

# The Best of Chicago

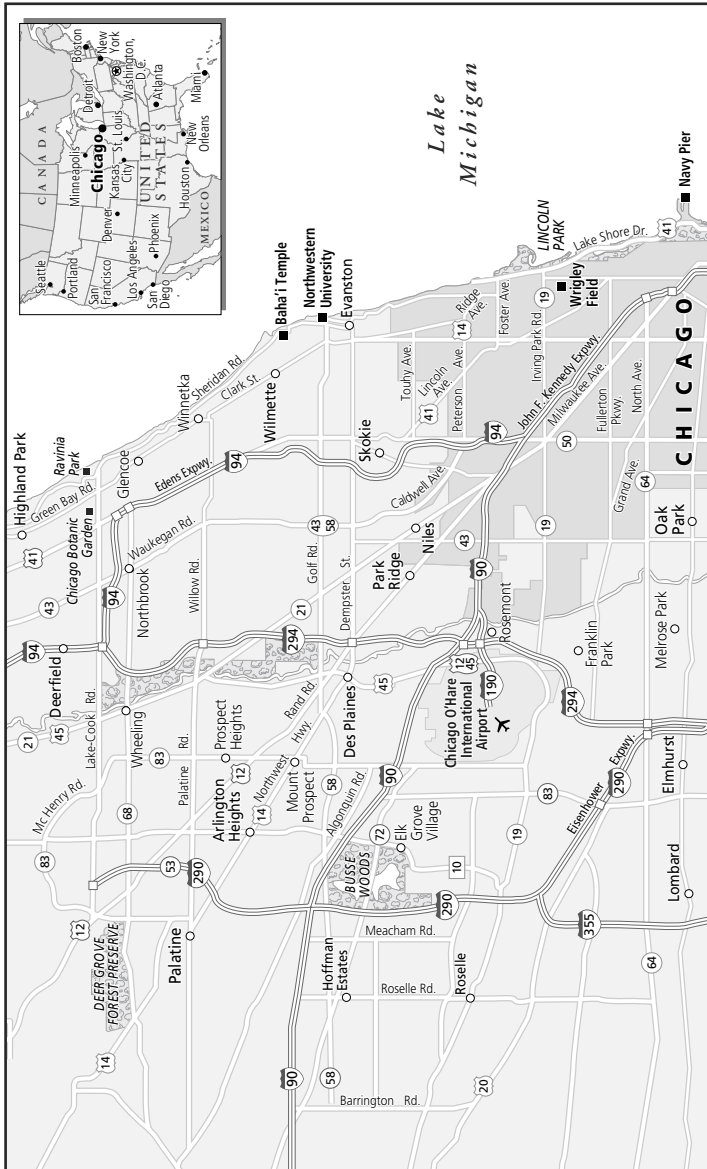
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**L**ike any great city, Chicago's got something for everyone, whether your tastes run toward world-famous museums and blow-your-budget luxury hotels or family-friendly lodgings and low-key neighborhood restaurants. Narrowing down your choices may seem daunting, but never fear: Here's your cheat sheet to the very best of the city.

## 1 The Most Unforgettable Travel Experiences

- **Studying the Skyline:** The birthplace of the modern skyscraper, Chicago is the perfect place to learn about—and appreciate—these dramatic buildings. If you're only in town for a short time, get a quick skyscraper fix by strolling through the heart of downtown. If you have more time, take an architectural tour by foot, bus, bike, or boat. See "Sightseeing Tours" on p. 117.
- **Chilling Out on the Lakefront:** Chicagoans treat the Lake Michigan waterfront as our personal playground. Miles of parkland hug the shoreline; walk to Monroe Harbor for picture-perfect views of downtown, or join active Lincoln Park singles for biking or jogging farther north. See "Staying Active" on p. 121.
- **Riding the Rails:** Find out why the Loop is so named by hopping a Brown Line elevated train (or "the El," for short). Watch the city unfold as the train crosses the Chicago River and screeches past downtown high-rises. See "Getting Around" on p. 27 and "Sightseeing Tours" on p. 117.
- **Escaping Downtown:** You won't really experience Chicago unless you leave downtown and explore some residential areas, whether it's the historic wood-framed homes in Old Town or the eclectic boutiques of Wicker Park. It's one of the best ways to get a feeling for how the people here actually live. See "The Neighborhoods in Brief" on p. 26.

