

Chicago: The Windy City

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are some places in the world that everyone always seems to agree are well worth visiting. New York City, which we discussed in the [January 2, 2009 issue of PassPorter News](#) is one and Chicago seems to be another.

Having visited a lot of America's great cities, including New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston, it seemed that the time was right to move away from the western or eastern seaboard of the States and finally head inland to Chicago. However, even that statement feels like a contradiction, for while Chicago may be located in the middle of the States, we felt it was just as much of a coastal city as many of the others we'd already visited.

Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, we knew that this was one of the Great Lakes, but until you see the sheer size and scale of the lakes, you can't appreciate just how great they are. It stretches into the horizon, just like any ocean or sea, and on more than one occasion, we made the mistake of saying to locals that we were on the seaside. What adds to that feeling is the fact that Chicago is home to 29 miles of public lakefront shoreline, much of it made up of beaches.

That, and the many swimming pools we saw as we flew into the city, highlight just how warm Chicago can get during the summer months. And there's another contradiction, as the city can also literally freeze in the winter. We deliberately planned our trip for mid-October and we were fortunate enough to still have warm enough temperatures that we could comfortably walk around, although we had to be bundled up against the infamous wind that Chicago is so well known for. It certainly lives up to its name of the Windy City, with me almost taking off on one occasion, so strong was the wind.

There's certainly a lot to see in Chicago and something for everyone. One of the main draws for me was the architecture and I knew, from photos I'd already seen of the city before our visit, that I wasn't going to be disappointed. The city has done a superb job of preserving its heritage, although of course much of that history was sadly wiped out by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which burned for 36 hours. In that time, it destroyed most of the buildings in the downtown area, but from that disaster, Chicago was reborn, with some superb additions to the skyline since then.

As we toured the city, it became clear that building in Chicago seems to

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go in spurts, with huge growth, followed by periods of stability and then more growth. For example, the 1920s saw some of the city's most prominent landmarks arrive, such as the Wrigley Building, two massive towers connected by three arcades, and the Tribune Tower, which was built to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Chicago Tribune. The building you see today was the winning design of an international competition and is peppered with stones from landmark buildings around the world, including the White House, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the House of Commons in London, the Berlin Wall and the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.

Both buildings are located along what's called the Magnificent Mile, to the north of the Chicago River. It's Chicago's most fashionable street and, if you want to shop, it's the place to head for. It's also the place that you'll find one of the few buildings that escaped the Great Fire, the Water Tower and Pumping Station and, just a few steps away, one of the newer additions to the skyline. The John Hancock Center opened in 1969, boasting 100 floors, with an observation deck on the 94th. It offers superb views of the city, including the city's other famous skyscraper, the Sears Tower. That arrived on the skyline just five years later and ten storeys higher and, for many years, was the tallest building in the world.

We became aware during our stay in Chicago that the locals are very proud of the records that their city holds and that's apparent when you look at the history of the Sears Tower. We learned that it's twice been added to in an attempt to retain its title of the world's tallest building and plans are in place to build a new spire in the city, which will be over 2,000 feet tall to ensure that title returns to Chicago.

Engineering feats are nothing new to this city. Even the Chicago River that flows through the middle of the city is an engineering feat in its own right. It's the only river in the world that flows backwards, away from Lake Michigan and into the 28 mile Sanitary and Ship Canal, constructed after a devastating outbreak of cholera and typhoid in the 19th century.

The river is home to architectural cruises, giving you a different perspective of the city and allowing you to learn a lot about the history of Chicago. It was an excellent way to spend an hour and it certainly brought home to me how many bridges there are over the Chicago River. In total, there are 52 that are movable, more than any other city in the world.

It certainly makes getting around on foot easy enough, although there is a lot of walking involved in seeing the city. Another way to get around

the city is the "El," or "elevated line," Chicago's subway system. We were told by locals that every visitor should experience a ride on it while in the city and it's certainly an experience to hear these trains clattering through the streets overhead, although a ride on them proved to be just like any other subway journey.

Chicago is certainly a city of contradictions. It feels like a coastal city, although it's hundreds of miles away from the coast; it's got contrasting architecture, built throughout the years and contrasting temperatures that fluctuate widely throughout the year. Best of all, although it's one of America's biggest cities, it also has an intimate feel to it and a genuinely friendly community. I can't see any visitor to this beautiful city leaving disappointed.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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