

TRAVEL



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The original Cin city

Mark Jefferies gets a taste for one of the finest new US tourist hotspots



GLOW-UP
Cincinnati skyline from Roebling Bridge



IT'S A SIGN
Mark at the American Sign Museum

The local chilli may be on the mild side – but Cincinnati is heating up as a holiday destination. You can now fly direct to the Ohio city from Heathrow with British Airways, it's home of the first professional baseball team in the US, it has more bourbon whiskey types than you can drink and of course its own

unique chilli (more on that later). So while it might not be quite top of most people's lists of places to visit in America just yet, Cincinnati is just about the perfect place to explore Stateside if you like discovering new breweries, sports, restaurants and galleries.

Cincinnati, or Cincy as the area is affectionately known, is

on the Ohio River with suburbs in Kentucky across the water and offers different experiences to enjoy, and many of its delights are walkable.

The Ohio side houses the business district, with skyscrapers alongside the city's big sports stadiums and museums.

Over on the Kentucky side you have towns such as

Covington which have more of a hipster vibe, with the nearby Mainstrasse village an area perfect for bar hopping.

If that isn't enough, there are also craft beer and bourbon tours and a must-see incredible neon-inspired museum which is perfect to make your friends jealous on Instagram.

There are even unique foods

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BIG DEAL

Kos from £337pp: Jet off for a week on B&B at the three-star Sunny View Hotel, Kardamena, which has a TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Award 2023, departing Manchester on July 19. Flights also available from Gatwick, Luton, Birmingham, East Midlands and Bristol. dealchecker.co.uk

Cruise news

BY NIGEL THOMPSON

Caribbean itineraries will get a double deployment upgrade from Celebrity next spring.

Newest ship Beyond will be joined by sister Reflection from April and, for the first time, passengers can visit Royal Caribbean's Bahamian private island Perfect Day at CocoCay, which offers pristine beaches, a freshwater pool with

a swim-up bar, overwater cabanas, North America's tallest waterslide and a balloon ride for panoramic views 450ft up.

Homeporting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Beyond will sail six to eight-night voyages to hotspots such as Grand Cayman, the Bahamas, Mexico and Dutch Caribbean islands Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao. Also from Fort Lauderdale, Reflection will offer Celebrity's first four-night



weekend itineraries taking in Key West, Perfect Day and Nassau.

Celebrity president Laura Hodges Bethge said: "Our customers have been

consistently asking for more opportunities to visit this stunning region year-round and have expressed a desire for a private island destination.

"We are honoured to add Perfect Day to our portfolio too." celebritycruises.com/gb

BIG DEAL

Orlando from £669pp: Get away for seven nights at the three-star Avanti Palms Resort, on International Drive, close to the Florida theme parks, with return flights from Gatwick on selected dates in September and 23kg luggage allowance. britishairways.com/orlando

Buy of the week

BY NIGEL THOMPSON

It makes sense to hydrate your skin after a day exposed to the rays and this plant-based product will soothe and cool while also protecting against annoying bitey beasts which do, of course, tend to appear in the evening.

Vegan, DEET-free and made with 85% natural and organic extracts, and essential oils including Citrepel 75, aloe and chamomile, it is suitable for use on the face and body by adults and children aged over six months.

You'll also smell nice thanks to a fresh peppermint scent with undertones of citrus and lavender.

■ **Green People Organic After Sun with Natural Insect Repellent, £16, greenpeople.co.uk**



Florida's Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex has \$7 per person savings on one day admissions of \$75 per adult/\$65 per child. Book by August 30 for entry before December 31 using promo code SAVE7 during checkout at kennedyspacecenter.com/info/tickets



BIG DEAL

Bulgaria from £409pp: Go for a week on all-inclusive at the three-star Trakia Garden Hotel with large pool area, just a ten-minute stroll from Sunny Beach's swathe of sand, departing on August 31 from Gatwick. Includes free wifi. travelsupermarket.com

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to try including Goetta, a sausage loaf mixed with oats and spices and cut up in chunks, as well as the aforementioned chilli which is served with spaghetti instead of rice and the beef-based sauce has cinnamon, cloves and a dash of chocolate, rather than anything spicy.

