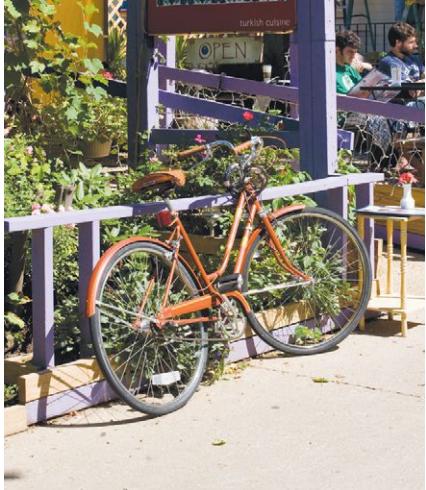




<u>On Tap</u>	<u>ABV</u>	<u>IBU</u>	<u>SG</u>
wheat ale	4.5	12.6	11.0
Dragonfly IPA	6.5	40.0	15.5
HELIOS PALE ALE	5.6	55.0	14.0
Double Dragonfly IMPERIAL IPA	4.9	21.7	11.9
Nut Hugger Brown Ale	6.2	41.7	14.7
Bad Elmer's PORTER	9.1	80+	22.0
	5.0	19.6	13.5



BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

A HOTBED OF LOCAL FOOD IN THE MIDWEST

BY BRYN MOOTH

Journalists are supposed to be impartial about their subjects, but in the interest of full disclosure, I'll own up to my love for Bloomington, Indiana. I spent four glorious years there in the late 1980s, earning a degree (in journalism, no less) at Indiana University, falling for my husband, and discovering myself.

But I can't attribute my affection for Bloomington to a simple case of collegiate nostalgia. The town I knew as a teenage student has evolved into a rich, vibrant small city with plenty that appeals to grown-ups, I.U. alumni, or otherwise. Several reputable restaurants with star-power chefs have come to town, enhancing a food scene that back in the day tended toward cheap pizza delivery and the grocery co-op for Birkenstock-wearing grad students. The university's world-class performing-arts department means there's a concert, play, reading, or other live performance nearly every night of the week. And charming bed-and-breakfast lodging beckons travelers from the Ohio Valley area for a weekend trip.

GETTING THERE

You'd be well-advised to plan a departure from Cincinnati on Friday afternoon so you're in Bloomington for its fantastic Community Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bloomington is an easy two-and-a-half-hour drive from downtown Cincinnati.

You may be tempted to travel via old US 50 west, envisioning a picturesque drive through quaint towns along the river. Don't. The US 50 route is more industrial and traffic-packed than it is picturesque and quaint. Opt instead for a more sensible itinerary along I-74 West to Greensburg, Ind., where you'll pick up IN-3 South before

connecting with IN-46 West. Route 46 steers you among pretty farm fields, through Columbus and Nashville, Ind. (both are worthy stops on the return trip), and then right into Bloomington.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Bloomington's Entertainment and Arts District (BEAD) is centered on the Monroe County Courthouse Square and includes the main drag, Kirkwood Avenue, and "restaurant row" on Fourth Street. The downtown area is pleasantly walkable and is adjacent to the I.U. campus' western border along Indiana Avenue.

Start your exploration with a stroll through campus, entering via the Sample Gates at the intersection of Indiana and Kirkwood Avenues. Any of the intertwining brick pathways lead among shady trees toward a collection of idyllic limestone buildings. Wander just a few minutes and you'll wind up on the steps of the Indiana Student Union, the hub of student life (and a great spot for people watching).

Make your way along Kirkwood Avenue toward the Courthouse Square, and you'll encounter a mix of bars, restaurants, and stores that speak to Bloomington's disposition as more than a college town. Shops selling university sportswear and dorm-room decor mingle with upscale apparel retailers. Dive bars and, well, less dive-y bars sit elbow-to-elbow.

Stop for a late-afternoon pick-me-up at Nick's English Hut on Kirkwood, an I.U. institution and popular reunion spot for alumni. Nick's holds revered status in student life — an all-hours place to gather, eat, watch I.U. basketball games, and drink (though, by tradition, not to excess). Order a "pound" of draft beer — served in

a 16-ounce Mason jar — and snag a table at the top of the back stairs for a great view of the bar's comings and goings.

