

A Brutally Honest Judge's Travel Guide for Grand Prix Cincinnati 2014

By Minh Vu

Please note the spelling: one N, then two Ns. It's spelled how it's pronounced. Cin-cin-na-ti

A. Overview of Cincinnati: the Queen's City



Temperature in March in Cincinnati has lows in the 30s and highs in the 50s. Cincinnati weather is woefully unpredictable so please check for the recent temperatures before you leave and adjust accordingly.

Let me be clear about downtown Cincinnati. I do not suggest anyone go anywhere in downtown Cincinnati alone at night. Areas to the north of the convention center can get rough.

In downtown Cincinnati expect to walk several blocks to find food and get to your hotel. Downtown Cincinnati is in the "revitalize downtown" movement, but it's pretty early in the process.

B. The Venue: Duke Energy Center

The **Duke Energy Center** is not the Sharonville Convention Center where the SCG opens are.

The Duke Energy Center is found in the west side of downtown, so most of downtown action will be a few blocks away at minimum.

Parking can be found to the north and south of the convention center. Parking rates vary based upon what else is occurring. Safe estimate is \$20/day.

The Duke Energy Center does have concession areas that may include some of Cincinnati favorites such as Skyline Chili, La Rosa's Pizza and Graeter's Ice Cream.

Duke Energy Center does not provide free Wi-Fi.

C. Hotels



In terms of nearby hotels there is the **Millennium Hotel** (\$145/night) across the street from the convention center and the **Hyatt Regency Cincinnati** (\$149/night) diagonally across from the convention center. The **Hilton** (\$217/night) is a block east of the Hyatt and the **Westin** (\$210/night) is a block east of the Hilton. The **Garfield Suites Hotel** is bit further north (\$139/night).

Cheaper hotels in Cincinnati will require a vehicle and as most of them are near University of Cincinnati campus area.

Be mindful. Cincinnati does have bed bugs. Most hotels are hyper vigilant dealing with bed bugs, but I recommend taking common sense precautions to help you **S.L.E.E.P. Survey** your room and bed before you sleep on it. **Lift** up the mattress and check the corners. **Elevate** your luggage off the ground away from your bed. **Examine** your luggage before you leave, and **Place** all your clothes in the dryer on high heat for 15 minutes when you come home. (Adapted from the Orkin website)

D. Travel



If you are flying to Cincinnati, the airport is not in Ohio. It's actually in northern Kentucky in the outskirts of Covington, KY; the city across the Ohio River from Cincinnati.

The TANK Airporter runs from the airport to downtown for \$2 and runs at least every hour from 5AM to 11PM. For more information visit:

<http://www.tankbus.org/routes-schedules/airporter.aspx>

Taxis will run approximately 30 dollars one way from the airport to downtown.

If you are taking the train, the closest is the station at Union Terminal Cincinnati, which will be another 10 dollar cab ride. The downtown Greyhound station drops off on the east side of downtown, so I suggest a 4 dollar cab ride instead of a 10 block walk.

Be mindful there are several one way roads in downtown Cincinnati: Elm Street in front of the convention center only runs north, 5th Street runs east and 6th Street runs west.

E. Food



Cincinnati has two major mainstays: Cincinnati Chili and Graeter's Ice Cream. Cincinnati Chili is a highly polarizing food with some people loving it and some people absolutely disgusted by it. **Skyline Chili** is the major regional chain that sells Cincinnati Chili. Cincinnati chili is commonly served on pasta or hotdogs and is never eaten alone.



Graeter's Ice Cream is much less polarizing. The ice cream is all natural and made 2 gallons at a time. They are well known for chocolate chip ice cream where they pour melted chocolate into the ice cream and then break up the chocolate shell into chunks. Oprah Winfrey has placed Graeter's Ice Cream under the chairs of her audience, and if Oprah can't convince you to try an ice cream, I doubt anything I can say will convince you.

Most of the quicker food within walking distance of downtown is in Fountain Square, 3 blocks east of the convention center. They have **Potbelly** (Fri:7a-7p, Sat:11a-4p,Sun:Closed), **Chipotle** (10a-11p daily), **Panera** (Fri: 6a-9p Sat 7a-9p Sun: 7a-8p), and **Fusian** [I call it "Sushi-Chipotle"] (Fri & Sat 11a-9p, Sun closed)

As for more sit down establishments within walking range, **Boi Na Braza** is a Brazilian Steakhouse near Fountain Square. **Jeff Ruby's Steakhouse** is another great location for a gourmet steakhouse in Cincinnati. **Nada's** is a fabulous Mexican Restaurant. **Boca's** is another high end Italian restaurant next door from Nada's.

