

DESTINATION

BUCKEYE BOOKMARKS

BUILD A TRIP AROUND
ANY OF THESE FIVE TOWNS

BY WENDY HELFENBAUM

Rich in history and natural beauty, Ohio boasts eight national parks, big-city amenities and small, charming villages. It's the birthplace of both aviation and rock 'n' roll: The Dayton-based Wright brothers designed the first aircraft here, and Cleveland DJ Alan Freed coined the music term in the 1950s. From its thriving arts scene to its award-winning culinary experiences, Ohio offers memorable road trip options for groups.

MARIETTA

Sitting at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, Marietta is the first settlement in the Northwest Territory, and it's packed with historic sites and riverfront vistas.

"We have lots of museums, historic home and church tours, brick streets, trolley tours and riverboat rides, and, in addition to all that cool history, we're just an awesome town," said Deana Clark, executive director of the Marietta-Washington County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"There are fewer than 15,000 people in the city proper, but we have over 70 locally owned shops and restaurants in our tiny downtown district."

Clark steers groups toward delicious dining options, including the riverfront Levee House Bistro, which has a private room for groups, and the historic Lafayette Hotel.

"There are great views of the river from anywhere in downtown Marietta, and we also have two boats, the Valley Gem Sternwheeler and the Major Riviera, so you can cruise and also have some of the best food in town," she said.

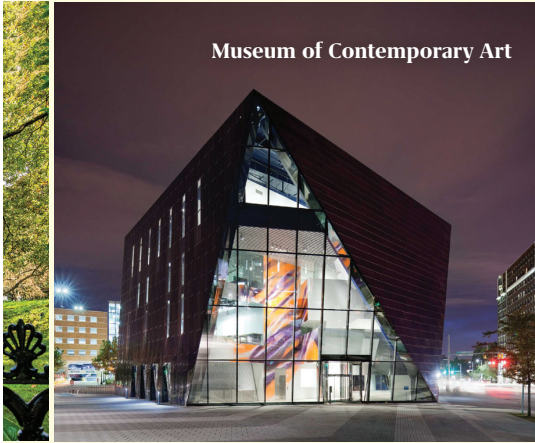
Groups can explore the Campus Martius Museum, which features the original cabin belonging to the town's founding father, Rufus Putnam.



MARIETTA-WASHINGTON COUNTY CVB



Museum of Contemporary Art



COURTESY DESTINATION CLEVELAND

While visiting Cleveland, groups can enjoy activities like paddleboarding on Lake Erie or the Cuyahoga River.



COURTESY DESTINATION CLEVELAND

“We have an incredible basilica worth visiting and the Castle Museum, one of our early homes; it’s beautiful with many of the original furnishings,” she said. “And there’s the Ohio Valley Opry, which has been bringing country, bluegrass and gospel music to the region for 26 years,” added Clark, who owns the facility with her husband.

“They have weekend shows but will do a special weekday show for a bus group, and we can feed you there as well.”

MARIETTAOHIO.ORG

CLEVELAND

From the shores of Lake Erie, Cleveland rises up to welcome visitors. Known as “The Land” by its passionate residents, this group-friendly city is compact, affordable and easy to navigate, said Ashley Baxstrom, Destination Cleveland’s director of out-of-market media relations.

“Cleveland is where world-class attractions come without a big city attitude,” she said. “We’ve got more culture, sports, outdoor access and distinct experiences than people expect from a midsize city.

“We’ve got open water, a real waterfront, some room to breathe. Groups could stay downtown and reach major attractions, dining and entertainment within minutes.”

Baxstrom pointed out that having a dual waterfront sets Cleveland apart from other Ohio cities. Lake Erie’s beaches offer water sports, and a new sailing center opened this spring. The Cuyahoga River runs through the city and is perfect for rowing or kayaking.

“You can take the water taxi up and down the river and enjoy many dining options,” she said.

Baxstrom suggested bringing groups downtown to East 4th Street, a walkable dining and entertainment nook. Other spots include Ohio City a few minutes away and the historic West Side Market, where visitors can explore the food stands.

