

Donut-cha Wanna Eat Your Way Through Ohio?

Taste how sweet the heartland
is on this 80-mile doughnut trail

BY MATT ALDERTON





If you're obsessed with wine, an obvious place to fill your glass is Napa Valley. If you crave steak, Chicago's probably king. And if pizza is your jam, New York is a top contender.

But let's face it, for foodies, sometimes the only way to shush a hangry stomach is with something sweet. And few things are sweeter than the simple, humble doughnut, with its unofficial epicenter being wholesome — or rather, hole-some — Butler County, Ohio.

Situated like jelly filling between Dayton and Cincinnati, Butler County has one of the highest ratios of doughnut shops per capita in the Midwest, according to the Butler County Visitors Bureau (BCVB), which says the region is home to one doughnut shop for every 19,000 residents. You can experience all of them by traveling the Butler County Donut Trail, a string of locally owned doughnut shops where the offerings promise to make your fried-dough dreams come true.

Forget Disneyland. To some people — including certain sweet-toothed travel writers — Butler County might be the happiest

place on Earth.

"People just really love a doughnut," says BCVB Vice President of Marketing and Communications Tracy Kocher. "When you go into a doughnut shop, you can't help but be happy. It's a joyous experience."

The Butler County Donut Trail debuted in January 2016. Spanning 80 miles, it takes approximately 4.5 hours to complete, which trailgoers can tackle in a single, sugar-packed outing or piecemeal over the course of several days, weeks, months or even years — whatever their schedules and stomachs permit.

"You can do it at whatever pace you'd like," states Kocher, who recommends downloading a "passport" from BCVB's website or picking one up at its welcome center in West Chester or at any of the trail's 12 shops. When they get their passport stamped at each shop and return it either in person or by mail, visitors receive a free T-shirt that reads, "I Dared to Donut ... You Jelly?"

More than 23,000 people — including visitors from 22 countries and all 50 states — have dared to doughnut, according to Kocher, who >





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says visitors should feel good instead of guilty about indulging because every calorie consumed puts a coin in local businesses' coffers.

One of those businesses is Kelly's Bakery in Hamilton. Started in 2015 by manager Kelly Hansel and her mother, owner Diana Ramsey, it was just a year old when the Butler County Donut Trail debuted.

"The Donut Trail has created a significant economic impact," Hansel says. "We've seen people from all over the world in our shop, and that's because of the Donut Trail. It definitely has impacted the amount of traffic that comes

through our doors. We're very fortunate."

Each doughnut trail stop is unique. Kelly's Bakery, for example, has a retro design with teal walls, black-and-white floors and diner-style tables and is known for its toppings, including sprinkles, chocolate chips, crushed cookies, marshmallows and cereal. Its signature offering, the Buckeye, is a yeast doughnut that looks like a deer's eye, thanks to its chocolate frosting and peanut butter cream filling.

Another standout is Jupiter Coffee & Donuts in Fairfield, which is known for gourmet coffee and "goofy" creations,

according to owner Cindy Wallis, who likes to thematically decorate both her shop and her doughnuts. In March, for example, she celebrates J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* franchise with Harry-themed pastries and décor. And every July, things get fishy for Discovery Channel's *Shark Week* programming.

"We just really like to have fun here," says Wallis, whose signature doughnuts are the Red Storm Roll and the Miami Maple Merger. Named for the planet Jupiter's Great Red Spot, the former features raspberry filling and cream cheese frosting. The latter — a nod to Wallis and her husband, who met at Ohio's Miami University — is topped with candied pecans and maple fluff icing that's made with locally sourced syrup.

Maple also is a star ingredient at Holtman's Donuts in West Chester, where the signature confection is the Maple Bacon doughnut, topped with maple icing and crispy bacon bits. Co-owner Katie Plazarin opened the shop in 2017 with her husband, Danny, whose family inherited the original Holtman's from his grandfather and has subsequently expanded it. Besides eating them, of course, the highlight at Holtman's is watching bakers cut, fry and decorate doughnuts through the large window that overlooks the kitchen. "It's breakfast and a show," Katie says.

One word of caution: On the Donut Trail, the "show" starts early, as some shops close when they run out of doughnuts (sometimes as early as 10 a.m.). So set your alarm and chart a course for the tasty treats and caffeine that await. ■



Holtman's Donuts

TASTE THE BUTLER COUNTY DONUT TRAIL

These 12 Ohio shops welcome you with an array of sweets and treats:

CENTRAL PASTRY SHOP

Signature Doughnut:
The Ugly (glazed, old-fashioned cake doughnut)

HOLTMAN'S DONUTS

Signature Doughnut:
Maple Bacon

JUPITER COFFEE & DONUTS

Signature Doughnut:
Red Storm Roll (raspberry filling, cream cheese frosting)

KELLY'S BAKERY

Signature Doughnut:
Buckeye (chocolate frosting and peanut butter cream filling)

MARTIN'S DONUTS

Signature Doughnut:
Twisted Sister (twisted plain, chocolate)

MILTON'S DONUTS

Signature Doughnut:
Oreo

MIMI'S DONUTS & BAKERY

Signature Doughnut:
Peanut Butter Reese's Cup

OXFORD DOUGHNUT SHOPPE

Signature Doughnut:
Kettle-Fried Red Velvet

ROSS BAKERY

Signature Doughnut:
Klunker (triangular-shaped cake doughnut)

STAN THE DONUT MAN

Signature Doughnut:
Pineapple Fritter

THE DONUT HOLE BY MILTON'S

Signature Doughnut:
Fried Cream
Cheese Danish

THE DONUT SPOT

Signature Doughnut:
Raspberry Cheesecake