

[Home](#) / [Life](#) / [Travel](#) / [World](#)

Ireland has a new direct flight from Dublin Airport to Indianapolis – here are 10 reasons to visit

May is a magical month for an alternative US city break, with summer in bloom, the Indy 500 on the way, and Hoosier hospitality extending from porch parties to pork tenderloins...



The Indianapolis skyline. Photo: VisitIndy.com

Pól Ó Conghaile



“The city’s going crazy!” my Uber driver says. Sun is streaking through cranes, skyscrapers and movie-set streetscapes as we drive through Indianapolis.

“In a good or bad way?” I wonder.

“In a good way, man!”

I’ve flown on Aer Lingus’s newest transatlantic service. The route feels random, but gives Indy (as the city is known by locals) its sole direct flight to Europe, and visitors a hassle-free gateway to the Midwest.

After US Customs and Border Protection preclearance in Dublin, you whizz through a small airport for a 20-minute drive to a Downtown immersed in loud sports, a stream of local brews (mine’s a Sunlight Cream Ale) and ma-hoosive portion sizes.

Locals are delighted, too. “It means we don’t have to drive three hours to Chicago or pay \$300 to connect,” as one tells me.



May is Indy's magic month. Chequered flags hang from windows ahead of the Indy 500, flowers are in bloom, neighbours 'porching' from one house to another.

It's not a 'crazy' New Yorkers or Chicagoans would recognise, but billions are being pumped into new hotels, trails and downtown developments. I find a warm, unpretentious and relatively affordable reminder that the US is a cultural kaleidoscope, not a simple war between red and blue, and a hospitality beyond the heat of news headlines.

"Indy is one of the biggest little cities you'll ever go to," another local says. "It's not a small town, but it feels like one."

1. Indy's need for speed



The Starting Line experience at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum

Start your engines at Speedway, a small town with a monster motorsports reputation. Every May, its Indy 500 sees cars race on a circuit so large four holes of the Brickyard Crossing golf course fit inside the oval (brickyardcrossing.com; \$215). The world's largest single day sporting event is faster than Formula 1, and its winner drinks milk. Milk!



Pól on the iconic Indy 500 track

The custom apparently began when champ Louis Meyer asked for buttermilk to quench his thirst in 1936, and you can learn more, see winning cars and immerse yourself in audiovisual pyrotechnics at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum.

It has just reopened after a \$60.5m, 17-month restoration, and costs a fraction of what it does to attend the race itself. Local 101: it's customary to stop for a no-frills doughnut at Long's Bakery nearby. Join the line for a classic glazed yeast (95c; cash only). Milk is optional.

Details: *imsmuseum.org, from \$25; longsbakery.com*

2. V for Vonnegut



A mural of Kurt Vonnegut

“Peculiar travel suggestions are dancing lessons from God,” Kurt Vonnegut wrote. I take one at a quirky museum (\$12) celebrating Indy’s famous literary son. It tells the story of a World War II veteran who went from PoW in Dresden to beloved author, wit and champion of free speech. Amid artefacts like his old typewriter, letters and Purple Heart, you’ll find a clear take on contemporary culture wars.

“The America that I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries,” reads one tote bag quote, and the museum sends free reads to students in an anti-censorship move (“I consider him a patriot in the best sense of the word,” says founder Julia A Whitehead).

Operations manager Pat Downey does his Irish heritage proud by digging up the fun fact of my trip: President Michael D Higgins studied at Indiana University in the 1960s.

Details: vonnegutlibrary.org; \$12

3. On yer bike



With sprawling burbs, humongous highways and gas at some \$3.25 a gallon (85c a litre), everybody drives everywhere in Indy. Well, mostly. The Indianapolis Cultural Trail is a ten-mile (16km) linear park that has turned a former traffic lane into an ambling trail connecting several neighbourhoods and dotted with public art.

“May is the best time here,” says Kären Haley of Pacers Bikeshare. “We call it peak trail. You’ll see the lilacs, smell the blooms and see the locals waking up and going to get their pastries on a Sunday morning.” She leads a tour that takes us past museums, the State Capitol and historic Indiana Ave among other stops.

