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Instant Guide to Chicago

The Magnificent Mile

4 hours on the go

Fodor's



Chicago's greatest tourist magnet reads like a to-do checklist: Navy Pier, the John Hancock Building, art museums and galleries, lakefront activities, and countless shops. This is the Magnificent Mile, the stretch of Michigan Avenue between the

Chicago River and Oak Street, where you could spend a few dollars or thousands. Shoppers cram sidewalks in summer and keep the street bustling even in winter, when the trees are twined with thousands of white fairy lights and buildings are colorfully illuminated. Our top picks will give you the best Magnificent Mile experience.

GET HERE FAST

Many buses run along Michigan Avenue, including the 3, 4, 144, 145, 146, 167, and 151. Or take the El's Red Line to Chicago Avenue or Clark and Division.

DON'T MISS

■ **John Hancock Center:** This Chicago-skyline favorite, built in 1970, is distinguished by its tapering shape and enormous X braces, which help stabilize its 100 stories. The observation deck is on the 94th floor, but an even more impressive perch is on the 95th in the Signature Room, a bar that offers unmatched skyline and lake views.

■ **Museum of Contemporary Art:** A group of art patrons who felt the great Art Institute of Chicago was unresponsive to modern work founded the MCA in 1967, and it's remained a renegade in spirit ever since. The museum doesn't have any permanent exhibits; works from its collection constantly rotate. Special exhibits are devoted to original shows you can't see anywhere else.

■ **Oak Street Beach:** There's no better place to grab a dose of sun along the lakefront, with some of the most elegant buildings in the Chicago skyline rising up behind you.

QUICK HITS

■ **Historic Water Tower:** This famous Michigan Avenue structure, completed in 1867, remains a Chicago landmark and a symbol of the city's spirit of survival following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

■ **Michigan Avenue Bridge:** Chicago is a city of bridges, and its most graceful example was completed in 1920. The four pylons feature impressive sculptures representing major Chicago events, including its exploration by Marquette and Joliet in the 17th century.

■ **Wrigley Building:** The headquarters of the chewing-gum company is a landmark with its gleaming white clock tower, inspired by the bell towers of grand cathedrals in Seville, Spain.

■ **Tribune Tower:** Embedded in the exterior walls of the *Chicago Tribune's* gothic tower are pieces taken from famous sites around the world, including the Parthenon, Westminster Abbey, the Alamo, St. Peter's Basilica, the Taj Mahal, and the Great Wall of China.

SHOPPING BLITZ

■ **900 North Michigan Shops:** Forget any notions about malls being suburban wastelands. Four decidedly upscale urban malls dot the Mag Mile, and the toniest of the four is this one, with a dazzling list of tenants.



■ **Jake:** Steps away from the Mag Mile's heavy hitters, this boutique stocks clothes for both sexes by up-and-coming designers. It's been a local favorite from the moment it opened its doors.

■ **City of Chicago Store:** Nab unusual souvenirs of the city here—anything from a street sign to a real parking meter. It's also a good source for posters and T-shirts.

IN-THE-KNOW

Unless you're with kids, the best—and some would argue the only—reason to go to **Navy Pier** is to ride the 15-story Ferris wheel for views of the lake and skyline.

See the **Wrigley Building** at dusk, when lamps bounce light off its gleaming terracotta facade.

