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# 36 Hours in Cleveland



David Ahnholz for The New York Times

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

By BRETT SOKOL  
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“YOU Gotta Be Tough” was a popular T-shirt slogan worn by Clevelanders during the 1970s, a grim period marked by industrial decline, large-scale population flight and an urban environment so toxic the Cuyahoga River actually caught on fire. These days it still helps to be at least a little tough; a fiercely blue-collar ethos endures. But instead of abandoning the city, local entrepreneurs and bohemian dreamers alike are sinking roots; opening a wave of funky boutiques, offbeat [art](#) galleries and sophisticated restaurants; and injecting fresh life into previously rusted-out spaces. It’s a vibrant spirit best exemplified by [Cleveland](#)’s new all-female roller derby league, whose wry name, the Burning River Roller Girls, and home, a former GM auto factory retooled into a 60,000-square-foot sports facility, say it all.

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Cleveland

**1) HELLO CLEVELAND!**

Staring at platform shoes worn by Keith Moon or [Elvis Presley](#)'s white jumpsuit hardly evokes the visceral excitement of rock [music](#), let alone its rich history, but the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum](#) (751 Erieside Avenue; 216-781-7625; [www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com); admission, \$22) thankfully has a wealth of interactive exhibits in addition to its displays of the goofier fashion choices of rock stardom. There's a fascinating look at the genre's initial 1950s heyday, as well as the hysteria that greeted it — preachers and politicians warning of everything from its incipient Communist subversion to its promotion of wanton sexuality. On the top floors, a well-curated exploration of [Bruce Springsteen](#)'s career is on display through next spring.

5 p.m.

**2) FROM STEEL TO STYLISH**

The steelworkers who once filled the Tremont neighborhood's low-slung houses and ornately topped churches have largely vanished. A new breed of residents has moved in along with a wealth of upscale restaurants, artisanal shops and galleries showcasing emerging artists. Inside Lilly Handmade Chocolates (761 Starkweather Avenue; 216-771-3333; [www.lillytremont.com](http://www.lillytremont.com)), you can join the throngs practically drooling over the mounds of freshly made truffles. Or grab a glass at the wine bar inside Visible Voice Books (1023 Kenilworth Avenue; 216-961-0084; [www.visiblevoicebooks.com](http://www.visiblevoicebooks.com)), which features scores of small-press titles, many by local authors.

7 p.m.

**3) IRON CHEF, POLISH CLASSIC**

Cleveland's restaurant of popular distinction is [Lolita](#) (900 Literary Road; 216-771-5652; [www.lolabistro.com](http://www.lolabistro.com)), where the owner and "Iron Chef America" regular Michael Symon offers creative spins on Mediterranean favorites including duck prosciutto pizza (\$13) and crispy chicken livers with polenta, wild mushrooms and pancetta (\$7). (Reservations are recommended.) More traditional comfort food is at [Sokolowski's University Inn](#) (1201 University Road; 216-771-9236; [www.sokolowskis.com](http://www.sokolowskis.com)), a beloved stop for classic Polish dishes since 1923. Even if you're unswayed by Anthony Bourdain's description of the smoked kielbasa (\$7.25) as "artery busting" (from him, a compliment) at least swing by for the view from the parking lot — a panorama encompassing Cleveland old and new, from the stadiums dotting the downtown skyline to the smoking factories and oddly beautiful slag heaps on the riverside below.

11 p.m.

**4) CLASSIC COCKTAILS**

One aspect of Tremont has remained steady over the years: it's a night crawlers' paradise. Nowadays, discerning drinkers head for the nearby [Velvet Tango Room](#) (2095 Columbus Road; 216-241-8869; [www.velvettangoroom.com](http://www.velvettangoroom.com)), inside a one-time Prohibition-era speakeasy and seemingly little changed: the bitters are housemade, and the bartenders pride themselves on effortlessly mixing a perfect Bourbon Daisy or Rangpur Gimlet. Yes, as their menu explains, you can order a chocolate-tini — "But we die a little bit every time."

Saturday

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11 a.m.

#### 5) FARM FRESH

Start your day with a visit to the [West Side Market](#) (1979 West 25th Street; 216-664-3387; [www.westsidemarket.com](#)), where many of the city's chefs go to stock their own kitchens. Browse over 100 vendors selling meat, cheese, fruit, vegetables and baked goods, or just pull up a chair at Crêpe De Luxe's counter ([www.crepesdeluxe.com](#)) for a savory Montréal (filled with smoked brisket and Emmenthal cheese; \$6) or the Elvis homage Le Roi (bananas, peanut butter and chocolate; \$5).

2:30 p.m.

