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Dan Morey's guides

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Best of Old Cleveland

Artsy
History
Foodies

Cleveland is hot. The Jack Casino has transformed downtown. Storefronts that were vacant for years are filled and flourishing. Big name chefs like Jonathon Sawyer have put the city on the foodie map. Lebron James came home and led the Cavs to an NBA championship. The Indians won 102 games this season. Cleveland even managed to land the 2016 Republican National Convention. Tourists are pouring in. But after you eat, gamble, watch sports and shop, what should you do? In this guide I provide an itinerary that delves into Cleveland's cultural, culinary and architectural history. This is the base that the Cleveland of today is built on.

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Wade Oval

1 Wade Oval Dr, Cleveland, OH 44106, United States

Wade Oval is a large public space in the University Circle neighborhood. It has a lovely park, with a pond known as "the lagoon," at its center, and is surrounded by cultural institutions: the Cleveland Museum of Art, Botanical Garden, Case Western University, and others. A walk around the lagoon offers many pleasing vistas, and there are benches when you're ready for lunch. Be sure to stop by the Wade Park Fine Arts Garden, which showcases a variety of sculptures from the Cleveland Museum of Art.

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JOHN DAVISON ROCKEFELLER
JULY 8, 1839
MAY 23, 1937

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Lakeview Cemetery

Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio

You could easily spend a day wandering this 285 acre cemetery, admiring the beautifully sculpted tombs and horticultural wonders. Be sure to seek out the Rockefeller obelisk and leave a penny on the grave of John D. Rockefeller, founder of Standard Oil. He started his career as a bookkeeper making fifty cents a day, and went on to become one of the richest (and most philanthropic) men in the world. Spring is a good time to visit, when flowers (Daffodil Hill) and trees are in bloom.

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Czuchraj Meats

1979 W 25th St # B10, Cleveland, OH 44113, United States

J & J Czuchraj meats has become pretty famous of late, having been featured on TV shows like Michael Symon's "The Best Thing I Ever Ate," and in numerous publications, including Rachel Ray's "Everyday." But Clevelanders have known about them since 1954. Their specialty is smoked meat (try the spicy beef jerky), and you can find them in the historic 100-vendor West Side Market, a Cleveland institution for over a century. All Czuchraj meats are hormone free and smoked over seasoned hickory chips.

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Cleveland Cultural Gardens

750 E 88th St, Cleveland, OH 44108, United States

These 30 gardens are located along Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in a green and beautiful part of Cleveland. Each garden represents a different nationality, ranging from British and Irish to Armenian and Syrian. They were begun in the early 20th Century in the spirit of multinationalism, and developed by the Works Progress Administration, Cleveland's diverse ethnic communities, and the city of Cleveland itself. There are over 60 statues and busts of important personages in the gardens. Check out the towering Goethe/Schiller in the German section.

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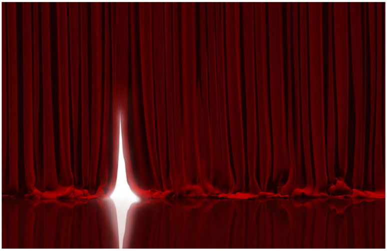

State Theatre

1519 Euclid Ave Cleveland, OH 44115

This huge theater opened on February 5, 1921, about a week before its neighbor, The Ohio Theater. It began as a movie house, with a live orchestra to accompany silent films. The lobby is one of the longest in the world and features the murals of modernist James Daugherty. The colorful paintings depict modern subjects like filmmaking, as well as fantastical scenes from Asia and elsewhere. Like the theater itself, the murals are one of Cleveland's great treasures. They made the cover of Life magazine in 1970.

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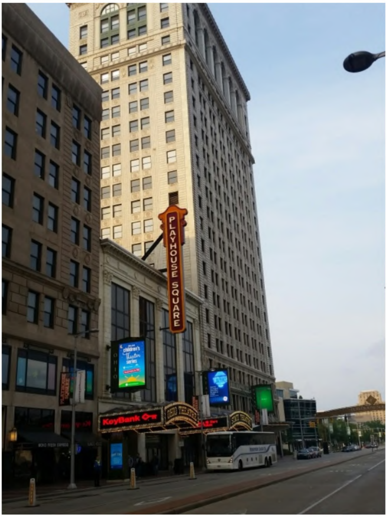

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Ohio Theater

1511 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44115

This intimate 1000-seat theater in the Playhouse Square district opened in 1921 with a play called "The Return of Peter Grimm," starring David Warfield. It continued as a legitimate theater for decades, but a terrible fire left it a gutted mess by the 1970s. It reopened in 1982 after a $4 million restoration, and has been home to touring plays, musical acts and comedians ever since. Don't let its small frontage on Euclid Ave. fool you, the lobby and auditorium are quite long. Decorations are mostly neo-classical, and the enormous chandelier is a scene stealer.

