

FINDING THE ANGLE

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SOUTH

Chicago's iconic skyline presents postcard-perfect vistas no matter the vantage point.

By Kit Bernardi

The 360 CHICAGO Observation Deck, originally known as the John Hancock Observatory, has ranked as one of the best places for skyline views since its opening in 1969.

360 CHICAGO



The Chicago River

tour boat's fanning wake

gently rocks my group's kayaks into stretched, slender shadows of skyscrapers. Muffled sounds of humming traffic and rumbling elevated trains drift across the rippling water. I look up to see a river of cloud-checked blue sky flowing between shores of glass and steel.

Kayaking in Chicago is to experience the city like an explorer. In

the languages of the Illinois and Miami tribes, Chicago means wild leek, which once flourished on the riverbanks. The name was adopted by 17th-century French fur traders and missionaries paddling the waterway.

That famous waterway and the architecture here has built a city bursting with distinctive, scenic stretches of skyline. And whether

by water, air or land, the ways to view those vistas are plentiful.

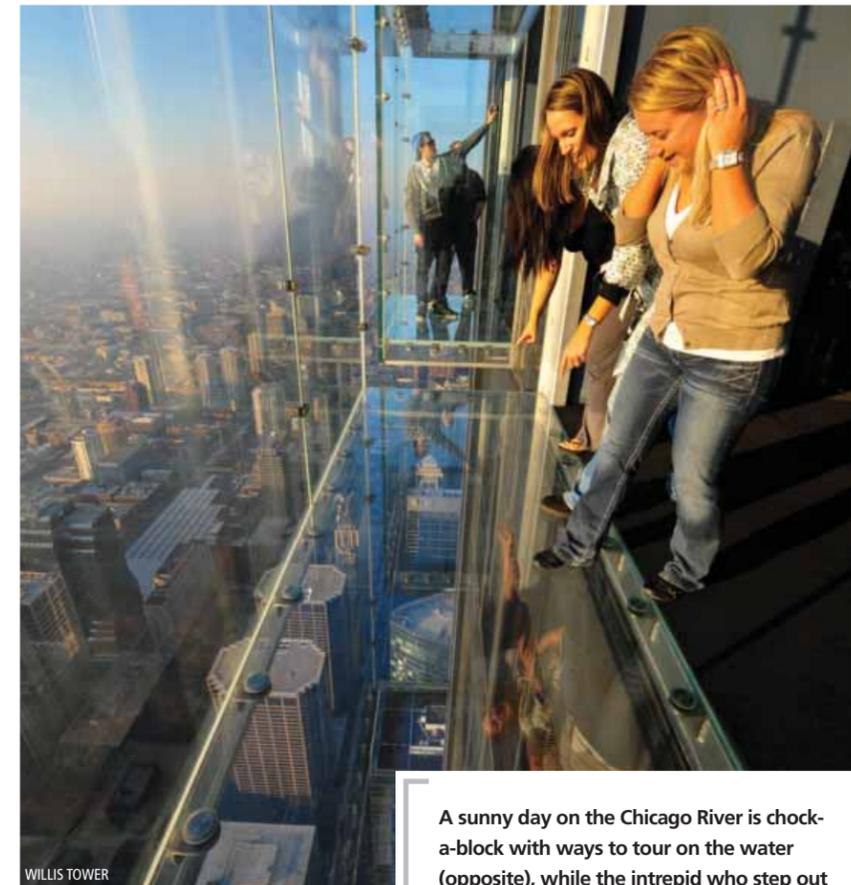
Taking to the Water An adventurous alternative to the usual architectural river cruises, Kayak Chicago's guided river tours paddle through the city's history told in bridges and buildings. The two-and-a-half-hour, five-mile round-trip starts on the river's North Branch

in an industrial district. Kayakers hug the shore into skyscraper-studded downtown, paddling to the Wrigley Building, across from where Chicago's first settler—fur trader Jean Baptiste Point du Sable—built his cabin. It's also the site of 1803 Fort Dearborn. The tour returns up the Ogden Canal.

