

THE GREATEST PLACE ON EARTH?

There is plenty to do in Canton

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CANTON — To the football-frenzied world, Canton will always be the Hall of Fame city. For more than 40 years, it has been the place where the sport's eternal are enshrined into the annals of history.

But there's so much more to this town — home to me for most of my life. My parents once gave me a sweatshirt that says, "Canton: The Greatest Place on Earth." That may be a slight exaggeration, but there are a number of attractions worthy of your attention, at the very least to compliment a trip to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

For history buffs, there's the William McKinley National Memorial, the final resting place of the nation's 25th president. He practiced law in Canton, married the daughter of a prominent family, and ran for the highest office in the land from here.



The William McKinley monument in Canton, Ohio is the final resting place of the 25th U.S. president.

I'm fascinated by dead presidents — I've visited 10 and counting — and this memorial is one of the best. Assassinated by a gunman's bullet in 1901 at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, McKinley and his wife Ida are buried inside an impressive granite monument. It rises above the landscape on a tiered, grassy pedestal that practically begs you to roll down it (and many do).

MULTIMEDIA

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The 108 steps leading up to the memorial are popular with workout warriors who constantly seem to be jogging up or down. It's enough to make you feel bad for being out of breath after a leisurely walk to the top. That's OK: catch your breath and enjoy the panoramic view. Then enter the monument to see the presidential tomb sitting beneath an interior dome that extends 77 feet above the ground.

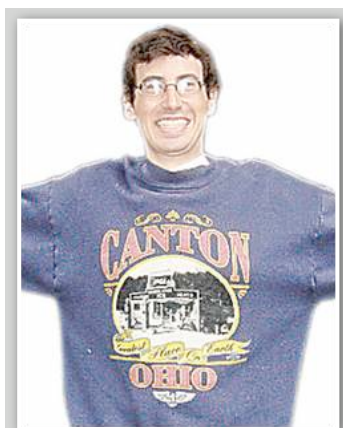
It's awe-inspiring stuff.

Next door is the William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum. It features artifacts from the president, whose legacy includes the annexation of Hawaii and the Spanish-American War. There's even an animatronic version of McKinley and his wife to welcome you.

The facility also is home to an interactive center called Discover World, a planetarium, and a life-size street of shops showing the evolution of a typical northeast Ohio town over time. Be sure to find the fire station with a pole you can actually slide down.

Now that you've worked up a sweat, cool off at nearby Taggart's, an old-fashioned ice cream parlor. It's a personal favorite, known for the Bittner, its sundae of homemade vanilla ice cream topped with pecans and chocolate sauce.

Fortified with these essential nutrients, make your way downtown to the National First Ladies' Library. This unique facility documenting the lives and accomplishments of the country's first ladies consists of two nearby buildings.



The author showing his Canton spirit. (JEN ROHER)

One is the old home of Ida Saxton McKinley, where she grew up and where she lived for a while with the future president. The stately Victorian home dating back to the mid-1800s has been restored after nearly being done in by the wrecking ball (that, following stints as a saloon and an, um, house of ill repute).

A tour of the house will reveal ornate historical wallpaper — sometimes copied directly from old photographs of the rooms — and plenty of period furniture.

IF YOU GO:

William McKinley Presidential Museum and Library: 800 McKinley Monument Drive NW, Canton, 330-455-7043, www.mckinleymuseum.org.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Admission: \$7 adult, \$6 seniors 60 and over, \$5 children over 3, free for kids under 3.

National First Ladies' Library: 331 and 205 South Market Ave., Canton, 330-452-0876, www.firstladies.org. Guided tours Tuesday-Saturday at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m., 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30 p.m., plus Sundays in July and August at 12:30, 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. Admission: \$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$5 children under age 18.

Canton Classic Car Museum: 612 Market Ave. South, 330-455-3603, www.cantonclassiccar.org. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Admission: \$7.50 adults, \$6 seniors 60 and over, \$5 children 6 to 18, free for children under 6.

Canton Palace Theatre: 605 Market Ave. North, Canton, 330-454-8172, www.cantonpalacetheatre.org.

Down the block in a former bank building is the education and research center. Currently on exhibit on the first floor are examples of White House china from over the years, as well as replicas of gowns of various first ladies.

Also downtown is the quirky Canton Classic Car Museum. A gearhead's dream, there are 45 vehicles on display, including an amphibious Amphicar (a mass-produced car that could also be used as a boat) and a 1937 Studebaker bullet-proof police car, complete with gun ports in the windows and 3,000 pounds of armored plating.

That's not all. For some reason, this place also has all kinds of random and unusual remnants of the past, like a fortune teller machine rescued from an old Canton amusement park.

Still want more? Cap off the evening with a movie at the historic Palace Theatre. Depending on the night, it could be a second-run film, art movie, or a classic.

The gorgeous restored theater, which remains home to a rare Kilgen Pipe Organ, is where generations of Cantonians (yes, that's what we're called) watched our favorite films — and the clouds, which wafted across the night-scene on the ceiling thanks to a special machine the theater still owns.

All this to do in little Canton — and I'm just getting started. Don't push me, or I'll start writing about the shopping mecca known as Belden Village featuring every store and restaurant you can imagine. Or I'll urge you to do your best Oompa Loompa impression and tour the Harry London candies factory in nearby North Canton. Or ... or ...

Or maybe I should just simplify things and have my parents hand out more of those sweatshirts.

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