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CHICAGO

AN AMERICAN
CLASSIC

EAMON DUNPHY

ON A LIFE OF
NO COMPLAINTS

CHAMPAGNE

THE WINE WORLD'S
LAST SECRET

AMSTERDAM

FUN IN EUROPE'S
FUNKIEST CITY

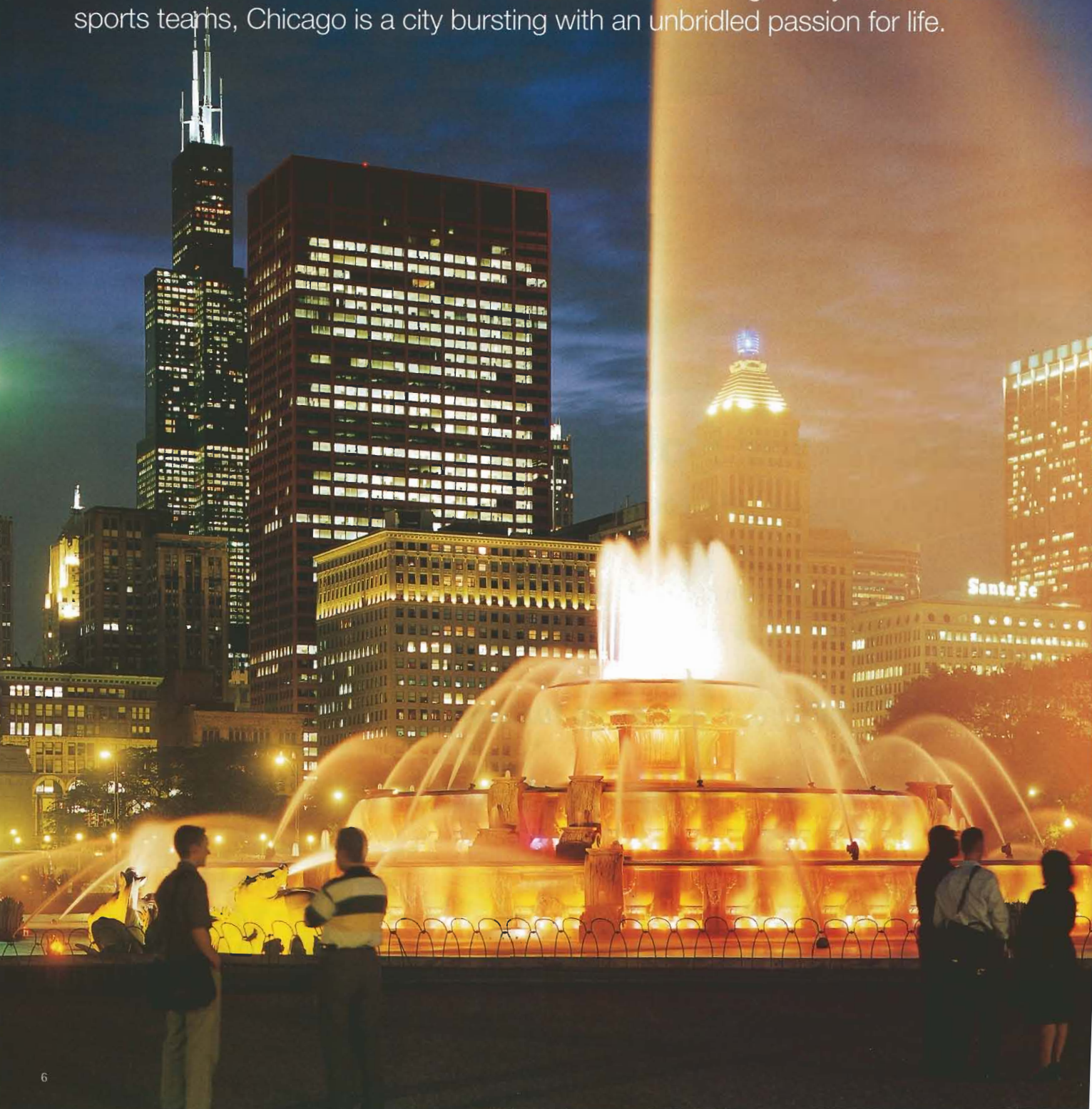
GEORGINA CAMPBELL'S

TOP XMAS RECOVERY SPOTS

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CHICAGO – AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL

Chicago is a city that has much to surprise the visitor says long-time resident Jerry Soverinsky. With its rich tradition of modern architecture, stunning lakefront parks, famous department stores, world class museums and legendary blues clubs and sports teams, Chicago is a city bursting with an unbridled passion for life.





I've lived in Chicago since 1991, and there's no other place I'd consider calling home. While many short-term visitors select Chicago because of its good links to the rest of the US and its well developed conference centre business, the city, and its passions, offer far more excitement to visitors interested in looking for a rich and uniquely American experience.