Guides gather kayakers at shoreline points offering views of significant buildings, such as the former 1872 Montgomery Ward warehouse, built after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The reinforced-concrete building with terra-cotta ornamentation is now loft condominiums. At Wolf Point, the monolithic, Art Deco-style Merchandise Mart marks the entrance to the river's main artery, flowing through a skyscraper canyon. Paddlers pass Chicago Riverwalk restaurants and Mid-Century Modern-style Marina Towers and slip under historical bridges opening skyward for sailboats to enter Lake Michigan.

Tall Ship Windy, a schooner moored at updated 101-year-old Navy Pier, offers a twist on traditional Lake Michigan cruises. On the majestic ship's 75-minute storytelling sails, professional entertainers are guides weaving together skyline buildings' facts with local insights and city history, legends, politics and culture. Passengers can help hoist the sails.

Passengers learn about Great Lakes pirate history dating to the 1700s. Schooners docking at the Port of Chicago carried timber and beaver pelts, "the equivalent of gold for Caribbean pirates," said guide Dave Gonzalez. On swashbuckling-themed sails, Gonzalez and mate Mark Lancaster perform family-friendly pirate tales about a legendary buccaneer simply called Fox and Roaring Dan Seavey, who stole ships to sell the cargo on Chicago's black market and ran alcohol for gangster Al Capone.



A sunny day on the Chicago River is chock-a-block with ways to tour on the water (opposite), while the intrepid who step out on Willis Tower's The Ledge (above) get an up-top view available nowhere else in the city.

Above It All Jaws drop and cameras click nonstop when viewing Chicago's skyline from a helicopter and from atop two of the world's tallest buildings.

The 15-minute Chicago Helicopter Experience loops above Lake Michigan from the Museum Campus north toward Wrigley Field, the nation's second-oldest major league baseball park. Equipped with headphones, passengers converse with the pilot, who points out landmarks while sharing Chicago history, such as how the lakefront parks were envisioned by architect Daniel Burnham in his 1909 Plan of Chicago and how Navy Pier was once a World War II flight-training center.

At 110-story Willis Tower, visitors seeking Instagram-worthy moments step onto The Ledge, four glass boxes cantilevered 1,353 feet above busy West Loop streets. However, daring isn't required to glimpse four states

from Willis' Skydeck observatory, on the 103rd floor of the Western Hemisphere's second-tallest building.

"From here, you see much of the city's detail, like the river's curves, old versus new skyscraper heights and railroad tracks interlocked like a kid's train set," said Tanya Bigler, a visitor from Syracuse, Utah.

The John Hancock Center's 360 CHICAGO Observation Deck offers Lake Michigan shoreline views from the 94th floor and the thrilling TILT attraction. Like a loose drawer opening 1,000 feet up, TILT's bank of windows gently thrusts 30 degrees into the blue. Visitors gulp down vistas of the Magnificent Mile, lakefront and rooftop swimming pools. On the west side of the Hancock, Chicago's fourth-tallest building, visitors watch sunset drench the city in honey gold while planes circle O'Hare Airport like bees.

360 CHICAGO's Sky Series features professional-photographer-led shoots, aerial architecture tours, cityscape painting sessions, DJ entertainment, Saturday morning yoga and Sunday kids' activities (most programs included with admission). Before sunset on Tuesdays, Chicago Architecture Foundation docent Hau Chyi conducts casual tours. Looking south, Chyi said, "You see Chicago's three tallest buildings—Willis Tower, Trump Tower and AON Center."

Ground-level Views Ever since 1892, when the first elevated train tracks were built, the L train has highlighted downtown Chicago in its own unique way.

Greg Dreyer, docent for the Chicago Architecture Foundation's Elevated Architecture: Downtown L Train Tour, said, "Viewing Chicago's architecture from the tracks and station platforms 20 feet above street level reveals details you may not otherwise see." Such as the relief sculpture riders spy when passing the 1925 Allegro Hotel and the Harold Washington Library Center's corner-perched, book-reading owl sculptures.

