



About the City

Introduction

“Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood,” advised one of Chicago's leading architects nearly a century ago. Chicagoans listened. You can't visit the Windy City today and find much that's small about it.

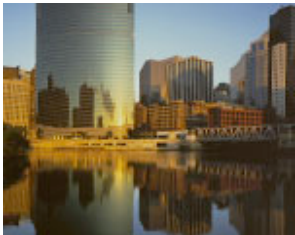


Skyscrapers stretch toward the heavens—four are more than a thousand feet tall—while shorter buildings loom large as unrivaled works of art as much as architecture. Lake Michigan, that sparkling inland sea, laps at the city's doorstep along 29 miles of shoreline adorned with spacious parks, marinas and public beaches. Venerable museums house treasures, both natural and manmade, in such profusion that even the most determined sightseers can't manage to see every painting, sculpture, fossil or living specimen on display. And even the most dedicated shoppers can't hope to browse all the glitzy boutiques, department stores and vertical malls along downtown's Magnificent Mile within a single visit.

Wandering among its intimate neighborhoods or encountering that famous Midwestern friendliness, you might briefly forget you're in one of the world's biggest cities, but only briefly. Reminders of Chicago's immense scale are everywhere, and you will probably be overwhelmed at first. But if you're looking for blood-stirring magic, this is the place.

In Depth

Imagine you're walking through a city park when a huge silver object suddenly appears before you. Surrounding it, curious onlookers stroke its gleaming surface as if mesmerized by someone—or something—inside.



Although it seems like a scene straight out of a science-fiction thriller, and probably not a very good one, such a sight has become commonplace in Chicago's remarkable Millennium Park since 2006 when installation of the mammoth “Cloud Gate” sculpture was completed. Likened, not unkindly, to a big silver bean or a blob of mercury, the artwork has already become a city icon recognized around the world, and people do indeed find it difficult not to touch its highly polished and apparently seamless sides.

British artist Anish Kapoor designed “Cloud Gate” partly as a mirror to Chicago's extraordinary skyline, which explains why sightseers gaze into its shiny, light-bending contours as if it were a crystal ball. And in a way, it is like a crystal ball, only instead of the future, Kapoor's sculpture reveals the past as recorded in the brick, glass and steel towers reflected in its surface. And no event looms larger in that past than one so catastrophic that it's still associated with the city more than a century later: the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

Although the old story about Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lantern and starting the blaze has been discredited, and the exact cost in lives and property remains in question, one thing is certain: the fire was one of the worst disasters in U.S. history. It created a 2,000-acre swath of devastation that included the central business district and left 100,000 Chicagoans homeless. One of the very few buildings to survive in the burned area was the Chicago Water Tower on North Michigan Avenue.

That picturesque, castlelike tower has come to symbolize Chicago's endurance and near-miraculous rebirth. Within just 20 years of the



conflagration, Chicago surpassed Philadelphia to become the nation's second largest city, and the arrival of many talented and ambitious architects during the post-fire building boom heralded an era of architectural innovation that distinguishes the city today. Chicago is even credited as the birthplace of the skyscraper, a distinction earned in 1885 with the completion of the 10-story Home Insurance Building (demolished in 1931), which relied on an internal steel skeleton for support rather than heavy, height-limiting masonry walls.



One of those early innovators who helped develop what's known today as the Chicago Commercial Style or Chicago School was Daniel Burnham, whose firm designed such Loop landmarks as the Rookery Building (209 S. LaSalle St.), Reliance Building (32 N. State St.) and the iconic flagship store for Marshall Field's, now Macy's (111 N. State St.). Burnham also helped pen the 1909 Chicago Plan, an influential guide to the city's further development. Navy Pier and its amusement park, the "Magnificent Mile" shopping district along Michigan Avenue and Chicago's beautiful lakefront park system all have their origins in Burnham's plan.

And Burnham's influence on the city didn't end there. He directed construction of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, which premiered the very first Ferris wheel; one even rotates today at Navy Pier, providing passengers with fantastic views of Chicago and Lake Michigan. Other top Chicago attractions owing some part of their existence to the 1893 World's Fair: the Museum of Science and Industry in Jackson Park, site of the fair; the Field Museum with its vast natural history collection; and the Beaux Arts building housing the Art Institute of Chicago.

One of Burnham's rivals within the Chicago School, as this early group of high-rise designing architects came to be known, was Louis Sullivan, whose designs tended to be even more forward-looking than his colleagues'. With his partner Dankmar Adler, Sullivan designed the beautifully restored Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University (50 E. Congress Pkwy.) and the Old Chicago Stock Exchange, which was torn down in 1972.

You can still see one of the exchange's massive arched entryways preserved in the Art Institute of Chicago's East Garden at Columbus and Monroe drives, and within the Art Institute itself is the salvaged Trading Room, considered to be one of Sullivan's masterpieces. The nearly 6,000-square-foot space features rich dark wood and art glass panels, and the walls and ceiling are covered in ornate stenciled decorations. Sullivan also designed the former Carson Pirie Scott Department Store (1 S. State St.), now the Sullivan Center, which really shows off the great architect's fondness for elaborate ornamentation in the intricate ironwork surrounding its main entrance.

If Louis Sullivan's name isn't better known outside architectural circles, it's no fault of his apprentice, Frank Lloyd Wright. Although he and Sullivan had a falling out that led to Wright's dismissal from Sullivan's firm, the two eventually patched things up, and it was Wright who became one of his former teacher's staunchest advocates. After Wright launched his own architectural practice, he perfected his Prairie style of house, so called because the low, horizontal profiles evoked the Midwestern landscape he grew up with. To see one of the best examples of Wright's signature style, visit the Frederick C. Robie House on the University of Chicago campus, or head to suburban Oak Park, which has an entire district of Wright-designed houses, including Wright's own home and studio.

While you'll have a nice variety of walking tours to choose from in Oak Park, the amazing diversity of architectural tours available downtown—no surprise considering the variety of styles and number of significant buildings—is almost overwhelming. Even choices about how to get around are wide open, with boat, bus, bike, foot and even Segway being among the options. And taking a high-speed elevator trip to the top of the Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower) or John Hancock Center is an essential part of the Chicago visitor experience; exhibits at both will tell you how these landmarks were at the forefront of skyscraper design when they were constructed, just as the city's first high-rises were a century before.

Chicago's tradition of cutting-edge architecture continues with the new Renzo Piano-designed Modern Wing of the Art Institute of Chicago, Frank Gehry's warped steel Pritzker Pavilion and serpentine BP Pedestrian Bridge nearby in Millennium Park, and the graceful, spiraling column of Santiago Calatrava's Chicago Spire, which will be the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere

when it's completed.

Once the Spire takes its place among the towers of Chicago's photogenic skyline, it too will be part of the city's architectural heritage, a fascinating story filled with firsts and superlatives that begins with a fiery tragedy transformed into an opportunity to build a better city on the ashes of the old. Of course visitors come here to enjoy the full spectrum of amenities—restaurants, theaters, museums, shopping, nightlife, sporting events—that any major metropolis offers in spades, but in Chicago the pursuit of urban pleasures takes place in a setting with a story all its own.

Getting There

By Car

The primary route into Chicago from Milwaukee and other lakeside cities to the north is I-94. In the northern suburbs it divides; the eastern segment (Edens Expressway), still marked I-94, joins the John F. Kennedy Expressway, which enters downtown Chicago. The western leg, called the Tri-State Tollway, is numbered I-294; it forms a circumferential expressway around the city's west edge and ends at I-80.

From Madison and Rockford, I-90 (Jane Addams Memorial Tollway) is the main highway. In the northwestern suburbs it intersects I-290, which curves southeast and continues into Chicago as the Eisenhower Expressway. Near O'Hare International Airport, the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway intersects I-294, where it becomes the John F. Kennedy Expressway (I-90) as it heads into the city.

From the west direct access to Chicago from the Aurora area is via the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88). Once inside the I-294 belt it becomes the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290). I-55 comes from Bloomington and other points in central Illinois; in the Chicago area, it is called the Adlai Stevenson Expressway. A major transcontinental route, I-80 passes to the south of Chicago and provides several connections into the city via I-55, I-57, I-90 and I-94. I-355 (Veterans Memorial Tollway) runs through the southwestern and western suburbs and connects with I-80, I-55, I-88 and I-290.

The major routes from the south are I-94 (Bishop Ford Freeway), I-57 and I-90 (Chicago Skyway—toll). All three connect with the Dan Ryan Expressway (I-90/94), which leads into the city center. On the Indiana outskirts of Chicago, I-90 and I-80 form the Northern Indiana Toll Road, which is the main route to the city from the eastern seaboard; I-94 provides access to the city from Michigan.

Chicago's Loop, once defined as an area of the city encircled by the "L" elevated rapid transit line, now lends its name to the entire downtown area.

Air Travel

O'Hare International Airport, 17 miles northwest of the city proper, is considered the world's busiest, averaging some 190,000 passengers and 2,300 flights a day. The three domestic terminals service most major carriers and offer plenty of amenities for travelers as well. The international terminal is host to more than 25 airlines from around the world and is linked to the main building via the Chicago Department of Aviation Transit System. Allow yourself plenty of time to negotiate the airport.

The only highway exit is via I-190, which connects with I-90 directly east of the airport. I-90, a southeasterly route into the city proper, intersects I-294 a short distance east of the I-190/90 junction. I-294 leads north to Wisconsin and south to Indiana. Another option for going downtown is the locals' choice, which saves tolls but involves some highway number changes: I-90/I-94/I-94 E/I-90 E. Either way, allow plenty of time for traffic, which is always a factor in getting around greater Chicago.

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) provides 24-hour service between O'Hare and downtown on the Blue Line, a 45-minute ride via rapid rail. Departures occur every 15 minutes from the lower pedestrian tunnel level of Terminal 3. The fare is \$2.25. Purchase a Transit Card or a 1-day or multi-day unlimited-ride pass from the CTA vending machines; turnstiles do not accept cash. CTA

also provides rapid rail service between O'Hare and Midway airports (at the Clark/Lake stop, transfer for free to the Midway-bound Orange Line during its hours of operation); phone (312) 836-7000 for details.

Midway Airport, though smaller than O'Hare, is closer to the Loop; it is only 10 miles southwest of the downtown core. It serves a much shorter roster of five airlines, offering a balance of domestic and international flights.

Exit Midway via Airport Drive, which intersects SR 50 (Cicero Avenue) along the airport's eastern edge. The most direct route downtown is on SR 50 north to I-55 north, then northeast to I-90/94 (Wisconsin) and east on Congress Parkway.

Rapid transit service on the Orange Line elevated train takes travelers from Midway to the heart of the city in less than 30 minutes. Visitors can board the train about every 15 minutes at the terminal just east of the airport building. The fare is \$2.25. CTA Transit Cards and unlimited-ride passes are available at station vending machines.

GO Airport Express, (773) 247-1200 or (800) 654-7871, provides buses between O'Hare, many downtown hotels, McCormick Place and Lincoln Park. One-way fare from O'Hare to the Loop is \$28; round-trip \$50. One-way from Midway to downtown is \$23; round-trip \$40.

Depending on traffic, a cab ride between either airport and downtown will average \$45-\$50.

Chicago is served by major car rental agencies. Arrangements should be made before you leave on your trip; your local AAA club can provide this assistance or additional information. Hertz, (312) 372-7600 or (800) 654-3080, offers discounts to AAA members. For listings of other agencies check the telephone directory.

Rail Service

Chicago Union Station, 210 S. Canal St., is the city's main train depot and Amtrak's local hub. Trains run to both coasts and well into the South, with stops at most major cities along the routes; phone (800) 872-7245.

Commuter rail service into Chicago from surrounding suburban communities is provided by METRA (Metropolitan Rail). Nearly a dozen lines run through the four downtown stations: Chicago Union Station, LaSalle Street Station at 414 S. LaSalle St., Millennium Station at Randolph and Michigan Avenue, and Ogilvie Transportation Center (Union Pacific Station) at Madison and Canal streets. For further details phone () 836-7000 from any of the local area codes (224, 312, 331, 630, 708, 773, 779, 815, 847 and 872).

Buses

Greyhound Lines Inc. has its station at 630 W. Harrison St.; phone (312) 408-5821 or (800) 231-2222.

Getting Around

Street System

In driving around Chicago, as well as in approaching it, you should know where you are going and exactly how to get there. Plan your route in advance, particularly in regard to expressway interchanges, and be sure to keep a good street map handy.

Most Chicago streets follow an orderly grid running north-south and east-west. The few exceptions to this rule are outside the Loop—as downtown generally is known—and include N. Clark Street, N. Lincoln Avenue, Clybourn Avenue, Grand Avenue, Hyde Park Boulevard, Elston Avenue, I-90/94, N. Milwaukee Avenue, W. Ogden Avenue, S. Blue Island Avenue, S. Archer Avenue, S. Chicago Avenue and Lake Shore Drive.

State Street is the east-west bisector; Madison Street divides north from south. The intersection of State and Madison streets in the Loop is ground zero for the street numbering system; all

addresses begin at this intersection. The uniform numbering system from this point is an added help in finding an address. Downtown street numbers increase by 100 every two blocks leading away from this central intersection; outside the Loop they increase by 100 every block. For example, 800 W. Madison St. would be 16 blocks west of State Street.

In the northern section of the city all streets are designated by name. In the south, beginning at 8th, most east-west streets are numbered consecutively, and only north-south streets are named.

Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit on most streets is 25 to 30 mph. U-turns are allowed only where indicated by a sign. Many downtown streets are one-way. Rush hours, from 6 to 10a.m. and 3 to 7 p.m., should be avoided.