# Chicago & Vicinity





## 2 The Best Splurge Hotels

- The **Four Seasons** (120 E. Delaware Place; ☎ 800/332-3442; www.fourseasons.com): A favorite among camera-shy celebrities who want to keep a low profile, the hotel exudes understated luxury; expect discretion, not a lively lobby scene. Where the Four Seasons really shines is its service—the concierges might be the best in town. See p. 39.
- The **Park Hyatt Chicago** (800 N. Michigan Ave.; ☎ 800/233-1234; www.parkchicago.hyatt.com): With its focus on modern design and clean lines, the Park Hyatt feels like one of those cool urban spaces featured in *Architectural Digest*. The coolest feature? Moveable bathroom walls that allow you to soak in the view while you lounge in the tub. See p. 40.
- The **Peninsula Chicago** (108 E. Superior St.; ☎ 866/288-8889; <http://chicago.peninsula.com>): The Chicago outpost of this Asian chain is a seamless blend of classic and modern. The grand public spaces may be a throwback to the past, but the hotel's amenities are ultramodern. The top-notch gym, spa, and indoor swimming pool (filled with natural light) make The Peninsula a must for fitness fanatics. See p. 41.
- The **Ritz-Carlton** (160 E. Pearson St.; ☎ 800/621-6906; www.fourseasons.com): The Ritz has one of the most welcoming lobbies in town, with bird's-eye views of the city. The guest rooms, decorated in warm shades of yellow and blue, have European-style elegance, and the staff prides itself on granting every wish. See p. 41.
- The **W Chicago Lakeshore** (644 N. Lake Shore Dr.; ☎ 877/W-HOTELS; www.whotels.com): The city's only hotel with a lakefront address may try a little too hard to be hip, but it offers a nightclubby vibe that sets it apart from the many cookie-cutter convention-friendly hotels in town. The rooms' color scheme—shades of gray, black, and deep red—are a refreshing change from the chain-hotel look. See p. 44.

## 3 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Chicago City Centre Hotel & Sports Club** (300 E. Ohio St.; ☎ 800/HOLIDAY; www.chicc.com): A real find for budget-conscious families, the City Centre scores big for its amenities: two pools (indoor and outdoor) and free access to the

Lakeshore Athletic Club next door. The location is great, too—just a few blocks from kid-friendly Navy Pier. See p. 45.

- **Hampton Inn & Suites Chicago Downtown** (33 W. Illinois St.; ☎ 800/HAMPTON; www.hamptoninn.com): The Hampton Inn feels more expensive than it is. The rooms have an upscale urban look, and the indoor pool is a draw for families. The hotel's hot breakfast buffet puts the standard coffee-and-doughnut spread at other motels to shame. See p. 47.
- **Red Roof Inn** (162 E. Ontario St.; ☎ 800/733-7663; www.redroof-chicago-downtown.com): This is your best bet for the cheapest rates downtown. The rooms don't have much in the way of style, but it fits the bill if you want a central location and plan on using your hotel as a place to sleep rather than hang out. See p. 45.
- **Majestic Hotel** (528 W. Brompton St.; ☎ 800/727-5108; www.cityinns.com): This neighborhood hotel is tucked away on a residential street just a short walk from Wrigley Field and the lakefront. You won't find lots of fancy amenities, but the atmosphere here has the personal touch of a B&B. See p. 49.

#### 4 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences

- **Charlie Trotter's** (816 W. Armitage Ave.; ☎ 773/248-6228): Charlie Trotter is the city's original celebrity chef, and his intimate restaurant is the first place I steer foodie visitors. The service lives up to Trotter's legendary perfectionism; the chef himself has been known to come out of the kitchen and ask diners why they didn't finish a certain dish. See p. 75.
- **Alinea** (1723 N. Halsted St.; ☎ 312/867-0110): Widely considered the town's top restaurant of the moment, Alinea has gotten national press for chef Grant Achatz's revolutionary twist on contemporary dining. An added bonus: service that's friendly, not snobby. See p. 74.
- **Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse** (1028 N. Rush St.; ☎ 312/266-8999): This is the kind of place to live large (literally): The portions are enormous, so you're encouraged to share, which adds to the party atmosphere. See p. 61.
- **foodlife** (Water Tower Place, 835 N. Michigan Ave.; ☎ 312/335-3663): This is my top pick for a quick, affordable, family-friendly meal downtown. Leaps and bounds beyond the standard

mall food court, foodlife offers a wide range of nonchain food stations at affordable prices. See p. 66.

- **The Village** (71 W. Monroe St.; ☎ 312/332-7005): Eating at this Chicago landmark is like taking a trip back in time, from the so-tacky-they're-cool twinkling “stars” embedded in the ceiling to the vintage waiters (some of whom look like they’ve been working here since the place opened in 1927). See p. 55.

## 5 The Best Museums

- **Art Institute of Chicago** (111 S. Michigan Ave.; ☎ 312/443-3600): Internationally known for its French Impressionist collection, the Art Institute can also transport you to Renaissance Italy, ancient China, or any number of other worlds. See p. 86.
- **Field Museum of Natural History** (Roosevelt Rd. and Lake Shore Dr.; ☎ 312/922-9410): The Field can easily entertain for an entire day. Exhibits include ancient Egyptian mummies, a full-size Maori meetinghouse, and stuffed figures of the notorious man-eating lions of Tsavo. See p. 97.
- **John G. Shedd Aquarium** (1200 S. Lake Shore Dr.; ☎ 312/939-2438): Sure, you’ll find plenty of tanks filled with exotic fish, but the Shedd is also home to some wonderful large-scale re-creations of natural habitats. See p. 98.
- **Museum of Science and Industry** (57th St. and Lake Shore Dr.; ☎ 800/468-6674): Although the exhibits promote scientific knowledge, most have an interactive element that makes them especially fun for families. Some of the classic exhibits—the underground re-creation of the coal mine and the World War II German U-boat—have been attracting crowds for generations. See p. 104.
- **Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio** (951 Chicago Ave., Oak Park; ☎ 708/848-1976): The Midwest’s greatest architect started out in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, and his house—now a museum with guided tours—gives a firsthand look at his genius and his influence. See p. 111.