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The Western Reserve Historical Society

10825 East Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44106-1703

The Cleveland History Center at the Western Reserve Historical Society features 9 acres of museums, historic houses, galleries, libraries and exhibits. From vintage cars and planes to clothing and sports memorabilia (the original neon Indian sign from Municipal Stadium!), this is the place to immerse yourself in Cleveland history.

They even have the Grand Carousel from Euclid Beach Park. Be sure to tour the Hay-McKinney House and Bingham-Hanna Mansion. They provide a fascinating glimpse of how wealthy Clevelanders lived in the early 20th-century.

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DASANI
JACK
FLAPS

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5th Street Arcades

530 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44115, United States

These two arcades (The Euclid and the Colonial) aren't as grandiose or as famous as Cleveland's first arcade (The Arcade), but they do more business. The Colonial was built in 1898 and used to house the Colonial Hotel (now a Marriott). The Euclid came later, in 1911. In 2000 they were conjoined by a food court. The Colonial is the more ornate of the two, with lots of marble and grotesque carvings. The Euclid, with its gleaming white tile, is always nice and bright. Stores include stylish boutiques and artsy specialty stores. Popular restaurants: Jack Flaps and Vincenza's, among others.

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University Inn

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Sokolowski's University Inn

1201 University Rd, Cleveland, OH 44113-3642

I try to get across the bridge to Sokolowski's every time I'm in Cleveland. The place has been around for over 90 years, and will undoubtedly go another century if they keep serving up those generous helpings of fried perch and chicken paprikash. Not to mention the pierogis. You go through the line with a tray and load up cafeteria style, and it pays to get there early. On my last visit they ran out of potato pancakes! Lots of celebrities have eaten here, including Bill Clinton, which is nice, but I go for the food. And the piano player.

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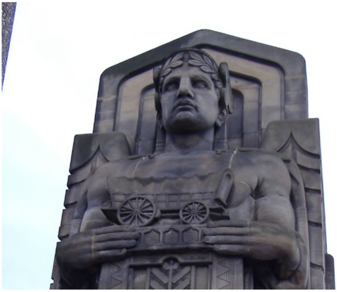

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Hope Memorial Bridge

Cleveland, OH 44113, United States

The Hope Memorial Bridge was originally called the Lorain-Carnegie. Its name was changed in 1983 to honor actor/comedian Bob Hope, who grew up in Cleveland, and his father, a stonemason who actually worked on the bridge. The most notable elements of this 1932 span are its decorative pylons, known as "The Guardians of Transportation." They are Art Deco masterpieces—colossal figures, each holding a different form of transport (train, automobile, etc.). These magnificent sandstone sculptures were almost lost to the wrecking ball in the 1970s, but have survived to become Cleveland landmarks.

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Glidden House Inn

1901 Ford Dr., Cleveland, OH 44106

This hotel's location is perfect for all the attractions of University Circle. If you're going to the Museum of Art, Botanical Garden, Western Reserve Museum, Natural History Museum or Severance Hall, this is where you want to stay. You might pay a bit more, but it beats driving from downtown. Plus, the Glidden House has free on-site parking, which will save you a lot of money and hassle. The mansion itself is a historic treasure (1910, Gothic Revival), and the staff is top-notch.

See more

World Famous
AGORA

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Agora Theater

5000 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH, United States

When I was a teenager in Erie, PA, I used to drive down to the Agora with my friends for shows. We saw a lot of great bands (Ramones, Bad Religion, Supersuckers) and always had a blast. The Agora has two rooms: an 1800 seat theater and a 500 seat ballroom/bar. They still book nationally touring acts. Historically, the building started out in 1913 as an opera house called the Metropolitan. Over the years it was home to a Yiddish theater troupe, vaudeville and burlesque acts, and a movie theater.