Parking

Forget about street parking; it is illegal in the Loop area. As for metered street parking, there is little open to the heavy volume of determined drivers, and fines for parking violations are steep and towing, a real possibility. Instead, take advantage of the city's numerous lots and garages.

Some of the larger lots downtown are beneath Grant Park on N. Michigan and S. Michigan avenues and S. Columbus Drive near Monroe Street; and beneath Millennium Park on S. Columbus Drive near Monroe; southeast of Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum on Solidarity Drive (cash only); east of the Field Museum (cash only), and south of it on Museum Campus Drive (south garage also has McFetridge Drive entrance); and at Burnham Park Harbor at the junction of 16th Street (Waldron Drive; access via 18th Street) and Museum Campus Drive. Full-day rates average \$14-\$29.

There are many public garages, both downtown and on the outskirts. Rates range from \$11-\$17 for 1-4 hours to \$14-\$29 for 5-24 hours. Three lots are available in Grant Park and one in Millennium Park; for information phone (312) 616-0600. There also are many private garages; rates there average \$17 a day but can be as high as \$40.

Taxis

Expect to pay for the privilege of taking a taxi within city limits. Cabs are metered, with a basic charge of \$2.25 for the first 1/9 mile plus 20c for each additional 1/9 mile. Further charges for extra passengers (\$1 for the first additional passenger ages 12-65, and 50c for each additional passenger after that), gas prices (50c per ride when prices are above \$2.70 per gallon) and airport trips (\$1 surcharge plus tolls if toll roads used—from downtown it is \$45-\$50 to O'Hare and \$30-\$32 to Midway on average) can add up. There's generally no charge for baggage or credit card use, and tipping, though optional, is appreciated for good service. The largest cab company is Yellow, (312) 829-4222; others are listed in the telephone directory.

Public Transportation

Chicago has one of the nation's most convenient and accessible public transportation systems, serving the entire metro area. METRA commuter trains, augmented by PACE suburban buses and the Chicago Transit Authority's (CTA) extensive network of buses and subway/elevated ("L") trains, connect suburbanites to the heart of the city. Stations are throughout the city; each has a color-coded map showing the system's myriad routes.

Rapid rail trains provide service around the city proper, north to Evanston, south to 95th Street and west to both airports. Routes are designated by colors and offer varying schedules. The Red and Blue lines (subway in the Loop) operate daily 24 hours. The Orange, Brown, Purple, Green, Pink and Yellow lines ("L") all have different schedules, most beginning in the early morning hours and ending after midnight; not all lines stopping in the Loop operate on weekends. The trains operate every 3 to 12 minutes during weekday rush hours, every 6 to 20 minutes at other times. Schedules are posted in each station.

Buses also provide transportation from numerous stops found throughout the city. The route number, name and destination of each vehicle are clearly displayed on the windshield sign, and many shelters offer graphical maps highlighting the routes. Service is offered daily, with most schedules beginning in the early morning and ending around midnight; some buses run on a

more limited schedule.

The fare for all CTA vehicles is \$2.25 (no transfer allowed when paying cash); exact change is required on buses and at the train station Transit Card vending machines. (Dollar bills and coins are accepted; credit cards are accepted at select train stations.) Transit Cards permit an additional two rides (25c deducted on first bus-to-bus transfer, second transfer free), provided they occur within 2 hours and are not on the rider's original route. Reduced rates are available for senior citizens, the physically impaired and ages 7-11; children under 7 ride free. Active U.S. military personnel ride free provided they are in full uniform and present their United States Armed Forces ID. CTA also offers unlimited-ride visitor passes good for a specified time period. A 1-day pass costs \$5.75; a 3-day pass, \$14; and a 7-day pass, \$23. They are sold at vending machines at select locations including the CTA train stations at O'Hare and Midway and the two visitor information centers.

The fare for all CTA vehicles is \$2; exact change is required on buses and at the turnstiles. (Dollar bills are accepted.) Transfer cards cost 25c and permit an additional two rides, provided they occur within 2 hours and are not on the rider's original route. Reduced rates are available for senior citizens, the physically impaired and ages 7-11. CTA also offers unlimited-ride Visitor Passes good for a specified time period. A 1-day pass costs \$5; a 2-day pass, \$9; a 3-day pass, \$12; and a 5-day pass, \$18.

For additional information phone CTA at () 836-7000 from any of the local area codes (224, 312, 331, 630, 708, 773, 779, 815, 847, 872). The handy "Downtown Transit Sightseeing Guide" illustrating the CTA system is available at train stations, both airports, City of Chicago Visitor Information Centers at the Chicago Cultural Center and the Historic Water Tower, or phone (888) 968-7282.

Note: As in any major city, it pays to be cautious when using public transportation. Know where you are going, which trains to take before boarding and avoid after-dark travel.

Informed Traveler

City Population: 2,896,016

Elevation: 665 ft.

Sales Tax: Illinois sales tax is 6.25 percent; cities and counties impose additional increments. The Chicago area has a lodging tax of 15.4 percent.

Whom To Call

Emergency: 911

Police (non-emergency): 311

Hospitals: Northwestern Memorial Hospital, (312) 926-2000; Resurrection Medical Center, (773) 774-8000; Rush University Medical Center, (312) 942-5000; St. Anthony Hospital, (773) 484-1000; University of Chicago Medical Center, (773) 702-1000; University of Illinois Medical Center, (312) 355-4000.

Where to Look

Newspapers

The two major dailies are the Tribune and the Sun-Times, both morning papers. These are supplemented by smaller journals and foreign-language papers.

The Reader, a free weekly newspaper; TimeOut, a weekly magazine; and Chicago, a monthly magazine, are helpful for visitors. Key—This Week in Chicago, Concierge Preferred and Where are available at most major hotels in the metropolitan area and provide entertainment and event information.

Radio

Radio station WBBM (780 AM) is an all-news/weather station; WLS (890 AM) is talk radio; WBEZ (91.5 FM) is a member of National Public Radio.

Visitor Information

Chicago Office of Tourism: 78 E. Washington St., Chicago, IL 60602. Phone: (312) 744-2400 or (877) 244-2246.

The Chicago Office of Tourism operates two information centers that provide city and state maps and brochures. One office is in the Chicago Cultural Center, 77 E. Randolph St. at Michigan Avenue, and the other is in the Chicago Water Works, 163 E. Pearson St. at Michigan Avenue. Both centers are open Mon.-Thurs. 8-7, Fri. 8-6, Sat. 9-6, Sun. 10-6, holidays 10-4; closed Jan. 1, Thanksgiving and Dec. 25. Holiday hours may vary; phone ahead.

What to Pack

Chicago weather is rarely boring. Summer is muggy, spring is damp and cool, and winter is downright challenging.

Temperatures can peak in the 90s in July and August, the heat exacerbated by humidity. Lake Michigan breezes bring a hint of relief. In winter the breezes become chilling winds that combine with frigid temperatures to produce wind-chill factors that can drop to 20 below zero. Precipitation levels are highest April through September, but winter snow is a given. December and January are snowiest, but flakes may pile up into March.

A light casual look is appropriate in summer; add layers during the spring and fall. A heavy coat and winter boots are a must from late November through March; a light jacket is advisable even in summer. An evening at a world-class restaurant or cultural institution is an occasion for finer fashion.

AAA Picks

Essentials

Sure, you'll want to see a few sights while you're here, but don't forget to include these experiences on your to-do list.

By Frank Swanson



Let yourself be whisked 1,353 feet up in a high-speed elevator to the [Skydeck Chicago](#), from which you'll view the entire city spread out before you and, on a clear day, even see four states.

Lose yourself within the cavernous exhibit halls of [The Field Museum](#), where you'll (safely) come face-to-fang with the man-eating Tsavo lions (stuffed) and Sue, a menacing Tyrannosaurus rex (fossilized), along with a menagerie of other well-preserved and well-displayed creatures.

Savor a slice of Chicago-style pizza (also known as stuffed or deep-dish), but try not to draw too much attention to yourself when you make the yummy sound. Try [Lou Malnati's Pizzeria](#) in the Near North district for its signature crispy crusts.

Ride the "L" (Chicago's ELevated mass transit trains) around the Loop and enjoy an up-close look at downtown Chicago's historic architecture that you can't get from the ground, or for another perspective, take a boat tour along the Chicago River and Lake Michigan shoreline.

Make a pilgrimage via the Red Line to the Chicago Cubs' Wrigley Field, whose venerable ivy-covered outfield walls have served as backdrop for some of Major League Baseball's most thrilling moments.

Experience live blues music for four days in June during the free [Chicago Blues Festival](#) in Grant Park or visit one of the blues clubs scattered about “Sweet Home Chicago.”

Limber up your shopping muscles and spend an afternoon hunting for that must-have item or tracking the latest styles along the Magnificent Mile, that boutique-crowded section of North Michigan Avenue between Oak Street and the Chicago River.

Entertain the kids at the [Navy Pier](#), a 50-acre waterfront entertainment complex complete with 150-foot Ferris wheel and a musical carousel, not to mention a children's museum, a miniature golf course, shops and restaurants ranging from family-friendly to romantic.

Snap a photo in front of [Buckingham Memorial Fountain](#) in [Grant Park](#) with either the Chicago skyline as a background or the lovely lakeshore, which during warm weather will no doubt be crowded with joggers, bikers and skaters.

Tour suburban Oak Park to see the groundbreaking work of Frank Lloyd Wright, often called America's greatest architect, whose home and studio stands amidst several of his Prairie-style masterpieces.

Frank Swanson has been an editor in publishing at the AAA National Office since 1995. Despite having been born on an air force base in Germany, he considers himself a Florida native. In his teens he became disenchanted with the Sunshine State for its complete lack of mountains and began plotting his escape to any place that could offer him a respectable altitude change outside of an airplane. A relocation never happened, and over the years he has learned to love Florida for its history, its mild winters and its tropical foliage even though it has stubbornly remained flat as a pancake. (As a runner with problematic knees, Frank has learned that flat can be good.) For a change of pace, he enjoys traveling to locales with elevated areas and awesome vistas such as the Canadian Rockies, Utah's Zion Canyon and Hawaii, but he is always eager to return to the welcoming embrace of his home state's heat, humidity and friendly palmetto bugs as big as your fist.



Restaurants

Our favorites include some of this destination's best restaurants—from fine dining to simple fare.

By Inspector 40

as told to Frank Swanson



A Chicago mainstay for more than 75 years, [The Italian Village](#) continues to be one of the city's favorite Italian restaurants. Its second-floor location within the Loop features a long, narrow, dimly lit dining room with small nooks offering semi-private seating areas. With its large murals depicting the Italian countryside and strings of twinkle lights hanging overhead, the dining room has the feel of a small village street. Known for its variety of fresh pastas, the restaurant's other signature dishes include fine choices of veal, steak, fish and chicken. Try the excellent chicken Vesuvio with roasted potatoes, which is prepared in the traditional way. The experienced wait staff provides good overall service, but the tables are cramped in places, so beware if you're claustrophobic.

Also within the Loop, [Everest](#) is aptly named for its almost divine perch high atop a lavish bank building. Guests reach the exclusive dining room after traveling up a series of elevators, one of which is private, before finally reaching the 40th-floor restaurant. Exhilarating Alsatian-influenced French cuisine is served in a highly refined space featuring colorful, fresh floral displays, luxurious crystal chandeliers and a unique safari theme. The food is as heavenly as the location with chef Joho's signature dishes taking center stage. For an appetizer, order the Dover sole braised in an Alsace Riesling with mushrooms and tomatoes, and follow it up with the exceptional sautéed beef tenderloin with braised oxtail, potato gratin and spring vegetables. The courteous and friendly wait

staff exhibits a supreme level of guest awareness, tact and knowledge. To put it simply, Everest is the quintessential special occasion restaurant.

Despite being part of a national chain hailing from New York City, [Smith & Wollensky](#) has made a huge dent in Chicago's highly competitive steakhouse scene. Its 24-ounce Porterhouse along with some of its other fine steaks consistently rate among the city's best. The multilevel restaurant has a fabulous location overlooking the Chicago River just north of the Loop with outdoor patio dining in season. The dining room has a "clubby" ambience with lots of wood trim and carvings and abundant natural light courtesy of windows and French doors. The dry-aged steaks are robust and expertly prepared, and there are plenty of fine fish and seafood choices.

For traditional deep dish, Chicago-style pizza [Lou Malnati's Pizzeria](#) stands out among the huge number of the city's fine pizza parlors. The Italian restaurant's signature, crispy "buttercrust" blends beautifully with the supremely fresh mozzarella and tomatoes on each pie. The sausage pizza, an obvious star on the menu, features many small chunks of spicy Italian sausage mixed with the sauce and cheese of each slice. It literally melts in your mouth. The casual sports-themed restaurant in Chicago's Near North neighborhood is great for groups or families and offers plenty of TVs to watch as you dine. The wait staff is very laid-back and dresses casually but is efficient.

Also in the Near North area, [Frontera Grill](#) and its more sophisticated sister next door, [Topolobampo](#), are at the top of the heap of Chicago's exceptional and authentic Mexican restaurants. Call ahead if you expect to get a seat at this supremely popular venue. Frontera Grill, the ultra-casual part of this hot spot, has an exciting, colorful décor and serves such traditional Mexican food as burritos, six kinds of tacos and mouth-watering enchiladas. The guacamole and rich mole sauces burst with flavor. The restaurant features a lively bar along with an inviting outdoor patio dining area. The wait staff rush about and generally provide good service while displaying an exceptional knowledge of menu items.