## 6 The Best Nightlife Experiences

- **Getting the Blues:** Here, in the world capital of the blues, you’ve got your pick of places to feel them, from the touristy but lively atmosphere of Kingston Mines in Lincoln Park to the roadhouse feel of Buddy Guy’s Legends. See “The Music Scene” on p. 156.

- **Taking in a Show:** Chicago is home to a downtown Broadway-style district anchored by beautifully restored historic theaters. Beyond downtown, you'll find a number of innovative independent companies, where the pure love of theater makes up for the low budgets. See "The Performing Arts" on p. 147.
- **Taking in Some Cool Jazz at the Green Mill:** This atmospheric Uptown jazz club is the place to go to soak up smooth sounds from some of the hottest up-and-coming performers on the jazz scene, while the club itself is a living museum of 1930s Chicago. See p. 157.
- **Watching Improv Come Alive:** Chicago is a comedy breeding ground through improv hot spots such as Second City and iO. The shows may soar or crash, but you just might catch one of comedy's future stars. See "Comedy & Improv" on p. 155.

## 7 The Best Places to Hang with the Locals

- **Shopping the Town:** Michigan Avenue is often touted as a shopper's paradise. For more distinctive items, head to the city's residential districts, where trendy independent clothing boutiques sit next to eclectic home-design stores filled with one-of-a-kind treasures. See chapter 9.
- **Soaking Up Sun at Wrigley Field:** It's a Chicago tradition to play hooky for an afternoon, sit in the bleachers at this historic baseball park, and watch the Cubs try to hit 'em onto Waveland Avenue. Even if you can't get in, you can still soak in the atmosphere at one of the neighborhood's many watering holes. See "In the Grandstand: Watching Chicago's Athletic Events" on p. 123.
- **Playing in the Sand:** If you're staying at a downtown hotel, you can hit the sands of Chicago's urban beaches almost as quickly as your elevator gets you to the lobby. Oak Street Beach (at Michigan Ave. and Lake Shore Dr.) is mostly for posing; North Avenue Beach, a little farther north along the lakefront path, is home to weekend volleyball games, family beach outings, and a whole lot of eye candy. See "Beaches" on p. 121.

## 8 The Best Free (or Almost Free) Things to Do

- **Bonding with the Animals at Lincoln Park Zoo:** Occupying a prime spot of Lincoln Park close to the lakefront, the zoo is small enough to explore in an afternoon and varied enough to make you feel as though you've traveled around the world. See p. 102.

- **Listening to Music Under the Stars:** The Grant Park Music Festival presents free classical concerts from June through August in Millennium Park. A few blocks south, you'll find the outdoor dance floor that's home to Chicago SummerDance, where you can learn new dance moves and swing to a variety of live acts. See "Classical Music" on p. 148.
- **Exploring Millennium Park:** This downtown park is Chicago's newest great showcase (and it's an easy walk from downtown hotels). See p. 93.

## 9 The Best One-of-a-Kind Shops

- **ArchiCenter Shop** (224 S. Michigan Ave.; ☎ 312/922-3432): Looking for unique, well-designed souvenirs? This store, run by the Chicago Architecture Foundation, should be your first stop. See p. 144.
- **Uncle Fun** (1338 W. Belmont Ave.; ☎ 773/477-8223): This old-fashioned storefront is crammed with a random assortment of classic dime-store gadgets (hand buzzers, Pez dispensers, rubber chickens) along with an equally eclectic selection of retro bargain-bin items (where else can you pick up a Mr. T key-chain?). See p. 139.
- **The T-Shirt Deli** (1739 N. Damen Ave.; ☎ 773/276-6266): Got a soft spot for those cheesy 1970s "Foxy Lady" T-shirts? Head to the T-Shirt Deli, where the staff will customize shirts while you wait. Come up with your own message, or browse the hundreds of in-stock iron-on decals. See p. 138.

## 10 The Best Chicago Websites

- **www.metromix.com:** A good place to check restaurant reviews and get an early look at new bars and nightclubs.
- **www.chicagoreader.com:** At the site of the *Chicago Reader*, the city's alternative weekly paper, you'll find extensive coverage of local music and lots of reviews of smaller theater productions.
- **www.cityofchicago.org/exploringchicago:** The official site of the Chicago Office of Tourism gives a good overview of what's happening in town.
- **http://chicago.citysearch.com:** This local edition of the national Citysearch sites offers reviews of restaurants, bars, shows, and shops. Reviews tend to be fairly short, but they keep readers up-to-date on openings.



- **www.chicagoist.com:** Want to see what issues have Chicagoans riled up? Check out this sounding board for local news, which covers everything from government corruption scandals to the latest celebrity sightings.