

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
NEWS RELEASE
CHICAGO OFFICE OF TOURISM

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CHICAGO SUPERLATIVES

Chicago, a global city, is home to three of the world's largest buildings, the only river on earth that flows backwards, and more green-roof space than any other city in the United States or Canada. While every city has a list of the biggest, best and most impressive, here are a few of the past and the present standouts that make Chicago a world-class, modern-day destination.

- The city's international renown for inspired architecture began after the 1871 Great Chicago fire, when its blank landscape and reputation for innovation attracted leading and up-and-coming architects of the day. One result was the world's first "skyscraper" - the Home Insurance Building built in 1885. Though gone, this building set Chicago en route to becoming a living architecture museum that today includes three of the world's tallest buildings: Sears Tower (1,450 feet); AON Center (1,136 feet); and the John Hancock Center (1,127 feet).
- The Chicago River is the only river on earth that flows backwards. Reversed in 1900 for sanitary purposes, the Chicago River is one of the 20th century's top engineering wonders according to the American Society of Civil Engineers. Each year on the Saturday before St. Patrick's Day, the Chicago River is dyed green.
- Chicago is America's first city built according to a comprehensive municipal plan, which was authored by architect Daniel Burnham. Burnham's 1909 landmark work spurred modern city planning.
- Chicago boasts more green-roof space than any other city in Canada and the U.S. with 4 million square feet completed and underway. Constructed on top of a sub-level parking garage and train yard, the 24.5-acre Millennium Park is one of the largest green roofs under the sun.
- Chicago is home to eleven Fortune 500 company headquarters, while the metropolitan area hosts an additional 21 Fortune 500 companies.
- The Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago's main public library branch, is the world's largest public library building and houses more than 2 million books.
- Among the world's largest indoor aquariums, the John G. Shedd Aquarium houses the oldest living aquarium fish and nearly 26,000 aquatic animals, representing 1,500 species of fishes, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, birds and mammals.
- The Buckingham Fountain in downtown Grant Park is one of the planet's largest fountains. It was inspired by the Latona Basin in Louis XIV's gardens at Versailles, France. Operating seasonally, this Chicago icon's 20-minute light and music display runs every hour, on the hour.
- Chicago is home to an exceptional public art collection, with more than 100 pieces in downtown alone, plus stellar works in neighborhoods throughout the city. Highlights include the monumental untitled Pablo Picasso sculpture in Daley Plaza; the world's largest sculpture by environmental artist David Nash located on the Museum Campus; the only authentic Guimard Metro entrance in use outside of Paris; and Millennium Park's Cloud Gate sculpture by artist Anish Kapoor—weighing 110 tons, it is one of the largest outdoor sculptures in the world.
- Residing on Chicago's North Side, the Lincoln Park Zoo is America's oldest zoo. The zoo was founded in 1868, when the Lincoln Park Commissioners were given a gift of a pair of swans. Today, the Lincoln Park Zoo is a national leader in zoo-based conservation programs. It is open daily and remains admission free.

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Chicago Superlatives/Add One

- The world's first Ferris Wheel made its debut in Chicago in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition. Today, Navy Pier is home to a 15-story tall Ferris Wheel, modeled after that first Ferris Wheel.
- The Art Institute of Chicago holds the largest and most extensive collections of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings outside of the Musee d'Orsay in Paris.
- The Chicago Cultural Center is the first free municipal cultural center in the U.S. and home to the world's largest stained glass Tiffany dome.
- Chicago is a center for fashion design, with more than 250 Chicago-based designers and 400 independently-owned boutiques.
- Many of the greatest American authors hail from Chicago, including Theodore Dreiser, Carl Sandburg, Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks and Saul Bellow.
- The Taste of Chicago attracts 3.5 million hungry attendees on average each year and is the country's largest free food and entertainment festival.
- Chicago's acclaimed Field Museum houses Sue, the largest, most complete and best-preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex specimen ever found.
- The Adler Planetarium is America's first planetarium and has one of the world's most important antique instrument collections.
- Chicago is the only U.S. city with four Tony Award-winning theaters: Steppenwolf Theatre Company (1985); The Goodman Theatre (1992); Victory Gardens Theater (2001); and Chicago Shakespeare Theater (2008).
- Chicago is home to more five-diamond restaurants than any other city in the nation: Alinea; Arun's; Avenues (The Peninsula Chicago); Charlie Trotter's; Everest; Seasons (Four Seasons Hotel Chicago); and Tru. Chicago is also the location of the 2007 James Beard Foundation Outstanding Restaurant - Frontera Grill.
- Chicago's Polish population is the largest in the world outside of Warsaw.
- Chicago is a music mecca, where visitors can hear dozens of live performances at clubs and venues throughout the city every night of the week. Chicago is considered the Blues Capital of the World and is also home to a thriving jazz scene, famous for nurturing jazz giants like Louis Armstrong and Earl "Fatha" Hines in the early 20th century. More recently, the city was the birthplace for house music, where pioneers, including Frankie Knuckles, emerged at places like the defunct Warehouse Club.
- The University of Chicago leads all institutions with 81 associated Nobel Laureates, starting with the first American to win in science Albert A. Michelson (a 1907 winner for measuring the speed of light).
- There are thirty-seven operable, movable (bascule) bridges, the most found in any city, over the Chicago River. Downtown's Millennium Park is home to the only Frank Gehry-designed bridge in the world.

Visitors and Chicagoans planning to entertain out-of-town guests can receive Chicago brochures, reserve hotel accommodations and receive trip-planning assistance at 1.877.CHICAGO (1.877.244.2246, toll-free) or visiting www.explorechicago.org. Brochures and information on Chicago's exciting events and activities are also available at the Visitor Information Centers: Chicago Water Works, 163 E. Pearson Street at Michigan Avenue; the Chicago Cultural Center, 77 E. Randolph Street. The TTY toll-free number for the hearing impaired is 1.866.710.0294.

The Chicago Office of Tourism, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, is the official City agency dedicated to promoting Chicago to domestic and international visitors and to providing innovative visitor programs and services.

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