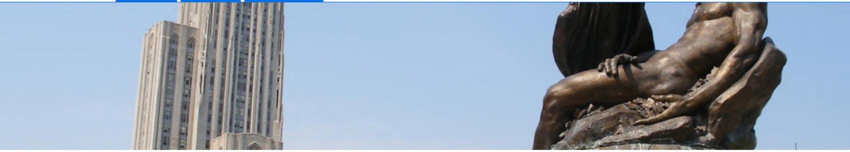

List view
Map view

Dan Morey
Pennsylvania, USA

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Dan Morey's guides

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Pittsburgh: Public Art and Architecture

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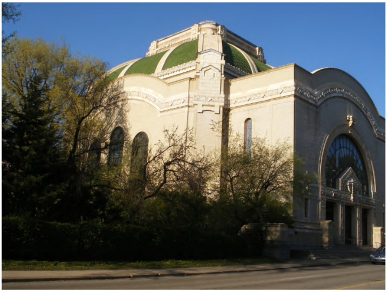
History

Thanks to wealthy philanthropists like Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, H.J. Heinz and Mary Schenley, Pittsburgh is a city brimming with great architecture and public art. There are statues, monuments and memorials all over its expansive parks, and great buildings everywhere. Dominant architectural styles include Gothic Revival, Art Deco, Beaux Arts and Midcentury Modern. I share some of my favorite examples in this guide. You can easily spend days visiting these sites... and most of them won't cost you a cent!



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Rodef Shalom Temple

4905 5th Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

This 1907 Beaux Arts temple is on the National Register of Historic Places. It was designed by Henry Hornbostel, the architect who drew up the plans for Carnegie Mellon University. The temple's 90 foot double dome is supported by a Catalan Arch system, and its interior accommodates 1200 congregants. The terracotta embellishments that decorate the yellow-brick exterior are amazing. It's the sort of intricate, artisanal design work you just don't see anymore. The posts in the wall that surrounds the temple property also feature terracotta decorations, beautifully colored.

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NATIONALITY ROOMS
PITTSBURGH, PENNS...

Adrienne Grigori Skyscanner

Nationality Rooms

4200 5th Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA

These classrooms are located inside the Gothic Revival skyscraper known as the Cathedral of Learning on Pitt campus. You can get an audio tour at the info desk and roam through the 30 Nationality Rooms at your own pace. The rooms were created by the city's various ethnic communities, and are designated Pittsburgh Historic Landmarks. I love the woodwork in the German room and the fireplace in the English room, which was removed from the House of Commons in London after a World War 2 bombing. My favorite stained-glass windows are in the Hungarian Room.

See more

Bellefield Tower
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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Bellefield Tower

Fifth and Bellefield

This tall bell tower really sticks out on the corner of Fifth and Bellefield Avenues in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood. It used to be part of Bellefield Presbyterian Church (1889). When the church was demolished to construct an office building, the developers left the bell tower intact. There's no bell inside, and it isn't open to the public, but its Gothic style makes a very interesting juxtaposition with the modern building beside it. The battlements on top give it a castle-like appearance.

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Schenley Park

Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

This 450+ acre park started with a donation of 300 acres from Mary Schenley in 1889. Today it includes a golf course, swimming pool, 13 tennis courts, hiking trails, a lake, the renowned Phipps conservatory, an outdoor movie theater in summer, and a skating rink in winter. Antique car fans converge on the park every July for the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix. Architectural/historical sites include the 1787 Neill log cabin, and the Westinghouse Memorial, a bronze/granite monument honoring George Westinghouse, the inventor of the Railway air brake.

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Bellefield Hall

Bellefield Hall, 315 S Bellefield Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA

Bellefield Hall was designed by Benno Janssen in 1924 in the Italianate style. It was originally home to the Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association, but was leased in 1984 (and later purchased) by the University of Pittsburgh. It now contains recording studios, rehearsal spaces and classrooms for Pitt's Music Department. The best part of Bellefield Hall is its historic auditorium. Many great musicians (Arthur Rubinstein, Isaac Stern) made their Pittsburgh debuts here, and you can still catch great performances under the famous Spanish stalactite ceiling. The last show I saw was the University Gamelan Ensemble, and they were fantastic.

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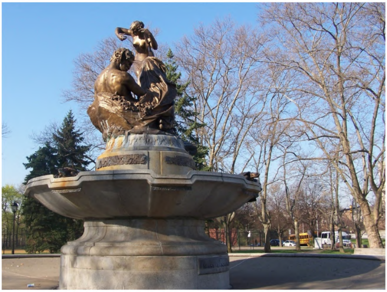

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Mary Schenley Memorial Fountain

Schenley Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

Victor David Brenner, designer of the Lincoln penny, won a national competition to create Mary Schenley's memorial sculpture in Schenley Plaza. Schenley had donated the huge tract of land that eventually became Schenley Park, the second largest green space in Pittsburgh, after Frick Park. It's a great fountain: 30 feet high, with turtles spitting water into the basin. The sculptural group shows Pan luxuriating at the feet of a woman playing the lyre. The inscription reads: "A Song of Nature, Pan the Earth God Answers to the Harmony and Magic Tones Sung to the Lyre by Sweet Humanity."

