

More than a movie

Next time you go to a movie, consider giving yourself a real Hollywood treatment at one of these plush theaters. Once you've sampled the service, cocktails and pillows, it'll be hard to go back to the multiplex.



Super-plush seats are only part of the experience. (From top) Mixed drinks and beef filet sliders await patrons at iPic Theaters in South Barrington.

1 CHICHI MENUS (AND BLANKETS)

Posh drinks and a high-end seasonal menu star at the newly renamed iPic Theaters (formerly Gold Class Cinemas) in South Barrington's Arboretum, an upscale, 55-store outdoor shopping complex (35 miles northwest of the Loop). At the eight-screen venue, patrons hang out at the lobby's Salt Bar and open a running tab for drinks, tickets and food. Then settle into a premium seat for first-run movies. You can order a charcuterie platter (\$13), grilled lemon chicken satay skewers (\$12), or a filet mignon trio served with arugula and sweet onions (\$17). Wine, mixed drinks and beer run \$3–\$18 a glass. Want a pillow and blanket? They have plenty on hand.

If all of that sounds pricey for movie night, you can settle for the less-expensive seats, which even get their own serve-yourself snack bar.

Tickets from \$17.50. 100 W. Higgins Rd., South Barrington (224/293-1001; ipictheaters.com).

2 THOUGHTFUL CONVERSATION

Moviegoers who have always dreamed of a trip to Sundance for indie films can get a taste at Chicago's Gene Siskel Film Center. The sleek complex with an airy stainless-steel gallery stairway is part of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is named after the film critic who served as Roger Ebert's longtime review partner. Black-and-white glamour portraits of silver screen stars hang on a wall in the cafe and the snack bar. Patrons can buy beer and wine (\$6) (plus popcorn and candy) to take into the two luxe auditoriums known for their sink-into seats and soaring walls draped in black fabric. All films reflect historic and artistic value, and many show in conjunction with talks that are open to the public. Most people wouldn't recognize the movies by name, but earlier this summer, the center ran 12 programs of Charlie Chaplin's films.

Tickets are \$10. 164 N. State St., Chicago (312/846-2600; siskelfilmcenter.org).



3 HOLLYWOOD GLAM

Silver screen kitsch stars at Hollywood Blvd. Cinema, Bar and Eatery in Woodridge (25 miles southwest of the Loop). The lobby in this movie palace in a strip mall re-creates L.A.'s Grauman's Chinese Theatre with antique carved Asian-style woodwork, giant Buddhas, classic movie posters and film-set memorabilia. Patrons stroll the gold-star-decked walkway engraved with celebrities' names to reach the 10 screens showing first-run movies. Each theater is decorated in a cinematic theme (*Casablanca's* Kasbah streets and an Oscars set, to name two). During the show, attentive servers rove the aisles of comfy seats delivering giant buckets of popcorn, cocktails and full meals. The seemingly endless menu includes hefty burgers, pizzas, salads and sandwiches (\$8-\$12) plus shakes, wine and beer starting at \$4.

Tickets from \$6. 1001 W. 75th St., Woodridge (630/427-1880; atriptothemovies.com).

History in a bottle

Browsing Merz Apothecary's new corner store in Chicago's historic Palmer House Hilton is a history lesson in global hygiene. But we think it's more ahh than yuck. The business—tended by the Qaiyum family's pharmacist-father, Abdul, and son, Anthony—carries 13,000 body and bath products, 200 herbal teas, homeopathic remedies, aromatherapy oils and organic baby items. The Lincoln Avenue location opened 136 years ago (yes, you read that right); the family opened this store last year.

It's fun to study label artwork and ingredients. Some formulations date back centuries. Pedigreed goods include Caswell-Massey cologne (reportedly worn by George Washington), French L'Aromarine Vanille Eau de Toilette spray and scented Diptyque candles. Check out hard-to-find, original-German-imported Nivea creams, starting at \$4. In addition to Burt's Bees lip balm, you'll find rare queen bee jelly-pollen cream (\$20 for a half-ounce). Merz even stocks 60 varieties of toothpaste, as well as an overwhelming 700 kinds of soaps, some shaped like animals and uncut gemstones.

The products hail from all over the world, with 40 percent from Europe (all of them also are for sale on the store's website). The multilingual staff of herbalists, acupuncturists, aromatherapists and pharmacists helps you sort through the options and make satisfying selections to bring the ahh home.

17 E. Monroe St., Chicago (312/781-6900; merz-apothecary.com).

Buying American

If you're the kind of woman who falls for something while shopping and gets her heart broken by a Made in China sticker, consider a trip to Norton's U.S.A. in Barrington.

Housed in a handsome 1920s post-and-beam barn, the modern-day general store (45 miles northwest of the Loop) that opened in 2007 only sells American-made products. Lodge Cast Iron Cookware dates to 1896, but its basic \$25 skillet still is the best way to fry bacon or sear scallops. Classic 1946 Nordic Ware cake pans, Anchor Hocking glassware and J.K. Addams maple cutting boards work in today's home as well as they did in postwar dinettes.

The 21st-century items complement the classics, offering a mix of home decor items, cleaning products, stationery, food, gardening items and travel accessories. Wisconsin-based textile company Green 3 weaves cotton factory remnants into yarn for cute women's beatnik-chic casual clothes and blankets (\$69). Kids make a beeline to the back room, where a giant blackboard, Shortline Railroad sets (\$50) and a variety of Holgate wooden toys entertain. Wrapping paper silk-screened with owner Deborah Leydig's designs adds a personal touch to gifts, and all of Norton's products are available online.

With Independence Day upon us, consider shopping here just one more way to show your patriotism. Not that you needed an excuse.