Acclaimed by some as one of the top ten steakhouses in America, [Chicago Chop House](#) features USDA prime steaks, chops and prime rib. The steaks are huge so bring a hearty appetite, although you can also choose among chicken, lamb and various seafood dishes. The multifloor restaurant in the River North neighborhood has a lounge on the first floor with main dining areas upstairs. The walls are dotted with nicely framed, black-and-white Chicago photographs taken from 1830 to 1930. The oak-paneled walls give the dining room a classic steakhouse ambience. The restaurant's popularity rests squarely in the fine steaks and not the service, which can be uneven and inattentive at times.

Although known for its vertical malls and high-end boutiques, the Magnificent Mile abounds with eateries serving a spectrum of cuisine as well. For unmatched views of Chicago's skyline, visit [The Signature Room at the 95th](#), perched atop John Hancock Center. The views are breathtaking no matter where you sit in the moderately upscale dining room. The restaurant offers a hugely popular and inexpensive lunch buffet option and a seasonally changing menu. Plenty of fine salads and sandwiches also are available. Each dish brought out of the kitchen is dramatically displayed on bone-white plates. The menu also features an excellent variety of beautifully presented desserts. Be sure to pick a clear day and then call ahead to reserve your spot because this place stays quite busy during nice weather.

A few blocks south of John Hancock Center is [Kamehachi](#), one of Chicago's finest sushi restaurants. Within walking distance of Michigan Avenue and Navy Pier, this Kamehachi, unlike its older sister in the Old Town neighborhood, occupies a spacious, sleek and handsome space one half floor below street level. Inside you'll find polished, light wood floors, frosted glass dividers and bamboo trees. The upscale restaurant features an extensive menu with fresh seafood, sashimi, teriyaki, tempura, sukiyaki and noodles. Come ready to sample a variety of raw seafood items and their accompanying exquisite dipping sauces from the huge sushi menu. A surprisingly impressive wine list is available, and the waiters are helpful.

For years [Spiaggia](#) has impressed its patrons, elevating itself to the level of the place in Chicago for special occasion dining. Located on the Magnificent Mile, the restaurant presents luscious Italian food in a lovely, sophisticated, tiered dining room with views of Lake Michigan. Majestic columns, linen-covered tables and unusual chandeliers punctuate the room's refined ambience. Spiaggia has stood the test of time and continues to be a culinary treasure in Chicago as well as the standard for

upscale Italian cuisine. The silky smooth and creamy risotto is exceptional along with the signature dish of wood-roasted sea scallops with porcini mushrooms. The food is as stunning to the taste buds as it is to the eyes. The sharply dressed staff is well informed and, from the hostess to the bus boy, offers a welcoming disposition.

It should come as no surprise that to find the busiest and most popular Greek Restaurant in Chicago, you'll need to leave the Magnificent Mile and head west from the Loop to Greektown. Expansive [Greek Islands](#) has four dining rooms, each with a sea-blue Mediterranean theme complete with large, colorful wall murals, weather-worn wood and hanging plants. This hot spot literally sizzles with the sounds of saganaki being flamed tableside. Another treat: the enthusiastic wait staff shouts "opaa" along with the guests when the cheese is ignited. The menu is as large as the restaurant with many pre-entrée, main course and after-dinner choices available. Swordfish, red snapper, orange roughly, Dover sole, beef tenderloin, New York sirloin steak and white fish are just a few of the popular menu items. Lamb prepared in every possible way is, of course, the signature at Greek Islands. The wait staff has fun and provides good attention to each table.

If you're craving dim sum, your obvious destination is Chicago's Chinatown south of the Loop. Here [The Phoenix Restaurant](#) is a standout. The spacious second-floor dining room is outfitted with large, white-cloth-covered tables and attractive Asian artwork. Phoenix features both a traditional menu and daily dim sum offerings wheeled around the dining area in the customary carts. Hong Kong-style Cantonese cuisine includes a variety of game meats and live seafood prepared to each guest's liking. The service staff is smartly dressed, but it can be tough to communicate with them at times unless you happen to speak Cantonese.

A neighborhood hot spot in North Chicago bustling with activity especially during late-night hours, [The Wiener's Circle](#) is consistently rated among the very best for its hot dogs and cheese fries. Ordering at this quick-serve joint is not for the faint of heart, however, as the playful staff expects you to shout out your order. The plump, all-beef, charbroiled hot dogs are slathered in raw onions, relish, several fresh tomato slices and include some juicy dill pickles tucked inside the bun. The cheese fries are deep-fried and crispy, salted and covered in tasty melted cheddar cheese. You might want to bring your own napkins to clean up afterwards because they aren't provided.

Also in North Chicago, [Le Bouchon](#) is as authentic a French bistro as you'll find in the city. The exquisite neighborhood restaurant has a distinct Parisian ambience featuring a lovely wall mural, etched glass wall sconces and lace café curtains. The dining room is intimate with some tight table spacing, but it is always busy so phone ahead for a spot. The menu consists of exceptionally well-prepared French country cuisine. The rabbit loin is moist and tender and comes with a side of bowtie pasta and mushrooms. The classic steak pommes frites served with a tasty butter sauce is incredible. Steamed mussels, snails burgundy and sautéed frog legs are often on the menu. The courteous, apron-clad wait staff is well-informed about the menu and provides attentive service.

For those who are truly adventurous and interested in innovative, imaginative cuisine there is no better place than [Charlie Trotter's](#), a long-established mecca in North Chicago for cutting-edge fine dining. The world-class chef uses only the freshest and finest ingredients available. Although the menu changes weekly, the flavors, textures and appearance of each dish are consistently memorable. Rabbit, lamb, bison, beef and a wide variety of seafood regularly show up on the menu. Occupying a two-story townhouse, the restaurant features pristine salons on both floors with lovely fresh floral displays, light-colored trim and pressed-linen table tops. The wait staff is exceptionally polished in both appearance and manner. Reservations may need to be made months in advance.

See all the AAA Diamond-rated restaurants for this destination.



Inspector 40 is a AAA employee who inspects hotels, restaurants and attractions in this destination. Our inspectors have unique backgrounds and on-the-job stories to tell but AAA must keep their identities secret or their ability to conduct unannounced, anonymous inspections would be compromised.



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Attractions

In a city with dozens of attractions, you may have trouble deciding where to spend your time. Here are the highlights for this destination, as chosen by AAA editors. GEMs are "Great Experiences for Members."

By Frank Swanson



Often called Chicago's front yard, [Grant Park](#) really does create that impression with its broad, tree-bordered lawns spread out like a green picnic blanket before a wall of downtown high-rises. There's no better place to kick off your sightseeing itinerary since most of Chicago's top attractions either adjoin or are within sight of the park. The park's centerpiece is [Buckingham Memorial Fountain](#), a city icon since its 1927 installation. Within its wide pool, four stylized bronze seahorses spew water at three tiers of overflowing basins. At night the splashing water is synchronized to a light and music show.

Projecting above the leafy canopy along Michigan Avenue is the park's most impressive building and a definite must-see: the Beaux-Arts [Art Institute of Chicago](#), a AAA GEM attraction. Pass between the huge bronze lions guarding the main entrance and into the museum's echoing skylighted halls, and you'll likely be surprised by how many familiar faces you meet. There's the dour farmer and his daughter from Grant Wood's "American Gothic" on view not far from the haunted-looking couple drinking coffee at an all-night diner in Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks." You're liable to have many such déjà vu moments thanks to mass-produced versions available at shopping malls everywhere. These, however, are the originals.

But you need not confine your appreciation of art to the indoors when just across Monroe Street, at the northwest corner of Grant Park, is [Millennium Park](#), another AAA GEM attraction. Opened in 2004 on the site of a defunct rail yard, the park boasts stunning examples of alfresco modern art and architecture including the undulating stainless steel walls of the Pritzker Pavilion and BP Bridge, both designed by "starchitect" Frank Gehry. A photo of Anish Kapoor's "Cloud Gate" sculpture, which looks like a gigantic droplet of solidified mercury, is a must even for those connoisseurs who don't think much of it: You can capture an artfully distorted view of the Chicago skyline reflected in its mirror-shiny surface.

Of course, in a city noted for its architecture, a tour focusing on the topic is de rigueur. The [Chicago Architecture Foundation Shop and Tour Center](#), a AAA GEM attraction, is just across Michigan

Avenue from Millennium Park. Here you can choose among more than 90 different tours that'll suit about any taste or interest. You can also select your mode of transportation: bus, boat, bicycle or by foot.

If you want even more of a boat tour selection, head through the park and north along the lakeshore about a mile and a half to the [Navy Pier](#), a AAA GEM attraction from which a flotilla of sightseeing craft depart. Of course the pier, with its carnival-style rides, restaurants, shops, concert venues, street performers, IMAX theater and two museums—one geared toward children under 12, the other displaying stained glass windows—is a worthwhile sightseeing destination by itself. You'll be able to take in a wide swath of Chicago's spectacular skyline from the pier's eastern end, and in summer the night sky explodes with color and light during weekly fireworks shows.

On the southern end of Grant Park lies Museum Campus Chicago, a lakefront expanse shared by no fewer than three AAA GEM attractions. Foremost among these stands [The Field Museum](#), primarily known for its natural history exhibits but featuring anthropological specimens as well. A tyrannosaur named Sue, the most complete T. rex skeleton yet found, occupies pride of place in the museum's main entrance hall along with two preserved elephants, prominent museum residents since 1906.

What neighboring [John G. Shedd Aquarium](#) lacks in tyrannosaur fossils, it more than makes up for with dramatic aquatic displays including a Caribbean reef exhibit at the center of a skylighted Beaux Arts rotunda and the Oceanarium, which replicates a Pacific Northwest Coast habitat for harbor seals, beluga whales and Pacific white-sided dolphins. Don't miss the Wild Reef exhibit where panoramic floor-to-ceiling windows will give you an eerie sense of floating among the aquarium's school of sharks.

In terms of subject matter, leaping from our world's oceans into the vastness of space is as easy as walking to nearby [Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum](#), where the sky takes center stage courtesy of a glass roof that permits daylight to flood the main exhibit area. A planetarium replicates a nighttime view of the heavens in addition to showing off colorful nebulas and spiral galaxies. Displays of antique astronomical instruments reveal the artistry involved in producing these early devices, and a motion simulator theater takes visitors on a virtual journey through the universe.

Although separated from Museum Campus Chicago by 6 miles of lakefront, the [Museum of Science and Industry](#), AAA GEM attraction in the Hyde Park neighborhood, shares much with its downtown counterparts. Here again is a decades-old Beaux Arts palace crammed with an eclectic mix of exhibits—only in this case the theme is technology and engineering. The question isn't what will you see, but what won't you see inside these venerable walls. Don't be surprised to find a large portion of a 727 passenger jet, a 1936 streamlined locomotive with passenger cars and even a German U-boat captured during World War II.

While Chicago remains the birthplace of the skyscraper, the city can no longer claim to have the world's tallest building—a distinction it enjoyed most recently 1973-96 courtesy of the 1,450-foot-tall, 110-story Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower). While the building's rank has slipped a bit, it's ability to wow visitors who ascend to [Skydeck Chicago](#), a AAA GEM attraction, remains undiminished. On clear days views extend for 50 miles in every direction, a spectacular panorama that you also can enjoy from [The Hancock Observatory](#) at John Hancock Center. While at a mere 1,000 feet, the observatory falls somewhat short of Skydeck Chicago at the top of the Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower), you'll hardly notice the difference when you step onto the observatory's Skywalk for a thrilling, open-air view.

From your aerie atop the John Hancock Center you'll spy a narrow green patch along Lake Michigan north of downtown. A AAA GEM attraction, [Lincoln Park](#) started out as a small, makeshift cemetery in the 19th-century but now spreads out over more than 1,000 acres. In addition to monuments, playgrounds, beaches and recreation trails, the park's borders encompass a conservatory and [Lincoln Park Zoo](#), where such endangered critters as black rhinos, snow leopards and western lowland gorillas make their home in enclosures scattered among the zoo's historic buildings.

At the beginning of his illustrious career more than a century ago, Architect Frank Lloyd Wright chose the western suburb of Oak Park as his home and ended up executing some of his most renowned designs for himself and his neighbors and in the process perfecting his distinctive Prairie style. [Architectural Tours](#) in Oak Park, a AAA GEM attraction, offers an extensive menu of tours that

includes his home and studio and the exteriors of 13 Wright-designed buildings—the visionary Unity Temple among them.

In the shadow of John Hancock Center and just off Michigan Avenue stands an institution dedicated to visionary creativity: the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#). Focusing on works created since 1945 in a wide range of media, the museum's collection is edgy, challenging and sometimes confounding, and the modern building's bright, airy galleries suit the exhibits to a T.

Although not focused exclusively on contemporary art, the AAA GEM-rated [National Museum of Mexican Art \(NMMA\)](#) in Chicago's Pilsen/Little Village neighborhood southwest of the Loop spotlights works that fall into that category as well as a host of other genres. The unifying theme here is the artistic expression of the Mexican experience on both sides of the border. In addition to artifacts created centuries ago by Mexico's indigenous peoples, you'll find paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, textiles and photographs.

The focus narrows considerably at the [National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum](#), housed in a three-story brick commercial building south of the Loop. Vietnam veterans convey their personal war experiences through a variety of media on display here. One particularly moving artwork is, "Above & Beyond," a memorial sculpture made up of more than 58,000 dog tags suspended from the ceiling, each one imprinted with the name of a serviceman or woman who died in the war.

