

INTRODUCING CHICAGO



The city of Chicago rises high above the waters of Lake Michigan

PETER PYSCHELINZEW

The sun dips. Skyscraper lights flicker on, ricocheting around the steely towers. Then Beethoven's Ninth Symphony fills the twilight air. People on blankets spread as far as the eye can see.

They chat, clink beer bottles and hoist burly slices of pizza – a Chicago-style picnic, blending high culture and earthy pleasures. That's how it's done here, whether at a free concert by the Grant Park Orchestra or at the Art Institute, where the revered lion sculptures don hockey helmets for the Blackhawks' Stanley Cup win.

Chicago often gets 'discovered' for its cultural cool, perhaps never more so than when a local guy named Barack Obama got elected President of the United States. The spotlight swung to the nation's third-largest city. 'Wow,' visitors said. 'Look at that high-flying architecture. That blue, sailboat-dotted water stretching over the horizon. That whimsical public art studding the street corners.'

The accolades continued: 'Hey, there's a globe-spanning foodie culture. And loads of Beard-award-winning chefs. And the continent's top restaurant, Alinea, cooks in the Windy City.'

Then the deal sealer: 'Megabashes like Lollapalooza, Blues Fest and Pitchfork rock downtown almost every weekend in summer, while smaller concerts happen *every night* at Millennium Park for *free!*'

Chicagoans shook their heads and smiled, too polite to point out that, yes, that's Chicago, and it has been here – right at the nation's core – all along.

CHICAGO LIFE

If you want your finger on America's pulse, you don't head to New York or LA. The heart beats in Chicago. That's why businesses have come here for decades to test new products, be they Broadway shows or Costco caskets. Whether they make it to your local shelf depends on what the pragmatic but open-minded people of the Windy City have to say.

A spirit of inventiveness lingers from the days when Chicago built the first skyscraper. Big, bold ideas are still encouraged. You'll see it in groundbreaking theater productions, chefs' bubbling kitchens and the green architecture rising from city streets (Chicago has more LEED-certified buildings than anywhere else in the country).

For most of the past decade, the pace of change here has been fast and grand. Development swept through downtown and spilled over its edges. Mod Millennium Park led the way, The Donald popped the top on his new Trump Tower, and the Art Institute built a wing huge enough to make it the second-largest art museum in the nation.

Chicago actually added to its 2.8 million population, but there was a flip side. Taxes went up (becoming the country's steepest), which angered citizens and drove away some businesses. Traffic gridlocked, to the point where Chicago now ranks second only to LA. And segregation deepened, a remnant of historical immigration patterns and policies that put blacks, whites and Latinos in specific pockets of the city. The debate continues on how to deal with these issues.

In the meantime, locals continue to dash for the beaches, ballparks and beer gardens when the weather warms. Soak it up while you can, they say, because once winter hits, it's time to hibernate. Thank goodness for the slew of neighborhood taverns to socialize in, where chances are equal that you'll find an avant-garde jazz band, a poetry reading or a Bears or Hawks game on TV – and quite possibly all three.



Hit Chicago's eating streets for an encounter with a local legend: the humble deep-dish pizza

HIGHLIGHTS



CHUCK ECKERT/ALAMY

1 Chicago Blues Festival

Rock to fret-bending licks at the world's largest blues fest (p14).

2 St Patrick's Day

No, you're not seeing things – they really do dye the river green (p13).

3 Taste of Chicago

Loosen the belt before gorging on a park full of food (p14).

4 Lollapalooza

Bodysurf through three days of rock bands (p15).



GARY HEBDING JR/ALAMY

CITY OF FESTIVALS

The Windy City whoops it up like there's no tomorrow. Between March and September alone it throws 200 free festivals. Whether they honor Mexican independence or giant floating turkeys is irrelevant – Chicago just wants an excuse to crank tunes, blast fireworks and party in the streets.



PETER PISCHELINZEW



TIM MOSSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

ARTS APPRECIATION

Chicago treats its world-class operas and circus-punk marching bands with equal reverence. Same goes for its glitzy Broadway-style theaters and roll-the-dice-for-admission-price storefront stages. While you can find anything in a museum or on a stage here, specialties include blues, jazz, improv comedy and theater.



CHARLES COOK



CHARLES COOK

1 Theater District

Catch a show at the Chicago Theatre (p60), a historic venue downtown.

2 Art Institute of Chicago

View a quarter-million Monets, Renoirs and other colorful masters (p52).