400 Lageschulte St., Barrington (847/382-8872; nortonsusa.com).



(Clockwise) Montrose Point is one of the Midwest's leading rest stops for birds along the U.S. Central Flyway, including purple martins and woodpeckers.



Big-city birding

The black-legged kittiwake, a gull rarely seen in Chicago, flaps to a landing at Montrose Point, a thrilling moment for nearby bird-watchers primed with binoculars. But not totally unexpected. Of 440 bird species in Illinois, about 325 have been spotted at this little nature laboratory just 5 miles north of Chicago's famous skyline.

The 15-acre hooked finger of woodlands, dunes and beach reaches into Lake Michigan, creating an ideal bird and butterfly sanctuary. Marked paths take visitors within 6 feet of bird habitats. In summer, shorebirds populate Montrose Beach, including endangered piping plovers, American avocets, whimbrels and ruddy turnstones. Peregrine falcons soar overhead. Tall dunegrass attracts short-eared owls, killdeer and rarely seen Nelson's sharp-tailed and Le Conte's sparrows.

During spring and fall migrations, avid bird-watchers flock to the point's Magic Hedge, a former Cold War missile site camouflaged today by thick shrubs. If you go, you're likely to hear purple martins twitter, doves purr, grackles whistle and woodpeckers pound while the lake whooshes a rhythmic refrain.

New to bird-watching? Join the Chicago Audubon Society for free guided bird walks year-round at Montrose Point and other Chicago nature sanctuaries. You'll be surprised at what you see, just moments from the city's bustle. For dates and times, call 773/539-6793 or visit chicagoaudubon.org.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) COURTESY OF CHICAGO PARKS AND RECREATION; TOM VEZDEGETTY; ALTIRENDO NATURE/GETTY

Saddle up

This summer, Chicago's Field Museum showcases *The Horse*, a fact-filled and fascinating exhibit about our relationship with these amazing creatures. To whet your appetite, here are four things you didn't know about horses. For more, head to the museum. But hurry; the show only lasts until August 14.

1 Horses have the largest eyeballs of any land creature. In the sea, whales have the big numbers. (And, if you want to know more about those animals, check out the Field Museum's other summer blockbuster, *Whales: Giants of the Deep*, which runs through January 16, 2012.)

2 Horses have a heart the size of a basketball, which visitors can explore in the interactive biology exhibit.

3 Horses haven't always been as revered. "We contemporary humans have a special relationship with horses, and the idea of eating a horse is almost taboo," says Tom Skwerski, exhibitions project manager. Not so in Ice Age Europe (or in some modern countries, for that matter!).

4 Horses are the only herd animal that can eat while they're working. (Maybe we humans aren't so distantly related, after all.)

Admission charged. 1400 S. Lake Shore Dr., Chicago (312/922-9410; fieldmuseum.org).

Alysse Gear

A cool new partnership

This summer, Chicago's First Lady Cruises welcomes some of her youngest passengers in a new way—with a twist on the wildly popular architectural

cruises along the Chicago River. The sightseeing cruise line has partnered with American Girl Place Chicago to offer tailor-made tours that share some of the city's stories through the eyes of some of the American Girl characters, whose own story lines are set in different eras of American history.

Set to take place on July 10 and 24 and August 7 and 14, the tours intertwine history—including the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and architect Daniel Burnham's plan for Chicago—with the stories of Kit, Molly, Addy and other dolls loved by girls ages 8–12.

Rebecca "lived" during the birth of the skyscraper, so she would have watched these amazing structures rise during the early 1900s. Characters Julie and Ivy would feel more at home in the Willis Tower, where Sears Roebuck thrived during the 1970s, says Anita North-Hamill, the Chicago Architecture Foundation docent who created the tour.

"At the end of the tour they'll be able to look at a building and say, 'That's an Art Deco building,' by looking at clues on the building," Anita says. "Hopefully the kids and the adults will be able to go, 'Aha, I see!'"

The \$70 cruise tickets include dinner at the cafe inside American Girl Place, located along North Michigan Avenue. The Water Tower Place anchor store is a haven for doll-loving (and book-loving) girls and their parents, full of dolls, clothes, accessories, a doll hair salon and super-cute sweets shop.

For more information or to buy tickets, call 877/247-5223 or visit cruisechicago.com.

Alysse Gear



Opened last fall, IPO serves breakfast, lunch and dinner in Chicago's financial district. When we visited, the scallops were flavored with lemon verbena, white chocolate and sunchokes.



No risk at all

Trade traditional dining for IPO, a culinary venture in the sleek W Chicago City Center Hotel near the Chicago Board of Trade. Executive chef Trevor Hoyte's sophisticated restaurant dishes three squares daily of contemporary American food, and IPO's mod, monochromatic decor and high-intensity vibe mirrors its busy financial district views.

Like a diversified portfolio, IPO's changing breakfast, lunch and dinner menus balance secure choices (such as a.m. Nutella French toast and p.m. pappardelle pasta) with a few experimental entrees (such as barramundi [an Australian bass] served with Manila clams, spicy plums, golden beets and seaweed). We tried the \$22 sunny-side-up egg atop a tangy beef short ribs-potato tower (served all day). At dinnertime, smart investors share small plates accompanied by a selection of more than 50 varieties of domestic wines. Seared scallops (\$16) paired beautifully with Frei Brothers Chardonnay (\$13 a glass).

Lunch is the best buy-low, good-value option. A \$7 toasty flatbread starter comes with a duo of dips (onion-black pepper and tomatillo-pumpkin seed). Sandwiches and salads outperform the entrees; we especially liked the succulent crab cake served on a doughy pretzel roll (\$16) and the salad made with butter lettuce, avocado, grapefruit and maple bacon (\$13).

Reservations recommended. 172 W. Adams St., Chicago (312/917-5608; iporestaurant.com). ■