When it comes to getting around Chicago, probably no option is more fun or informative than that offered by [Chicago Trolley & Double Decker Co.](#) Not only are tours aboard the company's double-decker buses and trolleys entertainingly narrated, but you can hop on and off at most of the city's top attractions, offering you a very convenient way to sightsee.

Venturing just a few miles out into that vast metro area known as Chicagoland yields even more tourist draws well worth your time. The [Brookfield Zoo](#), a AAA GEM attraction in Brookfield just west of Chicago, treats animal lovers to a veritable Noah's Ark of exotic creatures too numerous to list, all housed in natural-looking enclosures. Dolphins splash about, gray wolves prowl around their lair and a troop of western lowland gorillas leisurely munch on fruits and leaves in some of the zoo's most popular exhibits.

If the zoo has whetted your appetite for the outdoors, then visit the [Morton Arboretum](#), a AAA-GEM attraction in Lisle, 25 miles west of the Loop. Established in 1922 by the owner of the Morton Salt Co., the 1,700-acre arboretum offers a pleasing counterpoint to Chicago's asphalt-and-steel landscape. You can roam paths around wetlands and lakes and through formal gardens and oak forests, and when you get tired, there's an open-air tram that tours the grounds.

Or if back-to-nature serenity isn't your thing, explore the opposite extreme at [Six Flags Great America](#), a AAA GEM theme park in Gurnee packed with enough roller coasters to keep your adrenaline levels high and, depending on your constitution, your stomach in knots all day. Motion simulators, carnival-style thrill rides and a Caribbean-themed water park round out the amusements on tap here.

See all the AAA recommended attractions for this destination.



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Events

In addition to its many cultural and historic landmarks, this destination hosts a number of outstanding festivals and events that may coincide with your visit. GEMs are “Great Experiences for Members.”

By Frank Swanson



While unnaturally green river water might cause alarm in other cities, in Chicago it's merely a sign that it's St. Patrick's Day. Along with the decades-old tradition of dyeing the Chicago River a lovely shade of emerald, the city celebrates with a lively procession—presided over by a queen riding in a horse-drawn carriage—along Columbus Drive through [Grant Park](#). Generous quantities of beer are dyed green during the festival, too.

The soulful sounds of gospel music resonate within [Millennium Park](#) in early June during the [Chicago Gospel Music Festival](#). The event brings together local and national artists for an inspirational weekend lineup highlighting both traditional and contemporary gospel styles, and each year the festival pays tribute to performers and others who have shaped gospel music.

Following hard on the Gospel Music Festival's heels is the city's largest musical event, the [Chicago Blues Festival](#), during which hundreds of thousands of blues fans converge on Grant Park for 4 days of Delta-style music. During the event, living blues legends from around the nation honor the memories of such blues icons as Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith and Muddy Waters.

For 10 days in late June and early July, Grant Park is transformed into one giant alfresco dining area for [Taste of Chicago](#) when dozens of Chicago restaurants dish out mouth-watering sample fare from tents arrayed along Columbus and Jackson drives. Whether you're in the mood for hamburgers or haute cuisine, you'll find something delicious to satisfy and once you've had your fill, you can settle down and listen to live music at one of the outdoor stages. Cooking demonstrations, street performers, a handful of carnival-style rides and an Independence Day fireworks extravaganza round out Taste of Chicago's schedule, which draws more than 3 million people each year.

An even more elaborate fireworks display illuminates the sky during [Venetian Night](#) in late July, which commences with a concert by the Grant Park Orchestra followed by a parade of boats sporting lighted decorations. The oldest event sponsored by the city, Venetian Night was first held in 1958 and takes its name from Venice, Italy, known for its centuries-old regattas and aquatic parades.

Another parade of sorts, this one above Lake Michigan, takes place in August during the [Chicago Air and Water Show](#). The highlight each year are the thrilling aerobatic performances of such flying teams as the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds and the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and precision sky diving by the likes of the U.S. Army Golden Knights Parachute Team. The 2-day show is crowded with performances that include stunt flying, ski shows and high-flying displays of state-of-the-art jet fighters and helicopters. Festivities center around North Avenue Beach, but other spots around the lakeshore offer vantage points as well.

The music returns to Grant Park in late August—this time with a Latin rhythm—during [Viva! Chicago Latin Music Festival](#). For one weekend you can tap your toes to the sounds of salsa, merengue and mariachi along the shores of Lake Michigan while eating traditional cuisine. Booths sell Latin American artwork and jewelry, too.

A week later, Grant Park swings to a different beat during the [Chicago Jazz Festival](#), which celebrates the city's role in music history with 3 days of performances by world-class musicians. You can listen to jazz in all its varieties—New Orleans, bebop, fusion and of course, Chicago—then stroll around the park and sip a glass of your preferred vino in the wine garden.

Hosting festival after festival, Grant Park certainly earns its reputation as the city's front yard, accommodating a Latin music festival one weekend and a jazz festival the next, with variety being the only constant. What next? How about Irish step dancers, highland athletics, a harp tent, a bagpipe circle and, in past years, a shepherding demonstration? That's right, in mid-September

[Celtic Fest Chicago](#) arrives at the lakeshore showcasing the culture of such far-flung locales as Brittany in France, Galicia in Spain and of course Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Country music fans in particular will want to attend the Chicago Country Music Festival, held in early October. Past performers include Faith Hill, Wynonna Judd, Loretta Lynn, Randy Travis, Keith Urban and Dwight Yoakam.

As the weather turns cooler in November, Chicagoans slip into sweaters and coats and stroll to Michigan Avenue to kick off the holiday season with the [Magnificent Mile Lights Festival](#), a AAA GEM event. For one weekend, choirs, carolers, ice-carving demonstrations and kid-friendly stage shows create an especially festive mood in Chicago's upscale shopping mecca. What's more, you can enjoy the brilliantly lit trees and extravagantly decked out store windows unveiled this weekend through the end of the year.

From Michigan Avenue, the holiday celebration moves to State Street for the [State Street Thanksgiving Parade](#), another AAA GEM event. Colorful floats, marching bands, equestrian units, gigantic balloons in the shapes of cartoon characters and roving theater groups performing samples of their latest shows draw hundreds of thousands of spectators despite the chilly temperatures.

See all the AAA recommended events for this destination.



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Chicago in 3 Days

Three days is barely enough time to get to know any major destination. But AAA travel editors suggest these activities to make the most of your time in Chicago.

By Frank Swanson

Day 1: Morning

Start your first day in the Windy City by heading to the Near North Side, which is just north of the Loop and the Chicago River. With so many hotels in the vicinity, you're probably staying nearby, but if not, take the Red Line CTA train to the Grand Station or take the Orange, Brown, Pink or Green lines to the State/Lake "L" Station in the Loop. If you haven't had breakfast at your hotel, try the café inside the Fox & Obel gourmet food market at 401 E. Illinois St. The breakfast panini with scrambled eggs, ham and Gruyère cheese is delicious. If you like to start your day with something sweet, order the challah French toast and for an extra bit of yumminess throw on some pecans, chocolate chips, bananas, strawberries or blueberries.



One of the best ways to get acquainted with Chicago is aboard a boat tour leaving from either the [Navy Pier](#), 600 E. Grand Ave., or the nearby Chicago Riverfront at Michigan Avenue and Wacker Drive. To get to the Navy Pier, hop on the free Navy Pier Trolley running daily 10-6 between the pier and State Street, Memorial Day through Labor Day. Just look for the "Navy Pier Trolley Stops" along Grand Avenue and Illinois Street.



[Shoreline Sightseeing](#) has a 1-hour architecture tour on the Chicago River that you don't have to be an architect to enjoy. As you float past some of the city's most famous buildings, an on-board guide shares entertaining stories and facts about Chicago's history, including the Great Fire of 1871 and the city's importance as birthplace of the skyscraper. Tours depart from the Ogden Slip dock near the Navy Pier's entrance. Shoreline offers other types of tours, including sunset and fireworks cruises, as well as water taxi service to locations along the lakefront. [Wendella Boats & Chicago Water Taxi](#) also offers hour-long architecture tours that are informative without being dull. Their excursions depart from a prime location at the foot of the Wrigley Building beside the Michigan Avenue Bridge. Choose whichever cruise company is most convenient; you can't go wrong with either one.

Afternoon

The Wrigley Building together with the Tribune Tower across the street forms a skyscraper gateway to Chicago's renowned Michigan Avenue shopping district popularly known as the Magnificent Mile (see Shopping under Things to Do). You'll only be able to scratch the surface of this shopping Shangri-la in a single afternoon, but if you're serious about exploring this mile-long corridor lined with high-end department stores, boutiques and vertical malls from one end to the other, be sure to slip on your most comfortable pair of get-around shoes.

To fuel your shopping spree, look no further than one of the plentiful corner coffee shops, chain restaurants or mall food courts. But if you make it to the northern end of the district, treat yourself to lunch at [Spiaggia](#) on the second floor of the One Mag Mile Building at Michigan Avenue and Oak Street. The stylish modern furnishings, sleek and spidery chandeliers and glossy marble columns will make you feel like you're spoiling yourself, and the soaring windows flood the restaurant with daylight as well as provide a nice view of Lake Michigan. While the ambience is a feast in itself, you'll probably enjoy the fresh-tasting Italian cuisine even more.

Evening

You've acquainted yourself with Chicago from street level (actually the river is several feet below the street), so now it's time to take in a bird's eye view of this vast metropolis. Head to John Hancock Center, a Mag Mile landmark looming more than a thousand feet above Michigan Avenue just a few yards from the castlelike Historic Water Tower. In addition to spectacular 360-degree views of the city, [The Hancock Observatory](#) on the 94th floor distributes handheld devices showing an amusing multimedia tour of the city and its history. One floor above is [The Signature Room at the 95th](#), a restaurant known for its views, its cocktails and its steaks and seafood. The traditional tourist uniform of shorts and a T-shirt are OK for lunch, but if you go there for dinner and the amazing nighttime views, you'll need to make a stop back at the hotel for a costume change. The Signature Room's dress code policy switches to business casual during dinnertime.

Day 2: Morning

Take a cab or train to [Millennium Park](#) and spend the morning exploring this striking and relatively new public space in the heart of Chicago. The closest "L" station is Randolph/Wabash in the Loop. Once the site of an ugly parking lot and rail yard, Millennium Park opened in 2004 to wide acclaim and has become one of the city's most visited places. The centerpiece Pritzker Pavilion, an outdoor concert venue, was designed by Frank Gehry and displays the artfully folded stainless steel shapes the architect is known for. A cage of gracefully curving stainless steel pipes forms a rooflike structure above the seating area and the Great Lawn, which together can accommodate 11,000 music lovers.

Complementing the park buildings that look like sculptures are the sculptures that are as big as buildings. Getting a picture of yourself reflected in the mirrored surface of "Cloud Gate," a 110-ton, kidney-bean-shaped arch, is something you shouldn't miss, and set aside a few minutes to sit and watch The Crown Fountain's 50-foot-high glass-brick video towers cycle through a succession of faces as they appear to spit water into a shallow basin. A thousand diverse

Chicagoans contributed their likenesses to this dynamic artwork, which in summer attracts crowds of laughing, splashing children.

Among the park's other focal points are the Millennium Monument, a Greek-style colonnade; 1,500-seat Harris Theater; McCormick Tribune Plaza and Ice Rink; and the Lurie Garden. With so many lawns, shrubs and trees, you might find it hard to believe that most of Millennium Park sits atop a parking garage. The silvery, serpentine BP Bridge, also designed by Frank Gehry, spans Columbus Drive, connecting the park with Daley Bicentennial Plaza.

Afternoon

You won't have to go far for lunch: the plaza surrounding "Cloud Gate" is actually the roof of [The Park Grill](#), an eatery serving salads and sandwiches including delicious hamburgers. In winter the restaurant's windows overlook the ice rink, which in summer becomes The Plaza at Park Grill, a coveted outdoor dining spot with frequent live entertainment. If the weather's especially nice and you really want to enjoy the park's lovely surroundings, phone in and order a picnic bag from the restaurant's Park Café.

Across Monroe Drive from Millennium Park is the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), one of the world's great art museums. What could be better than whiling away an afternoon among priceless treasures from around the world? You can get a sense of how comprehensive the museum's collection is by just wandering from gallery to gallery, strolling past Medieval suits of armor, ancient Asian sculptures of Buddha and impressionist and post-impressionist paintings by the likes of Cézanne, Degas, Gauguin, van Gogh, Manet, Monet, Renoir, Seurat and Toulouse-Lautrec. Or you can pick a specific collection and focus your efforts on, say, modern American art or photography or textiles. To enrich your experience, rent the institute's MP3 audio tour; it provides an overview of the vast collection you can tailor to your interests.

Evening

After several hours spent savoring some of the world's greatest art, it's time to sink your teeth into artwork of a different sort: Chicago-style deep dish pizza. [Lou Malnati's Pizzeria](#) in the Near North neighborhood called River North serves some of the best pizza in town; the closest CTA station is the Red Line's Grand Station at Grand Avenue and State Street. The restaurant's combination of fresh, mouth-watering ingredients with crispy, buttery crusts are to pizza lovers as paintings by Monet or Degas are to art aficionados. If you like spinach, mushrooms and sliced tomatoes, order the "Lou," a house specialty popular for its golden brown three-cheese topping of cheddar, mozzarella and Romano.

While you're in the River North area, stop by Blue Chicago, 736 N. Clark St., or Blue Chicago on Clark, 536 N. Clark St., both of which are just a few blocks away from Lou Malnati's, to sample some Chicago-style blues as you digest all that tasty Chicago-style pizza. The two locations are a mere 5 blocks apart and one cover charge admits you to both venues.

