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32. Blue Ash, Ohio

Local population: 11,923
County: Hamilton
Population: 866,228
Region: Midwest/Southwest Ohio
Closest metro area: Cincinnati, 12 mi. SW
Median home price: \$105,000
Median household income: \$51,725
Best reasons to live here: Accomplished city government, great parks and recreation, outstanding schools and higher education, endless diversions, booming business, easy access to Cincinnati.



Fabulous features

The people of Blue Ash know how to paint their town, and what a colorful canvas it is! The city makes a splash with exciting celebrations—Springfest, Holidayfest and the granddaddy of extravaganzas—the Taste of Blue Ash (more than three days, the eating and entertainment jubilee attracts much of Southwest Ohio).

Considered one of the top 10 districts in the state, the Sycamore Schools get straight As for academics, athletics and achievements. It has instituted primary (K-4), intermediate (5-6), junior (7-8) and senior (9-12) high schools. The end result is top-performing students (half the 8th grade class is eligible to take the SATs).

Procter & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson's Ethicon Endo-Surgery, Hewlett-Packard, Merrell Dow and numerous other corporations have created "Management Mile" along Reed Hartman Highway (modern office parks surrounded by lakes and trees). Others commute to Greater Cincinnati, home to numerous Fortune 500 regional and national offices (International Paper, Fidelity Investments, Star-Kist Foods and Xerox Corp. are "copying" the trend by opening branch operations here).

Blue Ash's secret to its success as the consummate "live, work and play" hometown is the result of two major factors: great city planning and great citizens. This "unusual government" as Blue Ash calls itself, is a model for any city. And to keep the city humming, they recently revitalized the downtown and built a gorgeous Towne Square where families gather for concerts and events. They even erected a life-sized bronze statue (23 ft. high) of a family of four alongside a Blue Ash, of course!

Possible drawbacks: Newer homes in the \$200,000-and-under range are scarce (ditto with single-family home rentals). Some residents want Blue Ash Municipal Airport *and* its planes to go up, up and away! In its current location, it is a possible noise, pollution and safety hazard. Blue Ash's daytime population soars from 12,000 to 70,000. The good news is that they all pay a 1-percent earnings tax to Blue Ash, for an annual \$15 million to city coffers. The bad news is how many workers come and go at the same time.

Climate

Elevation: 700'	Avg. high/low:	Avg. inches		Avg. # days precip.	Avg. % humidity
		rain	snow		
Jan.	40/24	2.6	7.9	10	68
April	66/45	3.9	.5	13	54
July	87/66	4.0	-	10	57
Oct.	69/47	2.2	.1	9	55
YEAR	65/45	37.5	25	126	60
# days 32° or below: 98			# days 90° or warmer: 28		

Wide but short-lived temperature swings, particularly Nov. through May. Winters mild compared to other Midwest cities. Fall is delightfully warm and sunny, while summer can be hot and humid.

Earning a living

Economic outlook: The current unemployment rate is 4%. They call this the "Blue Chip" region because with a broad economic base of industry, the area is like a solid portfolio, managing to stay even, if not slightly ahead. Fidelity Investments, Xerox Corp., International Paper and Star-Kist Foods are just some of the companies who've moved in or have built out. Blue Ash represents the largest economic force in the greater Cincinnati area. More than 5,000 new jobs are expected to be created in the next few years. Blue Ash is expected to continue to be cited as a "hot spot" for office locations as occupancy continues to remain high with more and more smaller companies taking advantage of the proximity to Cincinnati. Leading existing businesses continue to invest back into the community, often through expansion or improvements at current sites or the addition of office locations in other Blue Ash areas.

Where the jobs are: Two of Blue Ash's leading employers recently experienced expansions. Johnson & Johnson's Ethicon Endo-Surgery dramatically increased its employment while Procter & Gamble hired several hundred employees. Other major employers in Blue Ash include Fidelity, Masco Industries, Belcan Engineering,

Warner Cable Communications and Raymond Walters College (branch of University of Cincinnati).

Business opportunities: Light manufacturing, warehouses and professional offices and research centers continue to be the most coveted commodities in Blue Ash's business parks. Approximately 100 new businesses open every year, adding to the 2,000 existing businesses. The big draw is the burgeoning daytime population of 70,000, enough to keep retail, dining and service businesses flourishing.

The tax ax

Sales tax: 6%.

