

The Best
20 Reasons to
Love Bloomington

By Carmen Siering

There are soooo many reasons to love Bloomington. In fact, when Bloom turned 5, our big story in the issue was "50 Reasons to Love Bloomington." Then when the magazine turned 10, the large feature in that issue was "100 Reasons to Love Bloomington."

Here, as we begin our 20th year, we resisted the temptation (and the challenge) of proposing 200 reasons. Instead, we have picked the best to share with you.

So, here they are—the best of the best 20 reasons to love this incredible place we call home.

—the editor



(above, l-r) Filmmakers David Anspaugh and Angelo Pizzo call Bloomington home. Photo by Shannon Zahnle (right) So does internationally touring singer-songwriter Carrie Newcomer. Courtesy photo



(l-r) Bloomington poets Ross Gay and Adrian Matejka are both National Book Award finalists. Photo by Jeff Richardson

1 Arts & Literature

You might be surprised to learn that Bloomington is home to some of the country's bestselling writers, award-winning entertainers, and internationally renowned musicians.

Among our townspeople are Angelo Pizzo and David Anspaugh, screenwriter and director respectively of such legendary films as *Rudy* and *Hoosiers*.

Writers seem to find Bloomington particularly appealing. *New York Times* bestselling author Michael Koryta, 42, is a Bloomington native whose latest novel, *Departure 37*, is published under a pseudonym—Scott Carson. To date, Koryta has 23 novels under his belt—19 under his name, four as Carson.

Indiana University has given Bloomington a number of authors. Feminist scholar and professor emerita Susan Gubar's most recent book is *Grand Finales: The Creative Longevity of Women Artists*, retired professor Scott Russell Sanders has published more than 20 books for adults and children, and creative writing professor Samrat Upadhyay's novels are set in his homeland of Nepal. IU poets Ross Gay and Adrian Matejka are both National Book Award finalists. Matejka served as the Indiana State Poet Laureate in 2018 and 2019.

We also play host to an eclectic group of musicians, from hammer dulcimer virtuoso Malcom Dalglish to internationally touring singer-songwriters Krista Detor and Carrie Newcomer. And, as is befitting a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame recipient who was recognized for his contributions to heartland rock, John Mellencamp lives here, too.



3 Museums & Galleries

Museums and galleries are among the must-see things to do in Bloomington.

Indiana University has a multiplicity of offerings.

- The Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art features artistic treasures from Africa, the South Pacific, and the Americas, as well as an extraordinary collection of modern and contemporary art.
- The Lilly Library houses more than 400,000 rare books, approximately 150,000 pages of sheet music, and 7.5 million manuscripts.
- The Kinsey Institute's library, archives, and art collection has preserved more than 2,000 years of human sexual history, and the Kinsey Institute Gallery offers rotating exhibitions.
- IU Cinema offers theatergoers a glimpse into our historical past with luxurious seating, historic Thomas Hart Benton murals, and period details reminiscent of cinema's heyday.

The T.C. Steele State Historic Site is located midway between Bloomington and Nashville, Indiana. Guided tours of Steele's home—the House of the Singing Winds—and his Large Studio, are available, and many of Steele's landscape, still life, and portrait paintings are on view.

One of Bloomington's wonders is the WonderLab Museum of Science, Health, and Technology. This award-winning museum allows children of all abilities to discover science through interactive, hands-on exhibits that entertain while they teach.



The Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art at IU. Photo by Mike Waddell



Clash Gallery is just one of many smaller art galleries in Bloomington. It is located at 120 E. Kirkwood. Photo by Rodney Margison



The Monroe County History Center, 202 E. 6th St., had a 2024 exhibition of senior cords from area high schools and IU. Photo by Rodney Margison

The Monroe County History Center collects, preserves, and interprets the county's past. Visitors are encouraged to peruse the center's permanent and rotating exhibits and use its library for research.

The city is replete with galleries offering an interesting mix of fine arts, crafts, and other artistic expressions. Among them are Backspace Gallery, By Hand Gallery, Clash Gallery, Grunwald Gallery, I Fell Gallery, Juniper Art Gallery, Pictura Gallery, and John Waldron Arts Center. ▶

2 IU Jacobs School of Music

The Indiana University Jacobs School of Music is arguably the best music school in the nation. Instructors include Grammy Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell and seven-time Grammy-nominated trombonist Wayne Wallace. With more than 1,500 students, it has launched the careers of countless performers, scholars, and music educators across the globe.

The Jacobs School offers more than 1,100 performances each year, ranging from solo presentations to fully staged operas and ballets. Many of those are held at the Musical Arts Center—the MAC. It has the second-largest stage area in the country, surpassed only by New York's Metropolitan Opera, on which it is modeled.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay, the first co-production between the Jacobs School and the Met, debuted in November 2024 at the MAC. Commissioned by the Met, the new opera is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Michael Chabon. After its premiere at IU, the opera opened the 2024–25 season on the Met stage in New York City.

