

Travel

A visit to the other U.S. D-Day beach. **K4**

QUICK TRIP



The opening of Comerica Park, home of the Detroit Tigers, helped spur the city's downtown revival in 2000. photos by Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

A revitalized Detroit

Exploring downtown: Comerica Park, the QLine, Riverwalk and more

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DETROIT — The hostess at the Apparatus Room, a new, trendy restaurant in downtown Detroit, smiled when I asked the question. She had heard it before.

"Is it safe to walk back to my hotel?" I asked, after a lovely meal.

"Yes," she said. "Absolutely."

Maybe she's tired of answering the question. Maybe soon she won't have to.

Detroit — perhaps the most maligned big city in America — is enjoying a remarkable turnaround. Just five years after exiting bankruptcy, the city's comeback is, at least downtown, evident on nearly every street corner, where renovated buildings welcome new tenants or giant cranes work on huge construction sites. Much of it is fueled by Dan Gilbert, the Detroit native, founder of Quicken Loans, and the owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers.

I'd been meaning to check out the "new Detroit" for several years, and finally made it last month.

I scheduled my trip during one of the Cleveland Indians' first road trips of the season, a three-game stand against long-time division rivals, the Detroit Tigers, at Comerica Park in mid-April.

It was the relocation of the Tigers downtown — the team previously played in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood — that launched the revival of Detroit back in 2000, according to local lawyer Bob Goldsmith, who offers a tour of

SEE EXPLORING DETROIT, K2



Business Insider last year published an interactive map that showed the nearly 100 buildings in Dan Gilbert's portfolio.



Campus Martius Park, shown at night, is a popular gathering spot in the revitalized section of downtown Detroit.

WHERE TO GO

Motown Museum celebrates 60 years of made-in-Detroit sound

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DETROIT — From humble beginnings, a music dynasty was born.

In 1959, Berry Gordy bought a modest home just north of downtown Detroit with an \$800 loan from his family. He lived on the second floor and started what became Motown Records on the first.

Today that home, and the one next to it — Gordy eventually ran the business out of eight houses on the street — make up the Motown Museum, a major tourist attraction in Detroit with plans to become even larger.

The museum, capitalizing on renewed international interest in Detroit, is in the midst of a \$50 million campaign to fund a 50,000-square-foot expansion, filled with interactive exhibits, a performance theater, recording studios and more.

"I don't know if it would have been pos-

sible 20 years ago," museum CEO Robin Terry told the Detroit Free Press last year. "I believe it's happening when it's supposed to happen."

Terry is the niece of 89-year-old Gordy, a one-time professional boxer who was working at the Ford Motor Co. in the 1950s when he launched his music career.

"He got so bored at that job, he started writing songs in the factory," said Motown Museum guide Depella Hill.

Gordy's friend, Smokey Robinson, suggested he start his own business. So he did, scouting the streets of Detroit for talent. Among the artists he helped launch: Stevie Wonder, the Jackson 5, Diana Ross and the Supremes and many others.

In 1972, Gordy moved the company to Los

SEE MOTOWN MUSEUM, K2



Studio A inside the Motown Museum in Detroit. Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

If you go

The Motown Museum: 2648 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit.

Summer hours, through Sept. 30: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, open until 8 p.m. Saturdays.

Admission: \$15 adults, \$10 ages 62 and up and 5-17. Entrance by guided tour only; advanced reservations recommended, particularly on Saturdays.

More information: motownmuseum.org

Motown Museum

FROM KI

Angels, over the objections of his older sister, Esther, who stayed behind and continued to run portions of the business from Detroit. Fans would frequently stop by the house. In 1985, she turned it into a museum. It's as if Marvin Gaye might walk in at any moment, or Stevie Wonder might stop by for a snack.

"Marvin Gaye fell asleep on that couch," said Hill, as we walked through the sec-

ond-floor apartment, still filled with Gordy-owned, 1960s-era furnishings.

Wonder signed with Motown in 1961 at the age 11. He liked to buy Baby Ruth bars out of the first-floor vending machine, so staff at the studio made sure that the candy was always in the same spot — fourth from the left — so he could easily find it. "All the artists loved him so much," said Hill. "They left dimes for him on top of the vending machine."

She added: "To this day, it is his favorite candy bar."

