

36 Hours in Chicago

Culture, comedy and culinary outings in the ever-evolving Loop district and beyond.



By Elaine Glusac

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Chicago's 77 neighborhoods — including Lincoln Park, home to the new [Wrightwood 659 gallery](#) — offer myriad reasons to stray from the beaten path. But lately the Loop, as the downtown district is called for the elevated train tracks that encircle it, is fighting for your attention with a new architecture center, writers' museum, river walk, design-centric hotels, destination restaurants and [Art on the Mart](#), a digital art installation broadcast across a 2.5-acre building facade on the river. All of the city's train lines fan out from downtown, making it a great base from which to explore beyond, particularly for those in search of vibrant storefront theaters, design shops and breweries. Late fall and winter are bargain times to appreciate them, when rates for everything from airfare to hotel rooms drop. But the best reasons to visit Chicago now largely defy climate.

5) 12 p.m. View Points

For a panoramic lunch, dine at [Cindy's](#), the conservatory-like rooftop restaurant at the Chicago Athletic Association hotel overlooking Millennium Park and Lake Michigan. Share the generous seafood cocktail (\$22) and cast-iron chilaquiles (\$27) while taking in the views. Then continue north to the Chicago River to stroll on the two-year-old [Chicago Riverwalk](#), a 1.25-mile long, water-level promenade. In fair weather, the kayak launches, picnic lawns and cafes bustle, but even in the off-season, the walkway offers good perspectives on the surrounding landmark high-rises.

9) 10:30 p.m. Toddlin' Town

In a town where nightclubs and bars stay open an extra hour on Saturday nights, there's a nightcap for every mood. The polished new [Z Bar](#) at the Peninsula Chicago hotel offers bird's-eye views over Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile downtown. In bohemian Wicker Park, the intimate [Up Room](#) atop the Robey hotel channels a midcentury lounge with Chicago accents, including drinks inspired by the Great Fire of 1871, such as Holy Cow milk punch (\$15). In the Loop, enter through a neighboring diner to reach the neo-dive-bar [Moneygun](#) and huddle in a circular booth with a classic cocktail like a Pink Squirrel (\$11.75). Nearby, play a game of foosball or bocce ball at the retro [Game Room](#) in the Chicago Athletic Association.