



A PART OF ULSTER IN PITTSBURGH!?

THERE are three words that sum up Pittsburgh, past, present and future – steel, sports and study.

Steel, because right up until the 1980s it was the centre of the American steel industry, and even today its nickname remains Steel City. Then there's sports, because this is where Pittsburghers become fanatical, whether it's American football, ice hockey or baseball. So much so that, on landing at Pittsburgh International Airport, our pilot greeted us with the words "welcome to Penguin country". It wasn't anything to do with Pittsburgh Zoo, but with the local ice hockey team. Walk any street and you'll see people wearing T-shirts and hats with the Penguins logo, as well as those of the Pirates (baseball) and Steelers football (the American variety) teams. Handily, their colours are all yellow and black, which makes accessorising for games very cost-effective! If you can, make sure to take in a game to soak up the atmosphere in a state-of-the-art riverside stadium.

As for study, Pittsburgh has put its steel-and-smog reputation far behind it and is now a leader in higher education, with more than 29 colleges and universities. Many graduates going on to work in medical research or local tech start-ups, which makes for an increasingly young, educated, population.

Add to this list a fourth 'S' – space. The Pittsburgh of the future will be known, as a hub for tech, Artificial Intelligence and especially the space industry, with a wealth of tech companies to rival Silicon Valley. A new attraction, set to open in October, is the Moonshot Museum (www.moonshotmuseum.org) from Space robotics company Astrobotic. It will be Pennsylvania's only museum dedicated to space, where you will be able to see real lunar landers and rovers being built in real time and even go on a simulated lunar mission.

It's one of the quirky 'only in Pittsburgh' features that makes this Pennsylvanian city such a fascinating place to visit. Another 'only in Pittsburgh' fact is that it boasts more bridges (446 in total) than Venice. Yet while Pittsburgh may not currently be as familiar as the likes of Boston and Chicago, its reputation as a family-friendly US destination is growing. And there are numerous reasons why, aside from the above four 'S's'.

For a start, it's extremely affordable and clean, and filled with museums and activities. The people are also incredibly friendly. Each time my husband and I stopped on the street to look at a map we were approached by a helpful local eager to help us get our bearings. In fact, we wouldn't have been surprised if one of them had offered to turn around and take us to our destination themselves.

Of extra interest to Northern Irish travellers is the rich Ulster-Scots heritage of Pittsburgh. The Ulster-Scots (or Scots-Irish as they say Stateside) were the first Europeans to settle in this part of Pennsylvania during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, you'll quickly recognise some of the colloquialisms that appear on souvenirs and T-shirts, including yinz (what we would refer to as 'youse' or 'youse'uns) and 'nebbly' (nosy). Sound familiar?

The downtown area, which includes the cultural district, with its theatres and concert halls, hotels and museums, is easily walkable. From here, you can cross one of those many bridges to the north shore to visit The Andy Warhol Museum (www.warhol.org/museum). Born Andrew Warhola in Pittsburgh to Slovakian immigrant parents, Warhol became one of the biggest names in pop art, and the museum holds the world's largest collection of his work.

But Warhol is just one of the city's famous Andrews, the other being Carnegie, the rags-to-riches Scottish-American industrialist and philanthropist, who made



Discover the land of Ulster-Scots settlers as **Andrea McVeigh** brings a part of home to the US city of Pittsburgh in her latest adventure...

Bikers often enjoy the cycle trail down the North side of the river



Pittsburgh's Skyline and Duquesne Incline at sunset

this area, also came with an historic backstory. Not only was it perfectly placed Downtown, it was also formerly the city's Federal Reserve Bank and downstairs, leading to the corporate meeting rooms, are the bank's original 34-ton vault doors. The story goes that what is now the hotel swimming pool used to be the FBI firing range and you can still see the bullet holes in the walls!



Corrie from Walk the Burgh Tours

his fortune in the steel industry in the late nineteenth century. He bequeathed part of his fortune to libraries across the world, including several in Belfast, as well as to some of Pittsburgh's cultural attractions that still bear his name, including the Carnegie Museum of Natural History (www.carnegiemnh.org) - with its impressive dinosaur display - and the Carnegie Museum of Art (www.cmoa.org), one of the finest art museums in the USA.

