

Syracuse

A lively modern city, busy

SYRACUSE

made its name first for the production of salt and, more importantly, for its central position on the Erie Canal. Despite a population nudging half a million, there's little to see, though the presence of Syracuse University gives downtown an active and youthful feel. The redevelopment of Armory Square, around Franklin and Fayette streets, as an area of specialty shops, galleries and cafs has gone some way toward adding character to the city center, but the city still feels dominated by the highways and railroads that slice through it.

The

Erie Canal Museum (daily 10am5pm; donation; tel 315/471-0593), housed in one of the few surviving canal-era buildings, an 1850s weighing station at 318 E Erie Blvd, tells the story of the long battle between politicians and taxpayers before work on the canal began in 1810. The waterway was designed to link the Great Lakes with New York City via the Hudson, thereby cutting hefty transportation costs which it did by an average of ninety percent. At first, however, not everyone was in favor, critics speaking of a "big ditch" in which "would be buried the treasure of the state." The project eventually took fifteen years and one thousand lives, and went three million dollars over budget, but it spawned America's first generation of engineers, and after it opened in 1825, prosperous towns quickly sprung up alongside the canal. Erie Boulevard itself was created by filling in the old canal bed, and the industrial surroundings do little to evoke the era, though the reconstructed canal boat inside the museum is definitely worth a look.

Clark's Ale House

, 122 W Jefferson St (tel 315/479-9859), is locally famous for its roast beef sandwiches and cheese plates. The Empire Brewing Co

, 120 Walton St (tel 315/475-2337), has an eclectic menu and good beer brewed on the premises, while Pastabilities

, 311 S Franklin St (tel 315/474-1153), is health-conscious and popular. Student numbers ensure a lively music

scene; consult the resourceful and free

Syracuse New Times

. Good hangouts include the loud, bluesy

Dinosaur BBQ

, 246 W Willow St (tel 315/476-1662), and the small, punky

Lost Horizon

, 5863 Thompson Rd (tel 315/446-1934). The city's

visitor center

is at 572 S Salina St (MonFri 8.30am5pm; tel 315/470-1800 or 1-800/234-4SYR,

<http://chamber.cny.com>

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