On the two-hour tour, Dreyer shares details about buildings constructed from the late-1800s in the Chicago Commercial-style—when Chicago gave rise to the world's first skyscrapers—to the city's newest Contemporary-style towers. Tour highlights include the restored 1896 Quincy Station, West Loop skyline vistas, Chicago River crossings and platform photo opportunities capturing trains curving around the Loop.

"Trains run on electric rails supported by a riveted plate-steel truss structure, using the same construction technique that built the Eiffel Tower," Dreyer said. A truss salvaged from a Chicago train station supports the historical glass trainshed-style roof arching over restaurant-bar Cindy's, perched atop the restored, Venetian Gothic-style Chicago Athletic Association Hotel, built in 1893. The outdoor terrace overlooks Lake Michigan and Millennium Park.



KIT BERNARDI

Chicago Architecture Foundation Downtown L Train tours yield up-close elevated views of historical and modern buildings (left), while a spin on Absolutely Chicago Segway's Lakefront/Museum Campus Tour stops at The Field (below).

Visitors on Absolutely Chicago Segway two-plus-hour Lakefront/Museum Campus tours glide around Millennium Park past massive art installations, along floral paths to spouting Buckingham Fountain, through the campus to Soldier

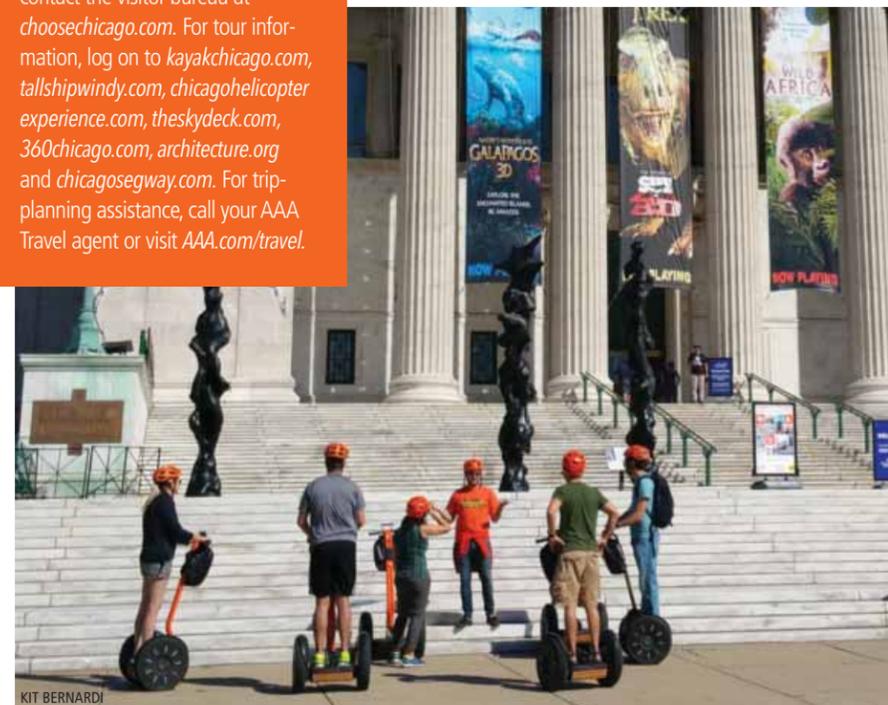
Field and down south Michigan Avenue past the Art Institute of Chicago, built for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Guides stop at ideal vantage points to discuss buildings designed by famous Chicago architects, including Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Helmut Jahn, Mies van der Rohe and Fazlur Kahn.

"A Segway isn't as much work as riding a bike but offers the same calm sensation, covering a lot of ground in a short time," said participant David Van Ommeren from Downingtown, Pa. Plus, a stop on the lakefront peninsula crowned by the Adler Planetarium provides just one more spot to capture a postcard-perfect picture of Chicago's skyline. **H&A**

Kit Bernardi is a Chicago-based freelancer.

Planning Your Trip

For more information on Chicago, contact the visitor bureau at choosechicago.com. For tour information, log on to kayakchicago.com, tallshipwindy.com, chicagohelicopterexperience.com, theskydeck.com, 360chicago.com, architecture.org and chicagosegway.com. For trip-planning assistance, call your AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel.



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