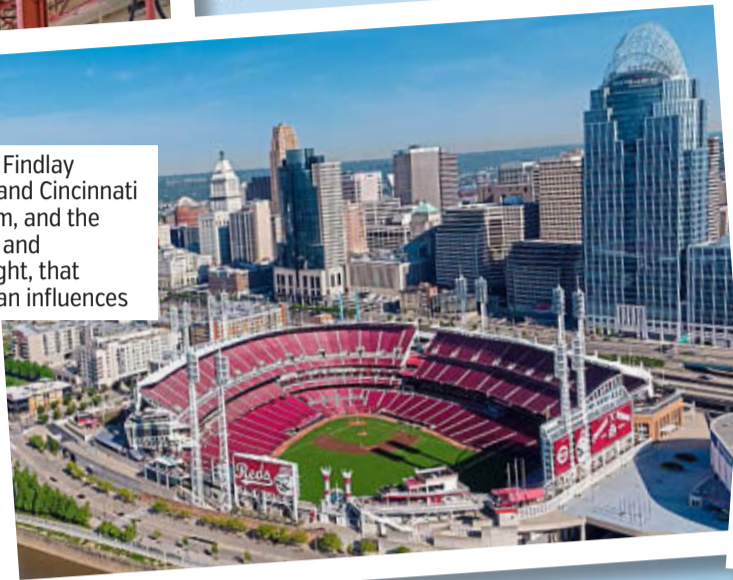




Melting pot: Findlay Market, left, and Cincinnati Reds' stadium, and the giant pretzel and bratwurst, right, that reflect German influences



TRAVEL

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CINCINNATI CITY

British Airways has launched a new direct route from the UK to Cincinnati, Ohio – a Midwestern town that's packed with surprises and plenty to eat

by LAURA MILLAR



More than a 'flyover state': Cincinnati as seen from the top of the Roebling Suspension Bridge; chilli hot dogs, left



I'M IN the Skyline Chili restaurant in downtown Cincinnati in what feels like my very own version of Wo-Man Versus Food. I'm about to tackle 'Cincinnati chilli' – although it's not like any chilli we'd recognise. Picture a bowl filled with a massive pile of spaghetti, then topped with a layer of mince mixed with cinnamon,

allspice, tomato and cocoa powder. It's smothered in a mound of grated cheese then onions and beans to become a famous local delicacy – a 'five-way' (skylinechilli.com). Cincinnati, I'm fast learning, does not do things by halves. This city is BIG on food, and much of it is influenced by the immigrants who came from Europe around the mid-19th century. The main settlers came from Germany and today there are

still German shop, street, bar and restaurant names all over the city. Many of these are concentrated in one of Cincinnati's most charming neighbourhoods, Over-The-Rhine (OTR). There used to be a long canal – since dried up – which was nicknamed the

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CRUISE NEWS

Kudos for Cadiz

Aided by its amphitheatre and big beach, the ancient Andalusian port topped a survey of favourite 'hidden gem' cruise destinations by the agency Cruise.co.uk. Madeira came second, ahead of Montenegro's Kotor.

Barbie at sea

Obsessed by Barbie? At new family zones on P&O Cruises' ships Arvia



Clockwise from left: A P&O Barbie booth; Cadiz topped a hidden gems poll; A-Rosa Sena's kids' club



Small river cruisers

Upwards of 650 children have sailed on A-Rosa Sena since the Rhine-based vessel unveiled five-person family cabins last year. arosa-cruises.com

and Iona, there are life-sized Barbie photo booths and fancy-dress costumes to try on. pocruises.com



Fry me a river: The Over-The-Rhine district and a bowl of chilli spaghetti, inset

There's a cocktail with your name on it

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I eat cheesy pretzels and a German haggis-type sausage

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Rhine due to all the Germans living here and who were also responsible for two of the biggest industries in the city: pork processing and beer brewing, both of which are still big today.

To get more of a flavour of how they've influenced this Midwestern city - often overlooked as part of America's 'flyover states', so-called because people fly over them to get to the likes of California - I take a food tour (£50pp, riversidefoodtours.com). This starts on the other side of the Ohio River which bisects the city, in a district called Covington that boasts charming streets lined with pastel-coloured buildings. We head to a little area within it called Mainstrasse. Here we do lots of sampling, where my favourite thing is a pile of soft, doughy pretzels eaten dipped into warm, beer-infused cheese.

Crossing the distinctive, blue-painted Roebling Suspension Bridge back across the river that afternoon, I explore Findlay Market, the city's oldest food market, which dates from the 1870s, with passionate foodie Barb Cooper (£30pp, cincinnatitour.com). She steers me towards one of the more unusual foods here: 'goetta', a sausage

made with pork, spices and oats, then served fried, in slices. Another German invention, it tastes like haggis.

Afterwards I spend a few hours happily strolling around the mix of residential streets and buzzy avenues lined with cute independent boutiques - drop into Homage (homage.com) for retro-style T-shirts, and visit the array of cocktail bars, cafes and restaurants. Massive, colourful murals cover walls, Gothic church spires pierce the skyline,



and there are several attractive parks. I take a break in Washington Park, armed with a couple of scoops from Cincinnati's most popular ice cream store, Graeter's - the black raspberry choc chip is insane (Graeters.com).

I do the tourist must and take in a baseball game at the Cincinnati Reds' stadium down by the river. It's a good excuse to order a hot dog with everything on it, and a massive pretzel (tickets from £9.50, MLB.com).

After all, if you're counting calories in this quirky, friendly city, I've discovered that nothing is a Cin.

GETTING THERE:

Return flight from London to Cincinnati from £498, ba.com; rooms at The Cincinnati from £162pn, Curio Collection by Hilton - hilton.com. For more info, see VisitCincy.com

DATE WITH A MEDIA STAR

SIX years ago, a baby was born in Cincinnati; little Fiona was six weeks premature, underweight at - yes - 29lb (13kg), and it was thought she wouldn't survive as she was too weak to nurse from her mother or even to stand.

Teams of volunteers worked through the night to keep her warm and fed, and her daily battle for survival was posted on social media, where it went viral.

Today Fiona weighs a healthy 3,000lb (1,360kg) and people flock from all over the world to see her. And yes, Fiona is a hippo, and lives a very happy life at Cincinnati Zoo (tickets £7.80, cincinnatizoo.org).

I time my visit just as lunch is being served. A huge crowd is watching her, her parents and little brother Fritz chomping on fresh lettuce. She has become a symbol of hope for an entire city - the smallest hippo ever to survive. Pay a visit - and fall in love.



The hippopotama-most: Baby Fiona