



Relocation Guide

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IOR makes every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide is as current as possible. If you notice errors, or information which is no longer accurate, please contact us immediately so that we may correct the issue.

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WELCOME AND OVERVIEW



Photo courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

With slightly over 2.7 million residents, Chicago is the largest city in Illinois and the third most-populous city in the United States after New York City and Los Angeles. Its metropolitan area is the third-largest in the United States, with an estimated 9.7 million people.

Chicago was founded in 1837, expected to be ideally situated to take advantage of the trading possibilities created by the nation's westward expansion. The name "Chicago" is derived from a French rendering of the Native American word *shikaakwa*, translated as "wild onion" or "wild garlic", from the Miami-Illinois language.

As Chicago grew, its residents began to take precautions to keep their city safe and competitive. In the 1850s, they raised many of the streets and buildings five to eight feet in order to install a sewer system. Unfortunately, these streets and sidewalks were made out of wood, and most were burned down in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The fire began at a barn owned by Patrick and Catherine O'Leary at 558 W. DeKoven. Today, the Chicago Fire Department training academy stands on this property as a reminder to all. The Chicago Water Tower and Pumping Station at Michigan and Chicago Avenues are among the few buildings to have survived the fire.

Chicago is sometimes referred to as the "Windy City", a nickname it acquired in the late 1800s. One theory is based on Chicago being subject to a nearly constant breeze coming from Lake Michigan, which can get particularly harsh during the winter. Another theory is that Chicago acquired its nickname from an old rivalry with its neighbor Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati newspapers nicknamed Chicago the 'Windy City' because of the 'gust' of Chicago sports fans who would flood Cincinnati whenever the two played. The third most common hypothesis is that the nickname refers to Chicago's unique political history. Chicago has always swayed between Democratic and Republican, and has held more Democratic and Republican National Conventions than any other city in the country.

City of Chicago Overview

- [Official Website of the City of Chicago](#)
- [Mayor of the City of Chicago](#)
- Population: 2.7 million
- Land Area: 234 square miles (606 km²)
- [Chicago Parks and Recreation Department](#)
- [Chicago Public Library](#)
- [Chicago Maps](#)
- [Weather Today in Chicago](#)

History

- [Chicago History Museum](#)
- [Index of history museums around Chicago](#)
- [Chinese-American Museum of Chicago](#)
- [Chicago Japanese American Historical Society](#)

Recommended Reading (available in print and on www.amazon.com):

- *Chicago and the State of Illinois: Cool Stuff Every Kid Should Know* by Kate Boehm Jerome
- *City of Big Shoulders: A History of Chicago* by Robert G. Spinney
- *Day Trips from Chicago: Getaway Ideas for the Local Traveler* by Elisa Drake
- *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America* by James Green
- *Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson
- [Lonely Planet Chicago](#) (Regional Travel Guide) by Karla Zimmerman

What to See, Sightseeing Tours, Value Packages and Passes, Tourist Information

- [Chicago Visitors Center](#)
- [Chicago attractions](#)
- [Save money on attractions](#)
- [Chicago tours](#)
- **Editor's suggestion:** [An architectural cruise of Chicago](#)

Where to Find Arts & Entertainment

- [Chicago Tribune](#)
- [Chicago Reader Calendar](#)
- [Chicago Metromix](#)
- [Chicago City Search](#)
- [Broadway in Chicago - Tickets & Shows](#)
- [Chicago Cinema - Listings & Schedules](#)

Where to Eat

- [Make online restaurant reservations](#) with OpenTable.
- [Chicago Restaurant Week](#): Chicago Restaurant Week is a member-based program designed to promote the restaurant industry and drive traffic to participating establishments during a typically slow time of year. For ten days, diners can enjoy value pricing for lunch and/or dinner at dining establishments throughout the city.
- [52 Weeks in Chicago](#) (Food Blog)
- Editor's Choice(s):
 - [Portillo's](#) (Get the Italian beef, you will not be disappointed!)
 - [Argo Georgian Bakery](#) (Small bakery, incredible food. Ask for the Khachapuri)
 - [Lou Malnati's Pizzeria](#) (A great place to find Chicago's signature deep-dish pizza)
 - [Café Iberico](#) (Spanish Tapas and Bar with a great atmosphere and menu)
 - [Girl and the Goat](#) (One of the best high-end restaurants in Chicago)

Selected Chicago Neighborhoods

- Chicago has 77 [neighborhoods](#)

River North

[River North](#) is the go-to district for those who appreciate fine art and design. And for those who appreciate fine dining and drinks, the momentum behind the latest trendsetting openings continues to build and the late night energy swells.

Lincoln Park

Historic churches and handsome brick row houses nestled within landmark districts sit next to peaceful parks, while quiet, tree-lined residential areas give way to bustling business corridors. From the nearby DePaul University campus, the neighborhood's namesake park, and a free zoo open year-round, [Lincoln Park](#) has something for everyone.

Gold Coast

Just north of downtown Chicago, and nestled against the Lake Michigan shoreline, is the [Gold Coast](#). As the name would imply, the area is one of the country's most affluent neighborhoods. With streets that are lined with historic mansions and specialty boutiques, the Gold Coast is an intensely popular area for residents and visitors.

Magnificent Mile

The [Magnificent Mile](#) packs luxury boutiques, department stores and multi-story mega malls all into one eight-block stretch. And that's not including the nearly 300 restaurants and 60 hotels that also make up this cosmopolitan downtown center. Beyond the glossy retail facades, however, lay incredible art and architecture, history and culture.

West Loop Area

In Chicago's [West Loop](#), you can feel the vibrant energy and see the neighborhood's rich history beside you, including the industrial grit and the faded-brick buildings. The train service, along with many CTA bus routes, has helped energize the West Loop's growing commercial and residential prosperity. [Fulton Market](#), is still a source of wholesale food for restaurants and hotels throughout the Chicagoland area.

South Loop

Much of its eastern edge is encompassed by the Museum Campus, an impressive collection of cultural treasures that includes the Field Museum, Adler Planetarium and Shedd Aquarium. [South Loop's](#) "Millionaire's Row", lined with mansions belonging to Chicago's most wealthy elite during the end of the 19th century, and the adjacent Printer's Row neighborhood with urban loft condos are highlights of the South Loop.

