

Chicago Relocation Guide

Your Full Resource for Moving, Living, and Thriving in Chicago

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Welcome

Welcome to Chicago — a city of bold culture, real neighborhoods, spirited seasons, and endless things to explore. Whether you're relocating from another state or making the move from a nearby city, this guide will walk you through *everything you need to know before you pack your bags*.

Chicago is more than just a skyline. It's lifestyle, history, community, and *opportunity*. I'm here to make your transition smooth, confident, and informed.

Quick Chicago at a Glance

Population: ~2.7 million (city)

Region: Northeast Illinois

Known For: Deep-dish pizza, lakefront, music & arts, architectural history

Time Zone: Central

Airports: O'Hare (ORD), Midway (MDW)

Chicago is the third largest city in the U.S. with over **200 unique neighborhoods**, each with its own character and vibe.

A Little About Me

With experience across Chicago's neighborhoods and the North/Northwest suburbs, I take a thoughtful, lifestyle-first approach to helping clients find a home that actually fits how they want to live day-to-day—whether that's a high-rise in Streeterville, a vintage walk-up in Lakeview, or a quieter pocket in the suburbs.

I graduated from University of Illinois at Chicago with a degree in Communication Studies, so I understand the importance of clear and consistent communication through one of the most important decisions of your life. Before getting into real estate full time, I worked in municipal

building, zoning, and plan review—an unexpected but incredibly useful path that gave me a deep understanding of how Chicago-area real estate really works behind the scenes. Renovations, inspections, permits, code, new development... I've seen it from the inside, and I bring that knowledge with me when advising clients.

To me, real estate is more than bedrooms and bathrooms. It's identity, pace, community, coffee shops, parks, restaurants, commutes, seasons, and lifestyle. Chicago is made up of over 200 neighborhoods, each with its own energy and rhythm, and I genuinely love helping people figure out *which version of Chicago is right for them*.

If you're relocating here or considering a move, I hope this guide helps you feel grounded, informed, and excited. Let's explore what makes Chicago such a magnetic place to call home. Shall we?

— Jade ♥

A few of my Chicago favorites

On a Saturday...

Coffee → farmer's market → lakefront walk → dinner out → rooftop, comedy show, or jazz club.

Best Views

The Lakefront Trail at sunrise + the Riverwalk at sunset (both are unbeatable in summer). Best city views: London House Rooftop or Cindy's Rooftop.

Restaurants I'll Always Recommend

Bavette's , Geja's Cafe (romantic fondue), Aba (amazing rooftop), Lyra (girls' night vibes), Tzucu (art & food), Girl and the Goat, and honestly half the West Loop.

Most Unique Chicago Trait

Chicago summers—the entire city comes alive. Street festivals, rooftops, concerts, lake days, patios, farmers markets... it's personality season.

Why People Move Here

- More space for the money than NY/LA
- Vibrant food + culture scene
- Real neighborhoods with identity
- Four beautiful (and dramatic) seasons
- Job opportunities across major industries

- Midwest friendliness without small-town pace
- Endless things to do—year round

Weather — the honest version

- Winters: windy + slushy + cold
- Spring: unpredictable, can be 70 degrees one day and 30 the next
- Summer: blissful, busy, humid, festival-filled
- Fall: cinematic + cozy + perfect

If you can handle a little seasonal drama, you get some of the best seasonal living in the country—especially summer.

Transportation

You can live here with or without a car. It depends on your neighborhood, job, and lifestyle.

CTA (Trains + Buses) — connects much of the city

Rideshare — fills gaps, especially late nights

Metra — connects to suburbs & beyond

Driving — easier outside the core

Walking/Biking — neighborhood dependent

Lakefront Trail — gym + therapy + commute alternative

Planning Your Move

Whether you're relocating for work, lifestyle, or a fresh start, there are a few steps that make the transition smoother. Here's the process I guide relocation clients through:

01 — Schedule a call

We'll talk through your priorities, questions, timeline, and how you want life in Chicago to *feel*. I'll break down neighborhoods that match.

02 — Explore neighborhoods

We'll narrow to 3–5 areas based on lifestyle, walkability, commute, transit access, and budget. If you're not here yet, I offer virtual tours.

03 — Build a search plan

We'll curate rentals or homes that match your timeline + season. (Chicago's rental market and purchase market move differently.)

04 — Tour + secure your place

Once we find "the one," we apply (rent) or write an offer (buy). I'll handle all of the details and

guide you through paperwork, strategy, and pacing. I will make the transition smooth and painless for you.