Property tax: As a rule, taxes average 1%-1.5% of a home's selling price. For example, a house valued at \$250,000 would run \$3,750/yr.

State income tax: For married taxpayers filing jointly, Ohio has a graduated tax liability based on federally adjusted gross income minus \$670 per personal exemption. The rate for income over \$20,000 up to \$40,000 is 4.46%; \$41,000-\$80,000 is 5.2%; over \$100,000, 6.9%. Note: Blue Ash imposes a 1% local earnings tax on both residents and nonresidents.

Local real estate

Market overview: Retirees and corporate transfers leaving the area will keep the resale market in play. Although the homes are spacious and well-built, there is very little to see in the \$200,000-and-under range. Easterners who have looked in other outlying suburbs are quite surprised by the high prices and property taxes. What makes the decision easier are the neighborhoods (most properties are on woodsy ½-acre lots), the size of homes (3000 sq. ft.) and the proximity to major employers (a “rough” commute is 25 min.).

What houses look like: The “Cincinnati” home is a traditional 2-story brick box—not an architect’s dream, but a sturdy abode. Many of the newer homes (5-15 years) are “transitionals”—great rooms instead of formal living rooms and dens, first-floor master BR suites (gives a feeling of a sprawling ranch-style home, with BRs upstairs for kids), deluxe kitchens and “glamour” BAs.

Starter homes: Realtors tell us that if a house in Blue Ash’s Ravenwood section goes on the market in the \$145,000-\$175,000 range, it’ll be snatched up unbelievably fast. These small 3-4BR/2BA 2-story houses are 15-20 years old and offer great values for the money.

Trade-ups: \$225,000-\$250,000 includes a large, formal 4BR/2½BA colonial (2800-3600 sq. ft.).

Luxury homes: Homes built around the Blue Ash Golf Course start at \$300,000 and go up to \$600,000. Generally 3000-3600 sq. ft., they offer 3-car garages, finished basements and more.

Rental market: You need the luck of the Irish to find a house for rent, and then you will be paying \$1,600 a month for it. You’ll

have better luck with condos/apartments: 2BR/2BA units go for \$550-\$650 a month.

Nearby areas to consider: Loveland and West Chester are outlying areas starting to develop quickly. Homes are less expensive, and new construction is everywhere.

What things cost

ACCRA’s national comparisons: Overall living costs for the Cincinnati MSA are 7.1% above the national average, with housing the main offender (13.4% above). Utilities and health care are 2.8% below. Transportation and goods and services average 8%-10% above.

Utilities: Phone: avg. \$20/mo. Gas and electric are billed together. Summer avg. is \$220/mo.; winter, \$180/mo.

Kid care: There are ample licensed day-care facilities as well as licensed day-care homes. Average cost is \$94/wk. for infants, \$78/wk. for preschoolers.

Pediatric visit: \$45-\$50.

Crime & safety

Blue Ash’s 12-point crime prevention efforts are so effective (ranked first in the state), you can feel safe walking at midnight or jogging at 5 a.m. Overall crimes per capita in Greater Cincinnati are exceedingly low (ranked seventh-lowest in the U.S. for metro areas with 1 million-plus population). And while most cities have a DARE program today, Blue Ash now has DARE graduates (6th graders complete a 17-week drug abuse awareness program and earn their degrees). It also has a cooperative program with 23 other communities to combat drug trafficking.

Making the grade

Public education overview: Ask families why they moved here and there's a universal response: "Sycamore Schools!" The district is recognized as one of the top 10 in Ohio for both academic and extra-curricular achievements. Sycamore High students have access to so many advanced placement courses, many earn enough credits to enter as college sophomores. The junior high has the highest number of students eligible for the Midwest Talent Search (50% of its 8th-graders take the SATs), 70% are involved in athletic programs, and the school consistently wins first prize in numerous academic and art contests. Three things make this district tick—tremendous community support (a local club raises \$125,000 a year for cultural events), endless parental participation and a zealous effort to maintain an optimum budget (the city nixes tax incentives to businesses because it reduces school funds). The Sycamore Community School District is also committed to state-of-the-art technology in its instructional programs. In this regard, faculty and students have easy access to data bases and program applications that streamline the educational process and make learning efficient and effective.

Class size: 20:1 (K-4), 23:1 (5-8).

Help for working parents: Schools provide a latchkey program at each Sycamore Elementary School from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (\$95-\$140 a week).

Blue Ribbon School Awards: Sycamore Junior High, and the most recent is Blue Ash (1995).