Thus refreshed, you'll be in the mood to browse the shops rimming Courthouse Square. (Or maybe you'll need to return to your hotel for a post-beer nap instead.) As it's farther from campus, the courthouse area boasts more upscale shops and restaurants, including the usual bookstores ubiquitous in college towns.

FRIDAY EVENING

If you're a college student looking for cheap eats in Bloomington, you're in luck, because even the cheap eats are good. Nick's, for one, is renowned for fantastic stromboli sandwiches: crusty bread stuffed with spicy ground sausage and a bit of tomato sauce with all the fixings.

Since you're probably not a college student, you'll dig Bloomington's fine dining scene, which embraces local and seasonal food. Two spots in particular shine under the creative leadership of well-trained chefs. Chef Daniel Orr's path took him from his native Columbus, Ind., to culinary school at Johnson & Wales to gigs in three-star restaurants in France and New York City. He returned to his roots to open FARM Bloomington, a disciple of the locavore movement. Handcrafted cocktails incorporate fresh herbs and infused liqueurs; the menu features seasonal produce from local growers. FARM encourages small-plate dining. The garlic fries are, bar none, the best fries I've ever eaten; green pea guacamole and a wood-fired pizza with Capriole goat cheese, red grapes, and arugula are fine nibbles.

Around the corner on Walnut Street, David and Kristen Tallent bring their

Culinary Institute of America training and Slow Food ideals to their eponymous Restaurant Tallent. The menu changes seasonally and features locally pastured meats and farmed vegetables from surrounding counties. Restaurant Tallent dresses up its southern Indiana heritage in Sunday finery: A late-summer menu included local duck breast with blackberry jus, sweet corn and swiss chard; pork done three ways was accompanied by better-than-picnic versions of baked beans and cole slaw.

You'll want to end your evening the way the I.U. kids do: with a drink at the Irish Lion. This historic brick tavern on Kirkwood west of the square boasts serious



Irish credentials, with a list of more than 200 single-malt Scotches and Irish whiskeys. Beer-drinkers can order drafts in half-yard or yard glasses (nearly three feet tall).

SATURDAY MORNING

Jump-start a busy day with a breakfast sandwich at the Scholar's Inn Bakehouse on the square, then head a couple of blocks to City Hall and the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market. Or just grab a hot coffee and a home-baked muffin or scone at the market. Foodies and locavores will be hard-pressed to find a finer farmers' market anywhere in the Midwest; the city built covered stalls and established a permanent, year-round home for the market. More than 60 vendors sell during the height of the May-to-October season. Be sure to bring a cooler so you can purchase Capriole's fantastic goat cheeses, farm-fresh eggs, Amish meats and other perishables. It's worth standing in the around-the-block line for the man selling Indiana sweet corn.

THE RETURN TRIP

Don't be in a rush to get home Saturday; plan for a leisurely return trip, with a stop along the way. Here are three options:

For nature lovers. Pick up the essentials for a picnic lunch at the Bloomington farmers' market or stop for sandwiches at the Scholar's Inn Bakehouse location on Third Street on your way out of town. Brown County State Park, on IN-46 around Nashville, is an ideal stopover if you're in the mood to walk off a heavy breakfast or too much wine from Friday night. The park, Indiana's largest, offers 12 miles of well-marked hiking trails. The more remote western entrance (just before Nashville) offers a lengthier trail of moderate difficulty; you can access shorter, easier hikes from the Abe Martin Lodge inside the North park entrance (just past Nashville).

For art-gallery browsers. American Impressionist painter T.C. Steele settled near Nashville, Ind., in 1907 and founded an art colony in Brown County. That artistic heritage lingers on, as more than 250 fine artists call the area home and longtime galleries display their work. The town hosts an Art Walk the second Saturday of the month from June through December. For all its emphasis on art, Nashville isn't particularly a foodie town, so adjust your expectations accordingly when it comes to lunch. Old-timey stores sell candies and snacks; the downtown Nashville House is known for

fried chicken and fried biscuits.

For architecture buffs. Indiana's 20th largest city, Columbus, is home to a startling collection of modern buildings designed in the 1940s through 1960s by noted architects like Eero Saarinen, I.M. Pei, Richard Meier, and Cesar Pelli. Six buildings are designated National Historic Landmarks, and 60 buildings in all help define Columbus as "the Athens of the Prairie." The American Institute of Architects ranks Columbus sixth in the U.S. among architecturally significant cities, behind San Francisco, Chicago, and other major hubs.