Order a "3-Way" and you will get chilli, spaghetti and cheese, a "4-Way" adds onions and a "5-Way" tacks on kidney beans.

It is not fine cuisine – nor does it try to be – and it is perhaps best tried one evening after drinks instead of a pizza or a burger.

Author and tour guide Rick Pender has written a book called 100 Things To Do In Cincinnati Before You Die and he is confident new tourists will love the place.

He says: "With history and professional sports, arts and culture, a restaurant scene that's a rival of any city and more craft breweries than you can shake a stein at, Cincinnati continues to be an exciting place to explore. When I guide tours, I often hear people say, 'I had no idea that Cincinnati was such a great place'."

Check our Cincy musts...

Where to eat

The best place to sample lots of foods in one go is without doubt Findlay Market (findlaymarket.org).

In the heart of the neighbourhood known as Over-the-Rhine, it is based in a market house built in 1852 and has been open ever since.

Here you have 50 full time businesses including the neighbouring shops which serve Goetta sausage, waffles, barbecued meats and even arepas from Colombia.

My favourite dish was the sweet banana pudding from Makers Bakers Co which cost \$7. A cross between a cheesecake and a banana trifle, it was delicious and sweet enough to keep me on the move all day.

At the other end of the scale, I enjoyed one of the best upmarket meals of my life with the \$60 tasting menu at Bouquet restaurant in Covington (bouquetbistro.com). It has relationships with more than 50 local farmers which means it is a constantly evolving menu with the freshest ingredients. My halibut and steak dishes there were cooked to perfection by chef Stephen Williams.

When you try the chilli, the easiest option is to go to Skyline (skylinechill.com), a chain with 130 locations around town which began selling the stuff in 1949, or Gold Star which is also a big operator. Expect to pay around \$10-12 for 3-Way and a soft drink.



SIMPLE Cincinnati chilli with spaghetti

Where to drink

Not the most obvious place to start but a bottle shop called KY Revival will soon be expanding to a full bar in Covington and offers a unique experience. Owner

CHEERS! There's no shortage of whiskey in the jar



FAST FOOD Mark tries Cincinnati chilli at Skyline

LOVIN' IT A giant McDonald's sign at the Sign Museum



Brad Bonds sells vintage bottles of spirits including rare and obscure bourbons, gins and tequila. Best of all, many are open to try by the shot for \$10-\$20. This includes ultra rare whiskey you couldn't afford to buy in bottles and people have flown in from other states to try drinks here (revivalky.com).

“ Kentucky still accounts for 95% of the world's bourbon production

boozer with more than a dozen local beers on tap. Kentucky is often described as the spiritual home of bourbon, and it still accounts for 95 per cent of the world's production.

Visitors can take a trip along northern Kentucky's Bourbon Trail with many potential stop-offs – think distilleries and specialist bars and restaurants dubbed the B Line (thebline.com).

But if you have less time, you can still do a distillery tour and try plenty of the hard stuff. Award-winning New Riff

Ohio's real big hitter



HOME RUN Cincinnati's Will Benson knocks it out of the park

offers a first hand look at their fresh take on the distillery process from fermentation to barrel-ling and bottling of bourbon and rye whiskeys. Prices range from \$20-90 (newriffdistilling.com/tour).

If you like history, the American Legacy tour heads deep underground and explores the tunnels that played a vital role in the city's brewing heritage. (americanlegacy-tours.com).

Best things to do

Sports fans have a variety of choices to get their fix here; top American football side Cincinnati Bengals play home matches at the Paycor Stadium and on match days from September to December the surrounding bars and restaurants are packed.