Locals can use the public bikeshare for free, but visitors need to create a Google Voice number to use the BCycle app, so you may prefer to book onto a group tour. Most cost \$45pp, but check [the website](#) for free options, including monthly Roast Rides and Bikes and Bakeries Rides - beginner-friendly options taking a spin to Indy bakeries and coffee shops.

Details: indyculturaltrail.org; pacersbikeshare.org

4. Jump into Fountain Square



Indy's neighbourhoods lack the diversity of Chicago (a three-hour drive north), or even Cleveland, but they are bubbling nicely. Try Irvington, or Broad Ripple, but especially Fountain Square, a cultural crossroads south of Downtown that looks like mid-century movie sets.

Browse vintage at Zodiac, vinyl at Square Cat records, musical instruments at Arthur's, and catch a gig at indie venue Hi-Fi (upcoming shows include Ireland's Inhaler in September). It's hard to believe this whole neighbourhood was once Indiana farmland.

Indy Reads is a brilliant bookshop with a mission not just to sell books, but to build literacy in its community. I drop in to buy a Vonnegut book, and come away with a calendar of events ranging from open mics to readings, workshops and book clubs, and a literary zine.

"I believe that writing changes the world," its editor writes. "And I believe that is happening right here in Indianapolis."

Details: *@zodiac.vintage; hifiindy.com; indyreads.com*

5. Paddle your own canoe



Frank's Paddlesports Livery

“This was my place of healing; my church,” says Peter Bloomquist, guiding a canoe trip on the city’s White River. He founded Frank’s Paddlesports Livery after finding peace and connection on the river during Covid, and today wears a ‘Make Indy a River City’ badge on his cap.

Millions have been spent cleaning up the waterway (White River State Park is the largest urban state park in the US) and we see turkey vultures overhead, and turtles sunning on rocks, as we go with the flow. Pay \$20 for an hourly rental, or \$40 for a guided tour.

6. Indy eats



St Elmo Steakhouse

St Elmo’s is an historic, wood-panelled steakhouse serving Indy’s iconic shrimp cocktail (\$19.95). Its horseradish-based sauce will blow your sinuses across the state, but it’s more a fun than a foodie experience, with fridge-cold shrimp adding little by way of flavour.

Steaks will set you back over \$50 a pop, and walls are lined with photos of celebrity visitors like Elton John and Magic Johnson... but cutting edge, it ain’t.



A farm-to-table salad at Milktooth

For a tangier taste of the region, try the hip, farm-to-table fare at Bluebeard or Milktooth in Fletcher Place. The former bakes its own bread and includes vintage typewriters in the decor; the latter describes itself as “a fine-diner” in a repurposed car garage. As I tuck into a zingy farm salad with charred chicken (\$22), I spot chunky pieces of a former mechanic’s lift supporting a long, wooden communal table.

Indy is a brilliant beer city, putting its Irish and German DNA to good use, and you can mix and match at its Rathskeller, or The Garage in the Bottleworks district for food-hall fare paired with madly named local brews (looking at you, Mortal Wombat and Bouffant Jellyfish).



Pól at Plump's Last Shot

Pork is beloved, too. For a mix of sports and dive bar, head to Broad Ripple. Here, Plump's Last Shot serves a pork tenderloin bigger than your face (\$13); it's named for owner Bobby Pump, whose basketball exploits — and a game-winning final shot — inspired the Gene Hackman movie *Hoosiers*. Ask nicely, and you might even bag a chat with Bobby himself.

7. Check into a Coca-Cola factory



Bottleworks Hotel

Well, a former one. 'A classic reimagined' is the tagline at the Bottleworks Hotel, an eye-catching restoration of the city's former Coca-Cola bottling plant. Along with its low, luxurious Art Deco exterior, features include original lobby tiling (best enjoyed over a game of pool), and contemporary nods like its red bedroom doors. It sits at the heart of the developing Bottleworks district, with a movie theatre, shops, cafes, bars, restaurants and The Garage food hall within a few steps. Leviathan Bakehouse, a five-minute walk away, is a good tip for breakfast.