Day 3: Morning

Take a cab or catch a Red Line Train to Roosevelt Station and walk toward the lakefront to reach the Museum Campus, home to the [John G. Shedd Aquarium](#), the [Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum](#) and [The Field Museum](#). With more than 20 million specimens and counting, the Field Museum's collection is so vast you'd need days to truly do it justice. You can, however, get a wonderful overview during the free docent-led highlights tour, which lasts about 45 minutes, or request a self-guiding highlights tour handout.

If you'd rather ramble on your own through this beautiful marble building's echoing halls, be sure to see the following exhibits: Inside Ancient Egypt, Ancient Americas, Lions of Tsavo and Evolving Planet. You'll see mummies and hieroglyphs; a full-sized replica of the intricate Aztec Sun Stone; two preserved lions that in 1898 killed 128 African railroad workers; and a huge hall of dinosaurs that'll make you glad the last of the big-boned, toothy monsters died out 65 million years ago.

Afternoon

Lunch options are slim in the Museum Campus' immediate vicinity unless you're in the mood for fast food, although one exception is [The Chicago Firehouse Restaurant](#), which as you might

guess is inside a former fire station. The beautifully restored yellow-brick building, completed in 1905, has a lofty main dining room on the first floor complete with a stamped tin ceiling and original fire poles near the bar. The cuisine is classic American with a lunch menu of salads and gourmet sandwiches, including the house specialty hamburger with mushrooms, onions and applewood smoked bacon. Unfortunately the Chicago Firehouse is open only for private events during weekend lunch hours, so if you're visiting Saturday or Sunday, you're out of luck.

As an alternative, try the daily dim sum at [The Phoenix Restaurant](#), which is just a couple miles away from the Museum Campus and a short walk from the Cermak-Chinatown Station, the very next Red Line stop south of the Roosevelt Station. Colorful paintings contribute to the festive mood as you sample from an array of more than 50 dim sum delicacies, and on top of that there's a regular menu offering traditional Peking duck, sweet and sour pork, lemon chicken and orange beef along with fresh seafood and vegetarian tofu dishes.

There's still plenty to see and do back at the Museum Campus. Spend the rest of the afternoon among rare and unusual sea creatures bathed in wavering blue-green light in the Shedd Aquarium or stroll next door and explore the far reaches of the solar system beautifully represented by scale models at the Adler Planetarium. Or if it's a nice day, you can ramble about the southern end of expansive [Grant Park](#), known as Chicago's front yard.

Bordering the Museum Campus at the park's southwest corner is a somber art installation titled "Agora," an array of 106 headless cast-iron figures standing 9 feet tall created by Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. Find your way to Grant Park's centerpiece: [Buckingham Memorial Fountain](#), a massive pink marble affair often seen on postcards with the distinctive Chicago skyline behind. You might recognize the fountain from the opening credits of the 1990s sitcom "Married with Children."

Evening

While the stately marble museum temples surrounding Grant Park draw millions each year with their collections of paintings, sculpture, scientific exhibits and biological specimens, not all of Chicago's landmark institutions are so serious. Case in point, The Second City Theatre at 1616 N. Wells St. in Old Town near Lincoln Park. Since 1959 the performers at Second City have been cracking audiences up with their sketch and improvisational comedy antics, and the theater's list of alumni reads like a who's who of movie and television stars: Alan Arkin, Fred Willard, John Belushi, Bill Murray, John Candy, Mike Myers, Chris Farley, Steve Carell, Amy Sedaris, Stephen Colbert and Tina Fey, among others.

A tasty preshow dinner is only footsteps away at the [Adobo Grill](#) nextdoor to Second City. Specializing in Mexican regional cuisine, the restaurant takes its name from spicy adobo sauce made from ground chilies and herbs, and unsurprisingly (and deliciously) most of the entrees are "en adobo." Even more memorable than the featured sauce is the experience of having guacamole prepared at your table to suit your taste and the long drink menu with more varieties of tequila than seems possible.



Frank Swanson has been an editor in publishing at the AAA National Office since 1995. Despite having been born on an air force base in Germany, he considers himself a Florida native. In his teens he became disenchanted with the Sunshine State for its complete lack of mountains and began plotting his escape to any place that could offer him a respectable altitude change outside of an airplane. A relocation never happened, and over the years he has learned to love Florida for its history, its mild winters and its tropical foliage even though it has stubbornly remained flat as a pancake. (As a runner with problematic knees, Frank has learned that flat can be good.) For a change of pace, he enjoys traveling to locales with elevated areas and awesome vistas such as the Canadian Rockies, Utah's Zion Canyon and Hawaii, but he is always eager to return to the welcoming embrace of his home state's heat, humidity and friendly palmetto bugs as big as your fist.

Things to Do

Sightseeing

Boat Tours

Boat trips travel along the Chicago River, through the locks into Chicago Harbor and Lake Michigan.

Bus and Trolley Tours

One of the best ways to get oriented and view a multitude of sights in a short time is to take a bus tour. City orientation tours, including land and lake tours, are available at the Palmer House at 17 E. Monroe St. through American Sightseeing Tours, (312) 251-3100, and Gray Line, (312) 251-3107 or (800) 621-4153.

The city's tourism office presents a series of guided motor coach tours of Chicago's neighborhoods. Among the various options offered by Chicago Neighborhood Tours are Chinatown, Little Italy and the Mexican enclave of Pilsen and Little Village. Other tours incorporate Chicago cemeteries as well as Abraham Lincoln-related sights and the Pullman Historic District. The Hyde Park & Kenwood Tour includes President Obama's South Side neighborhood. Tours depart from the Chicago Cultural Center's 77 E. Randolph St. entrance at Michigan Avenue; phone (312) 742-1190 for reservations and schedule.

Driving Tours

Exploring the area's scenic bluffs and historic sites can be as simple as hopping in a car. Beginning in Illinois and ending in California, Route 66 served as an important link between the Midwest's rural communities and Chicago. The road now paves its way through America's cultural past, with an abundance of drive-in movie theaters, homey diners, vintage gas stations and other charming landmarks found along its course. Information and maps can be obtained from the Illinois Route 66 Heritage Project Inc.; phone (217) 525-9308 or (866) 378-7866.

Walking Tours

The Chicago Architecture Foundation Shop and Tour Center, 224 S. Michigan Ave., offers an array of walking tours as well as bus, boat and bicycle tours.

One of Chicago's many architectural landmarks is the Merchandise Mart, on the north bank of the Chicago River between Wells and Orleans streets. Covering two city blocks, it is one of the world's largest commercial buildings. About 7.5 miles of corridors link hundreds of wholesale showrooms that display millions of dollars' worth of commercial and home furnishings. Except for the shops on the first two floors, the Merchandise Mart is closed to the public. A guided walking tour, however, is available select Fridays at 1; phone (312) 527-7762 to confirm availability.

Also departing from the Chicago Cultural Center are free visitor orientation tours. The Chicago Greeter program offers 2- to 4- hour walking tours of more than 25 neighborhoods. Visitors are matched with local volunteer guides based on special interest and language. Visitors must register for tours at least 7 business days in advance; phone (312) 744-8000. Free 1-hour downtown walking tours departing from the InstaGreeter booth in the cultural center are offered on a first-come, first-served basis Fri.-Sun. 10-4.

Not all of Chicago's art is confined to museums. The Richard J. Daley Plaza, Washington and Dearborn streets, offers the controversial sculpture known as "The Chicago Picasso." Farther south on Dearborn, at the Chase Tower Plaza at Monroe Street, is "The Four Seasons," an acclaimed mosaic by Marc Chagall. The bright red "Flamingo" that dominates Chicago Federal Center Plaza, Adams and Dearborn streets, is by Alexander Calder.

Spectator Sports

Chicago is one of the nation's great sports cities. From the early days of the Bears' gridiron glory to the 1990s reign of Air Jordan, locals turn out in droves year-round to cheer the home teams on to glory.

Those who would rather watch than work at their sports will find a full calendar of both amateur and professional contests. Do not forget the college and university teams; they can provide as much

excitement as the professionals. A review of the sports and events pages in the daily newspapers will tell you who and what is scheduled where.

Baseball

The national pastime is alive and well in the Windy City, with teams from both professional leagues bringing the boys of summer to local stadiums. The Chicago Cubs have been an area fixture since baseball's origin in 1876; never-say-die fans still pack the stands of Wrigley Field, N. Clark and W. Addison streets, (773) 404-2827. And the Chicago White Sox play in U.S. Cellular Field, which stands at 333 W. 35th St., directly across the street from a parking lot that once held the original ballpark; phone (312) 674-1000.

Basketball

The Chicago Bulls, the first team ever to win 70 games in a season, delight the hometown crowd during games at the state-of-the-art United Center, 1901 W. Madison St.; phone (312) 455-4000.

College hoops fans have plenty of teams to cheer. The Chicago State University Cougars play at Jacoby Dickens Athletic Center, (773) 995-2217; the DePaul Blue Demons take the court at Allstate Arena, 6920 N. Mannheim Rd. in Rosemont, (847) 635-6601; the Loyola Ramblers can be seen at the Loyola University Joseph J. Gentile Center, (773) 508-2560; the home games of the Northeastern Illinois University Golden Eagles are at their Physical Education Complex at 3600 W. Foster Ave., (773) 442-4135; the Northwestern Wildcats defend their court at the Welsh-Ryan Arena, 1501 Central St. in Evanston, (847) 491-2287; and the University of Illinois at Chicago Flames meet their opponents at the UIC Pavilion, 1150 W. Harrison St., (312) 413-5740.

Football

The Chicago Bears boast a long and gloried history dating to 1921, the year the team moved to the Windy City. Fans clad in orange and blue still fill the bleachers of Soldier Field in support of the home team, even in the bitter cold of winter. The stadium is at 1410 S. Museum Campus Dr.; phone (847) 615-2327 for ticket information.

Oddly enough, the ultimate football town claims only one representative in NCAA Division I football: The Northwestern Wildcats take to the gridiron at Ryan Field, (847) 491-2287.

Hockey

Body checks and flying pucks are cheered with equal enthusiasm during the icy matchups of the Chicago Blackhawks at United Center, (800) 745-3000, and during Chicago Wolves games at Allstate Arena, (847) 724-4625.

Horse Racing

The Thoroughbreds run at Arlington Park, 25 miles northwest of Chicago in Arlington Heights on Euclid Avenue. Races are held early May through September; post times vary. General admission is \$7, under 17 free (with an adult); phone (847) 385-7500. Cicero's Hawthorne Race Course, 3501 S. Laramie Ave., offers Thoroughbred contests in spring and late fall. For information on post times phone (708) 780-3700.

Trotters and pacers command the course at Maywood Park, 8600 W. North Ave. at North and 5th avenues in Maywood. Races are held year-round; post times vary. For information phone (708) 343-4800. Some 35 miles south of Chicago, Balmoral Park, 26435 S. Dixie Hwy. (SR 1) at Elms Court Lane in Crete, offers year-round racing; dates vary. For details phone (708) 672-1414.

Note: Policies concerning admittance of children to pari-mutuel betting facilities vary. Phone for information.

Recreation

Chicagoans also get in on the action themselves. And why not? Whether basking in the sun along the shore of Lake Michigan or enjoying wintry excursions in the surrounding heartland, you'll find the city's many recreational facilities offer a scenic playground in any season.

Information about the large variety of recreational facilities available in the Greater Chicago area can be obtained from the Chicago Park District, 541 N. Fairbanks Ct., which distributes free brochures describing all its offerings; phone (312) 742-7529.

In addition the Forest Preserve District of Cook County distributes free brochures, maps and information detailing recreational opportunities at its headquarters, 536 N. Harlem Ave. in River Forest. For more specific information regarding activities on the Forest Preserve District's 68,000 acres, phone (800) 870-3666.

Bicycling

Cyclists will appreciate the 18-mile path paralleling Lake Michigan from Lincoln Park south to Rainbow Beach, but should keep a watchful eye for joggers, power walkers and inline skaters. The most scenic areas are concentrated among the museums, statuary and landscaped walkways of Lincoln and Grant parks.

Paths for bicycling also have been designated along some 20 miles of lakefront on the east bank of the North Shore Channel, the south end of which starts at W. Argyle Street. These paths are not continuous, and bicyclists must walk their bikes across intervening thoroughfares to the next trail. The path resumes on the west bank of the channel and continues north into the suburb of Skokie.

The Forest Preserve District maintains more than 109 miles of bicycle trails winding through Cook County's bucolic countryside. Bicyclists can ride continuously on the North Branch Class 1 Bicycle Trail from Caldwell and Devon to Lake County, about 20 miles north. The trail winds along the North Branch of the Chicago River, Skokie Lagoons and through the Chicago Botanic Garden. In addition there are 13 separate bicycle trails at each end of the county as well as more than 200 miles of trails for hiking and horseback riding.

Equipment rentals are available from Turin Bicycle in Evanston at 1027 Davis St., (847) 864-7660; at any of Bike Chicago's nine lakefront, riverfront and South Side locations: Millennium Park, 239 E. Randolph St., (312) 729-1000; Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand Ave., (312) 595-9600; Riverwalk at Wacker Drive and Columbus Street, (312) 729-1000; North Avenue Beach, 1603 N. Lakeshore Dr., (773) 327-2706; Foster Beach, 5200 N. Lakeshore Dr., (773) 275-2600; Oak Street Beach, Oak Street and Lake Shore Drive, (312) 729-1000; Ohio Street Beach, 400 N. Lake Shore Dr., (312) 729-1000; DuSable Museum, 740 E. 56th Place at S. Cottage Grove Avenue, (312) 729-1000; and Adler Planetarium, 1300 S. Lake Shore Dr., (312) 729-1000. Bike Chicago also offers tours of the city, free trail maps and Segway tours; phone (888) 245-3929.