05 — Move, settle, and thrive

I'll help you integrate into your new neighborhood with local recommendations, resources, and vendors to make life easier—and more fun.

NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURE PAGES

(Chicago has over 200 neighborhoods. I highlighted the most popular areas that people move to/ live in. For more info and recommendations on any neighborhood, send me a message!)

Scale: 1 = low / limited, 10 = high / abundant

LINCOLN PARK —

Living here feels like:

A lakefront morning run, a café stop, a workout class, and dinner on Armitage all within a ten-minute walk. Weekends feel polished but outdoorsy.

Vibe tags:

active • scenic • polished • lakefront • classic Chicago

Housing mix:

vintage walk-ups • courtyard buildings • condos • townhomes • single-family homes • mid/high-rises near the lake

Anchors:

Lincoln Park Zoo • Lakefront Trail • Diversey Harbor • Armitage boutiques • farmers markets

Food/Drink Recs:

Mon Ami Gabi, Armitage Alehouse, Ramen San, Cafe Ba-Ba-Reeba

My take:

Lincoln Park is an elevated version of city living — clean, green, convenient, and close to the lake.

Ideal for:

People who want convenience + parks + scenery + restaurant access without the chaos.

Transit notes:

Red/Brown/Purple Lines + buses + strong bike paths.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 7/10
 - Lake Access: 9/10
 - Transit Access: 9/10
 - Walkability: 9/10
 - Commute to Loop: 7/10 (20-35 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 9/10
 - Parking Convenience: 4/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 8/10
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LAKEVIEW —**Living here feels like:**

Social, bright, energetic, and sporty. Think baseball games at Wrigley Field, lakefront walks, rooftop drinks, and a million brunch options. Feels like the Nashville of Chicago.

Vibe tags:

lively • social • lakefront • youthful • nonstop summer energy

Housing mix:

vintage walk-ups • mid-rise condos • courtyard buildings • high-rises near the lake

Anchors:

Lakefront Trail • Wrigley Field • boutique gyms • local coffee shops

Food/Drink Recs:

Matisse, Cheesies, Sluggers, Wrigley rooftops, sports bars, cozy cafés, wine bars, and lots of brunch.

My take:

Lakeview bridges the gap between “city” and “neighborhood.” It has range — from lively Wrigleyville to quieter pockets by the lake.

Ideal for:

People who want social energy + walkability + easy access to parks + roommates or solo renters.

Transit notes:

Red/Brown/Purple lines connect fast.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 8/10
- Lake Access: 9/10
- Transit Access: 9/10
- Walkability: 9/10
- Commute to Loop: 7/10 (25-40 mins by car)
- Green Space: 8/10
- Parking Convenience: 4/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 6/10

OLD TOWN —**Living here feels like:**

Walk to dinner → comedy show → rooftop nightcap. Cute, charming, and highly walkable with personality.

Vibe tags:

walkable • charming • historic • dining • nightlife

Housing mix:

walk-ups • condos • townhomes • mid-rise buildings

Anchors:

Second City • Wells Street • boutique fitness • bars/restaurants

Food/Drink Recs:

Maple & Ash, Alla Vita, cocktail bars, and rooftops.

My take:

Old Town is a very “quality-of-life” neighborhood — beautiful streets, good dining, solid energy, but not overwhelming.

Ideal for:

People who want nightlife + charm + easy Loop access.

Transit notes:

Red/Brown line + Wells is a transit-friendly corridor.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 8/10
- Lake Access: 8/10
- Transit Access: 8/10
- Walkability: 9/10
- Commute to Loop: 7/10 (15-25 mins by car)
- Green Space: 7/10
- Parking Convenience: 3/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 7/10

Living here feels like:

Rooftops, supper clubs, steakhouse energy, galleries, hotel bars, and walk-to-everything convenience.

Vibe tags:

luxury • nightlife • dining • artsy • polished

Housing mix:

mostly high-rises + condos + modern rentals

Anchors:

Riverwalk • Art galleries • Clark/Rush dining • Merchandise Mart

Food/Drink Recs:

Bavette's (iconic), RPM Seafood/Italian, Tzucu, Lyra (nearby), steakhouses, cocktail bars, rooftops.

My take:

If you want the city at its fullest — restaurants, nightlife, hotels, rooftops — this is the move.

Ideal for:

People who want a fast-paced urban lifestyle with luxury convenience.