Details: bottleworkshotel.com; rooms from \$199

8. Museum marvels



NDN Art, by Teri Greeves (Eiteljorg Museum)

Indy boasts the world's largest children's museum, classy art and garden trails at Newfields (including work by Robert Indiana, Van Gogh and Georgia O'Keeffe), but my don't-miss museum is the Eiteljorg (\$20), zeroing in on Native American culture and the American West.

It's a striking building — a low-lying, curvy composite of Minnesota dolomite and sandstone that evokes the colours of the southwest. Inside, works are accompanied by simple but superbly written panels coaxing you to think in different ways about people who have lived in the US since long before settlers arrived, about their repression and relocations, and showing how their likenesses have been used to perpetuate stereotypes, from art to advertising and sports franchises.



The Eiteljorg Museum. Photo: VisitIndy.com

And, of course, it spotlights Native American artists working today. ‘Radical Stitch’ (to August 3) for example, is a beautiful exhibition of beadworks both celebrating the tradition and looking to its future — with beads used on everything from platform boots to brain MRIs or, in the case of Katherine Boyer’s ‘The Sky Vest’, a striking sleeveless jacket in which sun, clouds and sky reflect her identity as Métis, queer and white settler.

A short visit really helped me to put my visit, and Indiana, into context.

Details: discovernewfields.org; childrensmuseum.org; eiteljorg.org

9. Sports and spirits



A Sunlight Cream Ale at the Slippery Noodle

“Welcome to the lies, myths and legends of the Slippery Noodle”, says ‘Door Guy’ Bo Bocock, kicking off an informal tour of one of Indy’s oldest bars.

It's a sports bar with a blues problem (or a blues bar with a sports problem, if you prefer) and with a history stretching back to 1850, is full of ghosts and gossip. John Dillinger is just one of the local legends said to have visited. Could he have been responsible for the bullet slugs still buried in a brick wall next to its stage?



Lucas Oil Stadium

Indy is sports-mad city, so plan an experience like a Colts (American football), Pacers or Caitlin Clark's Indiana Fever (both basketball) game, a Lucas Oil Stadium tour (\$20), or an evening baseball game with a hotdog to soak up the atmosphere.

Details: slipperynoodle.com; lucasoilstadium.com

10. Into Indiana



Cataract Falls

Indy is called the “crossroads of America”, with a plum location a few hours’ drive from cities like Chicago, Cincinnati and Louisville. I can see it as a hub for touring the Midwest, or for “open-jaw” trips flying in and out of different cities — Nashville, or Cleveland, for example.

Another option? Pick a shorter driving loop in Indiana. From caves in the south to Amish communities in the north, there’s a whack of Americana to absorb across a state smaller than Ireland in size.

I took a drive with Noelle Szydlyk of Visit Indiana, stopping for a hike in Shades State Park, views of Cataract Falls and photos of covered bridges. We passed vast corn and soybean farms, and I loved gliding through a landscape flecked with rail crossings, billboards, barns, silos and mailboxes.



From a distance, US culture wars can feel black and white. On the ground, there is every shade in between, from a Trump 2024 yard flag near Ladoga to the young energy of the university town of Bloomington. There, I stop into Gather, a store selling sassy gifts handmade by makers, and pick up a fridge magnet. It says, 'In this house, we play Taylor's version.'

Details: [visitindiana.com](https://www.visitindiana.com)

Get there

Aer Lingus flies four times weekly from Dublin to Indianapolis. Flights are on a new, single-aisle A321XLR aircraft from €219 each way in economy and €1,049 in business class, including taxes and charges. [aerlingus.com](https://www.aerlingus.com)

Irish citizens need an Esta or visa ahead of US travel. For the latest official advice, including updated entry and immigration notes, see the Department of Foreign Affairs' [US travel advisory](#).

The dollar was priced at roughly €1.11 on my visit. I found prices on a par with Dublin, and cheaper than New York. 20pc is a standard expected tip.

Pól was a guest of Aer Lingus and Visit Indy. For more to see and do in the city, see [visitindy.com](https://www.visitindy.com)

Irish Independent

May 2025 – Print and Digital

Unique Monthly Viewership: 3,532,481