For more information, visit music.indiana.edu. The current schedule of events and performances is available at music.indiana.edu/news-events/events/. ▶



In 2024, Macey Rowland played the title role in the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music presentations of the baroque opera *Alcina* by George Frideric Handel. Photo by Samantha Smith, courtesy of the IU Jacobs School of Music



(below) A scene from the opera *Trouble in Tahiti* performed by the Jacobs School. Photo by Samantha Smith, courtesy of the IU Jacobs School of Music (below, right) In a co-production with the New York Metropolitan Opera, IU hosted the debut performances of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Michael Chabon. Photo by Sarah Slover, courtesy of the IU Jacobs School of Music





Not only is The Elm, 614 E. 2nd St., consistently voted near the top of *Bloom's* best restaurants list, readers have chosen it for best atmosphere two years running. *Photo by Brick Kyle*

4 Restaurants

From our renowned chefs to our expansive array of authentic ethnic fare, Bloomington cooks up a rich local food culture. Whether you're looking for the perfect steak or a vegan experience, Bloomington restaurants have you covered.

Visitors might be surprised to learn that Bloomington is a mecca for those seeking global flavors. The city has nearly 100 local restaurants representing 17 different countries. You can find menus inspired by Afghani, Burmese, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin American, Mexican, Thai, Tibetan, Turkish, Uyghun, and Venezuelan cuisine.

But Bloomington isn't just about food. The city is well-known for its local libations. Oliver Winery opened in 1972 and is the state's largest winery. Bloomington Brewing Company, which opened in 1994, was one of the state's first craft breweries. Cardinal Spirits opened in 2015, and is a source of locally distilled whiskey, rum, vodka, gin, brandy, and liquors. And Friendly Beasts Cider Company, which opened in 2017, makes ciders that are pressed from Indiana apples from family farms, then fermented and blended locally.



The Wild Beet Spinach salad, shown here with ahi tuna added, is one reason why Lennie's was voted the best place to go in Bloomington for salads. *Photo by Rodney Margison*

BLOOMINGTON'S 10 BEST RESTAURANTS

Results from *Bloom's* second annual restaurant survey in 2025

1 The Uptown Cafe

For 49 years, The Uptown has set the standard for consistency both in quality fare and in service. And perhaps never has the restaurant been more popular than right now for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and brunch. Under the ownership of Michael Cassady and son Galen, The Uptown was voted "Best" by a huge margin.

2 C3

Now in its 11th year, C3 has a strong following of discerning diners who relish this elegant, chic bistro in Renwick's Village Center. Open for dinner only and featuring what many say is the finest cocktail bar in Bloomington, regulars laud its sophisticated vibe.

3 The Elm

To dine at The Elm is an experience like no other in Bloomington. The lightness of being in this airy, beautiful, soft space is complemented by expert service and eccentric offerings that encourage diners to "branch out." Open for dinner Tuesday-Saturday.

4 Lennie's

Lennie's has been a town staple since 1989, and even changes of ownership and location haven't dimmed the affection locals feel. Their specialty is gourmet pizza, but there's something for every palate at Lennie's—a little Mexican, a bit of Asian, a touch Middle Eastern, on occasion Cajun, and even Canadian.

5 Samira

How many cities Bloomington's size have an Afghan restaurant? Not many, for sure. A fixture on the downtown Square since 1989, Samira's cuisine is classic Middle Eastern, but with its own inimitable flavors. Lamb is a mainstay, as are beef, chicken, and vegetable dishes, served in an elegant, remodeled space.

6 Osteria Rago

Just like so many restaurants in Naples, Italy, Osteria Rago is hidden away in an alley, out of sight of main thoroughfares. But locals found it (behind Nick's English Hut in an 1880s carriage house) and discovered authentic Italian dishes and Napoletana wood-fired pizzas. Osteria Rago opened in 2018 and was an almost immediate hit. Open for lunch and dinner (make a reservation).

7 Taste of India

With curries, dosas, vindaloos, kebabs, biryanis, tandooris, seven kinds of naan, and a complete vegetarian menu, Taste of India has cuisines of both north and south India. Open seven days a week with a bountiful lunch buffet.

8 FARMbloomington

Perhaps the most "Hoosier" of Bloomington's restaurants, FARM has a down-home feeling in its décor, famous biscuits, legendary garlic fries, and Indiana specialties prepared by Chef Daniel Orr. Since 2018, serving lunch, dinner, and weekend brunch.

9 Chef's Table

While every other restaurant on this list is well-known and has been around for a while, Chef's Table, this 2-year-old hole-in-the-wall eatery in a west-side strip mall, is a revelation. Its legion of fans rave about its soups, salads, sandwiches, and desserts. Who knew?