The highlight of the tour comes at the end, inside Studio A, which looks largely as it did 50-plus years ago, when some of the nation's best musicians were belting out tunes in there.

Hill led our group in a version of the 1964 hit "My Girl," coaxing us to sing and dance like the Temptations. We weren't nearly as good, but no matter. "Now you got bragging rights," said Hill. "You can go home and tell your friends you were singing and dancing in Studio A."



The Belt, a pedestrian-only alley in downtown Detroit, is filled with public art and shops. Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

Exploring Detroit

FROM KI

downtown called "Detroit's Rise, Fall and Renewal."

That revival experienced a major hiccup in 2013, when Detroit became the largest city in U.S. history to file for bankruptcy. Even the magnificent, then-city-owned Detroit Institute of Arts was threatened.

Since the resolution of that financial crisis, the city has again found a path forward, at least downtown, where private and public dollars are funding billions in investment.

"If you were here a few years ago, almost all the buildings on this stretch of Woodward Avenue were closed," said Goldsmith, as we stood at the corner of Woodward and State Street, not far from new downtown retailers Nike, Lululemon and Bonobos.

He added, "We're a better city than people give us credit for."

Don't take his word for it. Spend a couple of days here and see for yourself, like I did.

In addition to watching the Indians trounce the Tigers at Comerica Park, I

- ▶ Stayed in one of the city's newest, chicest hotels, the Siren, located inside the historic Wurlitzer Building, and toured several other new downtown properties.
- ▶ Traveled on the new, 3-mile-long QLine streetcar (originally the M-1 Rail until Quicken Loans bought the naming rights), I took the trolley north along Woodward Avenue, past Little Caesars Arena, which opened in 2017, home to the Detroit Pistons and Red Wings. Our destination: Detroit's Midtown neighborhood, the city's cultural hub, which has also enjoyed substantial investment in recent years. We spent a couple of hours touring the magnificent Detroit Institute of Arts, stopping first to admire Mexican artist Diego Rivera's famous Detroit Industry murals, commissioned by the museum and Edsel Ford in the early 1930s, and also eye-catching works by Van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse and many others.
- ▶ Walked a couple of miles on the Detroit RiverWalk, the paved pathway along the Detroit River that opened in 2007. We wound past the Renaissance Center, headquarters for General Motors, a state park, merry-go-round and more. At Milliken State Park, my husband and I hopped on rented bikes and cycled along the Dequindre Cut, a 2½-mile recreational path formed along the old Grand Trunk Railroad line. It sits below street level, with street art decorating the way, and is a terrific example of how old spaces can be repurposed. Unfortunately, our desti-

nation — Eastern Market, the largest historic public market in the United States — wasn't open on the day of our visit; expanded summer hours start in June.

Goldsmith, the tour guide, divides the city's revival into two main phases: Before the Great Recession of 2008, and including the city's new hallmarks (Comerica Park and Ford Field, where the Lions play), the city's three casinos (MGM Grand, Motor City and Greektown) and the RiverWalk; and after the recession (and subsequent city bankruptcy in 2013, including the hotel boom, the QLine and Little Caesars Arena.

And the revival isn't even close to complete.

On the northern edge of downtown, the area around the new Little Caesars Arena is slated for major redevelopment, including residential, retail and commercial components that will link downtown and Midtown. The 50-block plan, dubbed the District Detroit, is developing slower than initially envisioned, led by the Ilitch family, who own the Tigers, Red Wings and the Little Caesars Pizza chain.

Dan Gilbert's imprint on the city is even more significant. Business Insider last year published an interactive map that showed the nearly 100 buildings in Gilbert's portfolio, most of which are downtown (the piece was published before Gilbert announced plans to sell his Greektown Casino late last year).

Among his most prominent projects downtown: redevelopment of the site of the former J.L. Hudson's, once the second largest department store in the country. The store closed in 1983, the building demolished 15 years later. Today, the corner of Woodward and Grand River avenues is a hub of construction activity, the future site of a massive complex that will include a 912-foot residential and hotel tower, Detroit's tallest building.

Goldsmith has mixed feelings about Gilbert, who has received massive tax breaks for his investments in Detroit. "We're all paying taxes and the billionaires are not," he said.