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TOWER CITY CENTER

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Tower City Center

230 W Huron Rd, Cleveland, OH 44113, United States

Tower City Center used to be called Union Terminal. It was Cleveland's version of Grand Central, a combination railroad terminal, office tower, and hotel, with numerous stores and restaurants. The project was developed by the Van Sweringen brothers beginning with the demolition of over 2000 buildings in 1922. It was, at that time, the largest excavation in the world, with the exception of the Panama Canal. These days, Tower City Center houses a shopping mall and casino, in addition to the historic Renaissance Hotel and Terminal Tower.

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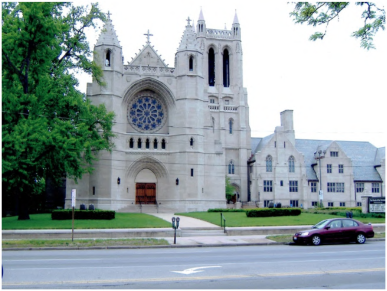

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Church of the Covenant

11205 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44106, United States

Presbyterian Church of the Covenant was built in 1911 and made the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. Its style is Gothic Revival. Notable features include a stained-glass rose window and a bell tower that would impress Quasimodo. I attended a service here one Sunday and found the congregation to be quite welcoming. Apparently, they get a lot of students from the nearby Case Western dorms. Church of the Covenant is well-known for its concert series, and the 47-bell carillon that resides in its tower—the only carillon in Cleveland.

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Rockefeller Park Greenhouse

750 E 88th St, Cleveland, OH 44108, United States

The Rockefeller Greenhouse has both indoor and outdoor gardens, all of which are free and open to the public. The land for the gardens was donated by business magnate John D. Rockefeller, and the greenhouse was completed in 1905. Garden themes include desert, Japanese, and tropical. There is also an orchid collection. One thing I really like is the display of old terracotta decorative elements (satyr faces, birds, etc.) rescued from the old Pennsylvania Railroad Euclid Ave. Station before it was razed in the '70s. The holiday displays at this greenhouse (Xmas poinsettias, especially) are wonderful.

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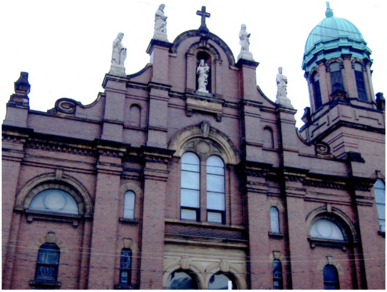

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Holy Rosary Church

12021 Mayfield Rd, Cleveland, OH 44106, United States

European immigrants were pouring into Cleveland in the late 19th Century, looking for jobs and a better life. Italians gravitated to Mayfield Road on the east side and soon formed their own Catholic Parish. Holy Rosary Church became the spiritual heart of Little Italy when it was completed around 1909. For nearly 120 years the parish has held a procession on August 15 in honor of the Feast of the Assumption. Holy Rosary is Baroque in style, with a brick façade, topped by white statues. It's been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1976.

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James A. Garfield Memorial

Cleveland, OH 44106, United States

James A. Garfield, 20th president of the United States, was born in Moreland Hills, Ohio, and buried in Cleveland. His presidency, which ended in assassination, is the second shortest on record at only 200 days. A competition was held to design his monumental tomb in Lakeview Cemetery. The winning architect was George Heller, of Hartford, Connecticut, who built a 180-foot tall Gothic/Byzantine turreted memorial. There are bas-relief carvings, gold mosaics and stained-glass windows. From the top balcony you can see all the way to Lake Erie.

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NAUTICA QUEEN

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Nautica Queen Cruise Ship

1153 Main Ave, Cleveland, OH 44113-2324

While the 124-foot Nautica Queen isn't terribly old (1981), taking a sightseeing cruise on her is one of the best history lessons available in Cleveland. The Captain navigates the Cuyahoga River and narrates the city's history as you pass beneath its bridges. Along the banks you'll see reminders of Cleveland's industrial past, and even a replica of first settler Lorenzo Carter's log cabin. The Queen also offers dinner cruises, and can feed up to 330 passengers at its unlimited buffet. There's a bar and DJ as well. If you want to party, opt for a sunset or theme cruise.

See more

EUCLID BEACH PARK
KEEP RIGHT

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Euclid Beach Park

16301 Lakeshore Blvd, Cleveland, OH 44110, United States

Euclid Beach was home to a much beloved amusement park from 1895 to 1969. The entrance gate is still there, as are remnants of the Flying Turns roller coaster. The land is now owned by Cleveland Metroparks and maintained as a public park with over 600 feet of Lake Erie beachfront, a pier, and a picnic pavilion. There's a festival every year to remember Euclid Beach Park, with a car show, walking tour, and all sorts of nostalgic fun. Euclid Creek Reservation abuts the park and is popular with hikers.