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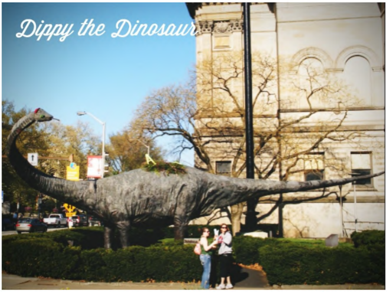

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Dippy the Dinosaur

Carnegie Museum & Library, 4400 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dippy has lived beside the Carnegie Museum of Natural History since 1999, and is very friendly. He even has his own Facebook page, where he introduces himself: "My name is Diplodocus carnegii, but you can call me Dippy. I'm a vegetarian, Pittsburgh sports fan, and friend to all who visit. Go CMU! Hail to Pitt!" Pittsburghers love Dippy and frequently adorn him with hats, scarves and other fashionable accoutrements. He is 22 feet high, 84 feet long, made of fiberglass, and modelled on the famous Diplodocus fossil skeleton inside the museum.

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Clapp Hall

4249 Fifth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

Clapp Hall was designed to complement the Cathedral of Learning (a Gothic Revival skyscraper) on the University of Pittsburgh campus. The buildings face each other on a diagonal axis, and both are constructed of Indiana Limestone. Like the Cathedral of Learning, Clapp Hall features Art Deco elements, especially on the inside, which is quite streamlined. The aluminum windows were inspired by the hall's namesake, George Hubbard Clapp, founder of the Aluminum Company of America. The 6-story building houses the university's Biology department.

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St. Paul Cathedral

108 N Dithridge St, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

Another great example of Pittsburgh Gothic Revival architecture, St. Paul Cathedral was designed by the Chicago firm of Egan and Prindeville, and completed in 1906 by Philadelphia contractor Thomas Reilly. It's the Mother Church of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, and has hosted numerous Catholic luminaries over the years, including Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. There are statues of evangelists and apostles on the cathedral exterior; St. Paul has the place of honor on the central pediment.

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Panthers of Pittsburgh

Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA

The Pitt Panther is the mascot of the University of Pittsburgh. There are over twenty panther statues in and around the Oakland campus. The oldest (1897) were created by Giuseppe Moretti, the same artist who sculpted the Stephen Foster statue in Schenley Plaza. Moretti was born in Siena, Italy and won a bronze medal in the Paris Exposition of 1900. He did four bronze panthers at the Panther Hollow Bridge, an area where real panthers used to roam. His statues actually predate the university's adoption of the panther as a mascot.

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Colonel Alexander Leroy Hawkins Memorial

Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Colonel Alexander Leroy Hawkins was a Civil War veteran who later led western Pennsylvania's Tenth Regiment in the Spanish-American War (1898). He fought in the Philippines, and died there of an illness. The memorial features a statue of Hawkins in uniform, overcoat and cape, holding a sword. He is flanked on each side by four bronze plaques listing the names of the battles he was in. The sculptor of the Hawkins memorial was William Couper (1853-1942) and the fabricator was the Gorham Manufacturing Company.

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Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum

4141 Fifth Avenue

This war memorial/military museum was built in 1910 as a Civil War monument. Over the years, through donations from soldiers, the museum has built a fascinating collection of artifacts from all the subsequent U.S. wars. Every branch of the service is represented. Visiting the museum allows you to get to know these brave fighters through their personal belongings. There is also a ballroom with an ornate, coffered ceiling, and a 2300 seat auditorium backed with an enormous canvas painting of the Gettysburg Address.

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KitAy flickr

Robert Burns Statue

Schenley Park, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

It might seem strange to find a statue of a Scottish poet in the middle of Pittsburgh's Schenley Park (in front of the Phipps Conservatory), but the Scots were an important immigrant group in western Pennsylvania. The statue was financed by a team of prominent Pittsburgh Scots, and the sculptor, John Massey Rhind (1860-1936), was Scottish as well. His most famous project was the memorial doors at Trinity Church in New York City. He did other work in Pittsburgh as well, including the allegorical figures at the Carnegie Library complex, and the tympanum of Bank Tower on 4th Ave.