Hyde Park

In 1893 [Hyde Park](#) hosted the Chicago's World Fair which, among other things, introduced the United States to electricity and the Ferris wheel. The event was so grand that it required the construction of 200 buildings and welcomed close to 30 million people. More than 120 years later, the area is still a profound hinge point of historical and social importance in Chicago. From the University of Chicago to the west and The Museum of Science and Industry to the east, Hyde Park is an incredibly popular South Side neighborhood for locals and visitors.

MAP OF CHICAGO



Map courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

EMERGENCY

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY
DIAL 911
FOR FIRE, POLICE & AMBULANCE**

Emergency personnel will ask for the following information so keep this page close to your phone:

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____

If you accidentally call 911, please do not hang up. The police will automatically be dispatched to your home to make sure there are no problems. Explain to the Operator the call was an accident.

[POISON CONTROL](#) (800) 222-1222
[ANIMAL POISON CONTROL](#) (888) 426-4435

Other Important Numbers:

PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN _____
WORK PHONE NUMBER _____

DIAL 311 to reach any City of Chicago agency, or to request a City Service (such as replacing a broken street-lamp or removing an abandoned vehicle).

Urgent Care Centers

An Urgent Care Center is different than a Hospital Emergency Room. An Emergency room would be in an absolute emergency. You may visit an Urgent Care Center if, for example, you have a terrible ear ache and need medicine immediately but your Primary Care Physician's office is closed. Many Urgent Care Centers have extended hours and are open early morning until late evening during the week and also some weekend hours. Be sure to refer back to your health insurance company to clarify which urgent care centers and primary care physicians you are allowed to visit using your health insurance. Your insurance card should have a toll-free 1-800 number on the back for you to call and ask questions and clarify which urgent care center would be closest for you. Please always carry your insurance card with you!

Hospitals & Clinics

[General Chicago Hospital Directory](#)

[General Children's Hospital Directory](#)

[Primary Care Physician](#)

- [University of Chicago Hospital \(South Side\)](#)
- [Northwestern Memorial Hospital](#)
- [Evanston Hospital – Northshore University HealthSystem](#)
- [Stroger John H Jr. Hospital of Cook County \(Downtown\)](#)
- [Mount Sinai Hospital \(West side\)](#)

Veterinary Clinics

- [Best Veterinarians in Chicago](#)
- [Animal Emergency Clinic](#)
- [Chicago Humane Society](#)

Pharmacies

There are several major pharmacy chains in Chicago, found on nearly every block on commercial streets. These pharmacies are also general stores and carry a large selection of cleaning, house care, pet care, and other supplies. Click on "Store Locator" and enter your zip (postal) code to find the pharmacy near you. Many pharmacies are open 24 hours. Check for hours of operation.

- Walgreens: www.walgreens.com
- CVS: www.cvs.com
- Yellow pages [list of local pharmacies](#)

A lease is an agreement that outlines the obligations of the owner and the tenants of a house or apartment. It is a legally binding document, so it is important for you to know the exact terms of the lease agreement before you sign it. Please do not sign a lease without reviewing it with your IOR DS Consultant.

Rental Agents

In most situations, your IOR consultant will partner with a local realtor to have access to the most current and extensive property listings as well as the realtor's expertise in preparing and negotiating leases. This agent receives a commission for their assistance, in most US locations this commission is paid by the Landlord, not the tenant. Your IOR DS Consultant will discuss this with you.

Renter's Rights

Tenants who lease or rent property are protected against discrimination by [The Fair Housing Act](#). If you think your rights have been violated, you may write a letter or telephone the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office nearest you. You have one year after the alleged violation to file a complaint with HUD, but you should file as soon as possible.

While you can generally expect the same service from landlords, it's important to know your state's laws. Each state and most major cities have their own tenant rights, laws and protections. [Here are Chicago's](#). You can also visit the [HUD website here for a full guide to renters' rights by states](#).

If your rental property ever suffers any defects that make your place uninhabitable, your landlord has a duty to fix it. While some apartments let you make online requests for repairs, as well as provide a phone number for "emergencies," always make sure you document your request in writing. The landlord will then have a certain amount of time to make those repairs.

Privacy

You have the right to privacy. While the landlord owns the property, they can't access it anytime they want. All states have laws stating renters have a right to privacy while renting. Pretty much the only time the landlord can come into your rental without permission or notice is when they're responding to an emergency that threatens injury or property damage. Any other time the landlord wants to enter your apartment, they need to have your permission and in most cases give you 24-hours' notice before entering.

What to expect from the landlord:

In most states, you are legally entitled to:

- Safe structural elements including floors, walls, roofs and secure doors and windows.
- Privacy as described above.
- All electrical, plumbing, heating and air conditioning systems function.
- Working hot and cold water.

- Exterminating infestations of rodents and other insects.
- Access to trash receptacles.
- Landlords cannot discriminate based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities.
- Apartment buildings sometimes come with laundry and dryer machines in the basement.
- Water, electricity and gas bills are up to you to pay. **Your IOR consultant will assist you with this process.**

Utilities and Appliances

Your IOR DS Consultant will assist you or provide information on connecting your utilities. It is possible some will be included in your rent, but typically most are not.

****Note that you will need a social security number in order to register and pay for utilities****

Recycling

Ask your IOR DSC about the recycling arrangements and requirements. [City of Chicago website](#) also has specific information on what can be recycled.



The Lease Process

Review your housing budget with your IOR DS Consultant

Your consultant can help you understand what kind of property you can afford. You also need to take into account that you may be responsible for some of the utility costs of your rental.

Know what you want

What are you looking for in a property? Do you want a studio or a single bedroom? Maybe you want to rent a single family home? Do you need the property to come with appliances, including washer and dryer? Do want it to be close to school or your work? Do you want it to be within walking distance of retail, like groceries or coffee shops? Are you looking for a child friendly area? Keep in mind that outside of the city center in major cities, there is not much public transportation and most locals drive everywhere.