3 Pilsen Murals

See eye-popping scenes splashed across Little Mexico's buildings (p107).

4 Green Mill

Relive Chicago's dark past at Al Capone's old speakeasy (p191).



RICHARD CUMMINS



CHARLES COOK

FOODIE FAVORITES

For years epicures wrote off Chicago as a meaty backwater. Then chef by chef, restaurant by restaurant, the city built a scene of plenty. Suddenly, foodies are bypassing the coasts, heading to the heartland. Critics agree: the eateries here might just be the USA's best.



RAY LASKOWITZ

1 Ethnic Eats

Explore Chicago's global restaurants, such as Mexican favorite Nuevo Leon (p173).

2 Chicago Hot Dog

Bite into a famed Vienna dog laden with peppers, pickles and more (p154).

3 Farmers' Markets

Reduce your food miles by eating locally produced items (p157).

4 Neighborhood Joints

Seek out local neighborhood eateries, such as the Chicago Diner (p160).



RICHARD CUMMINS



RICK GERHARTER



CHARLES COOK



JOHN SONES

1 Millennium Park
Look at the city reflect off *Cloud Gate* by Arish Kapoor, 2005 (p53).

2 Rookery
See Frank Lloyd Wright's atrium overhaul (p56).

3 Tribune Tower
Identify shards from global monuments in the Gothic building's base (p64).

4 Willis Tower
Skyrocket to the top of the USA's tallest building (p56).



RICHARD CUMMINS

STEELY SKYLINE

Hard to believe all this height came compliments of a cow. When Mrs O'Leary's bovine kicked over the lantern that burned down the city in 1871, it created the blank canvas that allowed Chicago's mighty architecture to flourish.



RICHARD CUMMINS



RICHARD J ANSON



RICHARD CUMMINS

SPORTS FANATICS

In warm weather Chicagoans dash like sun-starved maniacs for the parks and beaches to cycle, swim and skate. When the weather sucks, they hibernate (often in bars) and watch sports on TV. Year-round, they cheer on their baseball, hockey, football and basketball teams.



CHARLES COOK



PETER PITSCHELINZEW



TANNER MAURY/PA/CORBIS

1 Lake Michigan Beaches

Build sandcastles, spike volleyballs or swim in the waves (p219).

2 Watch a Game in a Bar

Join locals anytime, anywhere in the city's favorite pastime (p177).

3 Chicago Cubs

Watch baseball's favorite losing team play at historic Wrigley Field (p220).

4 Chicago Marathon

Join one million spectators feeling the pain of 45,000 runners (p16).

THE AUTHOR

Karla Zimmerman



Karla lives in Chicago, where she has been eating deep-dish pizza (Giordano's preferred) and cheering on the hopeless Cubs for more than 20 years. Like most Chicagoans, she's a little bit silly in love with her town and

will talk your ear off about its sky-high architecture, rockin' arts, global neighborhoods and character-filled dive bars. Come wintertime, the words she uses get a bit more colorful, especially if she's just shoveled her car out of a snowbank.

Karla writes travel features for newspapers, books, magazines and websites. She has authored or coauthored several Lonely Planet guidebooks covering the USA, Canada, the Caribbean and Europe. For more on the Windy City, see her blog, *My Kind of Town & Around* (www.mykindoftownandaround.blogspot.com).

KARLA'S TOP CHICAGO DAY

I take the El toward downtown, and the skyline zooms into focus. Soon the train is rumbling through the Loop (p52), so close to the buildings I can practically touch them. I

disembark near Millennium Park (p53) and admire 'the Bean' as it reflects the skyline and Crown Fountain's gargoyle people as they spit water. Then I cross the Nichols Bridgeway to the Art Institute for a peek at the Modern Wing's Picassos and Matisse's, and the Main Wing's Renoirs and Gauguins.

Arted out, I hop on the Red Line and head due north to Wrigley Field (p84) to catch a Cubs game. If the sun is shining and the breeze is blowing, there's nowhere in the city that beats an afternoon spent here; if the sun is obscured and the breeze blizzardlike, that sucks, but at least tickets are easier to come by. I order a hot dog and an Old Style beer and sigh as the Cubs get clobbered.

Nothing soothes the soul like a slice of banana cream, so it's off to Hoosier Mama Pie Company (p168) in east Ukrainian Village. Yes, it's out of the way, but this is crazy-good pie. Now I'm just a few El stops from groovy browsing on Milwaukee Ave, so I drop in to see what's stacking the shelves at Quimby's zine shop (p139), Myopic Books (p139) and Reckless Records (p140). And it dawns on me: I should probably have some dinner to soak up my dessert. The bike-messenger hangout Handlebar (p165) dishes up veg-friendly stews and sandwiches a few blocks away.

