

Chicago

Chicago Chicago is the largest city in the U.S. state of Illinois and the third-most populous city in the United States, after New York City and Los Angeles. Known for its bold architecture, vibrant arts scene, and deep-dish pizza, Chicago is a major cultural and economic hub in the Midwest.

Key Facts:

- Population: ~2.7 million (metro area: ~9.5 million)
- Location: Northeastern Illinois, on the shores of Lake Michigan
- Famous Attractions:
 - Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower) – One of the tallest buildings in the Western Hemisphere, with the Skydeck offering stunning views.
 - Navy Pier – A lakeside entertainment hub with rides, restaurants, and boat tours.
 - The Magnificent Mile – A premier shopping and dining district along Michigan Avenue.
 - Chicago Riverwalk – Scenic walkway along the river, great for dining and sightseeing.

Culture & Food:

- Deep-Dish Pizza – A Chicago specialty (try Lou Malnati's, Giordano's, or Pequod's).
- Blues & Jazz Music – Famous venues like Buddy Guy's Legends and Green Mill.
- Theater Scene – Second only to NYC, with Broadway in Chicago and improv at The Second City.

Sports Teams:

- Chicago Bulls (NBA) – Michael Jordan's legendary team.
- Chicago Bears (NFL) – Play at Soldier Field.
- Chicago Cubs & White Sox (MLB) – Rival baseball teams.
- Chicago Blackhawks (NHL) – Historic hockey franchise.

Transportation:

- Midway Airport (MDW) – A smaller, often cheaper alternative.
- "L" Train – Chicago's elevated/subway transit system.

Weather:

- Summers: Warm and humid, great for festivals like Lollapalooza.
- Winters: Cold and snowy, with winds coming off Lake Michigan ("wind chill" is real!).

Neighborhoods to Explore

- The Loop – Downtown heart with skyscrapers, theaters, and Millennium Park.
- Wicker Park / Bucktown – Hipster vibe with vintage shops, street art, and cool bars (Big Star for tacos, Dove's Luncheonette for diner fare).
- Logan Square – Trendy area with craft cocktail bars (The Whistler), breweries (Revolution Brewing), and the historic Logan Theatre.
- Pilsen – Mexican-American culture, murals, and National Museum of Mexican Art. Try Carnitas Uruapan for authentic tacos.
- Hyde Park – Home to the University of Chicago, Museum of Science and Industry, and Barack Obama's former house.
- South Side (Bronzeville) – Rich Black history, Harold's Chicken Shack, and jazz heritage.

Hidden Gems & Unique Experiences:

- Garfield Park Conservatory – A stunning, free indoor jungle (great for winter escapes).
- The 606 Trail – An elevated urban park/walking trail (like NYC's High Line).
- Chicago Magic Lounge – A speakeasy-style venue for live magic shows.

- The Violet Hour (Wicker Park) – A secretive, no-phones cocktail bar with ever-changing menus.
- Al's #1 Italian Beef – The real deal for Chicago-style Italian beef (dipped in jus, with hot peppers).

Seasonal Highlights:

- Spring/Summer:
 - Taste of Chicago (June) – Massive food festival in Grant Park.
 - Chicago Blues Festival (June) – The world's largest free blues fest.
 - Air & Water Show (August) – Fighter jets and acrobatics over Lake Michigan.
 - Street Fests – Neighborhood block parties (Wicker Park Fest, West Fest, etc.).
- Fall/Winter:
 - Christkindlmarket (Nov-Dec) – German-inspired holiday market with mulled wine.
 - ZooLights at Lincoln Park Zoo (Dec) – Free festive light displays.
 - Chicago Restaurant Week (Jan-Feb) – Prix-fixe menus at top eateries.

Pro Tips for Visitors:

- Get a CityPASS – If hitting major attractions (Skydeck, Shedd Aquarium, Field Museum).
- Try Malört – Chicago's infamous bitter liquor (if you dare).
- Watch for "Dibs" – In winter, locals reserve shoveled parking spots with lawn chairs (seriously).