Identify potential apartments

IOR offers home finding services to aid you with this process. Your consultant may work with a local broker who will help to organize appointments and visit properties. They will also assist in the rental application and the leasing process.

Common Abbreviations and Acronyms used in rental housing listings

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
24-hr mtn	24-hour emergency maintenance
AC or A/C	Air conditioning

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
LA	Living area
LR	Living room

Appls	Appliances
Apt	Apartment
BA	Bathroom
BR	Bedroom
Bsmt	Basement
CAC	Central air conditioning
DA	Dining area
Det	Detached
Dk	Deck
DR	Dining room
Dw (D/w)	Dishwasher
Eff	Efficiency
EiK	Eat-in kitchen
Fin bsmt	Finished basement
FDR	Formal dining room
FHA	Fair Housing Act
FMR	Fair market rent
FP	Floorplan
Gar	Garage
H/A	Handicapped accessible
H/W	Hardwood floors
Hi ceil	High ceilings
HVAC	Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning

MBR	Master bedroom
MBTH	Master bathroom
Neg	Negotiable
Ofc	Office
OSP	Off-street parking
Pkg	Parking
PM	Property manager (management)
Pvt	Private
Pwdr rm	Powder room (1/2 bath)
RE	Real estate
Renov	Renovated
Rf	Roof
Rm	Room
SF	Single-family
SFA	Single-family attached
SFD	Single-family detached
Sp, Pl (S/p)	Swimming pool
Sq. ft	Square feet
Th (T/H)	Townhouse
Vw (vu)	View
W/A	Wheelchair accessible
W/W	Wall-to-wall carpeting

Visit

Make this process as efficient as possible by visiting as many potential properties as you can in one or two days. Try to go sometime during the week if possible. Your IOR DS consultant will work with you to set an appropriate schedule and to ensure that the properties you visit meet your needs as closely as possible.

What to do once you're there

As you look at the rental unit, be sure to ask a lot of questions. While you should keep small concerns to yourself about the unit while looking at it, feel free to ask the landlord or apartment manager any questions you might have that will help in your decision. Here are some possible questions you may consider asking:

- What's the monthly rent?
- Are any utilities included with the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- When is rent due? Do you have auto-pay?
- What's the make-up of the other tenants? Are they mainly younger students? Married couples with families? Older folks?
- What's the parking situation like? Do you pay for a parking spot?
- Do you take care of small maintenance issues or am I responsible for some of the repairs in the property?
- Am I able to re-paint the walls or make other modifications?

Again, be friendly and polite when you ask these questions.

The Application

The next step in the leasing process for an apartment is to submit a rental application for the location you want. The manager or landlord will be able to give you the application as well as anything else that they may need to have filled out. Your IOR DS Consultant will assist with this process. For a single family home there will likely be a rental application.

You will need your ID, Social Security number, and proof of employment. Some landlords may charge you an application fee which could be between \$20 to \$400 dollars, depending on the landlord. This could be a combination of an application fee and move-in fee.

Once you've done this, it can take up to a few days to hear back from the property manager. Once your application has been approved the lease approval process will begin with IOR and likely your employer.

Signing the lease

DO NOT SIGN THE LEASE until your IOR DS Consultant has reviewed it in full and given their approval. The lease is a binding contract, so it is very important to pay attention as a leasing agent goes over it with you. It is perfectly normal for you to take your time and read all the fine print for yourself. If you are working with an IOR DS Consultant, make sure to talk with them and receive approval before signing. You will also be given a copy of the lease to take with you and keep for your records, but it is very important to know everything included in your lease from the start.

Some things to look for in a lease:

- Term of the lease and any important dates such as when the rent is due.
- Extra fees for parking spaces or storage, garbage collection and pets.
- Information regarding utility providers and whether you or the landlord is responsible for those bills.
- Notification requirements in case of renewal.
- Requirements/responsibilities of the tenants to do routine repairs such as lawn maintenance, cleaning or notification of repairs.
- Clauses that allow the landlord to change the terms of the lease after it is signed.
- Restrictions that would prevent you from living normally or comfortably in the home.

Sometimes landlords will ask for a security deposit before you sign the lease. This is normal, but you shouldn't pay in cash. Make sure all payments are made out as a check or money order just in case.

What to expect from the lease

Most leases include the following or a variation thereof:

- Your employer requires that all leases include a Break Clause in case you are transferred for work or personal needs.
- Contracts will often be for periods of a year or more.
- Minimum stay. Typically three fourths of your lease contract time. If you choose to move out before this date, you will lose your security deposit. If you move out afterwards, you are still required to give a specified number of days notice.
- Security Deposit. Landlords will expect you to leave them with a deposit (usually about one to two month's rent) that they will hold for the duration of your lease. You will receive your security deposit back at the end of the lease provided you don't break any specific clauses in your lease, such as moving out without proper notice, not paying rent, causing damages to the property, etc.
- Landlords should not be given unchecked access to your apartment. If there isn't anything in your lease about landlord's rights to enter the leased premises, suggest the following clause:

Entry by the Landlord. Landlord or his agent will not enter Tenant's home except to deal with an emergency; to make necessary or agreed repairs; to supply necessary or agreed services; or to show the unit to potential purchasers, tenants, or repair persons. Unless there is an emergency, Landlord will give Tenant at least 24 hours' written notice of the date, time, and purpose of the intended entry and will schedule entries during normal business hours, Monday–Friday.

Most landlords will be hard-pressed to say no to such a reasonable clause. If the landlord refuses, it's a sure sign that he won't be reasonable in other respects, too. Continue on in your housing search.

Moving In

On your selected move-in date, after the lease has been signed, and deposits have been paid...you should be given your keys and more than likely a move-in form to fill out. Your IOR DS consultant will assist you with an initial walk through of your apartment. Look for dings in the walls, cracked windows or other irregularities and report them on this form. This will indicate that these things were there before you moved in and you will not be held responsible for them at the end of the lease term.

Get Renter's Insurance

Renter's insurance covers any loss to your personal property due to robbery or accidents. It also covers any damage you might cause to other tenant's property. For example, let's say your washing machine springs a leak and water seeps through the floor and ruins your neighbor's antique dresser. Renter's insurance would cover that.

