

Last Hurrah: Chicago's City Beach and Beyond

By Patti Morrow
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Looking for a beach destination but can't afford a jaunt to the Caribbean? No problem. . . pack up the kids and head for... Chicago!

Ohio Street Beach on the shore of Lake Michigan is sure to please everyone in the family. Less crowded than the better-known Oak Street or North Ave beaches, the backdrop of Chicago's dramatic skyline juxtaposed against the sparkling azure water creates a very appealing setting for swimming, picnicking, castle-building, bike riding, or just breaking away from the daily grind to kick back, soak up the rays and squish your toes in the powdery-soft beach sand.

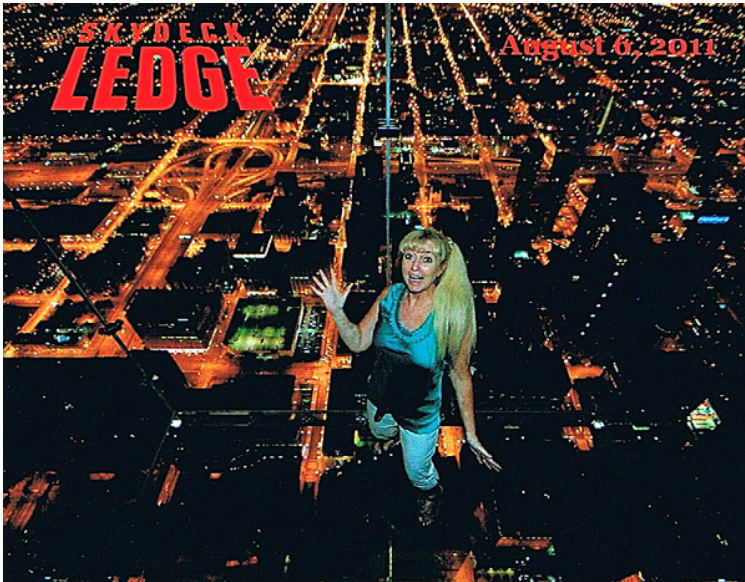
After a day on the beach, you'll find many activities just minutes away in one of America's most walker-friendly cities. Next to the beach is Illinois' most-visited site, festive Navy Pier, where you can grab a sizzling hot dog, ride the Ferris wheel, navigate through the 4,000 square foot Funhouse Maze, marvel at Cirque Shanghai's gravity-defying acts, or hop on one of several themed boat tours based at the pier.

Just a leisurely 20-minute walk to Michigan Ave in the heart of the city, and you'll find yourself at Millennium Park where "oversize" is the order of the day. Stretched out before you is the mirrored-surface Cloud Gate sculpture a.k.a. "The Bean" reflecting the cityscape, the expansive pavilion bandshell designed by world-renown deconstructionist architect Frank Gehry, 50-foot living faces displayed on Crown Fountain, and of course the infamous 3-story iconic statue of Marilyn Monroe temporarily on exhibit at the Chicago Tribune.



For more athletic pursuits, head to the River Walk. The Chicago River is the only river on earth that flows backwards – considered one of the 20th century's top engineering wonders. Whether you walk, jog, run, or bike – this is one of the best ways to absorb Chicago's architectural grandeur.

And the best part? All of the activities listed thus far are *free*.



Also within walking distance of the beach is the John Hancock Observatory, where you can zip up 1,000 ft. in a 40-second elevator ride to Chicago's only open-air skywalk exposing 360° views of the city skyline. For the more daring, a five-minute taxi ride to the Willis Tower – the tallest building in the western hemisphere – will provide an opportunity for you to go out on “the Ledge,” a glass balcony suspended 103 stories above street level!

For shopping, walk to the northern end of Michigan Ave, called “the Magnificent Mile.” Enough said.

Meander around the Lincoln Park Zoo, take in a major league baseball game at historic Wrigley Field, or visit one of Chicago's many excellent museums – you'll run out of time before running out of things to do.

Don't forget the pizza! Chicago is where the deep-dish pizza originated and you can find delectable samples at Giordano's, Gino's and Lou Malnati's.

So what are you waiting for? With just a few short weeks until books, soccer, and music lessons once again dominate family life, memories and adventures await at Ohio Street Beach and vibrant downtown Chicago.