



*Since 2000*

## Cincinnati Fit for Foodies



Buildings on streets along Findlay Market show off the Italianate architecture of Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. Photos by Katherine Rodeghier

### **Taking A Food Tour In Ohio's Queen City**

By Katherine Rodeghier



Barbara Cooper operates Cincinnati Food Tours offering visitors samples from the city's food purveyors including those in Findlay Market, the oldest public market in continuous operation in Ohio. Barbara Cooper photo.

If you think the Cincinnati food scene consists primarily of five-way chili, you need to take your taste buds to Ohio's 'Queen City' for a culinary update.

You could strike out on your own to discover new restaurants and leading food purveyors or you could take one of Barb Cooper's **Cincinnati Food Tours** and learn the backstories behind the city's culinary evolution.



Homemade biscuits with jam or gravy flights are the specialty of the house at Boomtown Biscuits & Whiskey in Cincinnati's Pendleton neighborhood.

Take the Pendleton neighborhood, for example. "This is my little secret," said Cooper.

Fifteen years ago, it was a drive-through area for drug trafficking just off the interstate highway, she said.

Community activists turned it into an arts district and five years ago trendy eating and drinking establishments began opening.

### **Saving a City Neighborhood**

**Boomtown Biscuits & Whiskey** launched in Pendleton in 2018 offering one-of-a-kind comfort foods from the creative imagination of Chef Christian Gill.

He started cooking at age 7 in his grandmother's Kentucky kitchen and proudly displays her big wooden rolling pin over the restaurant's kitchen door.

"She'd conk me on the head when I put too much chili powder into a recipe," he remembers.



Chef Christian Gill turns out biscuits with jam or gravy flights at Boomtown Biscuits & Whiskey in Cincinnati's Pendleton neighborhood.

Gill has appeared on TV's Food Network and was a contestant on Guy Fieri's "Guy's Big Project." Boomtown is his contemporary take on American frontier food from the Gold Rush era.

He pairs his homemade biscuits with jams or gravy flights, serves shareable poutines, camp stew, chicken sandwiches and for dessert, French toast biscuits. Along with an impressive list of whiskeys, try craft cocktails such as the Boomtown Gold Rush made from rye, lemon juice, and herbed honey.

### **A Taste of Barbecue**

Cooper's Pendleton tour usually includes a taste of barbecue at **Lucius Q**, short for Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, the Roman patrician lauded for his civic duty and for whom Cincinnati was named.

Housed in a former auto dealership and body shop, it has a modern industrial vibe. A smoker nicknamed “Big Bertha” smokes meats from the butcher shop around the corner over oak and cherry wood for 10 to 14 hours.



A hatchet is fashioned into the handle on the entry door at Nation Kitchen & Bar, named for temperance advocate Carrie Nation.

Five sauces representing barbecue styles from around the U.S. dress up sandwiches as well as pork, brisket, sausage, and turkey served by the pound with Southern sides. Come back for the Scotch egg and grits for brunch.

**Nation Kitchen & Bar** joined the community’s revitalization wave in 2015 as the first retail establishment to open in Pendleton in more than a decade.

It’s named for the formidable saloon-busting matron Carrie Nation who took her ax-wielding ways elsewhere when she realized she’d never make a dent in the overwhelming number of drinking establishments in Cincinnati around the turn of the last century.

The restaurant’s front door has a hatchet as a handle. Grab it and enter for craft beer, creative cocktails, gourmet burgers, and fun potato sides.

Order **The Hatchet**, which comes with the Nation burger, fries and Hatchet ale. If you’re in Cincy on a weekend, try the hangover burger and a bloody Carrie for brunch.

**3 Points Urban Brewery** marries Pendleton’s artistic vibe and community spirit with craft beer said Cooper. Local artists design the brewery’s beer labels and their work lines the walls.

Before Prohibition shut down Cincinnati breweries, many brewery workers called the neighborhood home. 3 Points honors that heritage as a neighborhood gathering place.

