

Quality of Life In Illinois

From the big-city excitement of Chicago to the peaceful Amish communities of Central Illinois, to the majestic Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois, Illinois is a reflection of America.

Chicago/Chicagoland

Chicago is one of the world's largest and most diverse cities. The "city of big shoulders" offers something for everyone, from blues to baseball, art to architecture. Chicago is famous for its unique deep dish pizza, hot dogs and ethnic foods, as well as its own legendary jazz and blues sound. But in addition to its theaters, comedy clubs, world-class museums and sports, Chicago also is a major player in business. Chicago is home to the World Trade Center Chicago and the Chicago Board of Trade, the Mercantile Exchange, the Board of Options Exchange and the Chicago Stock Market. Chicago offers world-class shopping including Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Tiffany's, Saks Fifth Avenue, American Girl Place and others.

Chicago is a convention mecca, annually hosting many of the nation's largest conferences and trade shows. The city features the famed Art Institute of Chicago, Adler Planetarium, Field Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the John G. Shedd Aquarium. Music lovers can enjoy the Chicago Blues Festival, the Grant Park Music Festival, Jazz Fest, Gospel Fest and Country Music Fest. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lyric Opera and Ravinia Festival draw thousands of visitors each season. Theater enthusiasts can choose from the new theater district, including the world-renowned Second City, Steppenwolf and the Goodman.

Those who enjoy sports enjoy Chicago. From the sentimental favorite Chicago Cubs and historic Wrigley Field, to the 2005 Champion White Sox; the Chicago Bulls, Blackhawks, and Chicago Bears; Sportsmen's Park, Hawthorne, Maywood, and the Chicagoland Speedway, Chicago offers the best in professional sports and an enthusiastic and well-versed community of fans.

Getting around in Chicago is easy. The world's second busiest airport, O'Hare International, as well as Midway Airport, provide flights from every destination imaginable. Amtrak and the Metra commuter system provide rail passenger service, while the Chicago Transit Authority's buses and elevated/subway trains whisk people around the city. Suburban communities are served by PACE buses.

Sightseers can enjoy 29 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, breathtaking architecture that includes the Sears Tower, Frank Lloyd Wright's home and studio, Brookfield Zoo, riverboat gaming establishments, and more than 5,000 restaurants and first-class hotels to make any stay in the Chicago area a memorable one.

Northern Illinois

A short drive from Chicago brings visitors to scenic bluffs and historic towns such as Galena, where Victorian architecture includes the post-Civil War home of President Ulysses S. Grant. Starved Rock State Park in Utica offers amazing vistas of canyons, waterfalls, plants and animals. The Illinois Railway Museum at Union beckons to railroad buffs, while business booms in thriving metropolitan centers such as Rockford. Northern Illinois University in DeKalb is one of the state's premier educational institutions.

Western Illinois

The rolling river country of Western Illinois hosts one of the strongest cultural mixes in the state. The French were the first Europeans to settle in Western Illinois. Quincy was founded by Germans, Moline by settlers from Belgium, and Galesburg was founded by Swedes. Peoria has thrived under the flags of France, Spain and England.

Today, visitors to the area can retrace the steps of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) founder Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, visit the restored utopia at Bishop Hill and explore the Great River Road. Global business leaders Caterpillar Inc. and Deere & Company are headquartered here. Edward

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Lee Masters and Carl Sandberg drew inspiration from their Western Illinois roots. Respected colleges and universities, including Western Illinois University, Bradley University, Quincy University, Augustana College and Knox College, graduate tomorrow's leaders.

Central Illinois

Truly the "Land of Lincoln," Central Illinois offers a wealth of historic sites, including Lincoln's Tomb, the Old State Capitol where he delivered the landmark "House Divided" speech, his law office, the only home he ever owned, and the restored New Salem community where he grew to manhood. Furthermore, the spectacular Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum opened in 2005. This is the only Presidential Museum in the state and the largest in existence.

Central Illinois is home to Springfield, the state capital; as well as Champaign-Urbana, home to the world-class University of Illinois; and Decatur, the "soybean capital of the world." The Amish communities of Arthur and Arcola mingle the past with the present. Several prestigious private colleges, plus Eastern Illinois University and Illinois State University, provide educational opportunities to a new generation of students.

Southwest Illinois

Walk in the footsteps of famed explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark along the east bank of the Mississippi River in Hartford, where the Corps of Discovery launched its legendary expedition. The Interpretive Center tells the story of Camp River Dubois, the original encampment and training grounds of Lewis and Clark, and includes a full-scale replica of the team's keel boat. Southwest Illinois is also home to Cahokia Mounds. This U.N. World Heritage Site shelters the remains of an ancient city where a Mississippian Indian culture once flourished from 700 to 1400 A.D. before mysteriously disappearing. Sixty-eight of the original 120 earthen mounds have been preserved on the 4,000-acre site. Stop at the interpretive center before tackling the 100-foot-tall Monks

Mound, which is the largest pre-historic earthen mound in the New World.

With more than 40 miles of pristine shoreline, the Middle Mississippi River Valley is a picturesque spot in which to view bald eagles. Beginning in December, more than 2,000 eagles migrate to the region, returning to their winter home along the bluffs of the Great River Road. Good places to view the proud birds include the Melvin Price Locks and Dam, the Alton Lake section of the Mississippi River and Pere Marquette State Park, the largest state park in Illinois. At a sprawling 8,000 acres, the park is known for its breathtaking natural beauty, spectacular views of the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, and the stone-and-timber Pere Marquette Lodge and Conference Center, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Southern Illinois

Unlike any other part of the state, Southern Illinois blends a colorful history with a vast array of outdoor recreational opportunities. The foothills of the Ozarks are here, as well as the Shawnee National Forest. Sparkling lakes and streams offer some of the best fishing and hunting in the Midwest. Fort Massac, provide opportunities for outdoor family fun. Southern Illinois University is respected for its excellent educational, agricultural and forest-related research facilities.

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