

HIKE, BIKE, SIP, STAY

STORY BY RICH WARREN

Get away this spring to explore Ohio's great outdoors and its abundance of craft distilleries. Take in Ohio's natural beauty at its 75 state parks by day and indulge in delicious cocktails at various distilleries located across the state in the evenings. Here are six getaway ideas – each located close to craft distilleries. Looking for more parks to explore? Get trip ideas for all of Ohio's 75 state parks by downloading the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' free DETOUR app.

LAKESIDE RETREAT

Watch sailboats glide past a sandy beach at **Maumee Bay State Park** right on the shores of Lake Erie. The comfortable park lodge sits right on the water with recreational activities in the park including boat and bike rentals, multi-purpose trails, and a Scottish-style golf course. Take one of the frequent naturalist programs, including birdwatching, in one of the country's best places to witness the spring migration.

In the evening, slip over to **Toledo Spirits** in Lowertown, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, where the handcrafted spirits using regional ingredients include a hop-flavored whiskey and a strawberry vodka. Enjoy seasonally changing cocktails in Bellwether, the distillery's cocktail lounge, where the beams and posts of its former life as a hat factory are part of the atmosphere. Purchase to-go spirits in the adjacent bottle shop as well as other items like cool tiki mugs. Light fare includes flatbreads and sliders, but your GPS may well route you past the world-famous Tony Packo's Cafe, where you also could stop in for a Hungarian hot dog, complete with the works.

Take in gorgeous lake views at Maumee Bay State Park

A SHORE SUCCESS

On the other end of Ohio's Lake Erie shoreline, **Geneva State Park** also offers a lodge right on the water. A marina and fishing pier are adjacent to a sandy swimming beach, while nearby hiking, biking, and snowmobile trails snake through forests and freshwater marshes. A stone's throw from the park is the frozen-in-time resort of Geneva-on-the-Lake, attracting summer vacationers for decades with arcades and fun places to eat like the popular old-fashioned diner Eddie's Grille and Madsen Donuts.

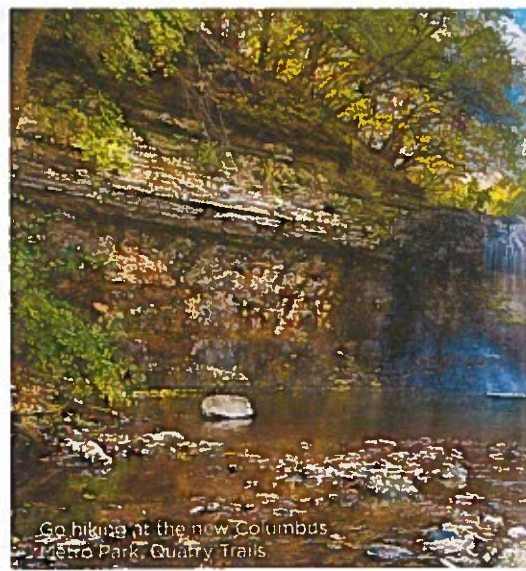
For more Lake Erie vistas, keep driving eastward along State Route 531 passing through Ashtabula with its historic harbor and finally arriving at **Conneaut Township Park**, where you can actually drive your vehicle right onto the beach. Then, head inland to the Grand River Valley where, in addition to many well-known wineries, you'll find **Red Eagle Distillery**, housed in a bright red barn dating from the 1880s with a remarkably preserved rustic interior. The five spirits produced here include bourbon and rye using locally sourced grains, a vodka distilled from grapes, brandy made from local wines, and a unique Red Maple spirit using distilled local maple syrup.



Take a photo by the historic red barn at Red Eagle Distillery.

URBAN ESCAPES

With its system of 20 Metro Parks, the great outdoors is close by anywhere in Columbus. Make a stop at the newest Columbus and Franklin County Metro Park, **Quarry Trails**, that opened in 2021. Situated inside what was once the largest contiguous quarry in the country, the park offers pet-friendly walking trails, a mountain bike trail, a lake for fishing, and a scenic waterfall. Those who want to sleep under the stars can do just that nearby in



Go hiking at the new Columbus Metro Park, Quarry Trails.

Grove City at **Scioto Grove Metro Park** at a backpacking campground right beside the Scioto River.

Built up a thirst? Fans of craft distilleries will be thrilled to learn of the abundance of them in Columbus. The oldest, **Middle West Spirits**, uses Ohio soft winter wheat in its vodka, whiskey, and its dry gin that's made with 18 botanicals. **Watershed Distillery** makes vodka, a trio of award-winning gins, and both a four-year bourbon and a bottled Old Fashioned. **High Bank**



Distillery received a high honor when its Whiskey War Barrel Proof blend was named the Best Blended Whiskey in America at the San Francisco Spirits Competition in 2021. **451 Spirits** puts an emphasis on creativity — its rum mixes in mint and lime to create the flavors of a mojito, while its whiskey is distilled with smoked apples. They even make a pizza-flavored vodka! **Noble Cut Distillery** makes flavored whiskeys starting with a base of bourbon and adding apple, black



Try a sample of one of the flavored options at Hocking Hills Moonshine.

cherry, salty caramel, or maple flavors.