Rental rates, for both office and residential space, have increased in recent years, said Goldsmith, a downtown resident for more than 15 years. "I surprised friends and family when I moved downtown in 2003. I've really seen things change around here."

Travel outside the city's core and things are also changing, but more slowly. Just a short distance from downtown are large tracts of vacant land, which may be forever uninhabited. Once home to almost 2 million people, Detroit's population has fallen

to under 700,000.

On our last day in town, we stopped for lunch at Slows Bar BQ, in the city's historic Corktown neighborhood just west of downtown. The restaurant, open since 2005, launched a still-developing revitalization of this part of town, which now features numerous eateries, shops, with more to come.

Last year, Ford Motor Co. announced plans to invest nearly \$1 billion in the neighborhood, buying the long-abandoned Michigan Central Station, the city's massive, historic train station, closed since 1988. Ford is converting it to a hub for the company's electric and self-driving car division. Some 2,500-plus employees are expected to relocate to the neighborhood starting in 2022.

Down the street from the train station, the former site of Tigers Stadium is also (finally) being redeveloped into a project called The Corner, a mixed-use development with residential and retail components. There's a ball field on the site also, owned by the Detroit Police Athletic League.

In 1999, the Tigers left Corktown and moved east, helping to spur downtown's revival. Eighteen years later, the Pistons returned to the central city, after playing for nearly four decades in the Detroit suburbs. Detroit is now the only city in the United States with four major sports teams playing downtown.

The Pistons were playing one of their last regular season games on the last night of our stay.

After a busy day touring, my husband and I booked a late dinner reservation at the Apparatus Room, inside one of the city's new, trendy hotels, the Detroit Foundation Hotel.

We walked to the restaurant when it was still light out, but the sun had gone down while we ate. It was perhaps a half-mile back to our hotel. We could have taken an Uber, but the weather was mild and so, at the urging of the restaurant hostess, we decided to walk.

Even so, I was cautious. Detroit still has a significant crime problem, though it has declined significantly in the downtown area, thanks in part to an influx of workers, residents and tourists, but also private security officers and security cameras.

The streets were well lit, happy Pistons fans filled the sidewalks. The city seemed vibrant, even on a Tuesday night.

As I walked that evening, I vowed to return more often to check on this evolving, comeback city. I'll be rooting for Detroit, even when I'm cheering on the Indians.

WHERE TO STAY

Options for boutique hotels in the city

Susan Glaser, sglaser@plaind.com

DETROIT — Downtown Detroit is experiencing a boutique hotel building boom — with a half-dozen trendy, unique properties now open and more on the way.

The only problem: How to choose where to stay during your next Detroit overnight?

Among the options

Shinola Hotel, 1400 Woodward Ave.: Opened in January, Shinola is the highly anticipated first hotel from the upscale, Detroit-based maker of watches, leather goods and bicycles. The hotel, developed by Dan Gilbert's Bedrock LLC, features 129 rooms inside a row of redeveloped buildings, including a former wig shop. Also here: San Morello, a highly acclaimed Southern Italian restaurant; a Shinola retail outlet; and Parker's Alley, with shops and eateries behind the hotel. Rooms: \$225 and up. Information: shinolahotel.com

The Detroit Foundation Hotel, 260 Larned St.: Located in the historic Detroit Fire Department headquarters, built in 1929, the Foundation Hotel opened in May 2017 across the street from the Cobo Center and a couple of blocks from the river. In addition to 100 guestrooms, the property features the gorgeous Apparatus Room restaurant, with huge bay windows that used to accommodate fire trucks, plus the Foundation Studio where guests can record podcasts. Rooms: \$200 and up. Information: detroitfoundationhotel.com

The Siren, 1509 Broadway St.: Built in 1926, the Wurlitzer Building was a showroom for musical instruments and jukeboxes sold by the Wulitzer Co. Empty since 1962, the building was in severe disrepair when investors from New York bought it, repaired it and opened it as the Siren Hotel in 2018. The hotel is home to 100 rooms, the intimate Candy Bar lounge, and the eight-seat Albena restaurant, recently named the best new restaurant in the city by the Detroit Free Press. Rooms: \$160 and up. Information: thesirenhotel.com