It's getting late, but I make one more stop. The Hideout (p193) is a tucked-away bar hosting indie-oriented rock, folk and country musicians. I stop in for a set, then cab it home, convinced once again that Chicago is my kind of town.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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GETTING STARTED

So you've decided to visit the Windy City. Excellent choice. You'll be well entertained, given all the festivals and attractions. The top sights are conveniently plunked near downtown – and what's not in the center is easily accessible by public transportation (ie the El trains) – so you don't have to worry about having a car. And Chicago's prices won't break the bank, especially with a bit of advance planning. What are you waiting for? Let's go...

WHEN TO GO

Wicked weather slaps the city between November and March. It gets nastiest in January, with temperatures hovering around 24°F (-4°C) and blasting snow and wind added for emphasis. This is when everyone stays inside and drinks.

When the sun begins to shine again and warmth creeps through the skyscrapers, from April through October, everyone flings open their doors and makes a greedy dash for the outdoor festivals, ballparks, beaches and beer gardens. This is the best time to visit Chicago. It's no surprise that this is also the city's peak season, specifically June through August, when summer temperatures average 85°F (29°C).

FESTIVALS

Chicago stages an insane number of festivals, concerts and events. The moment the thermometer registers a single degree above freezing, you can count on some group lugging a stage and speakers to Grant Park to celebrate the good news. Between March and September alone, the city throws around 200 free day- or weekend-long shindigs.

Grant Park hosts most of the outdoor biggies, such as Blues Fest, Jazz Fest and Taste of Chicago. Many of the major parades take place nearby along S Columbus Dr. We've highlighted some of our favorite events here, but this is by no means a comprehensive list. For the whole enchilada, check with the [Mayor's Office of Special Events](#) (% live 312-744-3315, recorded 312-744-3370; [www.cityofchicago.org/specialevents](#)). Another good resource is [Metromix](#) ([www.chicago.metromix.com/festivals](#)). The Arts (p201) and Nightlife (p189) chapters contain further information on music, theater, dance, film and literary festivals.

January

POLAR ADVENTURE DAYS

% 312-742-7529; [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](#)

On select weekends throughout the winter, the Chicago Parks District hosts free family

events on Northerly Island, with sled dogs, ice sculptures and snowshoeing. **Mush!**

CHINESE NEW YEAR PARADE

[www.chicagochinatown.org](#)

Loads of spectators line Wentworth Ave in Chinatown to watch dragons dance, firecrackers burst and marching bands bang their gongs. The exact date varies according to the ancient Chinese calendar, but it's typically in late January or early to mid-February.

February

CHICAGO AUTO SHOW

[www.chicagoautoshow.com](#)

Detroit, Tokyo and Bavaria introduce their latest and finest vehicles to hordes of excited gearheads in a huge mid-February show at McCormick Place.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

% 877-244-2246

The city hosts events and exhibits from north to south and everywhere in between to celebrate African American history throughout the month.

WINTER DANCE

% 312-744-3315; [www.explorechicago.org](#)

The party moves to Millennium Park for this cold-weather version of SummerDance (see p14), with live DJ sets and free ice-skating and ice dance lessons on weekends throughout February.

March

POLAR PLUNGE

1st Sun in Mar

% 312-527-3743; [www.chicagopolarplunge.org](#)

Watch 1500 people experience extreme shrinkage as they jump into Lake Michigan from North Ave Beach. The event is a fundraiser for the local Special Olympics.

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL MOVIES AND MUSIC FESTIVAL

www.cimmfest.org

CIMM Fest, as it's called, reels through the Windy City for a long weekend in early March. It presents movies. And music. And movies about music, which is the main gist. Screenings and concerts take place at various Wicker Park venues and at the Chicago Cultural Center.

CHIDITAROD

www.chiditarod.org

More than 100 teams compete in this crazy-costume, Burning Man–esque version of the Iditarod (the famed Alaskan sled-dog race), which swaps humans for huskies and shopping carts for sleds. The goal is to pick up 40lb of canned food for local pantries along the Near West Side route. Held on a Saturday in early March.

ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

www.chicagostpatsparade.com

It's a city institution: after the parade along S Columbus Dr, the local plumbers union dyes the Chicago River shamrock green (pouring in the secret, biodegradable coloring near the N Columbus Dr bridge). Then everyone drinks beer. Held the Saturday before March 17.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE

☎ 773-775-4949; www.enosis.org

Hellenic pride overtakes Greektown in this celebration and parade, typically held the Sunday closest to March 25. The action centers on Halsted St, from Randolph to Van Buren Sts.

April

CHICAGO EDIBLE BOOKS FESTIVAL

Apr 1

www.colum.edu/book_and_paper

Part of an internationally celebrated event on April 1, Chicago's version is sponsored by Columbia College's Center for Books & Paper Arts. You get one hour to view the entries before – that's right – you eat them.

CHICAGO IMPROV FESTIVAL

☎ 773-935-9810; www.chicagoimprovfestival.org

The town that invented improv comedy happily hosts its preeminent festival for a

week in mid- to late April, spitballing yucks at venues around the city.

ARTROPOLIS

www.artropolischicago.com

It's three international art shows rolled into one at the Merchandise Mart. Art Chicago features established artists, NEXT shows off newbies, and the International Antique Fair displays, well, antiques. Several museums and galleries hold simultaneous events. Held late-month over a long weekend.

May

POLISH CONSTITUTION DAY PARADE

1st Sat in May

☎ 773-745-7799; www.may3parade.org

Accordion-fueled polka'ing and lots of kielbasa bring out Chicago's mighty Polish community (the world's second-largest after Warsaw). The event celebrates Europe's first democratic constitution, signed in 1791. The parade starts in Grant Park and goes up S Columbus Dr.

CINCO DE MAYO FESTIVAL & PARADE

☎ 773-843-9738; www.el5demayo.org

Commemorating the Mexican army's routing of the French in 1862, this three-day, family-friendly bash draws more than 350,000 people to Douglas Park near Pilsen with food, music and carnival rides the first weekend in May. Sunday's colorful parade along Cermak Ave (beginning at Damen Ave) marks the finale.

CELTIC FEST CHICAGO

☎ 312-744-3315; www.celticfestchicago.us

Bagpipers, storytellers and Celtic culture let loose in Millennium Park during a weekend in early May. The traditional 'Men in Kilts Leg Contest' is always a hairy good time.

ANARCHIST FILM FESTIVAL

http://home.comcast.net/~more_about_it

Fight the power by checking out this festival's radical works by and about anarchists. Topics might cover everything from revolution in Oaxaca, Mexico to national identity card use in the UK. Screenings usually occur over two weekends early in the month at various cafes and cultural centers.

BIKE THE DRIVE

last Sun in May

% 312-427-3325, ext 251; www.bikethedrive.org
There's one day a year when you don't need to worry about cars knocking you off your bicycle. Starting at 5:30am, automobiles are banned from Lake Shore Dr, and 20,000 two-wheelers take to the road. Riding 15 miles along the car-free lakefront as the sun busts out is a thrill. Pancakes and live music follow in Grant Park. It costs \$40 to \$55 to participate; proceeds go to the nonprofit Active Transportation Alliance.

June**CHICAGO GOSPEL FESTIVAL**

% 312-744-3315; www.chicagogospelmusicfestival.us

Praise the Lord and say hallelujah for the choirs singing their souls out in Millennium Park. The free fest usually takes place during a weekend in early June.

CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL

% 312-744-3315; www.chicagobluesfestival.us
It's the globe's biggest free blues fest, with three days of the music that made Chicago famous. More than 640,000 people unfurl blankets by the multiple stages that take over Grant Park in early June.

PRINTERS ROW LIT FEST

% 312-222-3986; www.printersrowlitfest.org
This popular free event, sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune*, features thousands of rare and not-so-rare books for sale, plus author readings. The browsable booths line the 500 to 700 blocks of S Dearborn St in early June.

JUST FOR LAUGHS CHICAGO

www.justforlaughschicago.com
Montreal's famous comedy festival exported to Chicago in 2009, and for five days mid-month more than 100 funny people – including some Very Big Names – make 'em laugh at theaters around town.

ANDERSONVILLE MIDSOMMARFEST

% 773-664-4682; www.andersonville.org
The Swedes in Andersonville gather round the maypole mid-month to sing, dance and eat lingonberries during the weekend-long festivities.

PUERTO RICAN PARADE & FIESTAS PUERTORRIQUEÑAS

% 773-292-1414; www.prparadechicago.org
Chicago's large Puerto Rican community waves its flag in mid-June. The party starts downtown with a Saturday parade along S Columbus Dr, followed by carnival rides and pork-filled eats at the Humboldt Park festival.

