

Chicago

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THE U.S.'S THIRD LARGEST CITY OFFERS ARRAY OF SIGHT-SEEING TREASURES

Chicago greets visitors with a skyline that seems to rise directly from the waters of Lake Michigan, a bold introduction to a city that has long stood at the crossroads of American culture, commerce, and creativity.

Known as the “Windy City,” Chicago blends historic grit with modern innovation, offering travelers an experience that feels both grand and deeply human.

With a population of about 2.7 million people in the city and nearly 9.5 million in the greater metropolitan area, Chicago is the third-largest city in the United States. Its neighborhoods – more than 70 in total – give the city its rich personality. Each district tells its own story, whether it’s the vibrant Mexican culture of Pilsen, the historic jazz roots of Bronzeville, or the polished skyscrapers of the Loop.

Chicago’s history is one of resilience and reinvention. Founded as a small trading post in the early 19th century, the city quickly grew because of its strategic location connecting the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River system. Railroads, shipping, and meatpacking industries turned Chicago into one of America’s great industrial powerhouses.

The city faced a defining moment in 1871 when the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of downtown, but Chicago rebuilt itself rapidly. In the decades that followed, it pioneered the modern skyscraper, reshaping urban architecture and cementing its reputation as a city that refuses to stay down for long.

Today, Chicago’s skyline remains one of the most spectacular in the world, and visitors have no shortage of landmarks to explore – or to just contemplate the damage caused by the 1871 fire that destroyed 17,450 buildings, left 100,000 residents homeless, and claimed the lives of nearly 300 people.

Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

- Millennium Park: Home to the iconic Cloud Gate sculpture, affectionately called “The Bean,” also features a variety of public art, outdoor spaces, and venues. The Bean’s mirrored surface reflects the skyline and crowds alike, making it one of the most photographed spots in the city.
- Art Institute of Chicago: Consistently ranked among the finest art museums in the world. Visitors can stand inches away from

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masterpieces such as Grant Wood's "American Gothic" and Georges Seurat's "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte."

- Chicago Riverwalk: Offering a unique perspective on Chicago's groundbreaking buildings and running along the Chicago River where architecture cruises glide through the heart of the city.
- Willis Tower Skydeck (formerly the Sears Tower): Standing 1,450 feet tall, it was once the tallest building in the world. The Skydeck's glass ledges allow visitors to step out over the city – an exhilarating experience that provides sweeping views across four states on a clear day.
- Navy Pier: A lively waterfront destination filled with restaurants, shops, theaters, and a towering Ferris wheel that lights up the night sky. Stretching into Lake Michigan, it offers both entertainment and unforgettable lakefront views.

Chicago also thrives on its calendar of annual events and festivals. The city's summer months are particularly lively. Lollapalooza, one of the world's largest music festivals, draws hundreds of thousands of fans to Grant Park each year. The 2026 dates are July 30 through August 2. The Taste of Chicago, another beloved event, celebrates the city's culinary diversity with food from dozens of restaurants, and is slated for July 8-12 also in Grant Park. Meanwhile, the Chicago Air and Water Show, to be held along the lakefront on August 15-16, fills the sky with thrilling aerial performances that have captivated crowds for decades.

The city also has produced an impressive list of famous figures. Legendary talk-show host Oprah Winfrey built much of her media empire in Chicago. Cultural icons like Michael Jordan, whose basketball career with the Chicago Bulls defined an era, and famed animator Walt Disney, who was born in Chicago, all trace their roots to the city.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama began his political career in Chicago and still maintains strong ties to the city. In fact, the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago's Jackson Park is scheduled to open to the public on June 19, 2026 (Juneteenth), with dedication ceremonies beginning on June 18. The 19.3-acre campus will feature a museum, a Chicago Public Library branch, an athletic center, and outdoor spaces.

Behind Chicago's cultural energy lies a powerful economic engine. Historically driven by manufacturing and transportation, the city has evolved into a major hub for finance, technology, logistics, and global trade. The Chicago Mercantile Exchange and Chicago Board of Trade form one of the world's largest financial trading centers. Meanwhile, O'Hare International Airport, one of the busiest airports on the planet, keeps Chicago connected to cities around the globe.

Yet what truly makes Chicago special is its balance between grandeur and approachability. World-class architecture stands beside neighborhood diners serving deep-dish pizza. Blues clubs echo with music that shaped American culture, while lakefront parks offer miles of trails and beaches within minutes of downtown.