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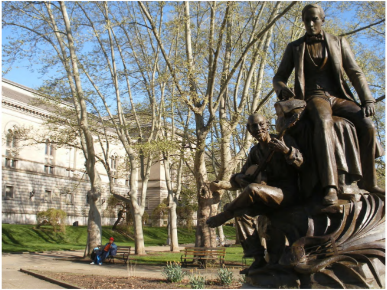

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Stephen Foster Statue

4100 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15260

This bronze sculpture of Pittsburgh-born songwriter Stephen Foster was created by Giuseppe Moretti in 1900. It depicts Foster (composer of "Camptown Races," "Beautiful Dreamer" and “Oh! Susanna" among many others) seated (with notebook) above a barefoot plantation slave who is picking a banjo. Some consider the depiction racist, but the slave is meant to portray "Uncle Ned," a character from Foster’s anti-slavery song of the same name. People often rub Ned's big toe for luck. The Stephen Foster memorial is also nearby.

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Point State Park Fountain

Three Rivers Heritage Trail, Pittsburgh, PA 15222, United States

This fountain is located at the tip of Point State Park, where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers converge to form the mighty Ohio. Surprisingly, the fountain's waters (capable of spurting 200 feet in the air) aren't drawn from any of the three rivers, but from a fourth, secret, Pittsburgh stream. It's called the Wisconsin Glacial Flow, an underground river formed by the Wisconsin ice Sheet over 70,000 years ago. The water is bacteria free and always 55 degrees. At night, the fountain is illuminated various colors, including Pittsburgh's favorite: gold.

See more

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PPG Place

1 Ppg Pl, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

PPG Place is like the Rockefeller Center of Pittsburgh. It's a six building complex with a central plaza featuring an ice-skating rink in winter and a giant Christmas tree for the holidays. There's also a glass-enclosed winter garden, full of plants, which is a nice escape during the colder months. The main building was designed by Phillip Johnson and John Burgee for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, and is constructed, appropriately, of glass. The entire neo-Gothic complex is made up of almost 20,000 pieces of glass.

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Union Trust Building

Union Trust Building, 501 Grant St, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, USA

Steel and railroad magnate Henry Clay Frick financed this Belgian-Gothic building in 1915, and spared no expense. Atop the stunning mansard roof sit two miniature towers that resemble chapels. Exquisite windows in the Gothic style ornament the upper facade. The building originally contained an arcade with some 240 galleries and shops. Don't miss the interior, with its gorgeous circular rotunda. This atrium is topped by a stained-glass dome. The Union Trust Building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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The Three Sisters

6th, 7th, 9th Streets

These three yellow bridges were built between 1924 and 1928 by the American Bridge Company. They are almost identical in construction, and were the first self-anchored suspension bridges in the United States. They span the Allegheny River at 6th, 7th and 9th Streets, and are known as the Roberto Clemente, Andy Warhol and Rachel Carson Bridges, respectively. They were named for famous Pittsburghers. The Clemente Bridge has a statue of the great ballplayer (who died tragically in a plane crash) at its entrance.

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jiuguangw flickr

Fort Duquesne Bridge

Pittsburgh, PA 15222, United States

Back in the '60s the Fort Duquesne Bridge was known as the "Bridge to Nowhere." A construction delay left it hanging over the Allegheny River with no off ramp for 6 years. In 1964 a crazy Pitt student drove his station wagon off the end of the bridge, jumping the gap Dukes of Hazzard style, and actually survived. The popularity of the stunt (celebratory bumper stickers were printed up) led authorities to block off the gap until the ramp was completed in 1969. Design is steel bowstring arch, double decker.

See more

WYNDHAM GRAND PITTSBURGH DOWNTOWN

Jessa Brooke Skyscanner

Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown

600 Commonwealth Place, Gateway Ctr, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

This iconic hotel became the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown in 2010, but I'll always think of it as the Hilton. Conrad Hilton opened the midcentury-modern style hotel in 1959. It was (and is) the largest in the city, and has hosted innumerable political VIPs over the years, from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush. It's in the heart of the Golden Triangle at Point Park and is perfectly located for forays into Pittsburgh's vaunted Cultural District. An expansion in 2014 added three additional floors and a swimming pool.

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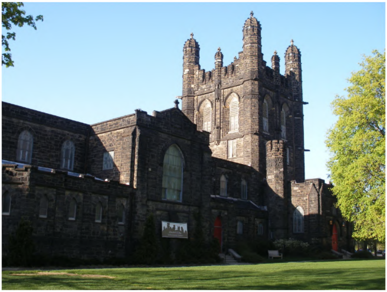

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Church of the Ascension

4729 Ellsworth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

This 1898 Anglican church in Shadyside was named a Pittsburgh Historic Landmark in 1971. Its most eye-catching feature is the hulking bell tower with four octagonal turrets (and four mini-turrets) on top. The entire church is constructed of stone and has a heavy, fortress-like appearance. The castle theme continues inside, with a wonderful stained-glass rendering of St. George in full armor. The church has always been renowned for its choir, and that tradition continues today, with the addition of occasional chamber music.

