

Fest-obsessed

Amid the 500-plus gatherings a year in Ohio, here are a few that might miss radar screens

By [Joe Blundo](#)

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When in doubt, go to a festival.

Such is the advice of Kristian Campana, who since 2009 has attended more than 200 Ohio festivals.

Campana, 38, of Oberlin, works as an accountant and information-technology consultant.

But his passion is www.ohiofestivals.net, a website where he lists all the festivals he knows of (last count: more than 500) and posts reviews of the ones he has attended.

He considers the Twinsburg Twins Days Festival the most surreal (because of all the people in matching clothes) and the Circleville Pumpkin Show one of the best for food (because of all the pumpkin-flavored dishes).

And he loves ComFest, the annual Goodale Park blowout, for its variety of food, vendors and music.

Those festivals are among the best-known, though. What about some of the obscure ones?

Small festivals, Campana said, range from surprisingly entertaining to somewhat disappointing.

But he likes them anyway.

“If I was giving advice to anyone about going to festivals, I would say, ‘Take a chance and go to someplace you’ve never been.’ ”

As the “high season” for festivals approaches, we offer a sampling of lesser-known offerings, with Campana’s comments when available.

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(1) HARROD PORK RIND HERITAGE FESTIVAL

(www.rudolphfoods.com)

- Dates: Friday and Saturday
- Location: Harrod, a village in Allen County about an hour and 45 minutes northwest of Columbus
- Founding year: 1990
- Why pork rinds: Harrod is the home of Rudolph Foods, which calls itself the world’s largest manufacturer of pork-rind snacks. But, according to organizer Annie Rumer, the festival rinds don’t come from a factory; they’re supplied by Rudolph and cooked fresh on-site.

The 2011 festival included a petition drive to have Super Bowl Sunday declared National Pork Rind Appreciation Day.

- Nearby attractions: The town square has a helicopter on a pedestal and a tank.

- Reviewer's comment: "Freshly fried pork rinds make quite an impression."

(2) RITTMAN SLEEPWALKER PARADE & FESTIVAL

(www.rittmanchamber.com)

- Dates: July 26-28
- Location: Rittman, a city in Wayne County about two hours northeast of Columbus
- Founding year: 1968
- Why sleepwalking: Years ago, retailers on Main Street in Rittman were known for keeping such late hours that some people shopped in pajamas, said Tina Gienger of the Rittman Chamber of Commerce.

The festival recalls those days, although pajamas no longer reign as the apparel of choice.

The event begins with a parade, on July 26. Fireworks and a car show are scheduled for July 27, with a Battle of the Bands on July 28.

- Nearby attractions: Rittman is about 30 miles from Wooster, the home of Wooster College.
- Reviewer's comment: "There really wasn't anything that grabbed my interest."

(3) SKUNKFEST

(www.skunkhaven.net)

- Date: Sept. 8
- Location: North Ridgeville, a city in Lorain County about 2 1/2 hours northeast of Columbus
- Founding year: 2001
- Why skunks: The event started as a small competition for skunk owners, organizer Deb Cipriani said. But she quickly learned that the public was interested, and the event grew into a show featuring rescued animals such as horses, parrots and raccoons. Skunks remain the main attraction, with people coming from all over the country to see them.

Visitors are asked to sign legal waivers before entering, but Cipriani notes that the skunks are all de-scented.

- Nearby attractions: The city is about 30 minutes from the new casino in Cleveland.

- Reviewer’s comment: “The people were great, the animals were interesting, and a festival I think I would go back to for sure.”

(4) RARDEN WHITETAIL DEER FESTIVAL

(www.rardendeerfest.com/festival)

- Dates: Sept. 7-9
- Location: Rarden, a village in Scioto County about two hours south of Columbus
- Founding year: 2002
- Why deer: “We have an abundance of white-tailed deer in our county,” said Sharon Ward, festival secretary. The event has a hunting theme. Attractions include a wall of deer heads, shotgun and muzzleloader shoots, BB-gun shooting for kids, archery competitions and a contest in which paint balls are fired at a deer target moving on a track.

Ward expects a venison vendor to be on hand.

- Nearby attractions: The village is about 30 miles from Shawnee State Forest.
- Reviewer’s comment: “Like the back-to-school sale for hunters.”

(5) SOAKUM FESTIVAL

(www.soakumfestival.com)

- Dates: Sept. 29-30
- Founding year: 1987
- Location: Caldwell, a village in Noble County about an hour and 50 minutes southeast of Columbus
- Why “Soakum”: The annual festival commemorates the little town of Matrim, which used to be a day’s drive from Marietta via horse-drawn wagon. Travelers began calling it Soakum because of the high prices that the town charged for whiskey, said Catherine Neuhart, festival chairwoman.

Moonshine is made at the 26-year-old festival — for educational purposes only, Neuhart said. Civil War re-enactors, pottery-making, storytelling and singing are among the other activities.

- Nearby attractions: The Baker Family Museum (www.baker_museum.org) in Caldwell has an extensive collection of locally made glass and pottery, plus antiques.

- Reviewer’s comment: not reviewed

(6) OHIO SMOKED MEAT & BBQ FESTIVAL

(www.ohiobbq.org)

- Dates: Oct. 19-20
- Founding year: 1997
- Location: Nelsonville, a city in Athens County about an hour southeast of Columbus
- Why smoked meat and barbecue: “They just wanted to have an event to draw people into the area,” said Steve Grinstead, a co-organizer. “And people like barbecue.”

The festival features a competition that’s part of the Ohio BBQ Triple Crown series. Competitive cooks have come from as far away as Canada, South Dakota and Texas.

Competitors who have the proper food-safety equipment offer spectators a taste. Otherwise, the crowd can buy barbecue from a festival concession.

- Nearby attractions: The Hocking Valley Scenic Railway (www.hvsry.org) will offer train tours on Oct. 20.
- Reviewer’s comment: “More (a) competition than a festival.”