GRANT PARK MUSIC FESTIVAL

% 312-742-7638; www.grantparkmusicfestival.com

The Grant Park Orchestra, composed of top musicians from symphonies around the globe, plays free concerts in Millennium Park's Pritzker Pavilion on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings from mid-June through mid-August. It's a summer ritual to bring wine and a picnic and soak up the ambience as the sun dips, the skyscraper lights flicker on, and glorious music fills the night air.

SUMMERDANCE

% 312-742-4007; www.chicagosummerdance.org
Boogie at the Spirit of Music Garden in Grant Park with a multiethnic mash-up of locals. Bands play rumba, samba and other world beats preceded by fun dance lessons – all free. It starts at 6pm Thursday to Saturday, and 4pm Sunday, from mid-June until late August.

TASTE OF CHICAGO

% 312-744-3315; www.tasteofchicago.us
This late-month, 10-day food festival in Grant Park draws hordes for a smorgasbord of ethnic, meaty, sweet and other local edibles – much of it served on a stick. Bring your wallet, extra napkins and your patience for long lines and crowd jostling. Several stages host free live music, including big-name bands (rock on, Stevie Wonder). The Taste closes around July 4th.

CHICAGO UNDERGROUND FILM FEST (CUFF)

www.cuff.org
Independent, experimental and documentary films from around the world screen at CUFF, the edgier, younger sibling of the Chicago International Film Festival (p16). Venues include various small

theaters and galleries. Held over a week in late June.

PRIDE PARADE

last Sun in June

☎ 773-348-8243; www.chicagopridecalendar.org
Colorful floats and risqué revelers pack Halsted St in Boystown. It's the gay and lesbian communities' main event, and more than 450,000 Chicagoans come to the party.

July

INDEPENDENCE DAY FIREWORKS

July 4

Pyrotechnics light up the night sky at Navy Pier, with synchronized shows blasting north (near Montrose Beach) and south (near 63rd St Beach). Note this is not your dad's firework display – Chicago ended its three-decades-long whopper of a show in 2010 due to budget constraints and replaced it with this smaller arsenal.

CHICAGO FOLK & ROOTS FESTIVAL

☎ 773-728-6000; www.chicagofolkandroots.org
Mid-month, one of Chicago's coolest organizations – the Old Town School of Folk Music – throws this two-day party in northside Welles Park, featuring everything from alt-country to Zimbabwean vocalists.

OLD ST PAT'S WORLD'S LARGEST BLOCK PARTY

www.worldslargestblockparty.com

It may be a church – Chicago's oldest, in fact – but St Pat's knows how to throw a party. Booze, bands and beautiful people are all here, and the West Loop event supposedly has brought together several couples over the years. The mingling takes place on a Friday and Saturday in mid-July.

WEST FEST

www.westfestchicago.com

This neighborhood festival rocks harder than most by staging a well-curated lineup of bands, including some pretty damn great national names. The dog-friendly, kid-friendly, weekend shindig takes place on Chicago Ave in Ukrainian Village in mid-July.

PITCHFORK MUSIC FESTIVAL

www.pitchforkmusicfestival.com

It's the sort of Lollapalooza Jr, only for bespectacled indie-rock fans. Sonic Youth, the Flaming Lips and other indie heroes shake up Union Park on a typically sweltering weekend, Friday through Sunday, in mid-July. A day pass costs \$40; tickets go on sale in February and become scarce by show time.

August

LOLLAPALOOZA

☎ 888-512-7469; www.lollapalooza.com

Once upon a time, this mondo rock fest traveled city to city. Now its permanent home is here in Chicago. It's a raucous event, with 130 bands – including many A-listers – spilling off eight stages in Grant Park the first Friday to Sunday in August.

Ticket prices vary, depending on how early you buy. A limited batch usually goes on sale in early March. These are the cheapest to obtain, since the band lineups haven't been finalized and you're buying on spec. The next ticket round goes up for grabs in early April; you get a bit more information on who's playing at this point, so tickets cost a bit more. By showtime, a three-day pass costs about \$215; day passes are about \$90. While tickets don't always sell out, advance purchases can help you save significant bucks. Keep a close eye on the website for updates.

NORTHALSTED MARKET DAYS

☎ 773-883-0500; www.northalsted.com

Prepare to see some wild costumes and booths at Market Days, the Midwest's biggest two-day street fair, which spans six blocks of Halsted St in Boystown. Locals gay and straight alike check out crafty vendors and the ample live music. It's held in early to mid-August.