10 Janko's Little Zagreb

Steak and Zagreb's are pretty much synonymous in this town. For 40 years, Janko's has been offering up sumptuous steaks, chops, kebobs, and spicy hot meatballs. Legend has it that Billy Joel pronounced his Janko's steak the best he'd ever eaten. So have legions of others.

5 Shopping



Tivoli, located in Fountain Square Mall across from the Monroe County Courthouse, is a popular boutique with styles for women of all ages. *Photo by Richardson Studio*

Goods for Cooks, 115 N. College, is Bloomington's one-stop-shop for gourmet foods and everything imaginable for the kitchen. *Photo by Rodney Margison*



Also located in Fountain Square Mall is Andrew Davis Clothiers, featuring high-end casual, dressy, and formal men's apparel and footwear. *Photo by Rodney Margison*

Bloomington is home to a variety of local retailers. From modern clothing to vintage togs, independent booksellers to antique dealers, and so much more.

Distinctive specialty shops include:

- Andrew Davis (101 W. Kirkwood) features high-end casual, dressy, and formal men's apparel and footwear.
- Bonne Fête (112 W. 6th St.) offers an eclectic mix of goods, from self-care products to home décor, candles, greeting cards, and more.
- The Briar & The Burley (101 W. Kirkwood) specializes in luggage, leather goods, pipes, cigars, and motor sports memorabilia.
- The Frock (118 S. College) is a bridal boutique offering original styles in a range of sizes with private appointments available.
- Goods for Cooks (115 N. College) stocks everything for the kitchen, plus wines and gourmet foods.
- O'Child Children's Boutique (101 W. Kirkwood) offers gifts, clothing, and toys for babies and young children.

Book lovers can shop at a number of independent retailers, including:

- Book Corner (100 N. Walnut)
- Caveat Emptor Used Books (112 N. Walnut)
- Morgenstern Books (849 S. Auto Mall Road)
- Vintage Phoenix Comics (114 E. 6th St.)

Local shops for women's fashions include:

- Alibi (1535 S. Piazza Dr.)
- Mainstream Boutique (215 S. Walnut)
- Mirth (101 W. Kirkwood)
- Tivoli Fashions (101 W. Kirkwood)

Antique shops for those who love the hunt:

- Bloomington Antique Mall (311 W. 7th St.)
- Jeff's Warehouse (424 S. College)
- Stella's Place Furniture (4904 S. Rogers St.)

For vintage looks and home décor, check out these shops with new, used, and unique items:

- Bloomington Thrift Shop (220 S. Madison St.)
- Cherry Canary Vintage Clothing (214 W. 4th St.)
- My Sister's Closet (404 W. 2nd St.)
- Office Clothier (111 E. Kirkwood)
- Opportunity House (907 W. 11th St.)
- skullznbunnies (101 W. Kirkwood)
- SLCT Stock (208 N. Walnut)
- Textures Uncommon Gifts & Goods (222 N. College)





Constellation Stage & Screen is Bloomington's largest theater company with eight productions in its 2025–2026 season, ranging from small new works to full-blown musicals, including an annual holiday family musical and two shows in its Constellation for Kids series. *Photo by Zach Rosing*

6 Live Theater

From small stages to large auditoriums, theatergoers have plenty of options when it comes to watching live performances in our city.

The largest local theater company in town is Constellation Stage & Screen, which features a mix of original plays and musicals, established works, family-friendly classics, and shows for young audiences. Constellation also runs year-round education programs for students of all ages, including summer camps, workshops, after-school programs, and student-only weekday matinees.

Off Night Productions is a nonprofit, women-led theater company producing contemporary theater and music on the off nights (Sunday-Tuesday) of the traditional performance week. Off Night's aim is to tackle the issues and limitations it sees in the theater industry by extending the traditional performance week, and prioritizing female and non-binary leadership.

The Jewish Theatre of Bloomington was founded in 2005 and is the only Jewish theater in Indiana. It presents plays that reflect the Jewish experience but also focus on universal issues of the human condition that are accessible to a wide audience.

Resilience Productions' tagline is "History reclaimed, stories retold, theater revealed." The brainchild of Gladys DeVane, Elizabeth Mitchell, and Danielle Bruce, Resilience was founded in 2016 to bring little-known Black history to the stage.

Stages Bloomington Theatre Company has been offering children and teens year-round theater arts education and performance opportunities since 2006. Stages produces three to five performances a year, geared to family and adult audiences.

The all-volunteer, nonprofit Monroe County Civic Theater, created in 1986, is well known for its Shakespeare in the Park performances and for its warm welcome to aspiring thespians, regardless of experience.