Another famous name associated with Pittsburgh is J. H. Heinz of ketchup and pickle fame. The Heinz company (founded in 1869) still has its HQ in Pittsburgh and you can discover more about it in the Senator John Heinz History Centre (www.heinzhistorycenter.org) which is devoted to the history and heritage of western Pennsylvania.

After visiting the Warhol Museum, we spent a sunny Spring morning walking along the riverside walkway, past the PNC Park baseball stadium and Heinz Field, home of the Steelers, to the Carnegie Science centre - a great place for children to get hands-on with its four floors of interactive exhibits and jaw-dropping robot display.

Then it was time to jump in an Uber (a handy way to get around the city if you don't want to take buses) to the terminal of the Duquesne Incline, a funicular dating back to 1877 and is still used as a practical way to get around today, in this hilly city.

At the top of the incline is Mount Washington - one of Pittsburgh's 99 neighbourhoods - and an observation deck, perfect for seeing the city skyline and the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet

to form the Ohio River. Back in Downtown, we also checked out the August Wilson African American Cultural Centre and its newly-opened permanent exhibit dedicated to the work of this Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright.

Another highlight of our trip was exploring Downtown on foot with an expert guide in the form of the wonderful Corrie, on a Walk the Burgh tour (www.walktheburgh.com). Her enthusiasm and knowledge of her home town made for a thoroughly enjoyable and eye-opening morning, getting to know the famous figures of Pittsburgh, the history of its skyscrapers and public art, and be told little nuggets of insider information such as the names of movies that were filmed in and around the old jail house (including 'The Silence of the Lambs'). At the end of the tour, Corrie awarded us with small green Heinz pickle badges, modelled on the pin given out by Heinz at the 1893 World's Fair, and the title of honorary Pittsburghers, or Yinzers in the local vernacular.

When it comes to food, there are plenty of global options, including pierogies, introduced to America by eastern European immigrants. We also enjoyed the inventive cocktails and cuisine of Bridges and Bourbon, and the fabulous Mexican fusion eatery, Tako (its signature dish is the octopus taco which I was so blown away by, I ate it two days in a row). But the one place everyone from Uber drivers to our hotel GM recommended was Primanti Bros. Its legendary sandwich includes meat, cheese, tomatoes, coleslaw and fresh-cut fries, all just-about contained between two slices of thick white Italian bread.

Our hotel, the Drury Plaza, like so many buildings in

A top tip when visiting the city is to pick up a copy of #lovepgh, the see and do guide and listings magazine, or Pittsburgh City Paper, an alternative arts and entertainment paper, both free and widely available in cafes, museums and tourist attractions. From these we learned about Bakery Square, in the East Liberty neighbourhood, which offers several restaurant options in one location, as well as the Strip District, filled with cafes, bars, souvenir shops and street hustlers, a bit like New York's Brooklyn. It's also where we discovered Wigle Whiskey distillery and bought our own reminder of Pittsburgh to take home to Belfast, in the form of a box of its ready-made cocktails. More souvenirs were bought in Love, Pittsburgh, with its curated craft gifts, and Steel City, a local T-shirt and accessories store featuring distinctive vintage-style designs.

It's fitting that we learned another 'only in Pittsburgh' fun fact on the last day of our holiday. Just before packing to go to the airport, we read that the first internet emoticon - the smiley face - was invented here in 1982 by a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon University. If the smiley face doesn't perfectly represent Pittsburgh, then I don't know what does :-)

FACT FILE:

For more information, visit visitpittsburgh.com. British Airways flies direct from London Heathrow to Pittsburgh International Airport. Fares start from £505 return. For more information, visit britishairways.com. Rooms at Drury Plaza Hotel Pittsburgh from \$139 per night. For more information, visit druryhotels.com.



A Glimpse of one of Pittsburgh's 446 bridges