Renter's insurance will cost approximately about \$15-125 a month, less if you tack it onto another policy (like auto) you have with an insurance company. A few popular options are [Allstate](#) and [StateFarm](#).

Obtaining a Driver's License/State ID Card

To drive legally in Illinois, you must have a valid Illinois driver's license, temporary visitor driver's license, probationary license, instruction permit, Restricted Driving Permit or Monitoring Device Driving Permit. If you have an out-of-state license, you may use it for as long as you maintain your residency in the state where it was issued. If you are moving permanently to Illinois, you may use your out-of-state license for only your first three months here. To obtain an Illinois Driver's License you must:

- Visit a [Driver Services Facility](#), show required identification documents and have your photo taken.
- Surrender all valid out-of-state licenses, state ID cards, instruction permits and commercial driver's licenses.
- Pay the appropriate fee.
- Pass the appropriate exams (vision screening, written and/or driving).

For general information and instructions on how to obtain an official state ID card or driver's license, [visit the website of Cyber Drive Illinois](#). You can find Chicago locations of the Driver Services Facilities [using this online map](#).

Your Destination Services Consultant will also assist you with the proper procedure.

SCHOOLS IN YOUR AREA

Generally, to register your child for school you will need to have a birth certificate, proof of immunizations, any applicable past school records and proof of residency. Most public schools have boundary areas, and you must show proof (i.e. copy of lease or home purchase agreement) to be allowed to register in that particular school. Please always confirm requirements with the school you are interested in before assuming that your child will be able to attend that school.

Grade level in the public school system is determined by the age of the child. Typically, the child must be 5 years old by September 1st to enter kindergarten. School districts may be very strict about the age requirement, but inquire with the school district you are interested in to determine if there are any exemptions for students who are ahead in grade level. You may also want to ask about any gifted or advanced programs. Some elementary schools also offer a pre-Kindergarten program for children who miss the September 1st requirement. You may inquire at the school districts for availability.

Contact your IOR Destination Services Consultant for more assistance with schooling questions.

Public Schools in Chicago

Chicago Public Schools, commonly abbreviated as CPS by local residents, and officially classified as City of Chicago School District #299 for funding and districting reasons, is a large school district that manages over 600 public elementary and high schools in Chicago, Illinois. Chicago Public Schools is currently the third largest school district in the United States, with more than 400,000 students enrolled in the school district.

To evaluate the standard of educational facilities in a district, parents can use the Chicago Tribune school reports (for [elementary, middle, and high schools](#)) – where they can compare schools by test performance, class-sizes, college-readiness, and other important factors. Chicago Public Schools includes [Magnet Schools](#) offering International Baccalaureate, agricultural sciences, military academics, pre-engineering, and Fine and Performing Arts Programs.

Note that many top schools require an application, testing, and interview in order to enter.

The City of Chicago has put together this [official guide to entering Chicago High Schools](#).
A guide to [elementary schools can be found here](#).

Private Schools in Chicago

Many of Chicago's private schools require that students complete an entrance exam, which must also be financed by parents. There are 454 private schools in Chicago, IL, serving 79,906 students. In late September, there is usually an annual "Private School Preview", a free event where parents can learn more about specific schools, their admission requirements, and their philosophies of education. Otherwise, the best method for finding out about private schools in an area is word of mouth, and by visiting the school in person.

You can find a ranking of [top Chicago private elementary schools here](#).

You can find a [complete report on Chicago Private High Schools here](#).

[Chicago Private Schools Reviewed](#)

Colleges and Universities

- [City Colleges of Chicago](#)
- [Columbia College](#)
- [DePaul University](#)
- [Illinois Institute of Art](#)
- [Illinois Institute of Technology](#)
- [Loyola University Chicago](#)
- [Moody Bible Institute](#)
- [National Louis University](#)
- [North Park University Chicago](#)
- [Northeastern Illinois University](#)
- [Northwestern University Graduate Programs \(Chicago campus\)](#)
- [Robert Morris University](#)
- [Roosevelt University](#)
- [Saint Xavier University](#)
- [University of Chicago](#)
- [University of Illinois at Chicago](#)



Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago



Loyola University

Checking and Savings Accounts

To open a checking or savings account you will need the following information:

- Two forms of picture identification including but not limited to your passport, driver's license or work ID.
- Social security number
- Local mailing address. You may use your office address as your mailing address, but be prepared to call your bank branch as soon as you have your permanent address.
- Letter of Employment
- Cash for the initial deposit can range from \$25-\$150 dollars.

Security

Always pay attention to the other people around you at an ATM. Do not use the machine if you are suspicious of someone's behavior. It is safer to find another ATM or to come back later. Do not enter your PIN number into the ATM with anyone close enough to see it.

Credit card theft is another increasing problem. In order to protect your card from being abused, never give your credit card or credit card number to a service provider you have not called. Another precaution is to destroy or shred copies of receipts and bills. Criminals will not hesitate to dig through the trash to find a copy of your credit card number.

Major U.S. Banks

Below is a list of links to some of the banks in the area. Not every bank is represented in all U.S. locations; in some cases you may find that the local bank is a better option for you than some of the larger banks. Your IOR DS Consultant can help you in selecting a bank by sharing the various options available locally.

- [Bank of America](#)
- [Chase](#)
- [Citibank](#)
- [HSBC](#)
- [TD Bank](#)
- [US Bank](#)
- [List of Chicago Banks](#)

Navigating Chicago is easy. Block numbers are consistent across the whole city. Standard blocks, of 100 addresses each, are roughly 1/8th of a mile long. (Hence, a mile is equivalent to a street number difference of 800.) Each street is assigned a number based on its distance from the point zero of the address system, the intersection of State Street and Madison Street. A street with a W (west) or E (east) number runs east-west, while a street with a N (north) or S (south) number runs north-south. A street's number is usually written on street signs at intersections, below the street name.

In general, "avenues" run north-south and "streets" run east-west, but there are numerous exceptions. (e.g., 48th Street may then be followed by 48th Place). In conversation, however, Chicagoans rarely distinguish between streets, avenues, boulevards, etc.