It becomes a co-working space on weekday mornings offering coffee, free Wi-Fi and plenty of seating.

### **To Market you go**



Choose smoked meats by the pound with Southern sides at Lucius Q barbecue in Cincinnati's Pendleton neighborhood.

Cooper's most popular tour, the **Original Findlay Market Tour**, takes you to the heart of Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood known for its parks, 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture and German heritage.

Those Germans were largely responsible for the dozens of breweries opening in Cincy from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. In 1893, average beer consumption topped 40 gallons a year for every man, woman, and child.

No wonder Carrie Nation threw down her hatchet and left in defeat.

**Findlay Market** was and is the epicenter of neighborhood life in Cincinnati. The oldest public market in continuous operation in Ohio opened in 1852 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

More than 50 businesses operate under and around its cast and wrought-iron framework. "It's the best place in town to shop local," said Cooper, offering a "nice mix of raw foods and prepared food."



Josh Lillis, one of a long line of family owners of Eckerlin Meats, offers a taste of goetta to visitors on Cincinnati Food Tours.

**Eckerlin Meats** began as a butcher shop in 1852 and six generations later still draws lines of customers to its counter.

On Cooper's tour, you might sample goetta, Cincinnati's own German-inspired breakfast side dish made of pork shoulder, beef chuck, steel-cut pinhead oats, onion, spices and a secret ingredient or two.

Around the corner, **Dean's Mediterranean Imports** opened about 35 years ago by a Lebanese family. What began as a grocery has expanded into a store specializing in foods of Mediterranean origin including bulk spices, olive oils, coffee, freshly made hummus, samosas and take-out foods prepared by three chefs on staff. It's Cincy's only nut roaster.

### **Cincy's Maverick Chocolate**

**Maverick Chocolate Co.** takes the artisan chocolate-making process from bean to bar working directly with farmers to import organic cacao beans and sugar.



Kate Zaidan, the owner of Mediterranean Imports, offers samples to visitors on Cincinnati Food Tours.

Paul Picton, a former aviation engineer, and his wife Marlene Picton ventured into craft chocolate making about six years ago and have won numerous awards.

### **Award-Winning Chocolate**

Their Big Island Hawaii Dark Chocolate won a 2018 Good Food Award and in 2017 they won silver medals in the International Chocolate Awards for their Espresso Dark Chocolate and for their best seller, Prohibition Milk Chocolate made with bourbon.

Cooper's tour might include a stop at **Pho Lang Thang** for a bowl of Vietnamese pho made of beef bones simmered for 24 hours and seasoned with cinnamon, cardamom, coriander, and cloves.



Findlay Market is the oldest public market in continuous operation in Ohio. It opened in 1852 and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Taste of Belgium** opened in the market in 2008 and has expanded to six Ohio locations with plans to open outlets out of state.

Along with coffee, crepes, and sandwiches on baguettes, it sells its signature pearl sugar-studded waffles—no syrup needed.

Findlay Market has indoor seating as well as outdoor tables in season. An outdoor farmers market operates from April to November.

### **Visit Cincinnati, Ohio**

**Information:** Cincinnati USA Regional Tourism Network, 859-581-2260, [cincinnatiusa.com](http://cincinnatiusa.com)





Former aviation engineer Paul Picton sells award-winning artisan chocolates at Maverick Chocolate Co. in Cincinnati.

**Cincinnati Food Tours:** The All-American Food Tour in Pendleton, \$65, The Original Findlay Market Tour, \$30; 513-602-5602, [cincinnatifoodtours.com](http://cincinnatifoodtours.com)



*Katherine Rodeghier* is an award-winning travel journalist. She began as travel editor at the Chicago Daily Herald and continues as a freelance contributor to outlets including the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Global Traveler magazine, Dallas Morning News, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Cruise Travel magazine, several AAA regional magazines, and Cruise Critic. She lives in Western Springs IL.

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