Transit notes:

Brown/Red Lines + walkability + rideshare heaven.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 9/10
- Lake Access: 7/10
- Transit Access: 8/10
- Walkability: 9/10
- Commute to Loop: 9/10 (5-15 mins by car)
- Green Space: 4/10
- Parking Convenience: 2/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 3/10

STREETERVILLE

Living here feels like:

Lakefront meets urban luxury. Hospitals, Northwestern, high-rises, Navy Pier, and a lot of wellness/fitness nearby.

Vibe tags:

lakefront • polished • amenity buildings • healthcare/education nodes

Housing mix:

high-rises + condos + rentals

Anchors:

Lakefront • Navy Pier • Northwestern • Riverwalk (east)

Food/Drink Recs:

Ema, The Purple Pig, Cocktail lounges, hotel restaurants, wine bars, and upscale cafés.

My take:

A quieter River North with more lake access and less nightlife. Popular for healthcare, education, and people who love amenity buildings.

Ideal for:

People who want the lake + views + modern buildings.

Transit notes:

Bus-heavy + convenient + rideshare.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 7/10
- Lake Access: 10/10
- Transit Access: 7/10
- Walkability: 8/10
- Commute to Loop: 9/10 (10-20 mins by car)

- Green Space: 8/10
 - Parking Convenience: 2/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 3/10
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WEST LOOP

Living here feels like:

Restaurant capital + rooftop culture + converted lofts + new construction + “work hard, play harder” energy.

Vibe tags:

foodie • trendy • industrial • modern • polished

Housing mix:

lofts • condos • mid-rise + high-rise rentals • newer construction

Anchors:

Fulton Market • Randolph Street • great nightlife • corporate offices

Food/Drink Recs:

Girl & The Goat, Monteverde, Aba, Lyra, Au Cheval, Smyth/The Loyalist

My take:

West Loop has become the epicenter of Chicago dining + modern urban living. Slick, stylish, and high-output.

Ideal for:

People who want walkability + dining + nightlife + design.

Transit notes:

Blue Line + Green Line + easy access to Loop.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 9/10

- Lake Access: 3/10
 - Transit Access: 8/10
 - Walkability: 8/10
 - Commute to Loop: 8/10 (5-15 mins)
 - Green Space: 4/10
 - Parking Convenience: 3/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 7/10
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SOUTH LOOP

Living here feels like:

Modern, convenient, and surprisingly scenic. Museums, parks, and lake access without being overly nightliefy. Can find more space for a lower price than areas like River North or West Loop.

Vibe tags:

modern • lakefront • museums • newer construction

Housing mix:

condos + high-rises + townhomes + new development

Anchors:

Museum Campus • Grant Park • Prairie District • Soldier Field

Food/Drink Recs:

Brunch at Half Sour, Umai, + cafés + casual restaurants + sports bars.

My take:

Quiet but central — a bit of an underdog neighborhood with some of the best views in all of Chicago.

Ideal for:

Relocators who want lake access + newer builds + quick Loop access.

Transit notes:

Red/Green/Orange + Metra nearby.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 6/10
 - Lake Access: 7/10
 - Transit Access: 9/10
 - Walkability: 8/10
 - Commute to Loop: 9/10 (5-15 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 7/10
 - Parking Convenience: 5/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 5/10
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WICKER PARK

Living here feels like:

Music venues, boutiques, coffee shops, bars, street festivals, and murals. Creative but polished.

Vibe tags:

creative • hip • walkable • nightlife • boutique

Housing mix:

walk-ups • duplexes • lofts • some newer mid-rise rentals

Anchors:

606 Trail • Milwaukee Ave • music venues

Food/Drink Recs:

Mott Street (amazing burgers), brunch at Dove's, Dorian's (for drinks), Cocktail bars, mezcal bars, oyster bars, wine bars.

My take:

A trend-setting neighborhood with culture and energy. Still cool without trying too hard.

Ideal for:

People who want character + art + nightlife + boutiques.

Transit notes:

Blue Line + bus + bikeable.

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 8/10
 - Lake Access: 2/10
 - Transit Access: 8/10
 - Walkability: 8/10
 - Commute to Loop: 7/10 (20-35 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 5/10
 - Parking Convenience: 4/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 7/10
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LOGAN SQUARE

Living here feels like:

Cocktails, music, art galleries, record shops, and Sunday farmers market energy.

Vibe tags:

creative • eclectic • artsy • buzzy

Housing mix:

walk-ups • 2-4 flats • newer mid-rise rentals

Anchors:

Logan Boulevard • Farmers Market • bars + music venues

Food/Drink Recs:

Navigator Taproom, Lula Cafe, breweries, and restaurants with personality.