BUD BILLIKEN PARADE

2nd Sat in Aug

☎ 877-244-2246; www.budbillikenparade.com
Held on the second Saturday of the month, this huge parade (the USA's largest African American one) features drill teams, dancers and floats. It runs along Martin Luther King Jr Dr, from 39th St to 51st St, and wraps up with a picnic in Washington Park afterwards.

ELVIS IS ALIVE 5K

☎ 773-305-3338; www.fleetfeetchicago.com/html/events_races_elvis.asp

Shimmy into your white jumpsuit, glue on the sideburns and energize with a peanut-butter-and-banana sandwich for this annual race through Grant Park, held sometime around August 16th, the day Elvis died. A post-run party in the park follows.

VIVA! CHICAGO LATIN MUSIC FESTIVAL

☎ 312-744-3315; www.vivachicago.us

Held during a mid-month weekend in Millennium Park, the free fest features salsa, merengue, mariachi and Spanish pop music delivered by well-known acts.

CHICAGO AIR & WATER SHOW

☎ 312-744-3370; www.chicagoairandwatershow.us

On Saturday and Sunday afternoon, the third weekend in August, the latest military hardware buzzes the lakefront from Diversey Pkwy south to Oak St Beach, rattling all the buildings' windows in between. North Ave Beach is the best place for viewing.

AFRICAN FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

☎ 773-955-2787; www.africanfestivalchicago.com

Soulful music and ethnic eats bring crowds to Washington Park for this annual event, usually held over the Labor Day weekend.

CHICAGO JAZZ FEST

☎ 312-744-3315; www.chicagोजazzfestival.us

Chicago's longest-running free music fest attracts top names on the local and national jazz scene. Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck and Charlie Haden are among those who have headlined. It's held over Labor Day weekend in Grant Park, with some shows spilling into Millennium Park and the Chicago Cultural Center.

September**WINDY CITY WINE FESTIVAL**

☎ 847-382-1480; www.windycitywinefestival.com

Vendors pour more than 250 global vinos by Buckingham Fountain, and a cool \$25 gets you 10 tastings plus cooking demos and free music acts. It's held the second weekend in September.

GERMAN-AMERICAN FESTIVAL

☎ 630-653-3018; www.germanday.com

Don the lederhosen and raise a frothy stein at this mid-September weekend event in the old German 'hood of Lincoln Square. The Von Steuben Parade marches through on Saturday (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* fans will remember it as the parade Ferris joins when he sings aboard a float).

WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

☎ 312-742-1938; www.worldmusicfestival.org

Musicians and bands from around the world tote their bouzoukis, ouds and other exotic instruments to Chicago for a week's worth of performances late month. Shows take place at venues throughout town, with the Chicago Cultural Center anchoring it all.

October**CHICAGO COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL**

☎ 312-744-3315; www.chicagocountrymusicfestival.us

Millennium Park fills up once again, this time with cowboy-boot-wearin' folks for a weekend early in the month. The music spans the gamut from slick new artists to old-school favorites like Loretta Lynn and Kenny Rogers.

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 312-683-0121; www.chicagofilmfestival.com

This is the city's main film event. It typically shows a few big-name flicks among the myriad not-so-big-name flicks, and brings a few big-name Hollywood stars to town to add a glamorous sheen to the proceedings. It's unspools over two weeks, starting early in the month, at varying venues.

CHICAGO MARATHON

☎ 312-904-9800; www.chicagomarathon.com

More than 45,000 runners from all over the globe compete on the 26-mile course through the city's heart, cheered on by a million spectators. Held on a Sunday in October (when the weather can be pleasant or absolutely freezing), it's considered one of the world's top five marathons.

CHICAGO BOOK FESTIVAL

% 312-747-4999; www.chicagopubliclibraryfoundation.org

The Chicago Public Library organizes special readings, lectures and book events throughout the month at its citywide branches. Many festivities revolve around the 'One Book, One Chicago' program, where everyone – including Mayor Daley – reads the same book (past selections have included Elie Wiesel's *Night* and Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice*).

CHICAGOWEEN

% 312-744-3315; www.explorechicago.org
From mid-October through Halloween, the city transforms Daley Plaza into Pumpkin Plaza and sets up a Haunted Village for kids.

DAY OF THE DEAD CELEBRATIONS

% 312-738-1503; www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org
The National Museum of Mexican Art in Pilsen puts on thought-provoking Day of the Dead events running from October to mid-December.