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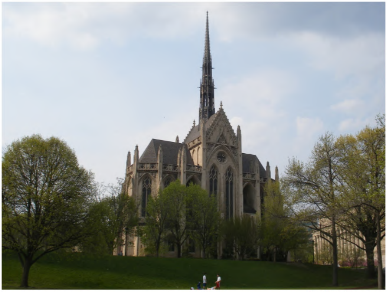

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Heinz Memorial Chapel

1212 Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh, PA 15260-6124

This is the chapel that ketchup built. It was completed in 1938, and funded entirely by money bequeathed by the late Henry John Heinz, founder of the H.J. Heinz Company, famous for its condiments, beans, pickles and other food products. The nondenominational chapel is located on the University of Pittsburgh campus and hosts close to a thousand events every year, from weddings to concerts. It was designed by Charles Z. Klauder in the Gothic Revival style. The 23 stained-glass windows were made by the studio of Charles J. Connick in Boston, one of the leading stained-glass producers of the time.

See more

Dan Morey Skyscanner

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

4400 Forbes Ave

Pittsburgh Industrialist Andrew Carnegie was once the wealthiest man in the world. He used his fortune to build over 2,500 libraries in numerous countries, from the United States to Fiji. He was especially generous in Pittsburgh, donating enough money to construct 19 libraries, including this main branch in the Oakland neighborhood. Though the windows are Romanesque, there's a lot of neo-classical design going on here: Corinthian columns over the doors, and Ionics inside. Acres of knowledge on tap, and even live music events. Yep, a library where you can hear guitars and drink beer.

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Carnegie Music Hall

4400 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

This 1895 music hall was built by Andrew Carnegie as part of his Carnegie Institute and Library complex in Oakland. The architects were Longfellow, Alden & Harlow. Its red velvet seats accommodate 1,950 listeners, and the acoustics are excellent. The exterior shares the same Romanesque/Neoclassical style as the neighboring Carnegie Library, and is enhanced by a series of statues representing academic disciplines. My favorite is John Massey Rhind's 1907 Shakespeare (the Bard is leafing through a folio), which embodies literature.

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Litchfield Towers

3990 Fifth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, United States

These midcentury-modern towers are the largest dormitories on the University of Pittsburgh campus. They were designed by Dahlen Ritchey, of the Deeter & Ritchey architectural firm, and completed in 1963. Over 1,850 students are housed in Litchfield Towers today. Their novel, cylindrical shapes led residents to nickname the towers (A, B, and C) Ajax, Bab-O, and Comet, after commercial cleaning powders packaged in similarly shaped containers. The buildings were named for Chancellor Edward Litchfield, who died in a plane crash.

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Omni William Penn Hotel

530 William Penn Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

When the William Penn opened in 1916 it was hailed as not only the best hotel in Pittsburgh, but the grandest in the country. After a 1929 expansion it became the second largest hotel in the entire world. Visiting celebrities flocked here, and still do. If you're going to a concert or hockey game at the PPG Arena, this is the place to stay. Really, you can walk just about anywhere downtown from the William Penn. Be sure to hit The Speakeasy downstairs. It's dark and intimate, and the cocktails are right out of the hotel's 1920s heyday.

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Daquella manera flickr

Primanti Bros.

46 18th St, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

You can find Primanti Bros. restaurants all over the place these days, but the original is in Pittsburgh's Strip District. It opened in 1933 when Joe Primanti and his brothers upgraded from a sandwich cart to a storefront and started serving affordable eats to working-class Pittsburghers. The faded sign on the side of the old brick building, the vintage murals in the barroom featuring local celebs...it's all classic 'Burgh. And don't forget the food. I like my Almost Famous Sandwich with half pastrami and half corned beef, plus plenty of fries, coleslaw and mustard on top.

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Travel + Leisure Skyscanner

The Original Hot Dog Shop

3901 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

When Syd and Moe Simon opened the "O" in 1960, their next-door neighbor was Forbes Field. Hungry Pittsburgh Pirate fans feasted on the Simon bros. cheap "franks and burgers." Forbes Field is now a memory and the neighborhood has changed considerably. The "O" has survived by keeping its eats affordable and catering to Pitt students with huge piles of french fries. The fries are famous not just for their quantity, but for their quality-- pure Idaho goodness, with an assortment of salts and condiments to choose from. A taste of old Pittsburgh at its best.

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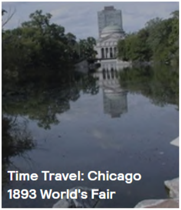

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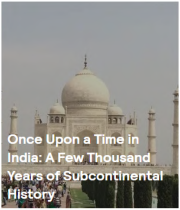

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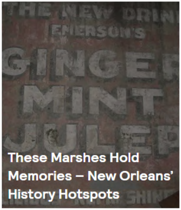

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