Public Transit

The best way to see Chicago is by public transit. It is cheap, efficient, and safe (with exceptions). The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) oversees the various public transit agencies in the Chicagoland area.

You can plan trips online with the [RTA trip planner](#) or get assistance by calling 836-7000 in any local area code between 5AM-1AM. The RTA also has an official partnership with Google Maps, which can provide routes with public transit.

Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)

The Chicago Transit Authority operates trains and buses in the city of Chicago and some of the suburbs. Fares are paid with transit cards, which can be purchased and re-filled at kiosks in the lobby of every CTA station. All accept cash, and some accept credit cards.

You can purchase a Ventra card at CTA rail stations, participating retail locations, by phone, or [online](#). These cards are like transit cards, but are more durable and allow you to spend less time paying your fares. The Ventra Card can be linked to a bank account to automatically refill, so you never get stuck somewhere due to a lack of cash.

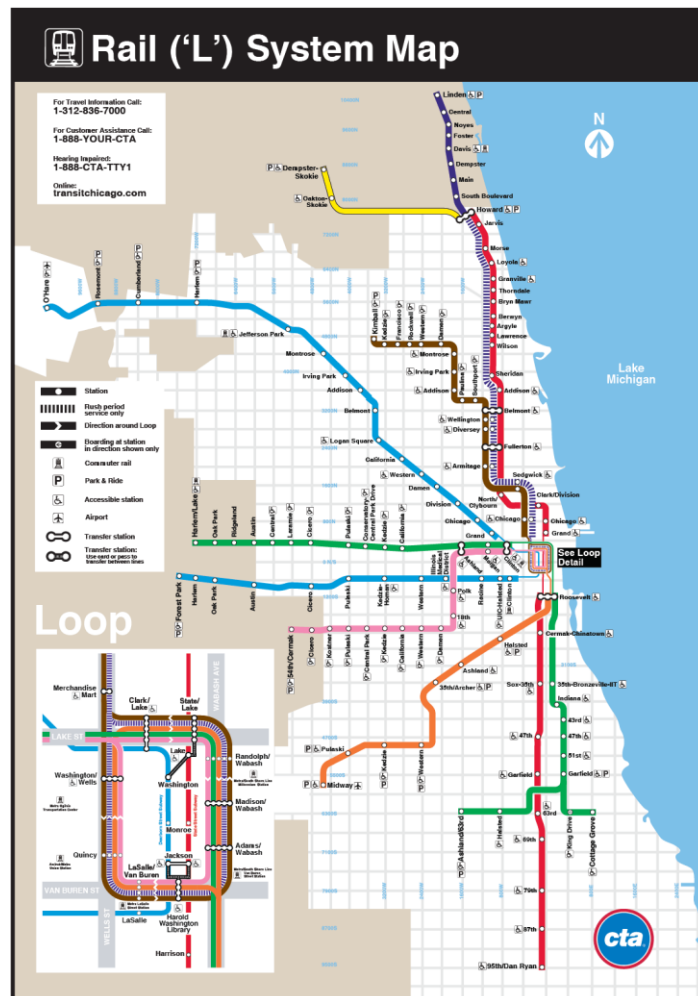
[How-To Guide: Buying Fares](#)

The "L" system

Locals refer to Chicago's public train system as the "L". The abbreviation is derived from the fact that the lines run on "Elevated" tracks. All train lines begin, end, or cross through the center of the city, known as the 'Loop'. The "Loop" name originally referred to a surface-level streetcar loop, which pre-dated the elevated tracks.

CTA train lines are divided by colors: Red, Green, Brown, Blue, Purple, Yellow, Orange and Pink. All lines lead to the Loop except the Yellow Line, which is a nonstop shuttle between the suburb of Skokie and the northern border of Chicago. The Red and Blue lines run 24/7, making Chicago and New York City the two American cities that offer 24-hour rail service running throughout their city limits. Hours for the other lines vary somewhat by the day, but as a general rule run from about 4:30AM -1:00AM.

Before you travel, find out the name of the train station closest to your destination, and the color of the train line on which it is located. Once you're on-board, you'll find route maps in each train car, above the door. [The same map is also available online](#). The name signs on platforms often have the station's location in the street grid, e.g. "5900 N, 1200 W" for Thorndale.



The Bus System

Buses run on nearly every major street throughout the entire city, and in many cases, every four blocks apart. Look for the blue and white bus stop sign, which should show the route that the bus will take. Once inside, watch the front of the bus, a red LED display will list the names of the streets as they pass by, making it easy to know that your stop is approaching if you're unfamiliar with the city.

Chicago has a large and comprehensive bus system, and buses typically run frequently. This allows Chicagoans to go to bus stops and wait for the bus without even looking at bus schedules, as buses usually run every few minutes apart. The major bus routes run every 7-15 minutes apart during the morning and afternoon hours. In the evening, these same routes run about every 15-20 minutes apart. The less traveled bus routes may run about 15-20 minutes apart during the day. There are many bus routes that run 24 hours a day; these are called OWL routes and the bus stop sign usually has a picture of an owl to belabor that point. Overnight OWL service is approximately every 30 minutes. (See individual district articles for major bus routes through different parts of the city.)

If you have a web-enabled mobile device, the CTA runs a little godsend called the CTA Bus Tracker, which uses GPS to provide reliable, real-time tracking information for almost all bus routes. CTA buses accept transit cards but do not sell them. They also accept cash but do not provide change. Like any bus system, you pay exact fare or forfeit your change.

In compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, all CTA buses and some train stations are accessible to wheelchairs. Wheelchair-accessible 'L' stations are indicated by the international wheelchair symbol and have elevators or are at ground level. If you are trying to get to a place with a non-accessible station, there will be alternate routes by bus so contact the CTA for more information.

Crime on the CTA is low, but as with any major urban area, travelers should be aware of their surroundings, especially when traveling in the wee hours of the night. Some L cars have a button and speaker for emergency communication with the driver, located in the center aisle of the car on the wall next to the door. This is for emergencies only: do not press this just to ask questions, as the driver is required to halt the train until the situation has been confirmed as resolved.