#### 6) ART CANVAS

For nearly 20 years the [William Busta Gallery](#) (2731 Prospect Avenue; 216-298-9071; [www.williambustagallery.com](#)) has remained a conceptual-art-free zone — video installations included. “With video, it takes 15 minutes to see how bad somebody really is,” said Mr. Busta, the gallery's owner. “With painting, you can spot talent right away.” And that's predominantly what he exhibits, with a focus on exciting homegrown figures like Don Harvey and Matthew Kolodziej. In the nearby Warehouse District, Shaheen Modern & Contemporary Art (740 West Superior Avenue, Suite 101; 216-830-8888; [www.shaheengallery.com](#)) casts a wider geographic net with recent solo exhibits from the buzzy ex-Clevelander Craig Kucia, as well as New York-based artists like Mark Fox and Keith Mayerson.

6 p.m.

#### 7) PARIS ON LAKE ERIE

The most talked about new restaurant this year is [L'Albatros](#) (11401 Bellflower Road; 216-791-7880; [www.albatrosbrasserie.com](#)), which the chef Zachary Bruell opened last December. Set inside a 19th-century carriage house on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, this inviting brasserie serves impeccably executed French specialties like chicken liver and foie gras mousseline (\$9), a niçoise salade (\$10) and cassoulet (\$22).

8 p.m.

#### 8) BALLROOM BLITZ

The polka bands are long gone from the [Beachland Ballroom](#) (15711 Waterloo Road; 216-383-1124; [www.beachlandballroom.com](#)), replaced by an eclectic mix of rock groups. But by running a spot that's as much a clubhouse as it is a concert venue, the co-owners Cindy Barber and Mark Leddy have retained plenty of this former Croatian social hall's old-school character. Beachland draws local favorites like the avant folkie Bill Fox and post-punkers This Moment in Black History, as well as hot touring acts like Neko Case and the Hold Steady. Mr. Leddy, formerly an antiques dealer, still hunts down finds for the basement's This Way Out Vintage Shoppe.

Sunday

11 a.m.

#### 9) BEETS, THEN BEATS

One of the few restaurants in town where requesting the vegan option won't elicit a raised eyebrow, [Tommy's](#) (1824 Coventry Road; 216-321-7757; [www.tommyscoventry.com](#)) has been serving tofu since 1972, when the surrounding Coventry Village, in Cleveland Heights, was a hippie oasis. The bloom is off that countercultural rose, but the delicious falafel (\$5.79) and thick milkshakes (\$4.59) endure. The time warp continues through a doorway leading into Mac's Backs bookstore

(No. 1820; 216-321-2665; [www.macsbags.com](http://www.macsbags.com)), a good place to find out-of-print poetry from Cleveland post-Beat writers like d.a. levy, T. L. Kryss and rjs.

2 p.m.

## 10) FREE IMPRESSIONISTS

For decades, the University Circle district has housed many of the city's cultural jewels, including Severance Hall, the majestic Georgian residence of the [Cleveland Orchestra](#); the Cleveland Institute of Art Cinematheque, one of the country's best repertory movie theaters; and the lush 285-acre Lake View Cemetery. At the [Cleveland Museum of Art](#) (11150 East Boulevard; 216-421-7340; [www.clemusart.com](http://www.clemusart.com)), already famed for its collection of Old Masters and kid-friendly armor, the June opening of the museum's [Rafael Viñoly](#)-designed East Wing puts the spotlight on more modern fare, moving from a roomful of Impressionists dramatically centered around one of [Monet](#)'s "Water Lilies" paintings, up to current work. A visually arresting 2008 drawing by Cleveland's T. R. Ericsson more than holds its own amidst heavyweight contemporary pieces from Anselm Kiefer and [Kiki Smith](#). A further enticement: admission to the museum's permanent collection is absolutely free.

## THE BASICS

Many major airlines fly nonstop from New York area airports into Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. A recent Web search found round-trip fares for fall flights starting at \$239. Although a light rail system connects the airport with both downtown and University Circle, a [rental](#) car is advised for reaching most other neighborhoods.

The [Marriott Downtown at Key Center](#) (127 Public Square; 216-696-9200; [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)) is a 25-story, 400-room hotel in the heart of the city. The comfortable, amenity-filled rooms provide quick access to downtown attractions; some feature impressive views of Lake Erie. Doubles start at \$159.

A boutique-style option is the [Glidden House](#) (1901 Ford Drive; 866-812-4537; [www.gliddenhouse.com](http://www.gliddenhouse.com)), 60 quaint rooms in a 1910 French Gothic mansion on the Case Western Reserve University campus, an easy walk to most cultural destinations around University Circle. Doubles from \$139.

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