

Welcome to Chicago

*Steely skyscrapers, top chefs,
rocking festivals – the Windy City
will blow you away with its low-key
cultured awesomeness.*

Art & Architecture

It's hard to know what to gawk at first. High-flying architecture is everywhere, from the stratospheric, glass-floored Willis Tower to Frank Gehry's swooping silver Pritzker Pavilion to Frank Lloyd Wright's stained-glass Robie House. Whimsical public art studs the streets. So you're walking along and wham, there's an abstract Picasso statue that's not only cool to look at, you're allowed to go right up and climb on it. For art museums, take your pick: impressionist masterpieces at the massive Art Institute, psychedelic paintings at the mid-sized Museum of Mexican Art or outsider drawings at the small Intuit gallery.

Chowhounds' Delight

Loosen the belt. You've got a lot of eating to do. On the menu: peanut butter and banana-topped waffles for breakfast (at Stephanie Izard's Little Goat), a fig and goat-cheese-slathered elk sausage for lunch (at Hot Doug's hot-dog shop), and 20 courses of centrifuged, encapsulated molecular gastronomy for dinner (at Grant Achatz's Alinea).

You can also chow on a superb range of ethnic eats from Vietnamese pho to Mexican carnitas, Polish pierogi and Swedish almond tarts. Still hungry? Order a late-night deep-dish pizza.

Sports Fanatics

Chicago is a maniacal sports town, with a pro team for every season (two teams, in baseball's case). Watching a game is a local rite of passage, whether you slather on the blue and orange body paint for a Bears football game, join the raucous baseball crowd in Wrigley Field's bleachers, or plop down on a bar stool at the neighborhood tavern for whatever match is on TV. Count on making lots of spirited new friends. Should the excitement rub off and inspire you to get active yourself, the city's 24 beaches and 580 parks offer a huge array of play.

Rollicking Festivals

Chicago knows how to rock a festival. Between March and September it throws around 200 shindigs. The specialty is music. Blues Fest brings half a million people to Grant Park to hear guitar notes slide and bass lines roll, all for free. During Lollapalooza's three-day mega-party, rock bands thrash while the audience dances in an arm-flailing frenzy. Smaller, barbecue-scented street fests take place in the neighborhoods each weekend – though some rival downtown for star power on their stages (oh, hey, Olivia Newton-John at Northalsted Market Days).



Why I Love Chicago

By Karla Zimmerman, Author

I've lived in the city for 25 years, and I never get bored. There's something groovy going on any night of the week. Like tonight: should I see the Grant Park Orchestra playing Shostakovich's 5th Symphony in Millennium Park, or a guitar-drum duo called Earring at Empty Bottle? I love that Tibetan dumplings, Mexican carnitas and crème brûlée doughnuts are all equally, easily accessible from local eateries. I love how total strangers sitting next to each other in a bar watching a Blackhawks game become high-fiving pals by evening's end. Chicago really is my kind of town.

For more about our authors, see p320.