Eclipse Productions is a nonprofit theater company with a mission to provide opportunities for professional advancement to local and emerging artists, and to offer affordable, immersive theater experiences for mature audiences.

The 3,200-seat Indiana University Auditorium opened in 1941 and houses the Daily Family Memorial Collection of Hoosier Art, the IU Auditorium Organ, and the Thomas Hart Benton murals. It presents national tours of Broadway shows, well-known musicians, comedians, and classical performers. ▶



Off Night Productions is a new, women-led theater company that produces performances on off nights of the traditional performance week. *Courtesy photo*

In 2024, Off Night Productions staged *Steel Magnolias*. *Courtesy photo*



(left) Curt Cignetti led the Hoosiers to an 11-2 record and a first-ever berth in the College Football Playoffs during his first year as head coach; (above) Teri Moren, center, is the all-time winningest coach in Indiana women's basketball history. This will be her 12th season leading the Hoosiers. *Photos courtesy of IU Athletics*

7 IU Athletics

There's more than the usual excitement around Big Ten sports at IU this coming season. For good reasons:

Coach Curt Cignetti led IU football to a program- record 11 wins and eight Big Ten victories last season in his first year as head coach.

New basketball coach Darian DeVries comes in untried and untested as a Hoosier, but he has the opportunity to put his brand on the team: The program brought in 10 transfers, one freshman, and retained two walk-ons from the 2024–25 roster. One of the transfers is DeVries' son, Tucker.

IU soccer has always been, and continues to be, a powerhouse, holding eight NCAA championships and 104 tournament wins. Equally impressive is its crowd appeal. Every year since the NCAA began tracking men's soccer attendance in 2001, the IU program has

ranked among the highest in average or total attendance.

It's not hyperbole to say that IU swimming is legendary. Swimmers like seven-time Olympic champion Mark Spitz, six-time Olympic medal winner Lilly King, and coaches like James "Doc" Counsilman have created a culture of success. IU swimmers and divers have won 121 medals at the Olympics, and have accounted for 241 Olympic berths, representing 26 countries.

IU Athletics supports 24 varsity sports. In addition to those already mentioned, these include women's cross country, field hockey, basketball, golf, rowing, soccer, softball, tennis, track & field, volleyball, and water polo. Men's sports include baseball, cross country, golf, tennis, track & field, and wrestling.



The 65-acre Switchyard Park features a skateboard park and an outdoor stage to host live music performances. *Top photo by StockVisions/Shutterstock.com; bottom photo by Rodney Margison*



8 Parks

The City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department manages 2,342 acres of property, including 34 parks, 27 playgrounds, a golf course, an ice arena, two outdoor pools, three community centers, 13 ballfields, 22 tennis courts, 19 basketball courts, and more than 30 miles of trails.

When it comes to getting and staying active, Bloomington makes it easy. There are public tennis courts at the Winslow Sports Complex, Bryan Park, Southeast Park, and Sherwood Oaks, plus tennis *and* pickleball courts at RCA Community Park, Switchyard Park, Park Ridge East, and Hopewell Commons. Plus, the City maintains Cascades Golf Course—three nine-hole courses which can be combined to create three separate 18-hole configurations.

Want to hang out with your dog? Visit Ferguson Dog Park. This 18.7 acre park includes two fenced areas, one for large dogs, one for the little guys.

Switchyard Park, on the city's south side, also has dog parks for both large and small dogs. The 65-acre park features tennis, pickleball, and bocce ball courts, a skateboard park, a

picnic shelter, and a playground that includes hillside slides, interactive music equipment, and face-to-face parent-child swings. There's also a splash pad! From April to October, Switchyard Park is home to Food Truck Fridays, a time to sample local food and hear local music.

You can also catch outdoor concerts (and movies) at centrally located Bryan Park. The park is popular for its wide-open spaces, walking trails, and a toddler playground. During the summer months, swimmers flock to Bryan Park pool, complete with water slides.

The city's newest park is Hopewell Commons, located adjacent to the B-Line Trail just west of the Seminary Square Kroger. The park includes a log scramble play structure, shaded picnic tables and bench swings, a small performance stage, ping-pong tables, and temporary pickleball courts. ▶



(above) Brown County State Park in nearby Nashville, Indiana, has two lakes, hiking and mountain bike trails, two campgrounds—one traditional and one equestrian—and much more; (right) Lake Monroe is the state's largest body of water, and a popular destination for outdoor activities of all varieties. *Photos by Rodney Margison*



10 Our Neighborhoods

Bloomington is made up of an eclectic assortment of neighborhoods, each with its own distinctive architecture and atmosphere.

Prospect Hill is considered to be Bloomington's oldest subdivision, platted and annexed to the City in 1893. The architecture of the district represents various high styles popular between 1890 and 1925, including Queen Anne, Free Classic, and Period Revival.