November

CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

% 312-661-1028; www.chicagohumanities.org
Put on your thinking cap: for two weeks in early November, a citywide series of chin-stroking talks, panels, readings, performances, exhibits and screenings take place, all focusing on a single, academic topic (it was 'the body' in 2010).

MAGNIFICENT MILE LIGHTS FESTIVAL

www.magnificentmilelightsfestival.com
During this free pre-Thanksgiving fest, Mickey Mouse and a posse of family-friendly musicians kick off the holiday season by turning on the Mag Mile's one million lights, which twinkle on into January.

THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE

4th Thu in Nov

www.chicagofestivals.org
Around 400,000 shivering souls show up to see giant helium balloons, floats, marching bands, and local and national

celebrities at the annual turkey day parade. It glides along State St from Congress to Randolph Sts.

TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

4th Thu in Nov

% 312-744-3315
The mayor flips the switch to light up Chicago's Christmas tree in Daley Plaza on Thanksgiving Day.

December

CHRISTKINDLMARKET

www.christkindlmarket.com
This traditional German holiday market takes over Daley Plaza in December, wafting sausages, roasted nuts and spiced wine along with Old World handicrafts. It starts around Thanksgiving and goes on until Christmas Eve.

ZOOLIGHTS

% 312-742-2000; www.lpzoo.org
As if the predatory cats weren't interesting enough, Lincoln Park Zoo gets gussied up for the holidays with sparkling trees, Santa spotting and seasonal displays throughout December.

WINTER WONDERFEST AT NAVY PIER

% 312-595-7437; www.winterwonderfest.com
With ice-skating, rides and an eye-popping indoor display throughout December, Chicago's most popular tourist attraction goes all out for the holidays, and then out with a bang during its New Year's Eve fireworks show.

HOW MUCH?

- Gallon of gas \$3.30
- Liter of water \$1.50
- Bottle of Old Style beer \$3
- Souvenir T-shirt from the Hideout \$15
- Italian beef sandwich \$5
- El fare \$2.25
- Green Mill martini \$8.50
- Near North hotel room approximately \$159
- Blues club cover charge \$15
- Small bag of Garrett's caramel popcorn \$4.50

COSTS & MONEY

Chicago is cheaper than its big-city coastal counterparts. In general, eating and drinking prices are reasonable, and there are loads of free concerts and cultural festivals for entertainment. Accommodation prices are another story.

Your hotel room can cost an awful lot. The rack rates on rooms here are shocking. This is partially because of the 15.4% hotel tax levied by the city, which Chicago depends on to maintain its parks and public buildings. But the city is only partially to blame for the price tags on hotel and motel rooms. Business travelers are the other culprits. Because of the huge number of conventioners in Chicago at any given moment, hotel rooms are almost always at a premium. And unlike leisure travelers, the business travelers (1) have to come here whether they want to or not, and (2) get reimbursed for their lodging costs.

A standard midrange room costs between \$150 and \$225 per night with tax. Sadly, \$35 hostel beds and other budget properties are thin on the ground. The best way to save money is to shop around as much as possible on the internet. Sometimes the room price listed on a discount travel website can be \$100 lower than the price quoted by the hotel reservation agent. For tips on bidding for rooms, see the boxed text, p232. For other lodging-related tips and tricks, see Saving Strategies (p227).

Food is typically good value in the Windy City. Lunch at a sit-down restaurant costs about \$15 per person, including a nonalcoholic

drink and a tip. Double it for dinner at a mid-range restaurant or pub. If you want to spend more, Chicago has plenty of upscale places where you can do just that and easily rack up a \$200 tab for top-end molecular gastronomy. Chicago's ample ethnic eats – Mexican, Indian, Middle Eastern and Vietnamese food – are the budgeteer's friend. So are the myriad burger and hot dog joints, where you can feast for less than \$10. A pint of beer averages \$6.

The premier museums charge around \$20 for admission. Many have scattered free days (see p111), and discount cards are available (see p268). Other top attractions, including Millennium Park, Navy Pier and Lincoln Park Zoo, don't cost a dime. Discount ticket brokers such as [Goldstar](http://www.goldstar.com) (www.goldstar.com) and [Hot Tix](http://www.hottix.org) (www.hottix.org) slash prices in half for theater and sports events.

The El offers an economical way to get around at \$2.25 per ride (\$5.75 for a day pass). Taxi fares mount quickly – even a short ride of just a few miles will cost \$10.