Be sure to get an online passport for the brand-new **Columbus Distillery Trail** and then collect points as you taste, tour, and sample.

HEAD TO THE HILLS

The hills of Southeast Ohio have long been a magnet for lovers of the outdoors. The **Hocking Hills** region draws more than four million visitors each year, while the **Wayne National Forest**, comprising

nearly a quarter million acres of heavily wooded land across several counties, offers hiking, camping, fishing, horseback riding, and all-terrain vehicle trails. Stay in the charming college town of Athens as a home-base for exploring the region. Stay overnight at the new boutique **Athens Central Hotel** that's less than a minute's walk to downtown where you'll find restaurants and independently owned boutiques. Each of the hotel's luxurious rooms has floor to ceiling windows.

Try spirits made with local ingredients at Athens' **West End Distillery** and the **West End Ciderhouse**, located about a block from each other in a hilly residential neighborhood. The distillery stays true to its Appalachian roots by using locally grown grapes to distill its unique vodka and spicebush gin, as well as sorghum grown in neighboring Meigs County to produce rum. Also available is a brand-new Elder Gin using Eastern red cedar, elder flower, and ginseng. Find these spirits mixed into imaginative cocktails at the nearby Ciderhouse. Head north to the Hocking Hills area to sample locally made moonshine in a wide array of flavors at **Hocking Hills Moonshine** in Logan and **Black Diamond Distillery** in New Straitsville.

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FIND YOUR SIPPING POINT

IMAGINE THIS...

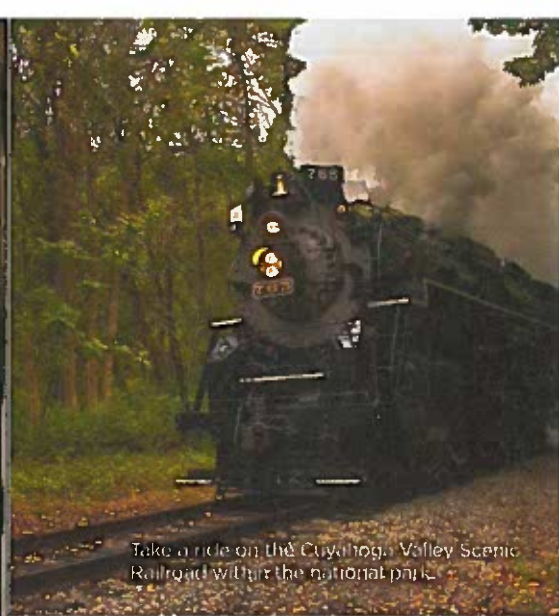
an experience centered around five Kentucky Bourbon Trail Craft Tour® Distilleries: New Riff Distilling, Boone County Distilling Co., Nealey Family Distillery, The Old Pogue Distillery, and Second Sight Spirits.

Add eight bourbon-centric bars, all with a culture of their own, and all named to The Bourbon Review's list of The Best Bourbon Bars in America. Finally, mix in six amazing restaurants cultivating the freshest tastes in bourbon culinary delights and you're on the **The B Line**.