Dye your hair orange or wear tiger stripes to fit in! There is also FC Cincinnati playing MLS football as we know it, and their tickets are reasonably priced to watch matches at the TQL Stadium and easier to buy than Bengals NFL ones. FC Cincinnati play from February through to October.

The Cincinnati Reds baseball team play dozens of games here each year at the Great American Ball Park on the Ohio River. The MLB season runs from April to October and tickets

HISTORY Over-the-Rhine district



CLASSY Hotel Covington in the city



GRUB'S UP Hotel Covington's dining area



start from as little as \$5. Aside from sports, the Contemporary Arts Center is free and is big enough to house several exhibitions at a time so something may catch your eye. Plus the Cincinnati Art Museum has a rich collection of more than 73,000 works spanning the last 6,000 years.

And your day will definitely brighten up if you get to the wonderful American Sign Museum (americansignmuseum.org), a short bus or Uber ride from Downtown in Camp Washington.

It is dedicated to the art of

commercial signs and sign making with 12,000 signs on display including fantastic giant neon ones from the 1960s.

It's fun and perfect for photos galore, everyone leaves with a smile on their face.

For a more sobering afternoon, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is a reminder of America's troubled past with slavery.

The underground railroad was an escape route and for many slaves that meant getting out of the south and over the Ohio River. More than 100,000 people visit this museum annually to see exhibits about freedom and human rights.

And for the best views in the city you could try some snacks or cocktails at Top Of The Park bar in The Phelps building in Downtown. If you time your visit right you will catch some fireworks at the end of a sports game in a nearby stadium.

Where to stay

The Hotel Covington has recently finished a multimillion-dollar expansion with the opening of North by Hotel



GET THERE

British Airways flies from Heathrow to Cincinnati, Ohio, from £498 return. ba.com

BOOK IT

Rooms at the Hotel Covington, Cincinnati Riverfront, start at around £172 a night room-only. hotelcovington.com

MORE INFO

visitcincy.com meetnky.com

Covington. This offers 53 apartment-style rooms next to the original hotel.

The spacious rooms are beautifully designed and the location means you have great bars in the same street as well as two options within the hotel. The restaurants on Mainstrasse are around a 10-minute walk away.

Travel test

BY NIGEL THOMPSON

WHAT: ibis Styles London Heathrow Airport hotel. From £75 a night, free wi-fi throughout the property. all.accor.com

WHERE: Closest to Terminals 2 and 3 on Bath Road, an easy five minute local bus (£1.65) from Heathrow Central Bus Station, with a stop right outside. Cross the road for the stop back to the airport. Services are frequent both ways.

EXPERIENCE: There was a warm welcome from Sara at the small reception and bar area and I was on my way to my fourth floor room in minutes.

While it overlooked always-busy Bath Road and the northern runway, it was extremely quiet, generously sized and nicely decked out with an astronaut graphic, TV, sofa, chair and table.

Plugs and USBs for devices are ample and bottled water, tea and coffee are available.

The bathroom featured artwork of a giraffe looking



through a plane window (me neither) and a good shower with ibis' own Press to Impress amenities, which did impress!

After a quick beer in the bar (reasonable prices) I headed to the dining area and ordered a chicken tenders starter (£5.50) and cod and chips main (£13). The tenders were nice but the accompanying salad was warm and limp; the main was much better and piping hot.

After a quick nightcap, I headed up for what turned out to be a very firm but comfy bed and an undisturbed night. You would never think you were right next to one of the world's busiest airports. I passed on breakfast and waited until I was airborne at T3.

One thing to note, the simple and bright contemporary public areas and my room were scrupulously clean.

QUIBBLES: Just that salad. **VERDICT:** If you are using T2-T3 you won't go wrong here. Good value and location - and really friendly. **9/10.**

BIG DEAL

Portugal from £592pp: Enjoy seven nights room only at the four-star Premium Porto Downtown in the historic centre of Porto. Includes return flights from Luton on August 16 and 23kg luggage per person. easyjet.com/en/holidays