A free copy of the "Chicago Bike Map" is available from the Chicago Department of Transportation, (312) 742-2453. Other cycling information is available from the Active Transportation Alliance, (312) 427-3325.

Fishing

Local waterways teem with varying combinations of smelt, smallmouth bass, carp, panfish, perch, brown trout, steelhead, walleye, pike, salmon and catfish. Harbors, piers and jetties along the Lake Michigan shoreline are popular, as are the Chicago Park District's two dozen ponds and lagoons. An Illinois fishing license, required for fishing any Illinois waters, is available for purchase at most local bait shops and at Mayor Daley's Fish 'N Kids HQ on Northerly Island, 1700 S. Lynn White Dr. For license, fishing and other area recreation information, phone the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at (217) 782-6302.

Besides designated Chicago piers on Lake Michigan—6900 N. Farwell Ave., 4400 N. Montrose Ave., 3600 N. Lake Shore Dr., 2700 N. Lake Shore Dr., 111 N. Lake Shore Dr., 3100 S. Lake Shore Dr., 5900 S. Lake Shore Dr., 6400 S. Lake Shore Dr. and 9600 S. Walton Dr.—lake fishing is permitted except where designated otherwise.

Surrounding locales also provide plenty of good angling. The Forest Preserve District manages three dozen sites ranging from lakes to sloughs. The organization also produces a fishing guide complete with maps of the primary lakes.

Charter boat excursions are available for going after coho and chinook salmon in Lake Michigan; for information phone Chicago Sportfishing Association Charter at (312) 922-1100. Anglers must comply with state laws, and ages 16-64 must have a valid license. Residents need a season license or a 24-hour Lake Michigan license; nonresidents can purchase a 24-hour, a 10-day (consecutive) or annual license. The annual license is \$24.50, 10-day \$13, 24-hour \$5.50, and a salmon or trout stamp is an additional \$6.50.

Golf

Chicago's harsh winters leave golfers yearning for spring. Golf enthusiasts can choose from the one 18-hole and five nine-hole courses of the Chicago Park District or from the eight 18-hole and two nine-hole courses operated by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Hours of operation and seasons vary. Generally, golf is possible from late March until November, depending upon weather and course conditions. The Forest Preserve District has three courses that are open throughout winter.

All of the following courses offer at least 18 holes and are open to the public. The Chicago Park District's 18-hole course is Jackson Park, 2 blocks east of Stony Island Avenue on 63rd Street, (773) 667-0524. Among the 18-hole courses operated by the Forest Preserve District are Burnham Woods, 142nd Street and 14201 Burnham Ave. in Burnham, (708) 862-9043; "Chick" Evans, 6145 Golf Rd. west of Harms Road in Morton Grove, (847) 965-5353; George W. Dunne, 163rd Street and 16310 S. Central Ave. in Oak Forest, (708) 429-6886; Joe Louis (The Champ), 131st Street and 13100 Halsted St. in Riverdale, (708) 849-1731; and River Oaks, 159th Street and 1 Park Ave. in Calumet City, (708) 868-4090.

Reduced fees are offered by the Forest Preserve District after 3 p.m. Special discounts are available for activity card holders, residents over 62 and under 18. Forest Preserve golf cards cost \$35 for Cook County residents and \$40 for non-residents. Rates may vary; phone ahead. Clubs and pull carts can be rented at the concession shops. For information about fees and tee times or to use an automated 24-hour tee-time registration system phone (800) 460-0010.

Hiking

Nature lovers can enjoy the more than 200 miles of scenic trails winding through the Forest Preserve District's prairie wilderness.

Horseback Riding

The Forest Preserve District also maintains bridle paths winding through the Cook County landscape; phone (773) 261-8400, (800) 870-3666, or (708) 366-9420 for information about licenses and trail maps.

Inline Skating

Inline skaters and bicyclists share the 18 miles of paths along Chicago's lakefront, both on the east and west banks of the North Shore Channel.

Jogging and Walking

Although the city is blessed with a multitude of parks and neighborhoods, your best bet for a stroll or run is along the lakefront trail, which from north to south passes through Lincoln, Grant, Burnham and Jackson parks near major museums and beaches. The campus of Northwestern University, north of the city in Evanston, provides a scenic setting for walkers and joggers.

Tennis

As evidenced by the Chicago Park District's 615-plus courts, tennis is a favorite sport of Chicagoans. The season begins around the middle of April, when players throng municipal facilities daily. Public courts operate on a first-come, first-served basis. For details phone the district at (312) 742-7529.

Richard J. Daley Bicentennial Plaza, in the Loop at 337 E. Randolph St., also is open to the public and features a dozen lighted courts; phone (312) 742-7650. Courts must be reserved. The

fee Saturday through Thursday is \$10 per hour, and typically, unless there is snow, they are open year-round.

Water Sports

With nearly 26 miles of shoreline fronting Lake Michigan and easy access to the Des Plaines, Calumet and Chicago rivers, Chicago is a water enthusiast's paradise. The Great Lake is a favorite spot for boating, sailing, swimming, water skiing and windsurfing. Contact the Chicago Park District, (312) 742-3224, for details about water recreation opportunities and local boating policies.

Lakefront launching ramps for motorboats are at 95th Street, Burnham Harbor, Jackson Park at Inner Harbor and Diversey Harbor. Jet skis are permitted at Calumet and Diversey harbors. For more information about permits call the Chicago Park District at (312) 742-8520.

Motorboats also are permitted on the Calumet, Chicago and Des Plaines rivers. The Little Calumet River boat dock is on the east side of Ashland Avenue, north of Jackson Avenue; the Plank Road Meadow launching ramp is north of Ogden Avenue, east of First Avenue. Other lakes and waterways do not permit motorboats; check with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Phone (800) 870-3666.

Canoes, rowboats and sailboats may be used on the following Forest Preserve District waterways (electric motors only): Big Bend Lake, Busse Lake, E.J. Beck Lake, Maple Lake, Powderhorn Lake, Saganashkee Slough, Skokie Lagoons, Tampier Lake and Turtlehead Lake. Contact district headquarters for restrictions and ramp locations. For canoeing and kayaking tours and Chicago River-related events as well as information on the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum, contact Friends of the Chicago River; phone (312) 939-0490, ext. 10.

Craft rentals are available through the Chicago Sailing Club in Lincoln Park's Belmont Harbor, (773) 871-7245, which also offers lessons to landlubbers; reservations are a good idea. Wateriders, 950 N. Kingsbury St. on the Riverwalk, offers kayak rentals and tours; phone (312) 953-9287.

Most major hotels have swimming pools, and the park district fills any gaps with more than 26 indoor and 51 outdoor pools. For locations and hours of operation phone (312) 742-7529. Popular beaches are those along the Lake Michigan shore from 9600 South to 7600 North. They are open daily 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Memorial Day through Labor Day. If you find yourself outside the city proper, take advantage of the Forest Preserve District's outdoor swimming areas: Cermak Family Aquatic Center, 7600 W. Ogden Ave. in Lyons, Whealan Pool at 6200 W. Devon Ave. in Chicago, and Green Lake Family Aquatic Center, at Torrence Avenue and 159th Street in Calumet City.

Winter Sports

Chicago's recreation scene thrives even in the dead of winter. The season generally runs from December through March, but can be longer at either end.

Ice-skating is available at nine Chicago Park District locations during the winter. One of the largest is the Midway Plaisance rink in a mile-long depression that is flooded for skating in winter between the double boulevard of the same name. Most rinks are open from late November to mid-March (weather permitting), admission is free and skate rentals are available. Admission to the indoor, year-round rink at McFetridge Sports Center, 3843 N. California Ave. in California Park, is \$2-\$5; skate rentals are available.

Ice-skating in winter and roller-skating the rest of the year are popular at the Richard J. Daley Bicentennial Plaza, 337 E. Randolph St. in Grant Park. The remaining five Park District locations are in McKinley (2210 W. Pershing Rd.), Mt. Greenwood (3721 W. 111 St.), Riis (6100 W. Fullerton Ave.), Rowan (11546 S. Ave. L), Warren (6601 N. Western Ave.), and West Lawn (4233 W. 65th St.) parks.

Perhaps the most renowned Chicago location is McCormick Tribune Ice Rink in Millennium Park,

which is one of the newest and most popular lakefront attractions (see attraction listing p.). This rink occupies 16,000 square feet on Michigan Avenue between Monroe and Randolph streets. Open from late November to mid March (weather permitting), the rink offers free admission and skate rentals are available.

Outside of Chicago the hardy can indulge in skating and ice fishing at designated Forest Preserve District sites. Skating is permitted at Barrington Road Pond, Buffalo Woods, Busse Woods (North Pool), Crawdad Slough, Deer Grove and Hidden Pond. Ice fishing is allowed at Arrowhead Lake, Axehead Lake, Beck Lake, Belleau Lake, Big Bend Lake, Bode Lake South, Busse Lake (Main and South pools only), Maple Lake, Powderhorn Lake, Saganashkee Slough, Sag Quarry West & East, Tampier Lake, Turtlehead Lake and Wampum Lake; phone (708) 771-1330 for information about other sites.

Snow skiing, while not available within the city limits, can be enjoyed at the Four Lakes Ski Area. For additional information contact the Chicago Metropolitan Ski Council, (312) 346-1268.

Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are offered weekends December through February 9-5 by the Chicago Park District at Northerly Island, 1400 S. Lynn White Dr., (312) 742-5039. Cross-country skis and snowshoes are available for free with an I.D. Ski rentals are available at Camp Sagawau, for use in that area only; phone (630) 257-2045.

The Forest Preserve District maintains several snowmobiling areas and sledding hills. There are five sledding and coasting hills with lighting that operates from 8 a.m.-10 p.m. (weather permitting). Snowmobiles are permitted at Miller Meadow, Morrill Meadow, Ned Brown Meadow, North Creek Meadow and Turtlehead Lake. Snowmobile areas are opened when a minimum 4-inch snow base exists on frozen turf. Snowmobiles must be registered with both the district and the state. The district charges a \$20 licensing fee for Cook County residents and a \$40 fee for non-residents.

Most Forest Preserve District winter activities are available daily 8-dusk (weather permitting); toboggan slides are open Mon.-Fri. 2-8, Sat.-Sun. 10-10. For information, phone (800) 870-3666.

Shopping

Even if you hate shopping and only set foot in a store when absolutely necessary, you owe it to yourself to stroll along the part of Michigan Avenue running from the Chicago River north to Oak Street in Chicago's Near North Side. This glass, steel and concrete canyon bears the august designation of "The Magnificent Mile," a title that would seem like just another overwrought marketing gimmick cooked up by Chicago tourism boosters if it wasn't—in many senses—true.

And what's so magnificent about it? First, there's all the high-end merchandise available. Cartier, Chanel, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Van Cleef & Arpels, the list goes on. It's a who's who of luxury retailers catering to people who aren't concerned with little things like budgets or price tags. If you're at all interested in how the other half lives, or if you are a member in good standing of that fortunate other half, then the Magnificent Mile certainly lives up to its name.

But what's just as magnificent about this mile-long stretch (yes, the length is accurate, too) of Michigan Avenue is the sheer number of stores (more than 450) and the variety of goods for sale. And "The Mag Mile" doesn't just aim to please deposed kings, socialites and trust-fund babies but those of more modest means as well. Mixed in with all the fancy boutiques are names recognizable from any suburban mall: Borders, Express, The Gap, Guess, Levi's, Nike, Nine West, The North Face and Williams-Sonoma, to name just a few. You'll also find the impressive flagship store for Crate & Barrel, which opened its first store nearby in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood in 1962.

And speaking of malls, the Magnificent Mile has a few of those, too. Instead of sprawling across acres and acres as they do in outlying areas, these urban shopping centers occupy multiple levels in tall buildings. Among Chicago's signature vertical malls are The Shops at North Bridge, anchored by Nordstrom; Chicago Place, anchored by Saks Fifth Avenue; Water Tower Place, anchored by Macy's; and The 900 Shops, anchored by Bloomingdale's.

As if this weren't enough, most of the side streets leading to Michigan Avenue are lined with even

more stores. And once you've reached the northern end of the mile, you know you've arrived at Chicago's ritzy Gold Coast neighborhood when you turn the corner on Oak Street and see brownstones occupied by salons, spas and more upscale boutiques: Agent Provocateur, Furla, Hermès, Jimmy Choo and Kate Spade among them.

Beyond all the glitz, glamour and raw consumerism you can revel in along the Mag Mile, there are restaurants, mall food courts and hotels. You'll find more hotels here in the Near North Side than just about any other neighborhood in Chicago, making the Mile as much a tourist district as Grant Park and the museums farther south.

And apparently believing that all the window-browsing and people-watching might not be enough to keep shoppers coming back, the local business association keeps things festive throughout the year by changing out elaborate seasonal garden displays in sidewalk planters: flowers in spring, lush tropical foliage in summer, twinkling lights in tree branches during fall and winter. Adding to this shopping mecca's charm: horse-drawn carriages for hire navigating the busy avenue.

