



Chicago, Illinois: Metropolis on the Great Lakes



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The third-largest city in the United States, Chicago is the unofficial capital of the American Midwest, rooted in the Industrial Revolution that transformed the country into a manufacturing powerhouse as urban centers welcomed new immigrant populations. In the early 20th century, the city became famous for the style of blues music developed by its African-American residents.

Then and Now

Before European traders and settlers arrived, the area around Chicago was inhabited primarily

by the Potawatomi tribe. In 1674, French Jesuit missionaries and explorers Louis Joliet and Père Marquette spent the winter on the site of the future metropolis. Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, of African and French descent, became the first non-indigenous resident in the 1780s. In 1833, the town of Chicago was organized with a population of 200.

Sited on the shores of Lake Michigan and linked by canals and waterways to the Mississippi River, Chicago, the trading and transportation hub connecting the eastern United States and its ever-expanding westward

settlements, soon became the world's fastest-growing city.

Milestones in the city's history include:

- 1837 — Chicago is incorporated as a city.
- 1848 — The Chicago Board of Trade, the world's oldest futures and options exchange, opens.
- 1871 — The Great Chicago Fire kills hundreds and destroys about 9 square kilometers, but spurs a massive rebuilding campaign using steel frames and plate glass.
- 1872 — Chicago's Montgomery Ward & Company establishes the first mail-order business.

Chicago, Illinois

- 1884 — The world's first skyscraper, the Home Insurance Building Company, is built.

The People

Chicago is diverse: 45 percent white, 32.9 percent African-American and 28.9 percent identifying as Hispanic or Latino. The city's African-American population is the third-largest among U.S. cities, after New York City and Atlanta. It is also home to the third-largest South Asian population in U.S. cities, after New York City and San Francisco. Chicago's Polish immigrants make up the largest ethnically Polish population outside Poland itself. Its Irish community is also vibrant, with a substantial presence in the city's fire and police departments, and in its political leadership for more than 150 years.

The Land

Chicago occupies the southwest corner shore of Lake Michigan on flat and fertile terrain that was once the bottom of Lake Chicago, the prehistoric ancestor to Lake Michigan. The lake is the largest freshwater sea on the planet and contains 20 percent of Earth's fresh water.

Stretching 251 kilometers, the Chicago River, which makes its way through downtown Chicago, originally emptied into Lake Michigan. In 1900 engineers constructed a series of canal locks to reverse its flow to provide better sanitation for city residents. Every March 17, the river is dyed green to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

The Climate

Chicago enjoys distinct seasons but generally avoids extremes of heat and cold. The most pleasant times to visit are in the spring and the fall. Average temperatures range from 22 degrees Fahrenheit (-6 degrees Celsius) in January to 74 degrees Fahrenheit (23 degrees Celsius) in July.



Bagpipers at an annual Saint Patrick's Day Parade in Chicago. ©Shutterstock.com

- 1893 — The Ferris wheel makes its international debut at the Chicago World's Fair.
- 1929 — St. Valentine's Day Massacre involving gang leader Al Capone becomes one of the most notorious examples of crime mob violence.
- 1956 — Chicago-based Zenith Electronics invents the first wireless television remote control.
- 1983 — Harold Washington is elected by Chicagoans as the first African-American mayor.
- 1992 — Chicago's Carol Moseley Braun becomes the first female African-American U.S. senator.

Skyscrapers, Sports, Celebrities

Today Chicago is famous as the home of President Obama, who got his start in politics as a community organizer and went on to represent his South Shore neighborhood in the Illinois state Senate before his 2004 election to the U.S. Senate. It is also where television host Oprah Winfrey rose to fame.

Chicago is home to some of the world's most famous sports teams

and athletes. Michael Jordan led the Chicago Bulls to six National Basketball Association championships between 1991 and 1998. The city hosts two Major League Baseball teams (the Chicago White Sox and the Chicago Cubs), the National Football League's Chicago Bears, the Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League, and Major League Soccer's Chicago Fire.

The two tallest skyscrapers in the United States are both in Chicago — Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower), and Trump International Hotel and Tower. At a height of 442 meters, the Willis Tower, with 103 floors and 2,232 steps, is the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere.

According to most local legends the nickname "the Windy City," comes from the hot air bellowing from its politicians and the fondness of Chicagoans for talking about their home. Many are especially proud of the city's deep dish pizza, Italian beef sandwiches and Chicago-style hot dogs.