Elm Heights, located between Bryan Park and the IU campus, has a mix of grand old homes and student rentals, and represents the greatest concentration of architect-designed homes in the city.

McDoel Gardens has a wealth of 1920's and 1930's bungalows and kit homes, while neighborhoods like Sherwood Oaks, on the city's south side, and Hyde Park, on the southeast side, feature the large lawns and quiet cul-de-sacs common to

contemporary subdivisions.

The Near West Side was designated a Historic District in December 2022, but has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1997. Largely developed between 1850 and 1948, the neighborhood features examples of Queen Anne-style homes as well as smaller Bungalow/American Craftsman homes, among others.

Bloomington's newest neighborhood, Hopewell, is still under construction, but its first component, Hopewell Commons—a 2.5-acre playground located at 332 W. University St. along the B-Line Trail—was unveiled in April. Hopewell is being developed on the former site of the Indiana University Health Bloomington Hospital, and city leaders envision the new neighborhood as one with truly public spaces for all to enjoy. Hopewell Commons is the embodiment of that ideal. ▶

9 Nature Abounds

Whether you're looking to spend a day hiking or want to really get out and rough it, Bloomington's location near the 200,000-acre Hoosier National Forest, Yellowwood and Morgan-Monroe state forests, Cedar Bluff Nature Preserve, and McCormick's Creek and Brown County state parks makes getting back to nature easy. These wilderness areas offer adventure any way you like it, from hiking and trail running to backpacking and camping. And Brown County State Park's mountain bike trails are considered among the best.

Nearby Lake Monroe is the state's largest body of water. Locals and visitors enjoy boating, fishing, waterskiing, and swimming on its more than 10,000 acres.

The City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department offers milder forms of adventure in town.

On the far north side of Bloomington is the 1,220-acre Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. While swimming is prohibited in the 109-acre lake, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has stocked it with bluegill, redear sunfish, largemouth bass, channel catfish, and crappie. The park offers a private boat launch, and rents kayaks, canoes, and stand-up paddleboards. Wapehani Mountain Bike Park, on the city's southwest side, was the first mountain bike park in the state.

The City parks department also maintains seven fitness trails with paved or gravel surfaces, eight multi-use trails with paved surfaces for walking and biking, and seven hiking trails with natural surfaces.



Bloomington is home to a number of unique neighborhoods including the Near West Side, which has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1997. *Photo by Cassandra Huskey*

11 Diversity

As the home of Indiana University, Bloomington welcomes international students and faculty to its campus. Still, for a city of just 82,000—which includes that student population—our city has a remarkably diverse population.

Take a stroll downtown and you're just as likely to encounter people from China, Africa, Tibet, Brazil, India, and dozens of other countries as you are homegrown Midwesterners.

The city's neighborhoods include longtime residents and new arrivals; young, middle-age, and elderly couples; college students and retirees; proud members of the LGBTQIA+ community; and families of many ethnic backgrounds.

Bloomington is also home to people of nearly every religious persuasion. We have a synagogue and a Chabad House



The Islamic Center of Bloomington and mosque provides a space for the city's Muslim population to worship and fellowship. *Photo by Stephen Sproul*



catering to the city's thriving Jewish population, the Islamic Center of Bloomington and mosque, the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center and Kumbum Chamtse Ling Monastery, a Baha'i Center, and dozens of churches of nearly every Christian denomination.

The really good news is that Bloomington is a place where people of all ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds can live, work, and play together in harmony.

Bloomington is a melting pot of diverse cultures, faiths, ethnicities, and identities. *Illustration by Mike Cagle*

12 Charities & Social Safety Net

Since its incorporation in 1990, the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County has granted \$50 million to more than 400 local nonprofit organizations.

Some of the nonprofits making the most impact include:

- Beacon, an antipoverty organization dedicated to aiding and empowering people experiencing extreme poverty, especially hunger and homelessness. Founded in 2000, Beacon has become the largest nonprofit housing provider in Monroe County.
- New Hope for Families, founded in 2011 as the only emergency housing solution in Monroe County that keeps families intact. In 2015 it opened an early childhood care and education program.
- Middle Way House provides emergency shelter, a 24-hour help and crisis line, on-scene advocacy, support services, and transitional and permanent housing solutions for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.
- Bloomington Refugee Support Network assists families who fled violence in their home countries as they adjust to life in our community, helping them address urgent medical and trauma concerns, reacquire job skills, raise their children, and practice their faith in safety. ▶



(top) New Hope for Families provides housing for families impacted by homelessness. In 2015 it opened an early childhood care and education program. *Photo by Martin Boling* (left) Habitat for Humanity of Monroe County has housed more than 890 people, including 510 children, in the past 36 years. It builds an average of 8–10 homes each year. *Photo by Stephanie L. Sanchez/Shutterstock.com*



Bloomington has a well-deserved reputation as home to a vibrant music scene. From dedicated concert venues like Indiana University’s Musical Arts Center to local bars, live music can be found all over town.

