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HOME & AWAY

Distinctly Columbus

The heart and soul of Ohio's capital city is revealed in five exceptional districts.

By Anietra Hamper

Between sips of a freshly brewed espresso and bites of a lemon- rosemary-pine nut tart, I'm mesmerized as I gaze out the large glass window of Pistacia Vera Pastry Kitchen and Cafe in Columbus' German Village. This charming, made-for-strolling area boasts many brick buildings, locally owned boutiques, chic restaurants and elegant 100-year-old homes. No wonder this beautiful neighborhood is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Red, White and Boom
James DeCamp Photography

German Village is one of five districts in Ohio's capital that contribute to the vibrancy and pulse of Columbus' urban core. Each area has its own charms and offers a variety of experiences for visitors to discover.

German Village

German Village is best explored by walking the brick streets that define the historical neighborhood. It's easy to get lost in gems such as the Book Loft, where hours pass as visitors wind their way through a maze of bargain books and other items that spans 32 rooms. Time also stands still at Schiller Park, where visitors can enjoy Shakespearean plays, statues and fountains.

Seasonal events such as June's annual German Village Haus und Garten Tour and winter's Village Lights luminaria tour draw thousands of visitors. From fine dining at Lindey's, G. Michael's Bistro & Bar, and Barcelona to casual fare at Katzinger's Delicatessen and Thurman Cafe, German Village boasts a variety of dining options. Finding authentic German cuisine is easy at Schmidt's Restaurant und Sausage Haus, a German Village fixture for more than a century.

"The neighborhood's history has created a passionate community," said Shiloh Todorov, executive director of the German Village Society.

Bordering German Village is the Brewery District. Old brick architecture has been repurposed into businesses, restaurants and a thriving brewery scene highlighted by Columbus Brewing Co., World of Beer and more. The Brewery District is also home to Shadowbox Live, a performance troupe that presents sketch comedy, original rock operas and music events.

Short North

On the fringe of downtown is the Cap, the gateway to the vibrant Short North Arts District. The Cap, designed to mimic Columbus' old Union Train Station, is home to fine restaurants and a pedestrian walkway that literally bridges the gap to downtown.

It's impossible to visit Short North without noticing the impressive arches over High Street. The arches, reminiscent of those originally installed for a reunion of Civil War soldiers in 1888, complement the district's artistic vibe.



Courtesy of The Ohio State University

There's a lively, independent vibe throughout Short North's art galleries, local boutiques, restaurants, breweries and distilleries. Art enthusiasts flock to Short North on the first Saturday of every month for Gallery Hop. Sidewalks are packed; galleries stay open late; restaurants are busy; and street musicians keep the scene lively along High Street. Le Méridien Columbus, The Joseph, a recently opened hotel, features contemporary art from the renowned

collection of Ron and Ann Pizzuti, in addition to works by Ohio artists.

"More than 90 percent of the businesses in the Short North are locally owned or Ohio-based, and they all embrace art in some way," said Betsy Pandora, executive director of the Short North Alliance.

University District

The University District has always been diverse. Home to thousands of students who attend The Ohio State University, the area was a crossroads of the city in the 1800s, with trains, streetcars and stagecoach stops. It became a patchwork of various settlers, which resulted in a diversity of architecture, food and residents.

"The University District defines diversity. It was home to older African-American communities, Welsh communities, the first suffragettes, gangsters in the 1930s, Underground Railroad homes, stagecoach runs and even an old Indian path," said Doreen Uhas Sauer, a Columbus historian and president of the University Area Commission.

Today, the University District is alive with sports facilities, entertainment venues and

museums, including the Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio Stadium and the Schottenstein Center. At South Campus Gateway, visitors will find a mix of retail, residences, restaurants and entertainment, including Gateway Film Center.

Arena District

A lively entertainment scene, numerous sports games, and a variety of bars and restaurants make the Arena District one of Columbus' most popular destinations. Opened in 2000, Nationwide Arena is home to the Columbus Blue Jackets ice hockey team, and the venue hosts big-name concerts and other touring productions year-round.

For 150 years (1834–1984), the Ohio State Penitentiary was the district's most recognizable feature. As a Columbus native, I remember only warehouses and surface lots existing beyond the 22-acre stone-wall fortress. The area was neglected and dilapidated until Nationwide Realty Investors arrived with an ambitious vision in 1998 to create a world-class sports and entertainment district.

The restored and reassembled Union Station Arch welcomes visitors at McFerson Commons in the center of the district. And old warehouses for the Moline Plow Co. and Belmont Casket Co. are finding new life through renovation and use as condos and business space.

“These are elements that add to the interest and character of the area,” said Brian Ellis, president of Nationwide Realty Investors. “We are trying to create an area that is timeless.”

At the North Market, dozens of vendors sell everything from fresh produce to gourmet cookware. It's also where nationally acclaimed Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams got its humble start with just a small vendor booth. The district welcomes visitors

for baseball games at Huntington Park (home to the Columbus Clippers) and, when night falls, concerts at Lifestyle Communities Pavilion.



Concert at Lifestyle Communities Pavilion
Courtesy of Nationwide Realty Investors

Downtown

People are always on the move downtown. The Ohio Statehouse, a Greek-Revival building, is the political pulse of state government. On any given day, elected officials, schoolchildren, tour groups and other visitors fill the Statehouse corridors.

Just beyond the windows of the Statehouse dome are the beautifully restored Ohio, Southern and Palace theaters, along with the newer Capitol Theatre in the Riffe Center. These treasures breathe life into downtown after dark and satisfy audiences with a variety of theatrical, music and comedy shows. The arts are also alive at the King Arts Complex, where cultural events, performances and exhibitions take place year-round.

Featuring 7 acres of green space, Columbus Commons attracts visitors with concerts, family events, food trucks and performances. Downtown riverfront development and the growing popularity of restaurants such as Ringside Cafe, Due Amici, Cafe Brioso and El Arepazo Latin Grill signify a downtown renaissance where old meets new.

“The richest cities are an interesting combination of the old and new, and that’s what has come to be in Columbus,” said Tom Wolf, historic preservationist for the Ohio History Connection. “There’s a depth and richness that it didn’t have 40 years ago.”

Planning Your Trip

To learn more about Columbus, visit www.experiencecolumbus.com. Columbus Landmarks Foundation, www.columbuslandmarks.org, leads walking tours of the city. For trip-planning assistance, contact your local AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.

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