Chicago is the quintessential American melting pot. Large concentrations of Europeans, Vietnamese, Chinese, East Asians, West Africans... the list goes on and on - along with a very left-leaning social and political bent, are testament to the Chicago's long-standing open welcome for people of all backgrounds. The city itself is a conglomeration of geographic and ethnic neighbourhoods, each with their own character and flavour. And because the city is arranged around a grid system (the majority of streets run either north-south or east-west), it is easy to get around, even for first-time visitors and helped by the city's 24-hour public transport system of buses and trains.

For me, no mention of Chicago is complete without referencing its magnificent public parks. Spread out over 7,300 acres throughout the city, Chicago's 552 public parks are immaculately maintained havens for families and individuals in search of idyllic places for recreation or just plain lounging. Chicago's Mayor, Richard M. Daley, is a passionate outdoors enthusiast, whose goal of making Chicago the "greenest city in America" is one he continually pursues. Indeed, in one infamous incident in 2003, around 11pm and just as the evening news had finished, he ordered the illegal demolition of Meigs Field, a small, lakefront single-strip airport that since 1948 had been used mainly by corporate jets and private

recreational fliers.

While one can find fault with the Daley Administration for any one of several scandals that have surfaced since its reign began in 1989, it's hard to knock (unless, of course, you're one of the corporate executives who now must fly to Midway Airport - nine miles away!) a politician who demolished a little-used airport - not for commercial gain, as might be expected - but rather for redevelopment as a public park. Today, Meigs Field, now known as Northerly Island, is a constantly evolving peninsular park almost completely surrounded by Lake Michigan, a magnificent venue for concerts and recreational activities.

The recently completed Millennium Park is another jewel in Mayor Daley's public development projects. This world-class park, technically part of the larger Grant Park, is a 25-acre lakefront landmark that features internationally acclaimed architecture and design in its sculptures, public-access pavilions, and gardens. It is a must-see experience for any Chicago visitor or resident. And despite severe cost overruns, Mayor Daley has succeeded in creating a world-class facility that will continue to serve the public for decades to come.

In addition to a massive park system, Chicago makes expert use of its coveted Lake Michigan frontage, with 33 public beaches stretching throughout its north-south boundaries. During the summer, most are teeming with droves of people swimming, playing volleyball, walking dogs, or just sunbathing. There's also an 18-mile lakefront path that's frequented year-round by cyclists, joggers, walkers, rollerbladers, dog walkers, and those out to simply enjoy Chicago's lakefront. Visitors can rent bikes, pedal carts, or even Segways, ideal vehicles for gaining a first-hand look





at many of Chicago's historic sites.

Chicago's architecture is also world famous. Though most of the city's buildings were destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, the city quickly rebounded. Less than one decade later, some of the first modern skyscrapers were erected with steel-frame construction, a pioneering achievement by the famed Chicago School. Over the next century, some of the world's most prominent architects - Daniel Burnham, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, to name just a few - left their trademark touches on scores of buildings that are included on any one of several architectural sightseeing tours.

And with no less than four-dozen museums - from the renowned Art Institute to the obscure Filipino American Historical Society Museum - Chicago boasts one of the richest collections of museums anywhere in the world. The city's Museum Campus, a museum triumvirate that includes the Adler Planetarium, Field Museum of Natural History, and Shedd Aquarium, is a 10-acre lakefront park that was developed by relocating a highway, a complex rerouting that took several years to complete. Since the highway rerouting was completed in 1998 this sprawling complex is a focal point for any well-planned Chicago visit.

Chicago is also home to a world-class symphony. And opera. And ballet. But no matter your preference, a Chicago visit would be incomplete without a night at one of Chicago's venerable blues clubs. The granddaddy of them all is Buddy Guy's Legends. Buddy Guy, a 2005

inductee into the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame, is "by far and without a doubt the best guitar player alive ..." according to Eric Clapton, not known for gratuitous hyperbole. Guy's Loop club is an accessible, lively joint where traditional Chicago-bred blues are played seven nights a week. And when Buddy's not touring, he's almost always there, eager to share his musical passion with his guests. It's a once-in-a-lifetime musical privilege that's unparalleled in its intimacy, an absolute essential stop during any proper Chicago tour.

Chicago's distinguished sports resume also offers year-round entertainment. Baseball, football, basketball, hockey, and soccer are sports with dedicated stadiums and fiercely loyal followings. The Chicago Cubs, who play baseball at Wrigley Field, are perhaps the most famous, if only for their extended run of futility (now entering its second century of championship-less play).

Some of the finest chefs in the United States and world showcase their talent in Chicago. With hundreds of restaurants in every price range and culinary specialty, there's something for every budget and taste. The list of possibilities is endless, there are dozens of establishments recognised in some of the world's most critical food and wine reviews, including AAA and Maitres Cuisiniers de France. Shopping is also world class in Chicago and in addition to the famous Mag Mile (a one-mile strip along Michigan Avenue), there are dozens of other unique and equally impressive shopping districts spread throughout the city's very accessible neighbourhoods.

