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RYAN SIMS

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SUMMER IN CHICAGO

Now is the prime time to explore this Midwestern hub of art, architecture and culinary delights

BY SUSAN LANIER GRAHAM



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Chicago might be known as the "Windy City" with long, cold winters, but its summers are delightful, with pleasant weather (maximum temperatures are in the 80s) and festivals and fun aplenty. Situated on the shore of Lake Michigan, Chicago is no ordinary concrete jungle, with a whopping 552 parks and 33 beaches. It is also filled with classic architecture and luxury hotels and is home to 26 Michelin-starred restaurants. That being said, it's an ideal escape from the Arizona heat.

Art and Architecture

Chicago grew in popularity during the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 – which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World in 1492 – when an estimated 150,000 people visited the city every single day for six months.

Upon arrival, they discovered a city filled with grand buildings. Experience some of this grandeur yourself by booking an architectural tour. One of the most

popular tours is a 90-minute river cruise with Chicago's First Lady Cruises.

You can also take a walking tour to get inside of some of these architectural gems. For example, the Historic Treasures of Culture and Commerce tour, available through the Chicago Architecture Foundation, goes inside the famous 19th-century Palmer House, and you can stand under the breathtaking dome of the original Chicago Public Library.

Of course, no visit to Chicago is complete without checking out The Art Institute of Chicago. The second largest art museum in the country, it houses one of the best collections of impressionist paintings, including works by Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir.

The modern wing of The Art Institute is a peaceful place to wander. Be sure to check out Marc Chagall's *America*



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Windows, which commemorates the American Bicentennial. They once marked the entryway to the museum, but now hang in a dedicated hallway.

Chicago by Night

After you've had a chance to take in the architectural glories of Chicago by day, head to the 360 Chicago Observation Deck high atop the John Hancock Building to get unbelievable city views at night. Located on the 94th floor (and 1,000 feet high!) you get a bird's-eye

view of the city and Lake Michigan.

Truly, this is a picture-perfect spot to grab a cocktail or glass of Champagne and toast the sunset. If you're looking for a bit of a thrill, check out the venue's latest attraction, TILT. Billed as Chicago's highest thrill ride (and the first of its kind worldwide), you step into a glass cube and tilt out over the city above The Magnificent Mile and the Chicago skyline.

Stay in Style

One of the places you see on a walking tour of Chicago is the Reliance Building at Washington and State streets. This National Historic Landmark was the city's first skyscraper, built in 1895 by Daniel Burnham, John Root and Charles Atwood. The building, with its unique white terra cotta and glass facade, now houses a newly opened luxury boutique hotel, The Alise Chicago (formerly Hotel Burnham) which oozes Old World charm.

With 122 rooms in the heart of downtown, it's in an ideal home base just blocks from The Art Institute, Millennium

Park, the theater district, and Michigan Avenue shopping (also known as The Magnificent Mile). The Alise Chicago is also across the street from the iconic Macy's department store that was originally Marshall Field & Company.

Even after a day of exploring, there's still much to anticipate at The Alise Chicago, such as complimentary treats in the lobby (don't miss their signature pineapple cupcakes) and custom yellow beach cruisers to see the city in a different way. The hotel is also dog-friendly, and you'll want to make sure you enjoy a delicious meal at the hotel's eatery, Atwood, which cooks up seasonal American food and follows the Monterey Bay Aquarium's seafood sustainability standards.

Dine Around

With the aforementioned 26 Michelin-starred restaurants, there's no quibbles about it: Chicago is a foodie town indeed. James Beard Award-winning Chef Tony Mantuano is a partner in several culinary ventures that offer unique experiences, both close to The Alise Chicago.

Two concepts – Spiaggia and Café Spiaggia – are housed in the same location but offer two different dining experiences. The more casual Café Spiaggia is open for lunch and dinner, serving up handmade pastas, shared plates, pastries and coffee. The café is a display of Italian home cooking, especially with its Sunday supper menu and family-style dining options. For a more upscale dining experience, book a table at Spiaggia, which has garnered a Michelin star and is a recipient of numerous awards. In fact, it's consistently named one of "America's 100 Best Wine Restaurants" by *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, giving a nod to its 700-bottle wine list.

If you're in Chicago on a Sunday morning, head across the bridge to River Roast, where Executive Chef John Hogan puts on Blues & Brunch, pairing creative morning-time indulgences with some of Chicago's finest blues musicians performing live. Be sure to try the rabbit and waffles or mascarpone French toast. Undoubtedly, sipping a bloody mary and listening to the blues is an ideal way to end a Chicago sojourn.