The Metra

The [Metra](#) runs commuter trains for the suburbs, providing service within Illinois, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, out west, and to the South Shore railroad, which provides service to South Bend, Indiana. Metra trains are fast, clean, and punctual, but unpleasantly crowded during rush hour. Generally, every car or every other car on the train has a bathroom.



Metra's Electric Line provides service to the convention center (McCormick Place), Hyde Park (Museum of Science and Industry, University of Chicago), and the Far Southeast Side's Pullman Historic District and Rainbow Beach. The Electric Line is fast, taking at most 15 minutes to reach Hyde Park from the Loop. Unfortunately, service outside of rush hours is infrequent (about once/hour), so be sure to check the schedules while planning your trip.

Although there are plans to change this in the future, none of the commuter trains currently accept CTA transit cards as payment. Buy your tickets before boarding the train at a window or one of the automated vending machines. You can buy a ticket on the train, but that comes with an extra surcharge if the station you're leaving from had an open ticket window or an operational ticket machine.

Ten-ride, weekly, and monthly passes are available. If you have a group of four or more people, it may be cheaper to purchase a ten-ride card and have all of your fares punched from that one card. If using Metra on Saturday and/or Sunday, you can purchase an unlimited ride weekend pass for just \$7. Keep in mind that Metra only accepts cash at this time.

Pace Buses

[Pace](#) runs buses in the suburbs, although some routes do cross into the city, particularly in Rogers Park at the Howard (Red/Purple/Yellow Line) CTA station and the Far Northwest Side at the Jefferson Park (Blue Line) CTA station. Pace is particularly useful if you need to go somewhere inconvenient via CTA.

By Car

Traffic in downtown Chicago is heavy and garages in the Loop can cost as much as \$35 per day. Free websites like ParkWhiz.com let you book off-street parking in advance after searching by location and price, which is often discounted. Other sites like ChiParking.com provide tips about where to park in different parts of the city. Although downtown streets are laid out on the grid, some streets have multiple levels which can confuse even the most hardened city driver. Even outside of the city center, street parking may not be readily available. If you do find a spot, check street signs to make sure that a) no residential permit is required to park, and b) parking is not disallowed during certain hours for street cleaning, rush hour or something along those lines. Parking restrictions are swiftly enforced in the form of tickets and towing — be especially wary during snowy weather.

Drivers on the city expressways can be very aggressive. For those used to driving on expressways in the Northeast US or Southern California, this may simply be a reminder of home. For everyone else, though, it may be intimidating.

By Taxi

Chicago has some of the least expensive taxi fares in the U.S. for a major city. Taxis can be hailed from the street throughout the entire city, and are most plentiful in the tourist areas. There is no additional charge for baggage or credit card use. Rides from O'Hare and Midway to outer suburbs cost straight meter plus one-half the straight metered fare from the airport to the suburban destination.

If you're outside of the downtown, North Side, Near West, and Near South neighborhoods, you can still hail cabs from the street, or call one to come and pick you up. Taxis typically take 10-15 minutes from the time you call to arrive. The principal companies are:

- [American-United Taxi](#)
- [Checker Cab](#)
- [Flash Cab](#)
- [Yellow Cab](#)
- [Chicago Town Cars](#)

Transportation “App” Options

Several web based phone applications to secure a driver are available throughout the area. The driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS. Payment is automatic through the app and fares may be cheaper than a taxi.

- [Uber](#)
- [Lyft](#)

Car Rentals

- [Zipcar](#)
- [Hertz](#)
- [Enterprise](#)

By Water Taxi

In the summer, water taxis are sometimes more convenient than the CTA, if you are traveling around the fringes of downtown. They are also a relatively cheap way to take in some offshore views. Two private companies operate water taxi services around the Loop.



[Chicago Water Taxi](#) uses yellow boats and has three stops (Michigan Ave, LaSalle/Clark, Madison St), plus Chinatown on weekends (\$2, \$4 Chinatown/all-day pass). Taxis run roughly M-F 6:30AM-6:30PM, Sa-Su 10:30AM-6:30PM.

[Shoreline Sightseeing](#) has blue and white boats. It is more expensive (\$5-7), but it serves seven destinations including some on Lake Michigan (Union Station/Sears Tower, Wells & Wacker, Michigan Ave Bridge, Navy Pier-Ogden Slip, Navy Pier-Dock St, Buckingham Fountain, and Museum Campus). Shoreline taxis run 10AM-6PM every twenty minutes and 6PM-9PM every half hour Memorial Day–Labor Day, with occasional and less frequent service in the spring and fall.

By Bicycle

Chicago has a bike path along the shores of Lake Michigan, making north-south travel very convenient as long as the weather is favorable by the lake. Most major city streets have bike lanes, and the biking culture is established enough that cars tend to accommodate and (grudgingly) yield to bicycles. Bike trips can also be combined with rides on the CTA.

Chicago Area Airports

- [O'Hare International Airport](#) - Chicago O'Hare International Airport is the fifth busiest airport in the world. It is connected to Chicago by train using the Blue Line of Chicago 'L', which runs 24 hours a day. The transit time from Central Loop Business District to O'Hare is about 40 minutes.
- [Midway Airport](#) - The Orange Line train service operates from approximately 4-4:30 a.m. to approximately 1:00 a.m. every day with more frequent service during weekday morning and evening rush hours. The normal travel time from Midway to downtown is 20-25 minutes.
- [Mitchell \(Milwaukee\) Airport](#) - MKE has non-stop flights to more than 35 cities and easy one-stop connections to 160+ cities worldwide, serving Wisconsin, northern Illinois & Chicago. MKE is a hour and a half drive from Chicago. In addition, MKE connects to a nearby Amtrak station with stops at Chicago's Union Station (downtown) and Glenview, Illinois.

AAA Travel Protection

[AAA](#) is a membership organization that offers benefits such as roadside service and towing, discounts on car products and services, maps, reference materials, etc. Call 1-800-352-5382 for additional information and cost.

TV, Cable, Telephone, and Internet

The main service providers for TV cable, landline telephone and internet all offer combination packages. They are in stiff competition with each other, so special offers change monthly, sometimes even weekly.