Practical Information

Arrival

By air: No shortage of flights into Chicago from anywhere in the US and beyond, its major airports, O'Hare and Midway, service almost 100 million passengers combined per year. Aer Lingus offers a regular scheduled service to Chicago. Check out www.aerlingus.com.

From the Airport

Public transportation is simple and cheap. You'll jump on the blue line from O'Hare and the Orange Line from Midway. \$2 gets you all the way downtown. More information at www.transitchicago.com. Taxis from either O'Hare or Midway to downtown cost between \$30-40.

Booking Hotels

The Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau's can book rooms directly from its website at www.choosechicago.com. Lots of practical information and addresses for sightseeing, dining, and nightlife, too.

Nightlife

www.metromix.com provides up-to-the-minute information on bars, clubs, and music throughout the city.

Useful Websites

For more information, you can check out the following websites.

The Chicago Transit Authority (or CTA)

- at www.transitchicago.com.

Chicago's public parks and beaches

- at www.chicagoparkdistrict.com.

The Chicago Architecture Foundation

- at www.architecture.org.

Chicago's museums

- at <http://centerstagechicago.com/other/styles/museums.html>.

For information about Buddy Guy's Loop club

- at www.buddyguys.com.

For information about shopping

- www.choosechicago.com/shopping.

Chicago's Sports Teams

Bears (American football): www.chicagobears.com.

Bulls (basketball): www.chicagobulls.com.

Cubs (baseball): www.chicagocubs.com.

White Sox (baseball): www.whitesox.com.

Fire (soccer): <http://chicago.fire.mlsnet.com>

Blackhawks (hockey): www.chicagoblackhawks.com.

5 Great Things To Do In Chicago

- ▣ 1. Movies in the Park: Every Tuesday evening in Grant Park during July and August, join 12,000 others and watch classic movies with a Lake Michigan backdrop.
- ▣ 2. Ice Skating at Millennium Park: Late fall through winter, no finer atmosphere for skating anywhere in the world. www.millenniumpark.org.
- ▣ 3. Wrigley Field: Since 1916, this ballpark has been the very definition of American baseball. Catch a Cubs game April to October and you'll become a fan for life.
- ▣ 4. Second City: Perhaps the most famous training ground for comedians anywhere in the world. Shows nightly. More information at www.secondcity.com.
- ▣ 5. Frank Lloyd Wright Tour: Just outside of Chicago in Oak Park, these tours provide great insights into one of America's most celebrated architects. More information at www.wrightplus.org.

5 Great Places To Stay

- ▣ 1. Peninsula Hotel: The premier five-star hotel in Chicago. More information at www.peninsula.com.
- ▣ 2. The Drake: The city's oldest and most venerable deluxe hotel. More information at www.thedrakehotel.com.
- ▣ 3. Four Seasons: Another sterling five-star property in the heart of Chicago's downtown. More information at www.fourseasons.com.
- ▣ 4. W Hotel: Hip, Four-star digs on Lake Shore Drive. Its evening bar scene attracts young 20 and 30 somethings. More information at www.starwoodhotels.com.
- ▣ 5. House of Blues: Just south of the Chicago River, this chain hotel offers a truly great Sunday gospel brunch. More information at www.hob.com/chicago.

5 Great Places To Eat

- ▣ 1. Gibson's: Steak lovers will swoon for the 24-ounce porterhouses and other massive entrees. A favourite of tradeshow attendees and those on an expense account. Find out more at www.gibsonsteakhouse.com.
- ▣ 2. Tufano's Vernon Park Tap: A 60-year old family-run Italian restaurant in Chicago's Little Italy. 1073 W. Vernon Park Place, Tel: (312) 733 3393.
- ▣ 3. Bacino's: You want real Chicago deep dish pizza? My favourite is Bacino's, especially the stuffed spinach variety. More information at www.bacinos.com.
- ▣ 4. Japonais: Sushi-lovers can't say enough about this contemporary, elegant take on an Old World favourite. More information at www.japonaischicago.com.
- ▣ 5. Wiener's Circle: Looking to fix those late-night hunger pangs? This edgy 5am Lincoln Park hot dog stand is my hands-down favourite for post-bar nourishment. 2622 N. Clark Street, Tel: (877) 280 9602.

4 Great Neighbourhoods For Shopping

- ▣ 1. Bucktown/Wicker: By far the funkier collection of great food, drink, and shopping found anywhere in the city.
- ▣ 2. Lincoln Park: Bordering the lakefront and with acres and acres of lush parks, this yuppie Northside neighborhood offers an impressive collection of boutiques and nightlife.
- ▣ 3. Old Town/Gold Coast: Close to the Mag Mile but without the high price tags (though not cheap by any means), this sophisticated neighbourhood is also well-known for its annual Old Town Art Fair, a popular June festival.
- ▣ 4. Mag Mile: The most famous shopping district in Chicago, Michigan Avenue is home to some of the most recognisable names in retail. Bring cash and lots of it—or plastic with lots of legroom. More information at www.themagnificentmile.com.