Built in 1922, the Buskirk-Chumley Theater is one of the city’s oldest entertainment venues. Rumor has it Hoagy Carmichael and his band, The Collegians, once performed there. Now local, national, and international musical artists perform on its stage.

Downtown bars offer a variety of entertainment. The Back Door, Bloomington’s only queer bar, hosts live music plus drag, burlesque, and cabaret shows. Or check out Blockhouse Bar. It’s one of Bloomington’s favorite underground live music venues—and it’s located literally *below* The Back Door.

The Bluebird, which has been around since the 1970s, has played host to a number of artists early in their careers. It’s still a great place to discover up-and-coming artists, or to catch local and regional acts.

Indie artists and bands can be found at The Bishop, and Max’s Place offers live music several nights a week. Max’s Place is also one of the few places in town to offer an open mic night.

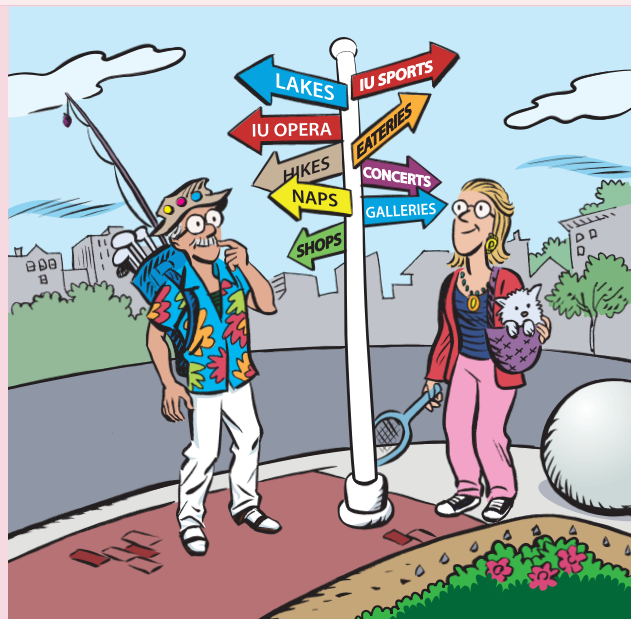
Other live-music venues, especially on weekends, include Metal Works Brewing Company, Orbit Room, The Tap, and The Sinkhole.

For more information on performances, check on each venue’s social media or web site.

13 Local Music Scene



(top) Bloomington native Hank Ruff is a regular performer at The Bluebird, which has been hosting up-and-coming as well as local and regional acts since the 1970s; (above) the Buskirk-Chumley Theater is one of the city’s oldest entertainment venues. *Photos by Rodney Margison*



There are a number of reasons that Bloomington is a great place to retire. *Illustration by Mike Cagle*

14 A Great Place to Retire

There’s no doubt that Bloomington is a popular retirement spot. It’s so popular with IU alumni, there’s even a name for those who return: Bloomerangs! The reasons are obvious. From high-quality health care options, a nearby international airport, and a low cost of living compared with major metropolitan areas, Bloomington has a lot to offer.

Culturally, Bloomington is a treasure, with near-daily recitals at the IU Jacobs School of Music, high-quality theater performances, numerous art galleries, and a world-class art museum.

There are plenty of outdoor activities, too, including city parks and paths, nearby state parks, the Hoosier National Forest, and Lake Monroe, the state’s largest. Add to that lifelong learning opportunities at IU and Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington, Big Ten sports, and plenty of excellent restaurants, and it’s no wonder so many retirees decide to call Bloomington home.

15 Festivals

There’s barely a month without a festival in Bloomington. If you love art, music, comedy, or just getting lost in a crowd, there’s something nearly every weekend in our fun-loving city.

The 11th annual Bloomington Pridefest, ranked by Thrillest as the best college town Pride in the nation, will be held **Saturday, August 23**, in the streets of downtown Bloomington. Visit bloomingtonpride.org.

Over Labor Day weekend (**August 30–31**), the city hosts the juried Fourth Street Festival of the Arts & Crafts. Since 1977, art lovers have strolled the streets to peruse the works of 100 artisans, plus enjoy live music, poetry readings, and storytelling. Visit 4thstreet.org.

The 32nd annual Lotus World Music & Arts Festival will be held **September 25–28** at multiple locations, bringing the world to Bloomington. The festival has showcased performers from more than 120 countries and regions in indoor and outdoor venues across the city. Visit lotusfest.org.

