

36 Hours in Chicago



Sally Ryan for The New York Times

Gilt Bar in the River North neighborhood takes its food seriously. [More Photos »](#)

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ALL cities have their ups and downs, but Chicago has been on the rise by playing to its strengths, adding parks, architectural crowd pleasers and public art. Much of this has happened on the watch of Mayor [Richard M. Daley](#), who, after 21 years in office, announced this month that he would be stepping down. How will the city fare without him? Just fine, probably, thanks to the raft of improvements that has left Chicago fortified both by 19th- and 20th-century public spaces brimming with 21st-century attractions.

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... SPIRITS ...

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Chicago, Ill.

Friday

4 p.m.

1) LOOP THE LOOP

Chicago is a city of [architecture](#) tours, but one of the best is right above you: the “L,” the elevated subway that circles the Loop ([transitchicago.com](#)). Get on the brown, orange or pink lines — it doesn’t matter which color, as long as you sit in the first car by the front-view window — and round the two-square-mile area. If you’re going clockwise, look to the left. Among landmarks you’ll see are Bertrand Goldberg’s spectacular Marina City, the new [Trump International Hotel and Tower](#), [Frank Gehry](#)’s Pritzker Pavilion band shell and Louis Sullivan’s historic Auditorium Building. Miss one? No problems. The \$2.25 ticket buys unlimited loops.

8 p.m.

2) MIDWAY FARE

Credit the recession, but a number of good midprice but high-style restaurants have opened in Chicago in the last two years. A favorite is [Gilt Bar](#) (230 West Kinzie Street; 312-464-9544; [giltbarchicago.com](#)), a casual restaurant in the River North neighborhood that isn’t casual about its cooking. The menu features New American dishes like blackened cauliflower with capers (\$7) and ricotta gnocchi with sage and brown butter (\$13). After dinner, head downstairs to Curio, a basement bar with a Prohibition theme. Try the Death’s Door Daisy, made with artisanal Wisconsin vodka and Aperol, a blood orange liqueur, for \$10.

11 p.m.

3) COME ON IN

There are so many clubs on Ontario Street, just north of the loop, that it's sometimes known as Red Bull Row. For a mellower jolt, head to the Uptown neighborhood, to [Big Chicks](#) (5024 North Sheridan Road; 773-728-5511; [bigchicks.com](#)) a gay bar that welcomes everyone. The drinks are cheap, the crowd is friendly and the décor is appealingly kooky.

Saturday

9 a.m.

4) FANCY EGGS

Couldn't get to dinner at Frontera Grill, the nouvelle Mexican restaurant owned by the celebrity chef Rick Bayless? No worries. Just head over for breakfast at [Xoco](#) (449 North Clark Street; 312-661-1434; [rickbayless.com](#)), Mr. Bayless's newest restaurant. It's served till 10 a.m.; expect a line after 8:30. Favorites include scrambled egg empanada with poblano chili (\$3), and an open-face torta with soft poached egg, salsa, cheese, cilantro and black beans (\$4). Chocolate café au lait (\$3.25) comes with a single hot, crisp, sugary churro.

11 a.m.

5) OFF-LABEL STRIP

The Magnificent Mile area is filled with flagships (Gucci, Vuitton — you know the list). But there are still some independent stores you won't find at your hometown mall. [Ikram](#) (873 North Rush Street; 312-587-1000; [ikram.com](#)) is the stylish boutique that counts Michelle Obama among its customers, with fashion-forward labels like [Jason Wu](#) and [Martin Margiela](#). East Oak Street has a couple of cool shops, including Sofia (No. 72; 312-640-0878; [sofiavintage.com](#)). Next door is Colletti Gallery (No. 102; 312-664-6767; [collettigallery.com](#)), with a gorgeous selection of Art Deco and Art Nouveau furniture and objets. It's a short walk from there to the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#) (220 East Chicago Avenue; 312-280-2660; [mcachicago.org](#)), which has a spectacular exhibition of works by [Alexander Calder](#) — and works inspired by Calder — through Oct. 17.

2 p.m.

6) FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD

Walking around Hyde Park, a leafy enclave about seven miles south of the Loop, it's easy to see why the Obamas settled there. Their house, on South Greenwood Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets, is nearly invisible behind Secret Service barricades. Luckily, the nearby [Robie House](#) (5757 South Woodlawn Avenue; 800-514-3849; [gowright.org](#)), a [Frank Lloyd Wright](#) masterpiece, is open for tours. See if you can find an abstracted male figure in the Japanese-inspired leaded-glass windows. Across the street, the beautifully landscaped [University of Chicago](#) campus is worth exploring for an afternoon.