Anchor attractions for groups include the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, which is completing a \$175 million expansion this fall; Playhouse Square, the largest performing arts center outside of New York; and University Circle, one of the most concentrated cultural districts in the country. University Circle is home to the Cleveland Museum of Art, the newly transformed Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the Severance Music Center and the Cleveland Botanical Garden.

“We have it all when it comes to the urban outdoors,” Baxstrom said. In addition to the lakefront and the riverfront, Cleveland Metroparks, which is called the “Emerald Necklace,” includes over 25,000 acres of protected parkland and more than 325 miles of still-expanding trail connections. Towpath Trail is a multiuse trail that follows part of the former Ohio and Erie Canal route, and the nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park gives groups space to explore just outside the city.

“Clevelanders are proud of where they come from, and that shows up in the people your group will meet while they’re here, the food they’ll eat, and the arts they’ll experience,” Baxstrom said.

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COLUMBUS

In addition to being Ohio's capital, Columbus is the largest and fastest-growing city in the state and has been called the "Midwest Quest," said Marie Kuess, senior program manager at Experience Columbus.

"Our destination is perfect for groups; we offer authenticity, a low-key cool factor and Midwest hospitality," she said. "We have a myriad of experiences, from world-class attractions to make-and-take activities to experiential tours, all surrounding our nationally recognized culinary scene, a vibrant sports culture and our distinct neighborhoods."

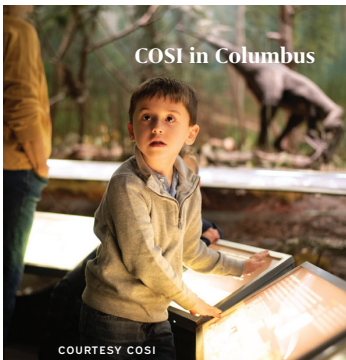
Foodies can taste their way through Columbus at spots like Schmidt's restaurant in the German Village area or at the 150-year-old North Market, with vendors dishing up different cuisines, including James Beard Award winner Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams. Kuess also recommended Glass Rooster Cannery in nearby Sunbury and Columbus Food Adventures for walking food tours.

Outdoor attractions include Franklin Park Conservatory, Columbus Botanical Garden and Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park, where groups can see a herd of bison in a natural prairie habitat. Columbus also has a renowned science museum, COSI, and the National Veterans Memorial Museum next door honors veterans from all military branches and from all eras of military service.

"Groups also love Motts Military Museum, the Early Television Museum and the American Whistle Corporation, the only factory in the country that makes metal whistles," Kuess said. "You can go on a fun tour where everyone gets a whistle."

To satisfy a sweet tooth, groups can explore the Buckeye Treat Trail for tours and treats, including stops at Anthony-Thomas Chocolates, Schmidt's Fudge Haus and Krema Nut Company. Make-and-take activity spots include the Penn & Beech Candle Company, where groups can choose from over 100 different scents, and the Ohio Herb Center, with unique classes for groups, like making a custom tea.