All in all, once you conquer the accommodation issue, you're looking at a reasonably priced holiday in Chicago compared to other big cities.

INTERNET RESOURCES

[DailyCandy](http://www.dailycandy.com/chicago) (www.dailycandy.com/chicago) Get the girly fashion and shopping lowdown.

[Richard M Daley's YouTube channel](http://www.youtube.com/mayordaley) (www.youtube.com/mayordaley) Da Mayor spouts on YouTube.

ADVANCE PLANNING

First and foremost, book your lodging ahead of time. Not only will this help avoid unpleasant surprises like the International Screwdriver Association taking up every room in town, but you'll cut costs off the outrageous rack rates. See p227 for detailed advice on saving strategies.

Foodies who crave dinner at top-end restaurants like [Alinea](http://www.alinea.com) (p156), [Topolobampo](http://www.topolobampo.com) (p150) and [Schwa](http://www.schwa.com) (p165) should make reservations six to eight weeks in advance.

Three weeks or so before your trip, sign up online with national ticket broker [Goldstar](http://www.goldstar.com) (www.goldstar.com) to be privy to half-price seats for a huge array of theater performances, sports events (including White Sox, Bulls and Cubs rooftop seats) and even local boat tours.

While you can get half-price theater tickets on the day of performances from [Hot Tix](http://www.hottix.org) (www.hottix.org), popular shows often sell out. If you have your heart set on a particular performance, keep an eye on the Hot Tix website a few weeks before your arrival and see if your show has a pattern of available tickets. If not, book ahead.

Pitchfork and especially Lollapalooza fans can save money by buying tickets in advance. Keep an eye on the events' websites starting in February; see p15 for details. If you're coming to town for these fests or any other big summer music bash, definitely secure lodging in advance.

You'll save more time than money by ordering your CTA train passes (p265) in advance, but didn't someone once say 'time is money'?

Finally, folks who enjoy DIY walking tours should download the several audio excursions the city has to offer. The MP3s cover everything from Loop architecture to blues sights; see p272 for a list of what's on offer.

Explore Chicago (www.explorechicago.org) The city's official portal, with excellent neighborhood information and a Twitter feed of day-by-day free events.

Gapers Block (www.gapersblock.com) Hip, playful reports on the latest news, cultural happenings and political shenanigans afoot in the Windy City.

Hot Rooms (www.hotrooms.com) Peruse this Chicago-centric hotel room consolidator to save a few bucks. If nothing else, you can take the prices you find here and try to beat 'em on Hotwire or Priceline.

HuffPost Chicago (www.huffingtonpost.com/chicago) Amalgamates news from major local sources.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Succinct summaries on travelling to most places on earth; postcards from other travelers; and the Thorn Tree bulletin board, where you can ask questions before you go or dispense advice when you get back.

LTHForum (www.lthforum.com) Foodies, this one's for you: wide-ranging talk about the local restaurant scene from a dedicated community of food lovers.

VegIllinois.com Chicago (www.vegchicago.com) Guide to local vegetarian and vegan restaurants and markets.

SUSTAINABLE CHICAGO

You can tread gently on the earth and still have a first-class visit to the Windy City. You're spoiled for choice if you wish to avoid flying here. Chicago is an Amtrak (p266), Megabus (p264) and Greyhound (p264) hub, so take your pick of these lower-impact modes of travel. Once in town, ditch the car. Public transportation goes to most visitor-oriented places; taking the train or bus not only cuts down on emissions, but allows you to avoid

top picks

ECOFRIENDLY BUSINESSES

Working Bikes Cooperative (p216)
 Hotel Felix (p234)
 Xoco (p153)
 Greenheart Shop (p138)
 City Provisions (p160)
 Green City Market (p157)
 Bleeding Heart Bakery (p161)

the megahassle of trying to find parking (and paying the absurd price for it).

Heck, if you really want to do it right, buy a recycled two-wheeler from Working Bikes Cooperative (p216) for \$50 or so. The cost won't be much more than a daily bike rental, plus when you're finished you can donate it back to the group.

It's getting easier and easier to eat sustainably, thanks to farmers' markets and a growing list of restaurants that source ingredients locally. See Farmers' markets (p157) and the **Local Beet** (www.thelocalbeet.com), a locavore website, for suggestions.

As for lodging, most of the city's properties do the usual by asking visitors to reuse towels and sheets. Approximately 15 downtown hotels have received Green Seal certification; see p229 for more on the subject.

Chicago continues its role as an architectural innovator and leads the nation in green building design; see p39 for details.

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