The Kiwanis Indiana Balloon Festival will take place **September 26–27** at the Lawrence County Fairgrounds in nearby Bedford, Indiana. The festival features



Yacouba Sissoko and SIYA, of Mali, perform at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater for the 2021 Lotus World Music & Arts Festival. *Photo by Jim Krause*

hot air balloons, helicopter rides, and pyrotechnic skydivers. Food and drinks, including a wine and beer garden, are available. Visit Kiwanis Indiana Balloon Fest on Facebook.

Indiana University’s Little 500 brings more than 25,000 fans to Bill Armstrong Stadium each April to cheer on their favorite teams. This legendary race inspired the 1979 Academy Award–winning film *Breaking Away* and drew a surprise visit from then-presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008. Visit iusf.bloomington.iu.edu.

Granfalloon is an annual celebration of art, ideas, and community inspired by Hoosier author Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Presented by the IU Arts and Humanities Council, most 2025 programming occurred in

June. Events included music and theater performances, film screenings, readings, exhibitions, and more—most free to the public. Visit granfalloon.indiana.edu.

The Limestone Comedy Festival is one of the Midwest’s top standup showcases. The annual three-day event, held in May, features world-renowned talent and up-and-comers. Information at limestonefest.com.

Situated as we are in the heart of nation’s limestone capital, it’s fitting that the Indiana Limestone Symposium is held in nearby Ellettsville every June. The event draws stone carvers—novices to experts—from across the country for up to two weeks of hands-on workshops. Learn more at limestonesymposium.org.

16 Location

Situated in the rolling hills of southern Indiana, Bloomington is a beautiful place to live, but it’s also a great place to start from when you want to visit other places!

Head out in any direction and in less than an hour you’ll find yourself someplace interesting.

Going north, you can take in Indianapolis Colts, Indiana Pacers, and Indiana Fever games, visit the Indianapolis Museum of Art or the Indianapolis Children’s Museum, or catch a plane at the Indianapolis International Airport. Who knows where you might end up?

Head east and you’ll find quaint local shops and galleries in Nashville, Indiana, a town with a history of talented artists. Nearby is beautiful Brown County State Park. A tad further east, you’ll find Columbus, Indiana, one of America’s top 10 architectural sites, boasting 70 notable buildings and public art installations. And in Orange County to our south is the fabulous, restored French Lick Resort, with the famed West Baden Springs and French Lick Springs hotels, spas, casino, and championship golf courses.

In less than two hours you can be in Louisville, home of the Kentucky Derby; in less than three, you can be walking through the beautiful Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens. And four hours takes you to Chicago, St. Louis, and Nashville, Tennessee.

All that talk about location, location, location is true, and you won’t find a much better location than Bloomington!



Nashville, Indiana, a 30-minute drive from Bloomington to the east, is filled with quaint shops and galleries. *Photo by Shannon Zahnle*



17 A Great Place for Families

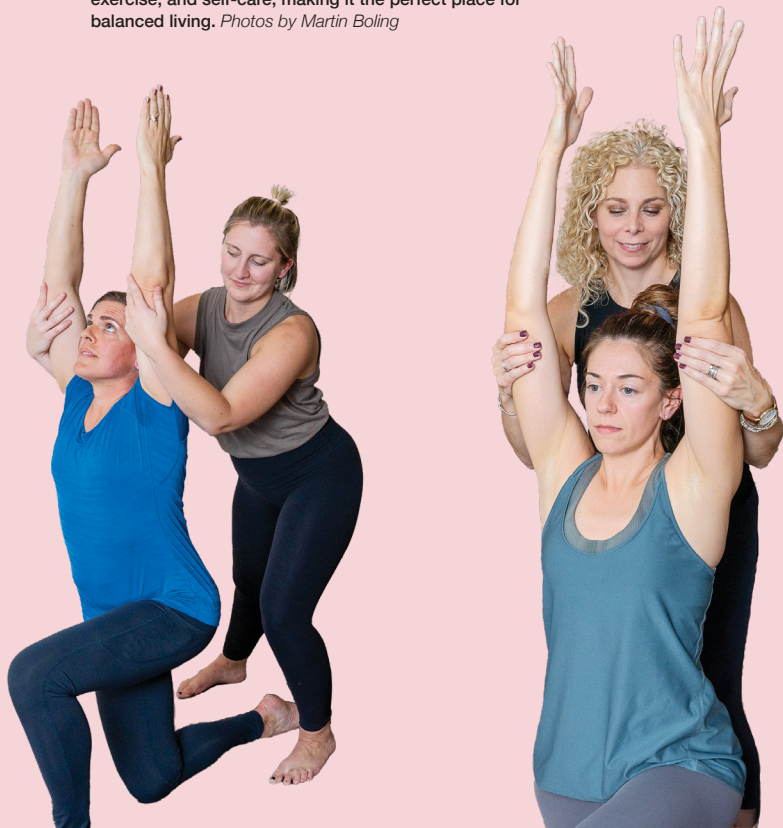
Families take many different forms, and those with children find Bloomington especially appealing. This is a place where youngsters are encouraged to attend concerts, visit museums, and eat at restaurants alongside their grownups.