Rock Bottom is on fountain square for a more affordable casual dining experience. **Local's** is another place a block north of Fountain Square with brews and food.

F. Other attractions

Unfortunately, timing makes seeing the Cincinnati Bengals or the Reds impossible in late March. The amusement park King's Island, located 20 miles north of the convention center on I-71 will not be open either, but a **Great Wolf Lodge** near King's Island should be open. (Vehicle required)

The **Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical** Garden is open all year round and a great place to bring children of all ages. Vehicle recommended for getting to the zoo, but buses are available to and from downtown Cincinnati.

Another great place for children is the **Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal**. It has three museums in it, a natural history museum, a Cincinnati history museum and a children's museum. A vehicle is again recommended for this location as well; but public transport is available.

The **Underground Railroad Freedom Center** is another amazing experience to be had in downtown Cincinnati. Be mindful it is not open on Sunday or Monday. It's an emotionally powerful experience and not suited for a very young audience.

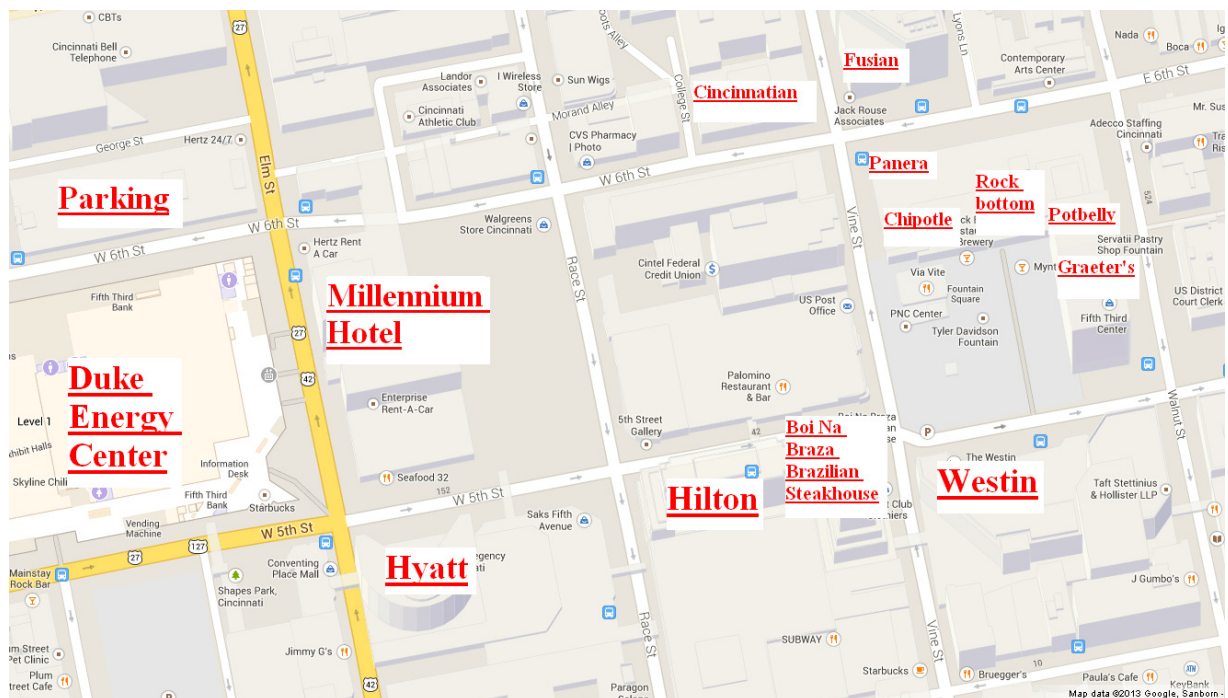
On the far northeast side of downtown is the **Horseshoe Casino**. It's a very new establishment, and it packs gambling, food and other entertainment in a small place.

At the **Aronoff Center** Downtown, the musical *Wicked* will be playing the weekend of Grand Prix. I suggest getting tickets in advance for that show as it is its final weekend.

The **Newport Aquarium** across the river is a well known in the area for those who enjoy viewing aquatic life.

Inside Eden Park is **Krohn's Conservatory**, (closed Sunday) which is presenting its Spring Show, as well as the **Cincinnati Art Museum**.

G. Map



Map adapted from Google Maps sourced on Nov 11, 2013