Another reason to take at least an afternoon to explore the Magnificent Mile, one that even the shopping-averse can appreciate: four of Chicago's great architectural landmarks. Creating a kind of grand gateway to the Magnificent Mile along the Chicago River are the landmark Tribune Tower and Wrigley Building, symbols of pre-Depression prosperity and optimism and emblems of the city itself.

Then several blocks north there's the Gothic Revival-style Water Tower, a famous survivor of the Great Fire of 1871 and monument to the city's endurance. It's decorative battlements and rough-hewn façade give the area around it the feeling of a theme park, which in a way, the Mag Mile is—if lavish spending can be considered a theme. Across the street is the 100-story John Hancock Center with its iconic X-shaped exterior bracing; its Michigan Avenue side has a broad below-ground plaza lined with shops and restaurants and featuring landscaped planters and a large curtain waterfall.

Although it's the unrivaled centerpiece of the Chicago shopping experience, the Magnificent Mile isn't the only game in town. About 2 miles north in the affluent Lincoln Park neighborhood, several blocks west of its namesake park, is a shopping district with a far more intimate, low-profile character. Instead of skyscrapers and vertical malls, the buildings here are mostly beautifully ornamented Victorian row houses with fanciful turrets and three- and four-story brick commercial buildings. The easiest way to get there is to take the Brown Line train to Armitage Avenue. Shops are concentrated along Armitage east to Halsted Street, on Halsted north to Webster Street, and on Webster west of Halsted.

Along the tree-shaded sidewalks are small shops selling all sorts of high-end merchandise including clothing (mostly women's but some men's), handbags, jewelry, lingerie, shoes, cosmetics, home furnishings and stationery. The most memorable store name you'll come across: a children's clothing store called Stinky Pants.

Just a few blocks southwest from the Armitage Brown Line station, at Clybourn Avenue and Wisconsin Street, is the Clybourn Galleria, a relatively new red-brick shopping center with such national chains as Talbots, Ann Taylor Loft and Jos. A. Bank.

And close by at the next intersection, Clybourn and Willow Street, is Clybourn Place, a plaza where the stores have commonplace names you'd recognize from just about any mall in America.

Nestled between Lincoln Park to the north and Gold Coast to the south, the Old Town neighborhood has its own shopping corridor along Well Street between North Avenue and Division Street. The closest "L" stop is the Sedgwick Station on the Brown Line, 4 blocks west of Wells. Though somewhat less exclusive than the boutiques along Armitage, the shops here are hardly run-of-the-mill. In addition to some interesting independent clothing and accessory retailers, there are stores selling fudge, specialty olive oils and vinegars, tobacco and even one dedicated entirely to exotic spices. Enhancing the experience are sidewalk cafés, shade trees, a series of plaques describing Old Town's history as well as intricate wrought-iron gateways every few blocks bearing signs reminding you what neighborhood you're in.

For a funky alternative to Chicago's fancy boutiques, head to Wicker Park and the adjacent

neighborhood known as Bucktown. The Blue Line's Damen Station is the most convenient, since shops are concentrated near where Damen, North and Milwaukee avenues come together. Far less gentrified than Old Town and Lincoln Park, the Wicker Park/Bucktown area is younger, edgier and more diverse, and the stores lining Damen north to Armitage, Milwaukee south to Division and Division west to Damen reflect that Bohemian character.

You'll find stores selling vintage clothing, used records and retro furniture mixed in among boutiques filled with fashion-forward apparel, shoes and accessories. One of Wicker Park's landmarks is the Flat Iron Arts Building nestled in the crook of North and Milwaukee avenues. Described as an "urban arts colony," this three-story Greek Revival building constructed in 1913 now houses art studios, galleries and performance spaces.

Of course, one of Chicago's most famous districts is its downtown core known as the Loop, named so for the circle of elevated train tracks that mark its boundaries. Unfortunately, shopping in the Loop is not what it used to be. Marshal Field's and Carson Pirie Scott, the grand old department stores that once anchored the area are gone, and tellingly it's now called the State Street Retail Historic District, stress on the historic.

But not all the Loop's retail glory is in the past. Macy's now occupies the Marshal Field's building at 111 N. State St., where the iconic clocks still tick away the hours at the building's northwest and southwest corners, and shoppers still crane their necks to view the beautiful Tiffany & Co. mosaic ceiling inside. Sears is just a block away at the corner of State and Madison streets, and discount departments stores, suburban mall-type chains, book stores and souvenir shops are everywhere. One note of caution: because many stores in the Loop cater to office workers, you're likely to find places closed on the weekends the farther you wander from State Street.

Nightlife

If you're staying at a hotel in downtown Chicago, odds are good you're either in the Loop or the Near North Side where the lion's share of hotels are. Although they don't quite roll up the Loop's sidewalks after 5 p.m., your after hours entertainment options in Chicago's main business district are limited. Fortunately the Near North Side is just a short cab or train ride away.

One Chicago experience you shouldn't miss, especially if this is your first visit to the Windy City, is a dose of that particular flavor of blues music born here in the middle of the last century. Two nightspots in the Near North district known as River North specialize in just such an experience: Blue Chicago (736 N. Clark St.) and Blue Chicago on Clark (536 N. Clark St.).

Locals might complain how touristy these places are, but if you want a Chicago blues souvenir to take back home—say a poster, T-shirt or CD—you've come to the right place. More importantly, the music is great, with some of Chicago's best singers and musicians performing here (count on hearing "Sweet Home Chicago"). An added bonus: one admission covers both clubs, so if the music disappoints at one, you can walk a short 5 blocks to the other without handing over more cash. Phone (312) 642-6261 for Blue Chicago or (312) 661-0100 for Blue Chicago on Clark.

Just a couple blocks over from Clark Street is another interesting River North club, but instead of being all about the blues, this one specializes in bubbly. Pops for Champagne (601 N. State St.) offers a dizzying choice of champagnes and sparkling wines in a stylish, modern setting complete with flat screen televisions, high-tech lighting and glossy tabletops made of glass, granite and marble. Downstairs from the street-level entrance is a cozy lounge with rough stone walls where you can sit and enjoy live jazz while nibbling something from their menu of accompaniments that includes wonderful pates, cheeses and desserts. Phone (312) 266-7677.

Although Chicago can't claim the world's tallest skyscraper anymore, its towers are still among the highest to be found anywhere, and a trip up to the observation level at either the Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower) in the Loop or Magnificent Mile's John Hancock Center for a birds-eye view is an essential Chicago experience. One nighttime twist on this is a visit to The Signature Room at the 95th (875 N. Michigan Ave.) in the Hancock Center. The Art Deco-style prints and murals are nice, the cocktails diverse and tasty (though expensive), but make no mistake, it's the sweeping vista that really draws the crowds. Because it's so popular, be prepared for a wait most evenings. Phone (312) 787-9596.

Just a couple blocks away in the venerable Drake Hotel (140 E. Walton St.) is a local institution of the first order that's been wetting the whistles of Chicagoans since the day after Prohibition ended. The first-floor Coq d'Or retains the feel of the last century with leather upholstery, dim lighting and a drink menu highlighting old-school martinis. In addition to hotel guests and other visitors, you're likely to spot some colorful local regulars who seem as much a part of the setting as the dark wood paneling. Phone (312) 787-2200.

Other high-end hotels in the neighborhood have lounges with their own particular charms. The posh Four Seasons Hotel (120 East Delaware Pl.) has the beautifully appointed Seasons Bar, an intimate place filled with rich woods, freshly cut flowers and glimmering brass chandeliers. The seventh-floor setting is so sumptuous (although windowless), you might feel underdressed no matter what you're wearing despite business casual being the general rule among bar patrons. Phone (312) 280-8800.

At the nearby Park Hyatt (800 N. Michigan Ave.) is the Garden at NoMI, an outdoor summer terrace on the seventh floor that's perfect for an early evening drink and a sushi appetizer. It's a pricey splurge (it is the Magnificent Mile after all) but enjoying the balmy weather surrounded by skyscrapers and with the traffic noise muffled by the terrace's height is worth it. The indoor lounge area adjacent to the Garden at NoMI is luxurious and not a bad alternative during inclement weather. Phone (312) 239-4030.

A couple blocks north and west is where the über-affluent Near North Side neighborhood aptly called Gold Coast begins. If you're searching for a late-night destination to rendezvous with friends, there's Le Passage (937 N. Rush St.) featuring both a restaurant, entered from Rush Street, and a dance club you enter from a cobblestone alley at the side of the building. Subdued amber lighting, wood paneling and columns adorned with reddish brown tiles give this intimate club a warm, sophisticated look, and the dance music and drinks are top-notch. Phone (312) 255-0022.

Right around the corner, the Underground Wonder Bar (10 E. Walton St.) has been hosting jazz and blues jam sessions into the wee hours since singer/songwriter Lonie Walker opened the place in 1989. Despite its small size, the venue looms large in the Near North music scene, and its history is documented in the posters and signed photos crammed onto the walls. While jazz and blues dominate the weekly schedule, don't be surprised to hear folk, funk and reggae in this casual below street-level venue. Phone (312) 266-7761.

Two more of Chicago's favorite blues haunts nearly face each other from opposite sides of Halsted Street in the Lincoln Park neighborhood: B.L.U.E.S. (2519 N. Halsted St.) and just up the road Kingston Mines (2548 N. Halsted St.). Regulars have their opinions about which one is best, but if you're a blues fan, you can't go wrong with either one. Locals affectionately refer to both as "dives," so don't expect Magnificent Mile ostentation, but you can count on hearing great music from local performers. Kingston Mines offers a kind of two-for-one deal by keeping two bands playing on two stages at the same time; phone (773) 477-4646. The cover at B.L.U.E.S. is usually cheaper, the setting a bit grittier, and you'll have to make do with one high-energy rhythm-and-blues act at a time; phone (773) 528-1012.

About a mile up the road brings you into the Lakeview neighborhood and the gay enclave centered on Halsted Street known as Boys Town. Several gay bars and dance clubs line Halsted, but one on Belmont Avenue has welcomed a diverse crowd of gays and straights since the 1980s. Virtually in the shadow of the Red Line's elevated tracks, Berlin (954 W. Belmont Ave.) is known for its first-rate sound system as well as its eclectic play lists, décor and patrons. Berlin's live-and-let-live style harkens back to the anything-goes cabarets of Europe in the '20s but updated to appeal to 21st-century clubbers. Weekly theme nights are dedicated to electronica, alternative, pop and old school with monthly celebrations of disco, Madonna and Prince. Phone (773) 348-4975.

If Berlin seems a bit cramped and you have the urge to bust a move on a bigger dance floor, head to Crobar (1543 N. Kingsbury St.), a two-level warehouse-style dance emporium in Old Town that has all the computerized lights, heavy-duty sound and pretty people you'd expect in a big-city club. Resident DJs trade off with celebrity guests from around the world, and four bars keep dancers from getting too thirsty. Phone (312) 266-1900.

A similar experience closer to Near North Side hotels is the River North dance complex known as

Excalibur (632 N. Dearborn St.). You wouldn't expect to find a high-tech nightclub in a massive 19th-century Romanesque Revival building (looking like something between a church and a castle) that once housed the Chicago Historical Society, but the contrast between exterior and interior is just part of Excalibur's allure. Inside is a maze of rooms with dance floors, lounge areas and stages; unfortunately there's often a separate admission charged to get into each area. Phone (312) 266-1944.

Just north of the Boystown district in Lakeview is Wrigley Field, centerpiece of a sports bar-packed neighborhood unsurprisingly called Wrigleyville. Evenings here generally come in two flavors: game and non-game days. When Chicago's beloved Cubs are playing at home, the atmosphere in the area resembles a carnival with crowds of raucous fans living it up. On non-game days the mood can still be pretty festive but without the hordes.

Murphy's Bleachers (3655 N. Sheffield Ave.) happens to be one of the most popular, partly because it's an institution that's been around for decades and partly because it's right across the street from Wrigley Field. Murphy's has outdoor seating, lots of televisions, a large selection of beers and enough Cubs memorabilia on its walls for a museum. And thanks to its proximity and a deal with the Chicago Cubs, Murphy's has legally installed bleachers up on its roof with a coveted view of right center field. One of the neighborhood's "Wrigley Rooftops," the bleachers of Murphy's Bleachers can be reserved but only by large groups. Phone (773) 281-5356 for the sports bar.

Another of Chicago's most coveted spots is a table near the stage at Buddy Guy's Legends (754 S. Wabash Ave.) in the South Loop neighborhood. This landmark club, owned by five-time Grammy Award winner Buddy Guy, who also frequently performs there, is a must for any blues fan. Like the name says, legends have played here, and the club books top contemporary and local talent seven nights a week. Unfortunately the celebrated blues venue will be closing its Wabash location in 2009, but the club promises to reopen at a new location nearby soon after. Phone (312) 427-1190 or (312) 427-0333.

Performing Arts

Chicago's world-class cultural amenities set trends as well as standards. The arts are showcased in numerous venues and often are the focus of area events.

The city's artistic contributions can be seen within a variety of media, including television. Between 1949 and 1955 the Chicago School of Television, as five locally produced NBC programs came to be known, was heralded for broadcasting original ideas and utilizing inventive production techniques.

Oprah Winfrey became a television pioneer after relocating to the city in 1984; she established her own Chicago production facility just 4 years later. Harpo Studios, 1058 W. Washington Blvd., is home to "The Oprah Winfrey Show," which is broadcast internationally in 132 countries. Tickets to the show, taped January through May and August through November, are hard to come by, and reservations must be made in advance through the studio's Audience Department; phone (312) 633-0808.