The city offers plenty of kid-oriented activities, too, from kids' programming at the FAR Center for Contemporary Art to exploring the wonders of science at WonderLab Museum of Science, Health and Technology. There's also recreational fun, including swimming at Bryan Park or Mills pools in the summer and skating at Frank Southern Ice Arena in the winter.

As for education, there are plenty of choices.

Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC) offers five high school platforms: two traditional high schools, Bloomington North and South; Hoosier Hills Career Center; Bloomington Graduation School; and the Academy of Science and Entrepreneurship. MCCSC also offers preschool programs for children ages 6 weeks through 5 years at two licensed centers, and preschool programming at 12 elementary schools for 3- and 4-year-old children.

Bloomington offers ample opportunities to de-stress, exercise, and self-care, making it the perfect place for balanced living. Photos by Martin Boling



Beyond public school, there's further diversity. Whether it's for the younger set at places like Bloomington Montessori School or the Children's Corner Cooperative Nursery; charter schools such as The Project School; or Harmony School, the independent K-12 school that breaks the mold when it comes to education, it seems that, no matter what you're looking for in education, Bloomington's got it.

Learning opportunities outside the classroom abound as well, from programs at Monroe County Public Library to the classes, shows, museums, and galleries on the IU campus.

With so many ways to explore, play, and learn, it's easy to see why Bloomington is an exceptional place to raise a family!

(top) Parents, community members, and Monroe County Community School Corporation staff, faculty, and administrators welcome students to Fairview Elementary School on the first day of classes. Photo by Jeremy Hogan (below) Templeton Elementary, on the city's south side, recently installed a \$3.3 million state-of-the-art, accessible playground with rope courses, carousels, swings, a climbing wall, and more. Photo by Kathryn Coers Rossman



18 Work-Life Balance

While there is no way to measure something as intangible as work-life balance, people who live in Bloomington have a head start because, according to experts, they have the right ingredients at hand.

College towns are often among the least stressful places to live, according to the *Huffington Post*. That's because universities tend to provide stable employment with decent wages and reasonable work hours. In addition, many Bloomington residents report a positive quality of life, noting a strong sense of community, a vibrant art and theater scene, plenty of parks and paths, and good schools for their children.

All stress can't be avoided but reducing it can help. Bloomington offers plenty of ways to do that, including ample opportunities and places to exercise or get out into nature, as well as services dedicated to stress reduction and overall wellness, such as massage therapy, yoga and meditation classes, counseling services, and even a salt cave.

Put it all together, and it looks like Bloomington is a great place to balance living, working, *and* playing. ►



The Mill opened in 2018 and now has more than 350 members, most of whom are working remotely. Photo by Martin Boling



Bloomington is a college town, and more than half of our population is made up of the students who attend Indiana University. Bloomington residents who work at the university are well aware that the student population is directly responsible for their livelihoods. But, in truth, students support nearly every business in the city, from shops and restaurants to bars and bakeries.

Students also help the community in less obvious ways. One way is through IU's community engaged learning programs. Approximately 250 classes and more than 5,000 students take part each year. It's a win-win situation, with students getting hands-on experience and community partners getting free help through initiatives such as after-school programming for kids or up-to-date IT assistance.

Being a college town is a boon in many ways, but maybe one of the most important things is one of the least tangible—college students help keep us young! ✨

19 The Trades District

Imagine concentric circles and you'll have an easier time understanding the relationship between Bloomington's 65-acre Certified Technology Park (CTP), the 12-acre Trades District within the CTP, and The Mill, a coworking and business incubator space within the Trades District.

The establishment of the CTP in 2005 signaled Bloomington's commitment to fostering economic development, attracting investment, and supporting high-tech businesses.

The Mill was the first venture within the Trades District. It opened in 2018, and now has more than 350 members, most of whom are remote workers. The Mill provides training, coaching, and access to capital, all within a cooperative atmosphere.

Long envisioned as a hub for innovation, the Trades District has begun building on the success of The Mill. New developments include construction of The Forge, a 22,000 square-foot sustainably designed building that will provide class-A office space, and The Kiln, a 100-year-old building repurposed into a collaborative workspace housing four local businesses.

Future projects could include the addition of a boutique hotel, and the construction of up to 1,000 residential dwellings, including single-family homes, townhouses, and multi-family units.

20 Students



Indiana University students make up more than half of Bloomington's population and support nearly every business in the city, from shops and restaurants to bars and bakeries. Top photo by Rodney Margison; Bottom photo courtesy of the Indiana University Student Foundation