

TravelHost feature

Chicago Neighborhoods

by Jill Ginsburg

Chicago, more than most other U.S. cities, is defined by its neighborhoods. It is here that you will find the ethnic expressions of Chicago's past and present. These neighborhoods, more of them than are mentioned here, offer interesting walks and glimpses of life in other places and other times. All have a good number of inexpensive restaurants, often family-owned.

It's best to enjoy these neighborhoods as residents do, in very casual clothes and in an unhurried way. If you have errands to run (a birthday card or gift, thread, something to repair your glasses with), try heading for one of the neighborhoods described below. You'll find what you need and discover pleasant surprises too. In neighborhoods where English is a second language for many, people who aren't fluent are usually glad to find someone to help you.

How to Find the Neighborhoods

Nearly all of Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods are easily accessible by public transportation. Call 312-836-7000 for information. Give any of the locations mentioned here as a reference. Note that north-south addresses are defined by their distance from Madison Street; east-west addresses are measured from State Street. For example, 100 N. Michigan Avenue is one block *north* of Madison, while 100 S. Michigan is one block *south* of it.

Devon and Western Avenues

6000 north at 2400 west (Western Avenue)

This older, once-Jewish enclave is rapidly becoming a street version of the United Nations. East Indians, Arabs, and recently-arrived Russian Jews offer Indian silks, imported candies, and an array of fresh and packaged ethnic foods, from Middle Eastern grains to East European baked goods. Devon Avenue in the blocks just west of Western Avenue is the main strip here. And it's a great place to eat or snack.

La Villita

2600 south near 4000 west (26th Street, near Pulaski)

Off the beaten track, "Little Village" is the Fifth Avenue, Times Square, and town plaza of the city's Mexican-Americans. Its residents are largely working class and bilingual. There are numerous summer festivals, which provide a great occasion to treat yourself to south-of-the-border food from street stands or from a restaurant. Busy and crowded, especially on weekends, with families out shopping, celebrating birthdays, greeting friends.

Chinatown

22nd St. (2200 south) at the Dan Ryan Expressway

This close-in neighborhood is one of the city's most densely populated and is due for a major expansion. For now, you can walk the sparkling clean streets lined with old frame houses, shop for Chinese giftware from high-quality art and clothing to kitchen gadgets, and have a gourmet Chinese dinner in restaurants well-accustomed to accommodating visitors from outside the community.

Hyde Park

51st St. to 57th St. (5100 to 5700 south), along the lakefront and for several blocks west.

The University of Chicago is the center of one of the oldest and most charming racially integrated neighborhoods in the country. The university campus, elegant apartment buildings and private residences, and a grand variety of commercial establishments (look especially for book and record stores and restaurants) all contribute distinctive touches. Very close by, there's the Museum of Science and Industry (312-684-1414, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, the DuSable Museum of African-American History, and a lakefront park and beach. Former mayor Harold Washington lived here.

Lincoln Park

1600 north to 2400 north, along the lakefront

The neighborhood is the streets bordering and west of Lincoln Park. Fine restaurants, theaters, bookstores, designer clothing—you'll find them all here, along with quiet residential side streets and some of the most interesting architecture the city has to offer. Lincoln Park attracts many professional and business people.

See one, see them all, save some for your next visit. Enjoy your adventures in the neighborhoods that "make" Chicago!