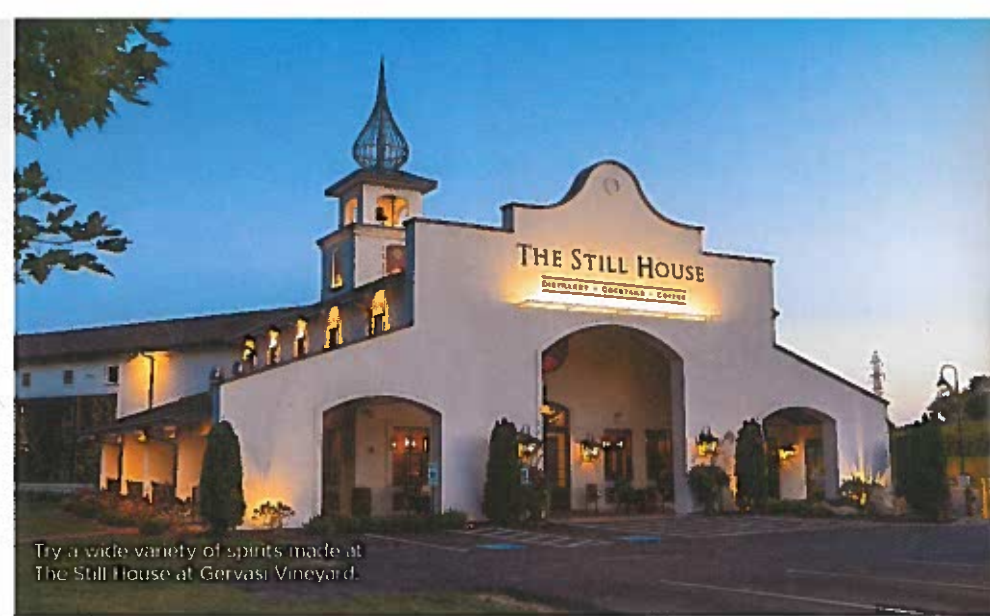
The Start of a Great Bourbon Adventure

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HOCKING HILLS MOONSHINE: LAURA WATLO BLAKE



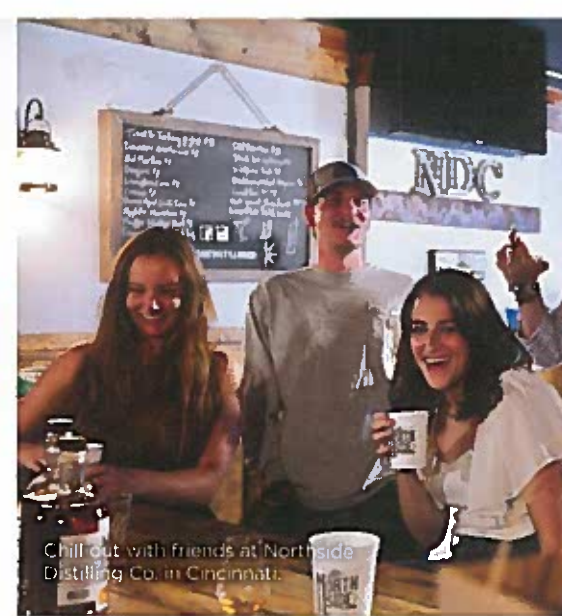
Take a ride on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad within the national park.



Try a wide variety of spirits made at The Still House at Gervasi Vineyard.



Explore the grounds of Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park.



Chill out with friends at Northside Distilling Co. in Cincinnati.

VALLEY VISTAS

In the **Cuyahoga Valley National Park** between Cleveland and Akron, there's all the scenic beauty you'd expect in a national park with hidden waterfalls, dramatic rock outcroppings, and of course the winding Cuyahoga River itself, all allowing for hiking, fishing, paddling the river, golfing, and horseback riding. The Towpath Trail following the course of the old Ohio and Erie Canal is especially

popular with hikers and bikers, and kids will love taking a ride on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad.

For a unique place to both taste local spirits and spend the night, head for **Gervasi Vineyard** in Canton, a 55-acre estate well-known for its distillery, winery, and three distinctive restaurants. Stop in **The Still House** to sip spirits like bourbons aged in wine barrels, a rosé vodka, blood orange gin, blueberry liqueur, and spiced

rum. From **The Still House**, walk to stay overnight in Gervasi's Villas, luxurious suites with fireplaces, heated floors, and Tuscan-inspired decor, or **The Casa**, an upscale boutique hotel.

ART WALK

Just north of Cincinnati, Hamilton is known as **The City of Sculpture**, since about three dozen playful outdoor installations are sprinkled through the

downtown area. Even more sculpted artworks await nearby at **Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park**, where nearly 80 outdoor sculptures sit on a breathtaking 300-acre tract of rolling forested hills, meadows, lakes, and gardens. Hop on an art cart to get up-close to the sculptures. Take a good long overnight rest at the recently completed **Warehouse Hotel**.

Seven distilleries can be found around Cincinnati. **Northern Row Brewery &**

Distillery uses traditional pre-Prohibition mash bills and recipes for its malted whisky and bourbons. Stop in the family-friendly taproom in the city's Over-the-Rhine district to try them. Close by is the **Knox Joseph Distillery** stillhouse where you can try cocktails made with their award-winning gin and whiskey. Not far away in downtown you'll find **Northside Distilling Co.**, serving its bourbon, gin, vodka, agave, and seasonal rum.

On Cincinnati's north side, **March First Brewing and Distilling** crafts beer, cider, and spirits like Cooper Island Rum, Redsky Gin, and Rebellion Agave. On the city's east side, stop at **Karrikin Spirits Company** to try the unique Shifu Chinese liquor made with Sake yeast. Also east of Cincinnati is the **Woodburn Brewery Taproom** where you can sip on rye and whiskey made by **Cincinnati Distilling**. 🍷





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