Element Detroit at the Metropolitan, 33 John R St.: The Metropolitan Building, built in 1925, had been vacant for 40 years and was at risk for demolition — with trees growing on the roof — when it was tapped for conversion to a hotel in 2017. Part of the Marriott family, the Element is an extended-stay hotel, featuring 110 suites, some with multiple rooms and kitchens. Features include the Monarch Club, a rooftop lounge that opened last week. Rooms: \$190 and up. Information: marriott.com/hotels/travel/dtwe-element-detroit-at-the-metropolitan/

Aloft Detroit at the David Whitney, One Park Ave.: Detroit's new Aloft opened in late 2014 after a \$92-million renovation, ushering in this new era of historic, boutique properties. The David Whitney Building, designed by Chicago firm Daniel H. Burnham & Co., was built in 1915, used primarily as office space, and had been vacant since 1999. Even if you're not staying here, it's worth a stop to see the four-story gold-leaf atrium. Rooms: start at about \$215. Information: marriott.com/hotels/travel/dtwa-aloft-detroit-at-the-david-whitney/

Trumbull & Porter Hotel, 1331 Trumbull Ave.: Unlike its boutique hotel brothers and sisters, Trumbull & Porter has been a hotel for years — first a Holiday Inn and then the Corktown Inn. It reopened in 2016 after a \$9 million renovation as the Trumbull & Porter, with 144 rooms, an outdoor courtyard with live music, local art throughout and a fleet of Detroit Bikes available for guest use. Rooms: \$150 and up. Information: trumbullandporterhotel.com

El Moore Lodge, 624 W. Alexandrine St.: This 1896 building in Detroit's Midtown neighborhood started out as an upscale residence for auto executives, was converted into a Depression-era boarding house, and in more recent years, was foreclosed and abandoned. In 2016, it reopened as a combination residence-hotel, with 11 overnight guest rooms ranging from Garden Level Bunkrooms (\$75 per night) to Rooftop Urban Cabins (\$200 per night). A key theme here is sustainability, from construction materials to water used to food. Rooms: \$75-\$200. Information: elmoore.com

Still to come

Furniture and home décor retailer West Elm plans to open a hotel in Detroit's Midtown neighborhood, adjacent to the historic Bonstelle Theatre in 2020.

Also in the works

The Mid, a luxury boutique hotel, is also planned for Midtown in 2020, part of the \$310-million mixed-use space at 3750 Woodward Ave. and the 100-room Temple Hotel, inside the 1920-era Standard Accident Insurance Co. building on Temple Street downtown. Rock star Lenny Kravitz's design firm will plan interior spaces for this hotel.

If you go: Detroit

Where to stay: These new downtown hotels can be pricey, depending on the timing of your visit. I stayed at the new Siren Hotel, 1509 Broadway, and paid about \$200 per night. Information: thesirenhotel.com

Where to eat: We enjoyed meals at the Avalon Café and Bakery, 1049 Woodward Ave. (avalonreads.net); Slows Bar BQ, 2138 Michigan Ave. (slowsbarbq.com); the Apparatus Room, 250 W. Larned St. (detroitfoundationhotel.com); and local brews at the Detroit Beer Co., 1529 Broadway St. (detroitbeerco.com).

Activities: "Detroit's Rise, Fall and Renewal" tour is offered at 4 p.m. every day except Wednesdays; price is \$29. Information: urbanadventures.com/Detroit-s-rise-fall-renewal

Detroit Institute of Arts: \$200 Woodward Avenue; open Tuesdays through Sundays; admission is \$14. Information: dia.org

Ride the QLine: Detroit's new streetcar travels 3 miles up and down Woodward Avenue, from downtown to Midtown. A three-hour pass is \$1.50, an all-day pass, \$3. Information: qlinedetroit.com

Walk the RiverWalk, along the Detroit River (detroitriverfront.org): We accessed the path near the Cobo Center and walked east to Milliken State Park, where we grabbed a couple of MoGo bikes and pedaled along the Dequindre Cut. Bike price: \$8 for a daily pass, which includes the first 30 minutes of riding. Information: mgo.detroit.org

Catch some baseball: The Indians return to Detroit next month for a three-game series at Comerica Park, June 14-16. For game information: www.mlb.com/tigers

More on visiting Detroit: visitdetroit.com