Ballets, concerts and legitimate theater productions with big-name entertainers are presented at Chicago's largest indoor theater, the Arié Crown Theatre, (312) 791-6190, in McCormick Place at 23rd Street and the lakefront. McCormick Place is reputed to be the largest exhibition and trade show facility in the Northern Hemisphere, featuring major shows throughout the year. Performances also are held at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, (312) 922-2110, 50 E. Congress Pkwy.; Chicago Theatre, (312) 462-6300, on State and Lake streets; and Rosemont Theatre, (847) 671-5100, at 5400 N. River Rd. in Rosemont.

Other cultural centers that offer lectures and present dance and classical concerts include the Chicago Cultural Center, at Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street, and the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, (847) 448-8260, 927 Noyes St., in nearby Evanston. Consult the newspapers for complete information.

Dance

Small dance ensembles bring fluid expression and graceful moves to every corner of the city. The

Chicago Dance & Music Alliance, (312) 987-9296, provides the (312) 987-1123.

Specializing in classical dance, Ballet Chicago, (312) 251-8838, has a fondness for Balanchine pieces. American styles are the forte of the Hubbard Street Dance Chicago troupe, (312) 850-9744, whose eclectic—and electric—performances honor such greats as Bob Fosse and Twyla Tharp. The Joffrey Ballet, (312) 739-0120, melds classic tradition and contemporary ideas into a unique vision of American dance.

Professional modern dance concerts are featured at the Dance Center of Columbia College, (312) 344-8300, 1306 S. Michigan Ave., which sponsors a varied schedule anchored by the resident Mordine & Company Dance Theatre.

Film

Chicago was the original Tinseltown. Film pioneers of the early 1900s produced short “moving pictures” through such ventures as Essanay Studios, employer of the young Charlie Chaplin.

Independent theaters honoring the city's cinematic legacy include Facets Multimedia, 1517 W. Fullerton Ave., and Chicago Filmmakers, 5243 N. Clark St.; phone (773) 281-9075 and (773) 293-1447, respectively. Both screen experimental and obscure works by international artists. Music Box Theater is a large movie house at 3733 N. Southport Ave., (773) 871-6604, which offers acclaimed art films and documentaries. The Gene Siskel Film Center at the School of the Art Institute, (312) 846-2600, augments its dynamic schedule of independent efforts, revivals and retrospectives with lectures and classes.

Music

Chicago's music is almost unlimited in scope. Since its founding in 1891, the world-class Chicago Symphony Orchestra has established a tradition of excellence that has come to define symphonic music. Its devoted following virtually guarantees sold-out performances at stately Orchestra Hall, 220 S. Michigan Ave. The regular season features a blend of classical and contemporary pieces, in addition to CSO Presents, a diverse concert series. For schedule and ticket information phone (312) 294-3000. Future stars can be heard in the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the symphony's ensemble of musicians in training.

The Ravinia Music Festival in Highland Park, a northern suburb, features a 12-week program, composed of a variety of concerts, dance and popular events presented daily. Internationally known artists and conductors take part. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is featured for 8 weeks. For prices and information phone (847) 266-5100.

Chicago Chamber Musicians, (312) 225-5226, sponsors respected touring groups. Performances are given at DePaul University Concert Hall, 800 W. Belden Ave. on the DePaul University campus, and Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, 50 Arts Circle Dr. at Northwestern University in Evanston.

Chicago Chamber Orchestra, (312) 357-1551, and Chicago Ensemble, (773) 889-4206, strike an eclectic note with classical and contemporary concerts at Chicago Cultural Center and The Three Arts Club, 1300 N. Dearborn Pkwy. Twentieth-century music is the province of Concertante di Chicago, performing at DePaul Concert Hall. The Contemporary Chamber Players perform at the University of Chicago, (773) 702-8068.

The Grant Park Symphony Orchestra entertains thousands of picnickers with free concerts at the Petrillo Band Shell in Grant Park on Wednesdays and Friday through Sunday, late June through August; phone (312) 742-4763, or (312) 742-7638 for the administrative offices.

One of Orchestra Hall's most revered traditions is the Christmastime performance of Handel's Messiah by the Apollo Chorus of Chicago, the city's oldest choir. The group also gives spring concerts at other venues; for information phone (312) 427-5620. Formed under the auspices of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1957, the Chicago Symphony Chorus, (312) 294-3000, since has come into its own; it performs classical and modern pieces by itself and with the symphony at Orchestra Hall.

Music of the Baroque, (312) 551-1414, and the Oriana Singers, (773) 262-4558, focus primarily on 17th-century music but have branched out into other periods from time to time. The William Ferris Chorale, (773) 325-2000, specializes in modern composers. All perform throughout the year at various sites.

Opera

The city's premier company, Lyric Opera of Chicago performs classical and contemporary works at Civic Opera House, (312) 332-2244, 20 N. Wacker Dr.

Several smaller companies offer light fare in more intimate venues. English-language compositions are the fare of the contemporary Chicago Opera Theater, which performs at the Athenaeum Theatre at 2936 N. Southport. Operettas and musicals dominate the repertoire of the Light Opera Works, (847) 869-6300, with performances held at the Cahn Auditorium on the Northwestern University campus.

Theater

Most of the houses that have become the main strongholds of legitimate theater are downtown. The grand dame of Chicago theater is The Goodman Theater, (312) 443-3800, 170 N. Dearborn St., whose reputation for excellence hasn't precluded innovation. Both Broadway shows and experimental productions are offered at Bank of America Theatre (formerly the LaSalle Bank Theatre), (312) 977-1700, 18 W. Monroe St, and productions also can be seen at the Chicago Theatre.

The Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, 50 E. Congress Pkwy., was designed by Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler in the 1880s and continues to serve as an active theater; phone (312) 922-2110.

Cultural diversity is a common thread in Court Theatre efforts at the University of Chicago, 5535 S. Ellis Ave., although the company also mines the classics on occasion; phone (773) 753-4472. The Chicago Shakespeare Theater presents plays by the bard year-round at Navy Pier; phone (312) 595-5600.

Summer has attractions of its own. The Chicago Park District offers a summer theater, Theater on the Lake, at Fullerton Avenue and Lake Shore Drive; phone (312) 742-7994. Shows begin at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, June through August.

The First Midwest Bank Amphitheater, a 30,000-seat outdoor amphitheater at Ridgeland Avenue and Flossmoor Road in Tinley Park, offers concerts by top-name performers; phone (708) 614-1616.

Chicago also has many notable off-Loop theaters as well as several suburban playhouses that have been converted from abandoned warehouses, old ballrooms and garages. Since the flood of talent that swept through the city's North Side in the mid-1970s, the off-Loop theater circuit has become a launching pad for several Broadway shows.

Prominent off-Loop theaters include Apollo Theater Center, (773) 935-6100, 2540 N. Lincoln Ave.; Royal George Theatre Center, (312) 988-9000, 1641 N. Halsted St.; and Victory Gardens Theatre, (773) 871-3000, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave. The Blue Man Group offers outside-the-box performances at the off-Loop Briar Street Theatre, 3133 N. Halsted St.; phone (773) 348-4000.

The Steppenwolf Theatre Company conquered Broadway in 1990 with its Tony award-winning rendition of "The Grapes of Wrath." The ensemble, which performs at 1650 N. Halsted St., is noted for daring performances by such actors as John Mahoney, John Malkovich, Laurie Metcalf and Gary Sinise; phone (312) 335-1650.

Among the best known suburban theaters are the Drury Lane Theatre Oakbrook Terrace, (630) 530-8300, 100 Drury Ln. in Oakbrook Terrace; Drury Lane Theatre Evergreen Park, (708) 422-0404, 2500 W. 95th St. in Evergreen Park; and Marriott's Theater, (847) 634-0200, 10 Marriott Dr. in Lincolnshire. In addition several colleges offer a variety of productions.

Next Theatre Company, (847) 475-1875, tackles social issues in an avant-garde style. The Next performs at 927 Noyes St. in Evanston. For interactive theater try the Neo-Futurarium, 5153 N. Ashland Ave., where offerings veer sharply off the beaten path; phone (773) 275-5255. At the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, 9501 Skokie Blvd., (847) 673-6300, new plays by emerging writers are showcased by the troupe of the Northlight Theatre, (847) 673-6300.

Half-price tickets for most Chicago plays can be purchased on the day of performance at the Hot Tix outlets inside the Chicago Tourism Center at 72 E. Randolph or at the Chicago Water Works Visitor Center at Michigan Avenue and Pearson Street. Both locations are open Tues.-Sat. 10-6, Sun. 11-4.

Insider Info

Attraction Passes

CityPass offers savings to those who plan visits to many Chicago attractions. The pass covers the price of admission to the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum, The Field Museum, the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Museum of Science and Industry (including the OMNIMAX theater) as well as admission to either The Hancock Observatory or the Skydeck Chicago.

A pass, valid for 9 days once the first attraction is visited, is \$66; \$54 (ages 3-11). CityPass is available from participating attractions; phone (707) 256-0490 for recorded information, or (888) 330-5008.

[Go Chicago Card](#) is an all-access attraction pass offering admission to more than 30 Chicago area attractions. The card, which is purchased by the day (1,2,3,5 or 7 consecutive calendar days), includes sightseeing tours, museums and historic sites. Among them are a hop-on, hop-off trolley tour; the John G. Shedd Aquarium; the Art Institute of Chicago; The Field Museum; the Museum of Science and Industry; Navy Pier attractions; and an architecture cruise. The card is priced as low as \$23 per day (based on a 7-day card) and can be purchased from Gray Line of Chicago at The Palmer House Hilton Hotel, 17 E. Monroe St. For more information about the Go Chicago Card, phone (800) 887-9103.

The Columbian Exposition

By Frank Swanson

In 1890, Chicagoans scored a surprising coup when they beat out New York, St. Louis and Washington, D.C., for the privilege of hosting the World's Columbian Exposition. With this honor, citizens of this still-young city stepped into the global spotlight and accepted the challenge of organizing a world's fair that would outdo the immensely successful Paris Exposition of 1889, which premiered the Eiffel Tower among other modern wonders. At stake was not only Chicago's reputation, but that of the entire nation.



Envisioned as a celebration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyages, the exposition was set to open in 1892, giving the fair's organizer's barely two years to turn swampy [Jackson Park](#) on Lake Michigan into a vast showplace for international commerce, culture, science and technology. The fair's Director of Works Daniel Burnham, architect of some of Chicago's first skyscrapers, enlisted a who's who of American architects and planners, including Frederick Law Olmstead, designer of New York's Central Park. Together they and an army of laborers and craftspeople transformed a desolate lakefront into a Beaux Arts wonderland of soaring columns, classical statuary and majestic domes.

The cavernous Manufacturers and Liberal Arts building, crowded with the latest products of an industrial society, was at the time the largest building ever constructed. Electric boats glided across a lagoon encircling a bucolic wooded island, and at night, a dazzling array of electric lights outlined each building and illuminated the grounds, a sight unlike anything most fairgoers—accustomed to kerosene lamps and natural gas flames—had ever encountered.

In contrast to the monumental architecture and edifying exhibits of the main fairgrounds, the exposition's Midway Plaisance was packed with amusements, including concessions designed to look like villages from exotic lands along with America's answer to the Eiffel Tower—the world's first Ferris wheel, an awesome, 260-foot-tall steel contraption with 36 cars, each one large enough to carry 60 passengers.

Today, few signs of the great fair remain. Most of its marvels were temporary steel-framed structures with wooden exteriors coated in stucco, an easily molded stucco-like material. What's more, a period of labor unrest following the fair coincided with a suspicious fire that destroyed many of the fair's grandest buildings. Even the Ferris wheel's novelty faded, and it was eventually dynamited and sold for scrap.

The only major exposition building left behind in Jackson Park, the Palace of Fine Arts, now houses the [Museum of Science and Industry](#). Olmstead's lagoon and wooded island remain, though somewhat altered, along with a one-third scale replica of "The Republic," the 65-foot-tall gilded statue of a woman in robes and armor that presided over the exposition and came to symbolize its grandeur.

But the fair's legacy extends far beyond its scarce physical remnants. [The Field Museum](#), then called the Columbian Museum of Chicago, was established to house the exposition's biological and anthropological exhibits, and the current Beaux Arts home of the [Art Institute of Chicago](#) in [Grant Park](#) was built for the exposition's scholarly meetings.

The exposition's influence can be seen in everything from electricity delivered via alternating current to modern theme parks. American companies debuted such now-familiar products as Cracker Jack, Cream of Wheat and Juicy Fruit gum at the fair. And what carnival would be complete today without a Ferris wheel or a ride-packed midway, a word that entered English courtesy of the exposition's Midway Plaisance?

With the fair's success, Chicago elevated itself among the world's great cities and thumbed its figurative nose at Eastern naysayers. The city pays tribute to this historic event within its municipal flag; of the four red stars prominently arrayed across the flag's center, one represents the World's Columbian Exposition.

Frank Swanson has been an editor in publishing at the AAA National Office since 1995. Despite having been born on an air force base in Germany, he considers himself a Florida native. In his teens he became disenchanted with the Sunshine State for its complete lack of mountains and began plotting his escape to any place that could offer him a respectable altitude change outside of an airplane. A relocation never happened, and over the years he has learned to love Florida for its history, its mild winters and its tropical foliage even though it has stubbornly remained flat as a pancake. (As a runner with problematic knees, Frank has learned that flat can be good.) For a change of pace, he enjoys traveling to locales with elevated areas and awesome vistas such as the Canadian Rockies, Utah's Zion Canyon and Hawaii, but he is always eager to return to the welcoming embrace of his home state's heat, humidity and friendly palmetto bugs as big as your fist.

