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Published on May 28th, 2012 | by Guest Blogger

It's The Pitts! Jesse's Trip to Pittsburgh

Built by immigrants who were drawn to her steel mills, the city of Pittsburgh is now sitting back on its laurels and offering a more leisurely and aesthetically pleasing lifestyle to residents and visitors alike. Once dubbed 'the Smoky City', Pittsburgh's mills have closed down and the emphasis now is on making the most of the city's natural beauty. Guest Blogger Jesse Ship (http://twitter.com/#!/jesse_ship) recently spent some time exploring Pittsburgh and shares with us the best places to eat, party and take in the local art scene:



When the opportunity to visit extended family in the balmy hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania came up, I just couldn't resist taking the weekend off. Silkscreened visions of the Andy Warhol Museum, Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece [home](http://www.flightcentre.ca/blog/) (<http://www.flightcentre.ca/blog/>), Fallingwater, and the world famous installation art museum, The Mattress Factory, danced in my head.

Entering Pittsburgh through the I90, the first thing that strikes you is the lush and hilly deciduous greenery, with tiny farmhouses dotting the countryside. The hills are a running theme throughout the city, with steep inclines that would make a seasoned San Franciscan think twice about darting down on their bikes.

As any NFL fan would know, Pittsburgh was once the Steel City, but after environmental and cultural initiatives in the 80s, the steel mills were dismantled leaving room for new industries to flourish, and for Pittsburghers to embrace their birthright as the birthplace of Pop Culture and Andy Warhol.

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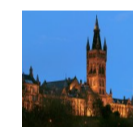
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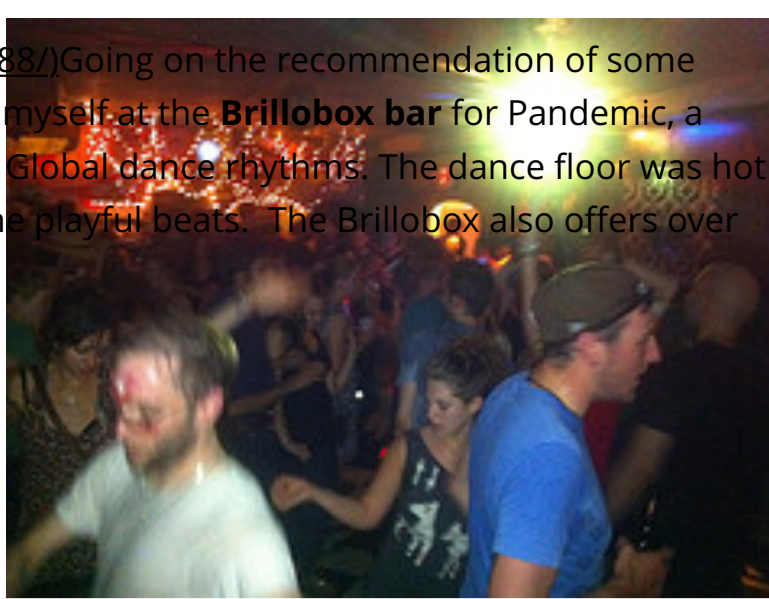


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(http://www.flickr.com/photos/flight_centre/7288580883/) Going on the recommendation of some locals I hit up prior through social media sites, I found myself at the **Brillobox bar** for Pandemic, a monthly (now in it's sixth year) playing out Balkan and Global dance rhythms. The dance floor was hot and sweaty as 300 plus partiers shook their butts to the playful beats. The Brillobox also offers over twenty different craft brews on tap, many of them unfamiliar to this hops loving Canadian. Bonus!



But as much as Pittsburgh is a University town, it is also one steeped in culture, and architectural reform. My Saturday afternoon was devoted to Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece of environmental and organic architecture built for the Kaufmann family in 1935, Surrounding their parcel of land that included a well-placed waterfall, just an hour out of town. Coloured mostly in ochre, to match the surrounding rhododendrons, with Cherokee red beams, the compact and zen-like country home was meant as a weekend getaway for the Pittsburgh-based family. Mr. Wright over delivered beyond the family's wildest dreams and built the home right into the waterfall and surrounding boulders.

My tour started in the living room, and we were shown the "hatch", a stairway that leads into the waterfall its self, where guests could sit and dip their legs into the water. Almost everything at Fallingwater is intact from the 1930s and 40s, including the mostly designed by Wright furniture, the family's original library and an art collection of Picassos sitting plainly on night tables, ancient Chinese Buddhas, and works by Frieda Calho, who was once a guest of the Kaufmanns. Aside from its unique stacked design, other striking features are the low ceilings, Armstrong cork lined bathrooms and an icy stream-water filled swimming pool. Words can only describe so much of the home that once graced the cover of Time Magazine in 1938, so an actual visit is a must!

The next day I woke up early to try and cram as much of Pittsburgh into my weekend visit, anticipating complications due to the Pittsburgh Marathon. It took me one and a half hours to make what should have been a twenty-minute trip at most. Rats... precious time was wasted but I did get to take in some local colour on my detour, and discovered the **Oh Yeah! Ice Cream & Coffee Co.**, an indie shop serving up a variety of waffles, famous for a whopping 60 different ice cream topping options.



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It's one thing to see reproductions of Warhol's ubiquitous prints, but to be in the presence of seven floors of unadulterated and original Warholia is surreal. Classics like the Mao print series, the Elvis Eleven Times series, a room of Andy's early video art projections and candid home videos of him with the Kennedys at the beach, David Bowie at Factory, a behind the scenes look at his famous drag shoot, and many others.

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What many forget, despite being gay, Warhol was a devout Catholic, so there is a room dedicated to his religious work that involves sexualized Madonnas with child, and large paintings of glowing crosses.



(http://www.flickr.com/photos/flight_centre/7288585142/)A brisk 20 minute walk from the Warhol Museum is the Mattress Factory, a world class museum dedicated to art installations, that is, works of art that take up one, or many rooms. I was dazzled by Yayoi Kusama's hall of polkadot mirrors, and James Turrell's mesmerizing 3D "Catso, Red" cube, made of light cleverly projected into the corner of a darkened room, giving it the illusion of solidity.

No visit to the US would be complete without a meal at one of many overconsumption themed restaurants, and Primanti Brothers Restaurant (almost famous since 1933) does not disappoint. I ordered their #2 most popular item, the Pittsburgh Cheese Steak, (the #1 most popular item is beer, ha ha ha) which comes loaded with large handful of fries, tomatoes and a bowl full of crisp and hardly creamy coleslaw.



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I wish I knew that these guys went easy on the spice, or else I would have slathered on some hot sauce before hopping into the car for the ride home. Overall, it was a satisfying meal in a hand that left no need for stops for food on the six-hour ride home.

Jesse Ship is an arts, music and culture journalist based in Toronto, Ontario. To follow more of Jesse's Adventures, check out his [website](http://www.shipwrckd.com/) (<http://www.shipwrckd.com/>) or follow him on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/#!/jesse_ship) (http://twitter.com/#!/jesse_ship).

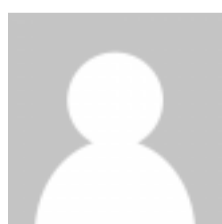


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