School year: First week of Sept. through the first week of June. Children must be 5

on or before Sept. 30 to enter kindergarten (testing for early entrance is possible).

Special education/programs for gifted students: Sycamore Schools offer a complete range of programs for the physically handicapped, hearing and visually impaired, and those with behavioral or developmental problems. Academically gifted students participate in special math and language arts programs.

Nearby colleges/universities: University of Cincinnati; University of Cincinnati's Raymond Walters College; Xavier University, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion; Miami University.

Medical care

Hospitals/medical centers: Greater Cincinnati boasts one of the nation's most advanced health care systems (20 acute-care hospitals) as well as one of the most cost-efficient (compared to 18 other comparably sized metro areas, it ranks first for low-cost medical care). The University of Cincinnati's Medical Center is one of the biggest teaching/research/treatment hospitals in the United States, with three colleges and numerous specialty centers. It offers a Level I trauma center and Air Care, the first 24-hour emergency service in the tristate area. Bethesda North in nearby Montgomery serves Blue Ash with urgent care and extensive outpatient services.

Specialized care: World-renowned Children's Hospital Medical Center and Shriners' Burns Institute bring patients and physicians from around the world. Barrett Cancer Center at University Hospital is nationally recognized.

Let the good times roll

Family fun: Blue Ash's Parks and Recreation Department offers several hundred classes, programs, events and leagues throughout the year. There are Tuesday Concerts in the Park, Friday Evenings on the Square, Movies in the Park, numerous special events, etc. The Summer Artventure Camp and Camp Blue Fish have imaginative theme weeks for kids 4-14. The city's anchor facility, a gorgeous, modern Recreation Center (that includes two gyms and state-of-the-art exercise facilities), features an outdoor Olympic-size pool with a 150-foot double-twist tube slide; there is also a championship-level 18-hole golf course (rated by *Golf Digest* as one of the top municipal courses in the country) and the Blue Ash Sports Center (lighted baseball, soccer and softball fields). The Crosley Field is an exact replica of the Cincinnati Reds' old playing field. The city also boasts the Blue Ash Nature Park, Blue Ash Towne Square and Bicentennial Veterans Memorial Park. A major renovation to the Recreation Center will include a gym and a zero-depth children's pool with aquatic play structures. Annual family memberships are only \$40 a year. Minutes away is the Kings Island Amusement Park, a 1,600-acre theme park.

Sports: Cincinnati sports fans are in a league of their own! They cheer for the Champion Cincinnati Reds (baseball's oldest team), the Bengals (NFL), the Cyclones (minor league hockey) and even the Silverback (professional indoor soccer). Numerous pro events come to the Jack Nicklaus Sports Complex, including men's ATP tennis and LPGA tournaments.

Arts & entertainment: The wonderful Blue Ash Symphony presents joyous family concerts during the year—a tremendous

achievement for a city this size. For children there is also ARTrageous and a city-sponsored performing arts series at Raymond Walters College. Cincinnati offers the Cincinnati Art Museum, Contemporary Art Museum, Natural History Museum, Children's Discovery Center, plus fascinating archaeological sites like the Serpentine Wall and Ft. Ancient Indian Burial Grounds. Recently a multimillion-dollar arts and theater complex opened, bringing nationally acclaimed acts to the area.

Annual events: The Taste of Blue Ash (sample dozens of restaurants, national musical stars and entertainment, and art, late Sept.); Blue Ash July 4th Celebration (perhaps the largest 4th of July celebration in Southeastern Ohio); Blue Ash Dash (bike race, Aug.); Springfest (four-day extravaganza with 5K run, concerts, antique cars and parade, Memorial Day weekend); Crosley Old Timers Baseball Game (legendary greats, Aug.); "Oktoberfest Zinzinnati" (second only to the Munich original); Cincinnati's Riverfest (one of the best fireworks displays in the country, Labor Day weekend).

Community life

For a city of 12,000, Blue Ash leaves most communities in the dust when it comes to showing residents a great time. The city sponsors so many multiday extravaganzas and "fests," you'll be wondering how you existed on such a meager social life before you moved here. There's a huge 4th of July party, the Taste of Blue Ash, Springfest, free concerts and films, a Holidayfest and much more.

