





BY GREG RIENZI

# Visit Chicago

An eclectic city known for sports, food, music and magnificent architecture

**A sk anyone:** Chicago is hot, even when it's cold. The Illinois city on Lake Michigan remains a premier travel destination both domestically within the United States and worldwide. In 2005, roughly 32 million people visited the Windy City for its food, architecture, festivals, sports and dynamic night-life scene.

Thought Chicago was just a home for famous gangsters? Think again.

French explorers discovered the area along the Chicago River and Lake Michigan in the 17th century and named it after an American Indian term for "smelly onion," as the vegetable grew wild there. In 1803, Fort Dearborn was established where the Chicago River meets the lake and was manned until the outbreak of the War of 1812.

Chicago was incorporated as a city in 1837 with a population of 4,200 residents. Today, it's home to 2.8 million people, many of them certifiably sports mad over the many professional teams who play there: the Cubs and White



Sox (baseball), the Bears (American football), the Bulls (basketball), the Blackhawks (ice hockey) and the Major League Soccer team the Fire. The Fire is named after the Great Chicago Fire that occurred on Oct. 8, 1871, killing 300 people and destroying nearly every building in the city.

Despite its immense size, Chicago is foremost a walker's city. The current top attraction to stroll to is the Navy Pier, a large pier on Lake Michigan close to the downtown area. Originally opened to the public in 1916, the Navy Pier went through an extensive renovation and renewal in the early 1990s and today is a tourist's playland replete with a three-story Children's Museum, shopping, restaurants, miniature golf, Shakespeare theater, concert stage, promenades and rides. Its signature ride is a 148-foot-tall Ferris wheel modeled after the first of its kind built by George W. Ferris for the 1893 World's Fair, held in Chicago. Most of the buildings from the fair, designed by renowned architect Daniel Burnham, still exist as museums.

Another popular destination in Second City (a reference to Chicago's historical position as America's second largest city) is the Magnificent Mile, a shopper's paradise on Michigan Avenue with more than 430 stores, including upscale department stores and high-end retailers such as

Louis Vuitton and Giorgio Armani. The strip also features many restaurants, clubs and hotels.

Most of the popular neighborhoods to visit (Lakeview, Bucktown, Old Town and Gold Coast) lie along Lake Michigan, which looms like an ocean.

The best way to get around town is on the "El" (elevated train system), which forms a large loop around the heart of Chicago's downtown business district, hence the area being called "The Loop."

The El can take you to many favorite destinations, including the Navy Pier, Sears Tower, Soldier Field (home of the Bears), Wrigley Field (Cubs) and the city's two most famous outdoor areas, Grant Park and Millennium Park.

Visitors to Grant Park must check out the Clarence Buckingham Fountain, commissioned in 1927 by philanthropist Kate Buckingham to honor her late brother, a prominent Chicago businessman and art collector. The magnificent fountain, modeled after one at the Palace of Versailles, is best seen at dusk when it is beautifully animated with a computerized choreography of color spotlights.

Millennium Park, located in the heart of downtown Chicago, is a sprawling 24 1/2-acre center for art, music,

Chicago's grand Clarence Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park (page 24); the city is an architecture lover's dream. Its skyline is enhanced by its position along the shore of Lake Michigan (left).

The city is easily commutable on the elevated train system (this page top); Navy Pier is filled with entertainment, food and plenty of shopping (this page bottom).



## Windy City Facts

**When to go:** While many contend the term Windy City originated from the local newspapers dubbing those at the 1860 Republican National Convention “the greatest collection of windbags,” the nickname’s lasting power has a lot to do with the gusts that blow off Lake Michigan—and the fact it can get downright cold there. That said, late spring through the summer is perhaps the best time to go: Less wind-chill factor and many of the city’s can’t-miss special events—Chicago Blues Festival, Taste of Chicago (touted as the world’s largest food festival), Air and Water Show—take place from June to September.

**What to do:** So much to do, how much time do you have?

Befitting the home of the tallest building in the United States (Sears Tower) and several Frank Lloyd Wright masterpieces, Chicago is an architecture lover’s paradise. The Chicago Architecture Foundation ([www.architecture.org](http://www.architecture.org)) offers a wide variety of bus and walking tours and a popular boat tour on the Chicago River. *The Devil in the White City* fans should hop aboard the bus tour that serves as companion fodder for Erik Larson’s best-selling book about the 1893 World’s Fair.

Two good bets on cold or rainy days are the Art Institute of Chicago and the Shedd Aquarium, the largest indoor aquarium in the world.

If you’re in the mood for kitschy art shops, trendy restaurants and bar hopping, go to Bucktown, a neighborhood that gets its name from the goats kept in the backyards of its early residents.

If the weather is nice, walk, jog or bike along the Chicago Lakefront Path, an 18.5-mile linear park along Lake Michigan’s shoreline. Make sure you stop at Oak Street Beach, haven for the young and tanned.

**Where to stay:** Big spenders should opt for the landmark Drake Hotel, the 87-year-old Italian Renaissance-style luxury hotel in the fashionable Gold Coast area. Or, just come have high tea there or eat at the famous Cape Cod room. If you don’t mind eccentric accommodations, try the strategically located Hotel Indigo, whose individualized rooms boast vibrant colors and unique touches such as teak benches in the bathroom. You also can’t go wrong with the Palmer House Hilton (The Loop) and The Willows (Lakeview neighborhood).

