museum](#).

2. Cleveland’s culinary scene is a force to be reckoned with.

Ever pass judgement on Midwestern cuisine as bland or liken it to solely meat and potatoes? (I certainly did.) The reality is that couldn’t be further from the truth. Simply put, Cleveland knows good food. The wide variety of menus – no matter the taste or budget- exemplifies not only the diversity of people (the historic [West Side Market](#) represents over 100 ethnicities) but also the city’s ability to sustain a wide range of influences.

From local icon and Iron Chef Jonathan Sawyer’s nationally recognized, eco-friendly [Greenhouse Tavern](#) to five-star [Pier W’s](#) commitment to 100 percent sustainable seafood, Cleveland provides an extremely tasty yet surprisingly environmentally-conscious dining experience.

Foodies: Also, check out [Lucky’s Cafe and Tommy’s Coventry](#). Don’t forget your appetites and stretchy pants because what you’ve heard about “the midwest” portion size *is* true.

3. Forget the Hamptons. Clevelanders know how to summer.

Imagine a destination just an hour outside the city that took you back 50 years. Ohio’s best kept secret, [Geneva-On-The-Lake](#) is straight out of the romantic classic, *The Notebook*. (Girls, remember Ryan Gosling in the carnival scene? And guys, remember that this place is as easy on the wallet as it is on the eyes.)



Photo by: Trishna Patel

In the mood for something a bit more wild? Yes? No? Doesn't matter because [Put In Bay and Kelley's Island](#) are where family fundays and bachelorette parties effortlessly coexist (at least before the sun goes down). The islands' array of activities allows people to indulge and let loose but also feel comfortable in bringing their families along. What's not to love about a place where toasting with either a gin and tonic or baby bottle are both completely acceptable? Cheers to the Midwest!