Off the Radar Eats & Drinks

- Jim's Original (Near UIC) – The original Maxwell Street Polish sausage stand (cash only, open 24/7).
- Cafe Colao (Humboldt Park) – Puerto Rican pastries and cafecito that'll transport you to San Juan.
- Kumiko – A World-Class cocktail bar (from the team behind Oriole, but no reservation needed).
- Calumet Fisheries – A smoked-fish shack by the river, untouched since 1948 (Anthony Bourdain loved it).

Secret Skyline Views (No Crowds)

- Cindy's Rooftop (early morning) – Same view as Millennium Park, but with mimosas.
- LondonHouse Hotel's Free Lobby View – Just walk in, take the elevator to the 21st-floor lobby.
- The 16th Floor of the Loyola Library (Water Tower Campus) – A silent study spot with panoramic windows.
- Montrose Beach Bird Sanctuary – Skyline + nature, best at sunset.

Bizarre Chicago History

- The real "Windy City" origin – It was an insult about politicians blowing hot air, not the weather.
- The Eastland Disaster (1915) – More people died in the Chicago River than on the Titanic (often overlooked).
- The original Playboy Club – Now a bland office building at 919 N. Michigan Ave.

Underground Arts & Oddities

- The Neon Wilderness – A dive bar covered in outsider art (like a punk-rock museum).
- The Leather Archives & Museum (Rogers Park) – Yes, it's exactly what it sounds like.

Only-in-Chicago Traditions

- The "Cheese Tax" – Street hot dog vendors must ask if you want cheese (it's a city ordinance).
- The Chicago Rat Hole – A rat-shaped sidewalk indentation in Roscoe Village (RIP, it got filled in 2024).
- The real Chicago Handshake – A shot of Malört + an Old Style beer (drink at your own risk).
- "Dibs" Culture – In winter, people mark shoveled parking spots with junk (and it's sacred).

Free & Cheap Thrills

- Lincoln Park Zoo – One of the last free major zoos in the U.S.
- Music Box Theatre's Matinees – Classic films for \$10 in a historic theater.
- The El's Best Views – Ride the Brown Line (Loop to Belmont) for skyline porn.

Brutally Honest Local Tips

- Avoid Navy Pier on weekends – It's a tourist trap (go to North Avenue Beach instead).

- Deep-dish is for tourists – Locals eat tavern-style (thin, crispy, cut in squares).
- Don't say "ketchup on hot dogs" – It's a felony in Chicago (just kidding... but seriously).

Hyper-Local Slang

- "The Jewels" = Jewel-Osco (grocery store)
- "Da Bears" = How locals say "The Bears"
- "Frunchroom" = Front room (a South Side accent quirk)
- "Pop" = Soda (but this is a Midwest thing)

The REAL Best Pizza Debate Fight Me

- Tavern-Style (The People's Champ):
- Deep-Dish (For Tourists... But Also Delicious):
- Milano's (Little Italy) – Forgotten OG with a killer "stuffed spinach."
- Nuclear Take: Chicago-style pizza is actually frozen Home Run Inn (you grew up on it, don't lie).

The Secret Chicago Foods No One Talks About

- The Mother-in-Law: A tamale stuffed in a hot dog bun, drowned in chili (find it at Fat Johnnie's).
- The Gym Shoe: A messy South Side sandwich with gyro meat, roast beef, and fries (try Ricobene's).
- Pizza Puff: A deep-fried, saucy, cheap-as-hell gas station delicacy (best at Albany Meat Market).
- Rainbow Cone: That weird South Side ice cream stack (chocolate, pistachio, Palmer House, etc.).

The Other Chicago Rat Hole (Yes, There's More)

- The "L" Rat: A bronze rat on the tracks near Adams/Wabash—touch it for luck (or don't, it's gross).
- The Dead Rat Hole: Roscoe Village's infamous rat silhouette got filled in, but the "Rat Hole 2.0" appeared nearby (look by Wolcott & Roscoe).
- Bonus: The "Demon House" in Beverly had a literal exorcism in 1971 (it's torn down now, but the block's creepy).