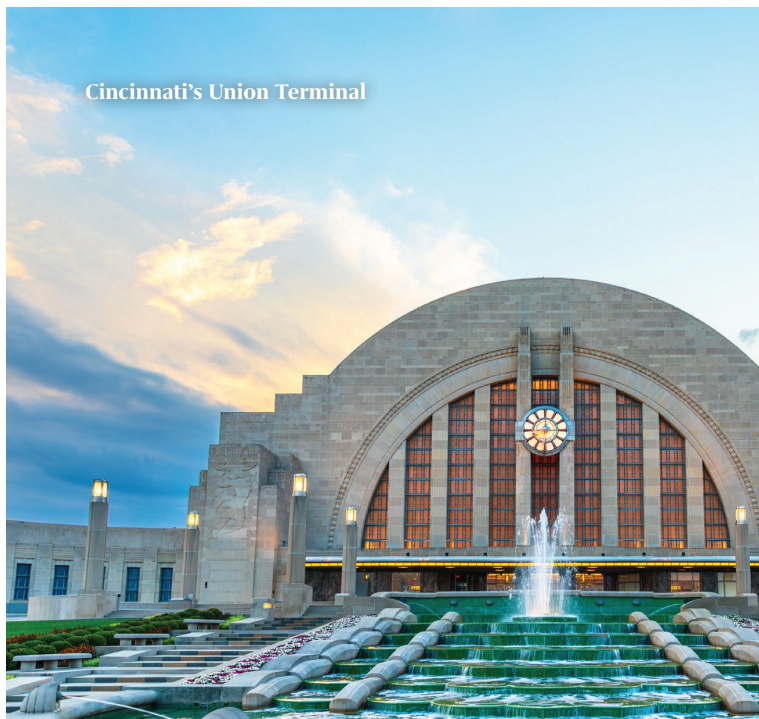
EXPERIENCECOLUMBUS.COM



COSI in Columbus



Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park in Columbus



Cincinnati's Union Terminal

COURTESY CINCY REGION

YELLOW SPRINGS

The vibrant, welcoming city of Yellow Springs boasts a history that spans about 300 years. In the 18th century, Yellow Springs became a spa destination thanks to its healing waters, and archaeological findings point to Native Americans using the iron-rich "yellow" spring water thousands of years ago. Today, bright colors continue to reinforce its vibe, said Phillip O'Rourke, executive director of the Yellow Springs Chamber of Commerce.

"Art is a huge component of our village; we have colorful murals and natural beauty, and what makes this place special is our unique small-town charm," O'Rourke said, adding the village hosts arts festivals year-round.

O'Rourke suggested groups stop by the historic Antioch College campus to take in scenic views and enjoy the walkable downtown core before visiting the circa-1869 Young's Jersey Dairy, where groups will learn how the dairy makes award-winning ice cream and farmstead cheese. Visitors can browse eclectic boutiques and local bakeries at The Shops of King's Yard and sample cask ales after touring the Yellow Springs Brewery.

"Each shop — from Asanda Imports to Wildflower Boutique to Little Fairy Garden — has a different character," O'Rourke added.



**HISTORY
& HERITAGE
ISSUE**

O'Rourke said groups often travel to Yellow Springs for day trips from Cincinnati, Columbus and Dayton. For overnights, he recommended the award-winning Mills Park Hotel, which serves brunch at Ellie's Restaurant. Other group-friendly dining spots include Sunrise Cafe, Peaches Grill and O'Rourke's favorite, Ye Olde Trail Tavern. Built in 1827, it's Ohio's oldest tavern.

Groups can explore Glen Helen Nature Preserve's rustic trails and wooden boardwalks that meander through lush forests and across slow-moving streams. Whether on a bike or on foot, the scenery is spectacular, O'Rourke said.

"Inside the Glen, you can walk down the stone steps and go right to the Yellow Spring, which we're named after," he said.

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CINCINNATI

Cincinnati sits on the banks of the Ohio River, right up against the Kentucky border. The Cincy region is easily accessible for groups; it's walkable, affordable and in reach of half the U.S. population within a day's drive.

The destination offers a wide mix of attractions, plus culinary options ranging from classic diners to fine culinary adventures and even Ohio's oldest public market, Findlay Market, where groups can sample many delights, ranging from bagels and smoothies to sushi, fried fish, empanadas and arepas. Montgomery Inn is famous for its barbecue and has been locally known as the "Ribs King" for over 70 years.

Cincy's German heritage can be experienced in the city's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, a National Historic District boasting the largest contiguous collection of 19th-century Italianate architecture in the country with many award-winning restaurants, bars and boutiques.

For casual fare, try a "three-way" — spaghetti, chili and cheese — at Skyline Chili or Camp Washington Chili. Cincinnati chili was developed by Greek immigrant restaurateurs in the 1920s and was first served in a burlesque theater. More than 200 local chili parlors serve this dish today.

The American Sign Museum is always popular for visitors, where guests can explore a labyrinth of glowing neon signs and blinking bulb marquees. Groups can also visit other museums all in one building at the Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal, which houses the Cincinnati History Museum, the Museum of Natural History & Science and the Cincinnati Children's Museum, as well as the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanities Center.

Other favorites include the Reds Hall of Fame & Museum, which honors America's first baseball team. For music fans, visitors can explore the self-guided, interactive Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame, which celebrates the history of Black musicians from the city.

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