The environment

All eyes are on Cincinnati as it unveils the world's first granular activated carbon water treatment facility. The \$60 million state-of-the-art plant (3½ years in the making) will systematically remove all organic contaminants, making the area's drinking water some of the purest, best-tasting in the world (supply has never been a problem). Air quality could use similar help. While one or two "bad" days here would be considered "good" days in Los Angeles, Hamilton County risks meeting EPA standards for ozone attainment. The suburban areas, however, are much cleaner than the industrialized valley. In addition, Blue Ash's residential and light industrial parks are well-separated.

In and around town

Roads and highways: I-75, I-71, I-275, Cross County Highway.

Closest airports: The Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport (35 min.), Blue Ash Airport (small commuter planes).

Public transportation: Queen City Metro provides bus service between Blue Ash and downtown Cincinnati as well as to many suburban communities. The region is also working on plans for a future major public transportation system that focuses on high-speed light rail.

Avg. commute: 20 min. (to downtown Cincinnati). Thanks to the excellent highway system, it's just as easy to commute to Cincinnati as it is to travel locally on Reed Hartman Highway.

FYI

Greater Cincinnati

Chamber of Commerce
9545 Kenwood Rd.,
Suite 403
Blue Ash, OH 45242
513-891-8833

City of Blue Ash
(Relocation info.)
4343 Cooper Rd.
Blue Ash, OH 45242
513-745-8500

Cincinnati Enquirer
312 Elm St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202
513-721-2700

West Shell Realtors

Carolyn Lowitz, Bobbie Gold
9600 Montgomery
Cincinnati, OH 45242
513-891-8500

Sibcy-Cline Realty, Inc.

Mary Bokon, VP-Sales
4770 Cornell Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45241
513-489-0066

Cincinnati Gas & Electric

4th & Main Streets
Cincinnati, OH 45201
513-651-4466

Cincinnati Bell

201 E. 4th St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202
513-397-9900

School districts:

513-791-4848 (Sycamore),
513-771-8560 (Princeton).
Contact Child Advocacy
Center for special ed.
programs: 513-381-2500;
513-632-8212

Northeast Welcomers:
513-247-0001

Interfaith Council: Contact
the city for list of churches/
synagogues.

Physician's referral:
513-745-1111 (Bethesda
Hospital's Ask-a-Nurse).

Day-care referral:
513-891-1723

Fast Facts

Location	Local population	Housing costs	Best reasons to live here
Albuquerque, NM (pp. 211-216)	384,736	Med. \$123,000	Job growth, low taxes and living costs, pleasant year-round climate, cultural diversity, excellent schools.
Andover, MA (pp. 175-180)	32,000 (Andover) 24,200 (North Andover)	Med. \$275,400/ \$296,750	The best of small-town life combined with intellectual life, excellent schools, reasonable housing costs.
Austin, TX (pp. 295-300)	543,596	Med. \$101,000	Job and business growth, no state income tax, highly educated population, great schools, family recreation, mild winters.
Bend, OR (pp. 253-258)	30,630	Avg. \$128,846	Scenic beauty, mild climate, low crime, clean environment, growing economy, recreation paradise, friendly atmosphere.
Blue Ash, OH (pp. 241-246)	11,923	Med. \$105,000	Accomplished city government, great parks, outstanding education, booming business, easy access to Cincinnati.
Blue Bell, PA (pp. 271-276)	15,673	Med. \$247,330	Rural flavor with city nearby, many professional job opportunities, upscale housing, excellent schools.
Burlington, VT (pp. 313-318)	39,435	Avg. \$125,000- \$140,000	Vermont's economic bright spot, clean, safe environment, cosmopolitan college town, excellent schools, friendly community.
Charleston, SC (pp. 283-288)	76,854	Med. \$114,300	Southern charm, exciting history, great climate, affordable housing, favorable economy, good schools.
Charlottesville, VA (pp. 319-324)	42,906	Med. \$149,000	Fantastic scenery, state-of-the-art research and medical facilities, affordable housing, quality schools, mild climate.
Chesapeake, VA (pp. 325-330)	187,830	Med. \$100,000	Fast-growing coastal region, affordable housing, economic growth, progressive schools, low crime, recreation, culture.
Colorado Springs, CO (pp. 97-102)	312,856	Med. \$160,000	Delightful climate and scenery, low cost of living, thriving arts community, abundant schools, economic growth.
Columbia, MO (pp. 193-198)	74,072	Med. \$97,900 (depending on area)	Highly educated people, outstanding medical care, award-winning schools, affordable housing, booming job market.