**Where (and what) to eat:** Hungry? You came to the right city. Many locals swear by the Chicago Chop House, an award-winning steakhouse in a city known for them. The food is great and the Chop House has an extensive wine list and cigar bar. Gino’s East is the place for legendary Chicago-style deep-dish pizza. A current hot spot is Sushi Samba, which offers Japanese cuisine with some Latin flair. Sticking to the Latin theme, bring your appetite to Brazzaz or Fogo de Chão, two Brazilian steakhouses where the Gauchos (carvers) expertly carve up skewers of grilled meat tableside. Another local favorite is Gene & Georgetti’s, an old-school Italian steakhouse that feels like a private club.

## Travel Tips from Locals

George Shea Jr. has a passion for sports and food. Or is it vice versa? No matter, Chicago has oodles of both.

Shea, 28, a territory manager for Dixon, currently lives just west of the city but was born and raised on the north side of Chicago. No surprise then he's a diehard Cubs fan—as if there were any other type.

So what if the supposedly cursed team hasn't won a World Series in nearly a full century. Since when has that stopped their faithful from showing up at the iconic Wrigley Field, major league baseball's second-oldest ballpark (built in 1912). Originally known as Weeghman Park, Wrigley was the site of Babe Ruth's historic "called shot," when he allegedly pointed to the center-field bleachers during the 1932 World Series and then hit the next pitch there for a homer. It's also where Matthew Broderick famously goes to play hooky in the 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

If you go during baseball season, Shea says you must make a point of being one of the 41,118 in attendance. Who knows what celebrity you will hear sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame"? Ozzy Osbourne, Mike Ditka, Bill Murray and Dennis Farina have tried, to varying degrees of success.

"You can't have a bad time there," Shea says. "It's a gorgeous field, the smell is great, and just being there puts people in a good mood."

Before and after a game, Shea recommends you check out his favorite watering hole, Murphy's Bleachers, across the street from the entrance to Wrigley's bleacher section. Here you can get a canned beer for a buck and a mouth-watering Chicago-style grilled Vienna hot dog, which is served on a steamed bun and dressed with onion, relish, tomatoes, celery salt and, for the brave of heart, sport (piquant) peppers.

But hold the ketchup, says George Shea Sr., 65, national training manager for Dixon Valve.

"That would be a mortal sin. Go with the mustard. My son orders ketchup just to aggravate me," says the elder Shea with a laugh.

Both Shea Sr. and Jr. agree you can spend most of the day in Wrigleyville, the name for the stadium's surrounding neighborhoods. The area sports a wealth of great bars and restaurants that buzz with activity win or lose, which, by the way, you can ascertain from the "W" or "L" flag planted atop the scoreboard.

Sports fans who come to Chicago out-



side the baseball months (April to September) should find some time to see "Da" Bears, Bulls or Blackhawks. As for hard-to-find tickets for all the Chicago teams, the younger Shea says where there's a will there's a way, and scalpers galore. For those scalper shy, try [www.StubHub.com](http://www.StubHub.com).

Shea Jr. admits that while most of the year the weather in Chicago can be "absolutely insane," there is no place he'd rather be.

"I love it here, I really do. Chicago is a great place to be year round," he says. "This city has a little bit of everything, and we are spoiled with great food."

Speaking of food, Shea says that no trip to Chicago would be complete without also savoring a sandwich stacked high with what's called Italian beef, thinly sliced roast beef soaked in its own gravy and numerous spices. "I've certainly had my share," Shea says with a laugh. The elder Shea has, too.

architecture and landscape design. Its most prominent features are the Frank Gehry-designed Jay Pritzker Pavilion, an awe-inspiring outdoor concert venue topped by a billowing headdress of brushed stainless steel ribbons, and the Crown Fountain, two 50-foot glass block towers at each end of a shallow reflection pool. The towers project rotating video images of Chicago citizens who appear to have water coming out of their mouths, courtesy of a water outlet in the screen.

For the best views of the city, take a river or lake cruise, or visit Sears Tower Skydeck or the Hancock Observatory.

Many locals swear by Chicago's concert festivals and music venues. Two must-see spots are Buddy Guy's Legends, owned by the legendary blues guitarist (who plays there regularly) and the historic Andy's Jazz Club.

The city's current big attraction is "Niki in the Garden," an exhibition of 30 monumental outdoor sculptures by the internationally renowned artist Niki de Saint Phalle. The exhibition will be displayed in and around Garfield Park Conservatory through Oct. 31, 2007.

Still, if gangsters are your thing, take a ride on the Untouchables Tour and hit old gangster hot spots and hear accounts of the exploits of Capone, Moran and Dillinger. Consider it a personal favor to Al. ■



**The Chicago River flows through Chicago and is dyed green for St. Patrick's Day (top); the Magnificent Mile is a shopper's paradise (near right); the view from the John Hancock Building (far right); the Frank Gehry-designed Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park (below).**