- [AT&T](#)
- [Comcast](#)
- [DirectTV](#)
- [Dish](#)

Housewares and Furniture

- [Bed Bath & Beyond](#) is a national chain whereas the name explains, you can buy necessities for the bedroom and bathroom. From bath towels to comforters.
- [Ikea](#): Swedish-owned furniture shop for all home and home office furniture, soft furnishings, home accessories, flooring, crockery and children's toys.
- [Home Depot](#) is a national chain where anything for renovation or home appliances can be bought. There's paint, tape, hammers and doors.
- [Crate and Barrel](#) is a national chain that sells more modern style furniture compared to Ikea. It is slightly more expensive but has more design.
- [Furniture Envy](#) is a national chain that sells furniture.
- [Pottery Barn](#) is a national chain that sells kitchen supplies, furniture and household items.
- [Williams-Sonoma](#) is a national chain that sells kitchen supplies.
- [Rooms to Go](#) is a national chain that sells furniture.
- [The Container Store](#) is a national chain that sells storage boxes, organizers and the sort.
- [Z-Gallery](#) is a national chain that sells affordable furniture.
- [Pier 1 Imports](#) is a national chain that specializes in imported furniture.
- [Target](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.
- [Kmart](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.
- [Walmart](#) is a national chain that sells anything from groceries, microwaves to furniture.

Food Shopping

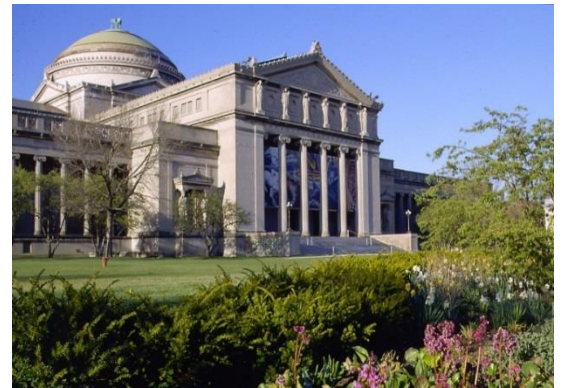
- Chicagoans go to market at a wide range of open air farmers markets, large gourmet markets, small specialty shops, and conventional supermarkets. The main conventional supermarkets are [Jewel-Osco](#), [Treasure Island](#), [Mariano's](#), [Trader Joes'](#) and [Whole Foods](#).

They are located all over town and the surrounding areas.

Sightseeing

Chicago is an ethnically diverse, architecturally important, and culturally rich city. It can be appreciated from the observation floor of the Sears Tower, at 110 stories the third-tallest manmade structure in the world. In fact, three of the world's 10 tallest buildings are located in Chicago, along with the tallest apartment building, the largest hotel, the largest commercial structure, and the largest post office.

- [Guided sightseeing tours](#) are available for viewing the city's architecture, finance and business districts, ethnic neighborhoods, cultural institutions, and even gangland sites from the Prohibition Era.
- Chicago offers fantastic [boat architecture tours](#). The distinctive Chicago School of Architecture, with its aesthetic credo, "form follows function," was shaped by such masters as Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and a later functionalist architect, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe—all of whom designed buildings in the city and produced in Chicago a veritable living architectural museum. Also important are the city's outdoor sculpture and art works. Pablo Picasso's gift to Chicago, a 50-foot-tall sculpture of rusted steel at the Civic Center Plaza, has become a symbol of the city's modernity.
- [The Shedd Aquarium](#), the world's largest indoor aquarium, cares for more than 21,000 aquatic mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and fishes.
 - A major attraction is the [Oceanarium](#), the world's largest indoor marine mammal pavilion, featuring beluga whales, dolphins, Alaskan sea otters, seals, and penguins. In 2003 the aquarium unveiled its Wild Reef shark exhibit.
 - Next to the Shedd Aquarium, the [Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum](#) sits on a peninsula that juts a half-mile into Lake Michigan.
- [The Museum of Science and Industry](#), founded in 1933, houses thousands of exhibits, including the Idea Factory and Omnimax Theatre; a full-scale, working coal mine, a WWII captured German submarine, a Boeing 727 airplane that visitors can walk through, and a walk-through model of a human heart.
- The Chicago area's two zoos are the [Brookfield Zoo](#) and the [Lincoln Park Zoo](#), which is free and open year-round.
- Just north of the city, the [Chicago Botanic Garden](#) features an international collection of flora on 385 acres.
- [The Chicago History Museum](#) showcases and interprets millions of authentic pieces of Chicago and U.S. history.
- [Richard Driehaus Museum](#) in downtown Chicago is not to be missed. This 1880's mansion has been lovingly restored & filled with beautiful period furnishings & accessories. The Tiffany pieces are a special treat.



Museum of Science and Industry

Arts and Culture

- [The Chicago Symphony Orchestra](#) plays a season of more than 100 concerts at Orchestra Hall from September to June and performs [summer concerts at Ravinia Park](#) in Highland Park.
- Equally prestigious is the [Lyric Opera of Chicago](#), which stages classical and innovative operas at the recently renovated Civic Opera House.
- You can find information on [Chicago Blues concerts in Chicago here](#). All-night jazz and blues clubs are a Chicago tradition.
- [The Art Institute of Chicago](#) is another local institution with an international reputation. Its collection is recognized for French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and for comprehensive holdings of American arts and photographs.
- [The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum](#) is the first Mexican museum in the United States and the only Latino museum accredited by the American Association of Museums.
- The [National Veterans Art Museum](#) houses a permanent collection of more than 500 pieces focusing on war from the soldiers' perspective.
- [The Field Museum of Natural History](#) is rated among the top museums in the world; it examines life and culture from pre-history to the present time.
- [The Chicago Academy of Sciences](#), founded in 1857, was Chicago's first museum and features natural science exhibits as well as timely scientific displays. Among the special attractions are life-size dioramas on natural areas of the Great Lakes and the children's gallery with its lifelike animated dinosaurs and prehistoric creatures.
- [The Academy's Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#) features 73,000 square feet of interactive, environmental education.
- [The DuSable Museum](#) is the nation's first museum dedicated to preserving, displaying, and interpreting the culture, history, and achievements of African Americans.
- [The Museum of Contemporary Art](#), one of the largest of its kind in the country at 151,000 square feet, focuses on contemporary works that are often risk-taking and controversial. Its permanent collection includes works by Christo, Rene Magritte, and Andy Warhol.
- The [Museum of Broadcast Communications](#) hosts free daily concerts, films, lectures, and dance performances.
- [The Chicago Public Library Cultural Center](#) presents hundreds of free programs, concerts, and exhibitions annually.