7 p.m.

7) LIVESTOCK MENU

Chicago was once the meatpacking capital of the world, and it still knows what to do with offal. Take [Girl & the Goat](#) (809 West Randolph Street, 312-492-6262; [girlandthegoat.com](#)), a much-blogged-about new restaurant where the "Top Chef" winner Stephanie Izard takes livestock parts seriously. The often-updated menu recently included lamb ribs with grilled avocado and pistachio piccata (\$17), and braised beef tongue with masa and beef vinaigrette (\$12). If you're not a carnivore, try chickpeas three ways (\$11), and for dessert, potato fritters with lemon poached eggplant and Greek yogurt (\$8). The soaring dining room, designed by the Chicago design firm 555 International, is warm and modern, with exposed beams, walls of charred cedar and a large open kitchen. Reservations essential.

10 p.m.

8) FUNNY BONE

The owners of the [Ontourage](#) nightclub (157 West Ontario Street; 312-573-1470; [ontouragechicago.com](#)) were tired of waiting until midnight for the crowds to gather, so they began offering comedy shows at 10 on Saturdays. You won't find big names, but a hit-or-miss roster of itinerant comedians, some who heckle the audience in language that can't be printed here. Tickets, \$10 include admission to the upstairs lounge, where bottle-service vodkas start at \$200.

Sunday

10 a.m.

9) BEAUTIFICATION BRUNCH

Logan Square, about five to six miles northwest of the Loop, is a remnant of Chicago's late-19th-century beautification movement, with a statue of an eagle by Evelyn Longman where two of the grandest boulevards meet. Nearby, Longman & Eagle (2657 North Kedzie Avenue; 773-276-7110; longmanandeagle.com) is a rough-edged bar that serves a refined brunch: a chunky sockeye salmon tartare with pickled mango (\$10) or a wild boar "Sloppy Joe" (\$10). Six hotel rooms are set to open upstairs.

1 p.m.

10) GRAND PIANO

Chicago knows how to mix neo-classical architecture with contemporary design, and no place does it better than the Art Institute of Chicago (111 South Michigan Avenue; 312-443-3600; artinstituteofchicago.org), which opened its celebrated Modern Wing last year. Designed by Renzo Piano, it the luminous addition contains a magnificent set of galleries for 1900-1950 European art (Picasso, Giacometti, Klee are a few of the big names) and a capacious room for the museum's design collection. Hungry or not, check out Terzo Piano, the stunning rooftop restaurant with views of the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park across the street.

3 p.m.

11) WHEELS UP

From the museum, walk over the pedestrian bridge, also designed by Mr. Piano, to Millennium Park, and rent bikes from Bike and Roll (312-729-1000; bikechicago.com), about \$35 a day, for a ride up the shore of Lake Michigan. You'll pass Navy Pier, skyscrapers by Mies van der Rohe, and hundreds of beach volleyball courts, which make this the Malibu of the Midwest on summer and fall weekends. Along the way, you'll pass Lincoln Park, with a new pavilion by the Chicago architect Jeanne Gang — another example of how the city is updating its open spaces.

IF YOU GO

Numerous airlines, including Delta, American and United, fly nonstop into Chicago from all three New York-area airports. Based on recent Web search, round-trip flights start at about \$219 for travel in October.

[The Allegro](#) (171 West Randolph Street, 312-236-0123; [allegrochicago.com](#)), a 483-room hotel in the city's bustling theater district, in the bold style of Kimpton hotels. Rooms from about \$149.

Opened last year, the Elysian (11 East Walton Street; 312-646-1300; [elysianhotels.com](#)) is a cushy 188-room hotel where the beds aren't made — they're "draped" in 460-thread-count Rivolta Carmignani linens. From the outside, the building, not far from the Magnificent Mile, resembles a chateau. Rooms start at about \$430.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 26, 2010

The 36 Hours column about Chicago, contained several errors. The well-known shopping district along Michigan Avenue is the Magnificent Mile, not the Miracle Mile. The distance from the Loop to Logan Square is five to six miles, not two, and the distance to the popular Hyde Park neighborhood is about seven miles, not four. The academic calendar of the University of Chicago operates on a quarterly — not semester — system. And the Red Bar Comedy Show — not Ontourage nightclub — offers performances on Fridays and Saturdays at 8 and 10 p.m. — not just on Saturdays at 10. (Red Bar is part of the Ontourage nightclub complex.) More information is available at (773) 387-8412 and [redbarcomedy.com](#).

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