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ERIE ST CEMETERY

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Erie Street Cemetery

2254 E 9th St, Cleveland, OH 44115, United States

A small, historic (1826) cemetery off busy 9th Street at Erie Court, right across from Progressive Field. It's not as well-known as the much larger Lakeview Cemetery, but you'll see some famous Cleveland names on the gravestones, including a number of mayors and Cleveland's first white settler, Lorenzo Carter. The cemetery is walled and divided by a dirt road. Trees abound, making it a nice place to escape the noise and traffic of downtown. You won't run into many people there, either.

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HE FOUND US GROPING
LEADERLESS AND BLIND
HE LEFT A CITY

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Old Stone Church

91 Public Square, Cleveland, OH 44113, United States

The first incarnation of the Old Stone Church appeared on the northwest corner of Public Square in 1834. The current building dates to 1884, and is the oldest on the square. The congregation is Presbyterian, and the church is very popular for weddings. Some families have held marriages here for four generations. The interior is beautiful, almost luxurious, with mahogany paneling and stained-glass windows by Tiffany. Choral concerts are often performed here, along with music on the famous Holtkamp organ.

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Landmark Office Towers

101 Prospect, Cleveland, OH 44115, United States

These Art Deco office buildings were financed by Cleveland's eccentric real estate barons, the Van Sweringen brothers, in the late 1920s. The exterior features many intricate relief carvings, but it's the interior that really shines. Three buildings make up the Landmark Complex: the Republic, the Guildhall and the Midland. The lobby of the Midland is an Art Deco masterpiece in travertine and oak. It was completely restored in the 1980s and renamed the Van Sweringen Arcade. It's open to the public, so be sure to go in and take a look.

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Frank Sterle's Slovenian Country House

1401 E 55th St, Cleveland, OH 44103-1303

There used to be a lot of these alpine-themed restaurants in Ohio, but most have disappeared (R.I.P., Alpine-Alpa). Sterle's opened in 1954 and quickly became famous for its Weinerschnitzel and rollicking polka nights. Well, they still serve schnitzel, and they still have polka every weekend. The summer Bier Garden has been a nice addition to the old chalet. Prices are a bit high for German and Slovenian comfort food, so I went for the Thursday Happy Hour: schnitzel burgers, soft pretzels, nachos and draft beers, all $4 each. Really fun place, with lots of kitschy art.

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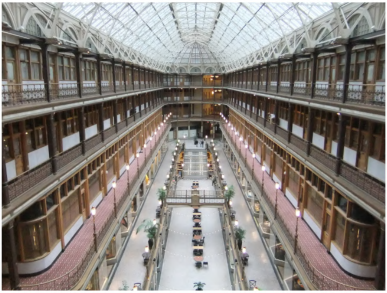

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The Arcade

401 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44114, United States

This grand arcade might not be as big as its famous predecessor in Milan, but the architecture is just as striking. It used to be known as the Crystal Palace, and it's easy to see why. The 300-foot glass skylight is as impressive today as it was in 1890. I love the scowling gargoyles (complete with glowing mouths) that ring the upper floor. This arcade doesn't get as much foot-traffic as the other two in Cleveland (there are a number of empty storefronts), but the Hyatt Hotel and frequent wedding receptions keep things hopping.

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SEVERANCE HALL
Cleveland Orchestra
Severance Hall
75th
Anniversary
Cleveland Orchestra

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Severance Hall

11001 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44106

Hearing the Cleveland Orchestra in Severance Hall is one of life's great pleasures. The orchestra is consistently top ten in the world, and the Severance acoustics are simply fantastic. You can hear every note with crystal clarity from the furthest seat in the balcony. Design-wise, the hall is a mix of neoclassical and modernism. Art Deco dominates the lower lobby with lots of zig-zag-patterned aluminum, while Art Nouveau and Egyptian Revival star in the grand foyer. There's an elegant restaurant on site for pre or post-concert dining.

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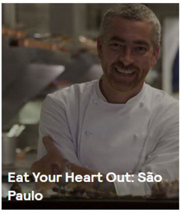

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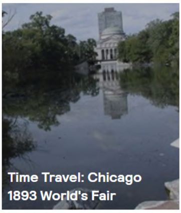

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