Festivals and Holidays

Special summer programming is designed to tap into Chicago's heritage and to attract tourists.

- [The Chicago Blues Festival](#) takes place the second weekend in June at the Petrillo Music Shell and brings the best blues musicians to one of the world's blues capitals for concerts, food, and exchange of memorabilia.
- [The Printers Row Lit Fest](#), in June, is the largest free literary event in the Midwest.
- [Taste of Chicago](#), held over two weeks in late June and early July, features food sampling from Chicago restaurants as well as entertainment in Grant Park.
- [Viva Chicago](#), held in August-September, is a festival celebrating Latino music, food, and arts and crafts in Millennium Park.
- [Open House Chicago](#) is the city's annual architecture festival. For one weekend in October you can explore Chicago's most iconic and unique architectural treasures with a behind-the-scenes look at the city's great spaces from mansions to sacred spaces, theaters to private clubs, hotels to secret rooms— that are rarely, if ever, open to the public.
- [Chicago Gospel Festival](#) (June)
- [Lollapalooza](#) (August)
- [Movies in the Parks](#) (Summer)
- [Chicago Jazz Festival](#) (August-September)
- [Gaelic Park Irish Festival Chicago](#)
- [World Music Fest Chicago](#) (September-October)
- [The Chicago International Film Festival](#) is one of the largest in the country (October).
- [Grant Park Symphony Orchestra's](#) regular concerts

Sports

- [The Chicago Cubs](#) compete in the central division of the National Baseball League and play their home games at Wrigley Field, a turn-of-the-century steel and concrete structure where seats are close to the field.
- [The Chicago White Sox](#) of the American Baseball League's central division play their home games at U.S. Cellular Field on the city's South Side. The teams—and their fans—enjoy a fierce rivalry.
- [The Chicago Bears](#) of the National Football League's National Conference compete in central division home games at the recently renovated Soldier Field.
- [The Chicago Fire](#), Chicago's Major League Soccer franchise, also plays at Soldier Field.
- [The Chicago Blackhawks](#) of the National Hockey League and the [Chicago Bulls](#) of the National Basketball Association play their home schedules at the United Center.
- Auto racing fans can view competition at [Chicago Motor Speedway](#) in Cicero, while horse racing action takes place from July to November at [Hawthorne Race Course](#) in Stickney/Cicero.



Volunteer Opportunities

- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [United Way](#)
- [PAWS Chicago](#) is a national model in animal sheltering, committed to bringing an end to the killing of homeless cats and dogs.
- [Chicago Anti-Cruelty Society](#) - Organization helping with the adoption of lost and unwanted animals.

Parent & Children Resources

- [Mom's Clubs](#) - social groups offering events and outings with mothers and their young children.

Smart Phone Apps for Travel

- [Uber](#) : Similar to a taxi service but all web based. Payment also handled online, do not pay or tip driver directly. Uber driver knows your approximate location based on your phone GPS.
- [Lyft](#) : Wherever you're headed, count on Lyft for rides in minutes. The Lyft app matches you with local drivers at the tap of a button. Just request and go.
- [Google Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Apple Maps](#) : Map by direction
- [Map Quest](#) : Map by direction
- [Waze](#) : Community based traffic & navigation with alternate route suggestions
- [CityMaps2Go](#) : The #1 travel app lets you discover exciting new places. Beautiful photos and insider tips at the touch of a button. You will receive stories about places you like and can instantly save and find them on your maps and in your lists.

Smart Phone Apps for Communication:

- [WhatsApp](#) : Free local & international Real Time messaging
- [Line](#) : Exchange free instant messages with friends whenever and wherever with one-on-one and group chats. LINE is available on all smartphone devices (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, Blackberry, Nokia) and even on your PC.
- [Viber](#) : Free text, calling, photo messages and location-sharing with Viber users. No registration, alias or invitations required. Instantly integrates with your own contact list. Best-quality mobile calls using 3G or Wi-Fi.
- [Skype](#) : Stay in touch with your family and friends for free on Skype. Download Skype today to chat and call on desktop and mobile.

Smart Phone Apps for Local Information/Reviews:

- [Angie's List](#) : Referrals for doctor, dentist, child care, maid, mechanic, painter, plumber, etc.
- [Yelp!](#) : Find local businesses, restaurants, bars, clubs, events, etc. with map, lists, and reviews
- [Next Door](#) : Neighbors share community events, items for sale, recommendations for babysitters, doctors and handymen, crime reports, ideas about how to improve their neighborhood and more.
- [Meet Ups](#) : Meetups are neighbors getting together to learn something, do something or share something. Cultural groups advertise gatherings here as well.

Smart Phone Apps for Weather:

- [WTHR13](#) : Local weather and closings; includes radar and forecast
- [Weather Channel](#) : National and international time, temperature & weather
- [Tornado](#) : Set up tornado alerts & siren

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Holidays can be confusing as there are national (federal) holidays, bank holidays, state holidays. Verify those in your area with Human Resources at your place of business, especially before planning vacations or weekend get-aways! Illinois also pays special tribute to Abraham Lincoln by observing his birthday each February.

[Federal Holidays listed through 2020](#)

[State Holidays Observed in Illinois](#)

The following are federal holidays:

- New Year's Day January 1*
- Martin Luther King Day Third Monday in January
- Memorial Day Last Monday in May
- Independence Day July 4*
- Labor Day First Monday in September
- Columbus Day Second Monday in October
- Veterans' Day November 11*
- Thanksgiving Day Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day December 25*

*If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the day following is observed as the legal holiday.



[Chicago Skyline](#)