The Miller House, commissioned by Cummins Engine owner J. Irwin Miller from Saarinen and completed in 1957, is now owned and operated by the Indianapolis Museum of Art. The modern home and gardens just recently opened for tours (reservations are required). You can also take a two-hour guided tour (Saturdays at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.) of Columbus architectural landmarks (reservations are recommended) or stop at the Visitors Center at 506 Fifth St. for a self-guided tour map. Visit www.columbus.in.us for tour information. Downtown Columbus is roll-up-the-sidewalks quiet on weekends when the banks and insurance brokers are shuttered, so lunch options are rather limited. (The Hoosier-style breaded pork tenderloin sandwich at The Garage is pretty great.)

WHERE TO SHOP

Book Corner

100 Walnut St.

Find an international array of newspapers and magazines, classic fiction, and books from small and independent publishing houses.

Caveat Emptor

112 N. Walnut St.

An eclectic selection of used and out-of-print books, served up to a clientele of bibliophiles, grad students, and professors.

J.L. Waters & Co.

109 N. College Ave.

They offer everything for the outdoor enthusiast, including an extensive array of clothing plus gear for fishing, climbing, kayaking, and camping. Pick up regional trail maps and plan a hike in neighboring Brown County.

Pitaya
417 E. Kirkwood Ave.
The first-ever location of this small apparel chain. Pitaya features-of-the-moment, made-in-the-USA clothes for young women.

WHERE TO DRINK

Nick's English Hut
423 E. Kirkwood Ave.
This prototypical college bar has lots to recommend it to nonstudents (though it helps if you're a sports fan). Bring a group and play Sink the Bismarck by floating a shot glass in a bucket of beer.

Irish Lion
212 W. Kirkwood Ave.
This place always seems packed in a very friendly way. As authentic an Irish bar as you can get in the Midwest, with a huge range of Scotch and Irish whiskeys and imported beers on tap.

WHERE TO DINE

FARM
108 E. Kirkwood Ave.
Chef Daniel Orr spotlights local and seasonal foods with a menu that encourages sharing. The decor, complemented with vintage farm equipment and kitchen antiques, is warm but not kitschy. The adjacent Root Cellar hosts live jazz and bluegrass. Also home to an amazing breakfast menu.

Restaurant Tallent
208 N. Walnut St.
A welcome white-tablecloth addition to Bloomington's food scene. Chefs and co-owners David and Kristen Tallent work with local farmers and producers to source fresh ingredients. This is comfort food all dressed up. ■

Snow Lion
113 S. Grant St.
Featuring Tibetan food and decor (and reportedly to be owned by either the nephew or brother of the Dalai Lama, depending on who you talk to), the Snow Lion is a long-standing fixture. Bloomington's restaurant scene is stocked with Asian restaurants, thanks to I.U.'s large international student body.

Mother Bear's
1428 E. Third St.
Though it's on the other side of campus from everything else featured here, Mother Bear's is the hands-down best pizza restaurant in Bloomington. Order the thin crust with sesame seeds; skip the limited wine offerings and order a local Upland beer.

WHERE TO STAY

Scholars Inn Bed & Breakfast
801 N. College Ave.
www.scholarsinn.com
This stately brick home, more than a century old, sits north of Courthouse Square. It's been renovated into a comfortable B&B with six rooms named after notable Indiana figures like author Gene Stratton Porter. Don't be surprised if the floor in your antique-filled suite slopes noticeably (it's not you). Full breakfast.

Grant Street Inn
310 N. Grant St.
www.grantstinn.com/
Just two blocks north of Kirkwood Avenue and easily accessible to both campus and the Courthouse Square, the Grant Street Inn offers 24 comfortable, charming rooms and a killer breakfast buffet. The inn is comprised of two historic homes that were moved, conjoined, and renovated in the mid-1990s. A wonderful overnight spot.

Biddle Hotel at the Indiana Memorial Union
900 E. Seventh St.
www imu.indiana.edu/hotel/
In the heart of the I.U. campus. Rooms are well-suited to the business traveler and pleasant, though not super-luxurious. Staying at the Union is all about the location. ■

More fabulous Bloomington businesses and a calendar of events can be discovered at www.visitbloomington.com – bring your appetite for local food!

Bryn Mooth is a Cincinnati-based independent journalist and copywriter who focuses on food and healthy living. She shares recipes and kitchen wisdom on her blog, www.writes4food.com.



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