My take:

Logan is culture-rich, interesting, and constantly evolving. Never boring.

Ideal for:

People who prefer discovery over perfection.

Transit notes:

Blue Line + bike-friendly.

Ratings:**Logan Square**

- Liveliness: 7/10
- Lake Access: 1/10
- Transit Access: 7/10

- Walkability: 7/10

- Commute to Loop: 6/10 (25-40 mins by car)

- Green Space: 7/10

- Parking Convenience: 6/10

- Overall Cost of Living: 6/10

ANDERSONVILLE**Living here feels like:**

Independent shops, cafés, brunch spots, bookstores, and charming main street energy.

Vibe tags:

cozy • independent • up and coming • creative • warm

Housing mix:

walk-ups • courtyard buildings • condos • Single-family home pockets

Anchors:

Clark Street boutiques + bakeries + wine shops

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 6/10
 - Lake Access: 7/10
 - Transit Access: 6/10
 - Walkability: 7/10
 - Commute to Loop: 5/10 (25-45 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 7/10
 - Parking Convenience: 6/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 5/10
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EDGEWATER

Living here feels like:

Lakefront living with quieter streets and diverse food options. You're close to the lake and will get a lot more square footage for a lower price than areas like Streeterville or Lincoln Park.

Vibe tags:

lakefront • relaxed • eclectic • practical

Housing mix:

mid/high-rises near the lake + vintage buildings inland

Anchors:

Beaches + Lakefront Trail

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 5/10
- Lake Access: 9/10

- Transit Access: 7/10
 - Walkability: 7/10
 - Commute to Loop: 5/10 (15-30 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 8/10
 - Parking Convenience: 6/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 7/10
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UPTOWN

Living here feels like:

Vintage architecture meets music history and a little bit of everything.

Vibe tags:

historic • music • vintage • textured

Housing mix:

walk-ups • mid-rise • high-rises

Anchors:

Aragon Ballroom + Riviera Theatre + lakeshore

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 7/10
- Lake Access: 8/10
- Transit Access: 7/10
- Walkability: 7/10
- Commute to Loop: 6/10 (25-35 mins by car)
- Green Space: 6/10

- Parking Convenience: 5/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 7/10

ROSCOE VILLAGE

Living here feels like:

Strolls, brunch, farmers markets, and quiet streets with cute shops. Great investment value- up and coming neighborhood.

Vibe tags:

charming • family-adjacent • boutique • calm

Housing mix:

walk-ups • Single-family homes • condos/townhomes

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 5/10
- Lake Access: 4/10
- Transit Access: 6/10
- Walkability: 8/10
- Commute to Loop: 6/10 (20-45 mins by car)
- Green Space: 7/10
- Parking Convenience: 6/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 5/10

NORTH CENTER

Living here feels like:

Brewpubs, parks, and chill neighborhood vibes with good transit.

Vibe tags:

classic • relaxed • local

Housing mix:

walk-ups • Single-family homes • 2-4 flats

Ratings

- Liveliness: 4/10
 - Lake Access: 4/10
 - Transit Access: 6/10
 - Walkability: 8/10
 - Commute to Loop: 6/10 (25-40 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 7/10
 - Parking Convenience: 6/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 5/10
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PILSEN**Living here feels like:**

Murals, music, culture, and serious food.

Vibe tags:

artsy • cultural • textured

Housing mix:

walk-ups • 2-4 flats • loft spaces

Restaurants:

Cerdito Muerto, 5 Rabanitos, Casa Madai

Ratings

- Liveliness: 7/10
 - Lake Access: 1/10
 - Transit Access: 7/10
 - Walkability: 7/10
 - Commute to Loop: 7/10 (15-35 mins by car)
 - Green Space: 4/10
 - Parking Convenience: 6/10
 - Overall Cost of Living: 7/10
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HYDE PARK

Living here feels like:

Academia, architecture, culture, museums, bookstores, and parks.

Vibe tags:

cultural • historic • intellectual

Housing mix:

condos • mid-rise • SFH pockets

Anchors:

University of Chicago • Museum of Science & Industry, The Promontory

Restaurants:

Virtue, Ascione, Mahari

Ratings:

- Liveliness: 5/10
- Lake Access: 8/10
- Transit Access: 6/10
- Walkability: 7/10

- Commute to Loop: 5/10 (15-30 mins by car)
- Green Space: 8/10
- Parking Convenience: 6/10
- Overall Cost of Living: 6/10

Renting in Chicago: What to Expect

These are **ballpark** expectations (things change fast), but this gives you a sense of what you're walking into. The type of building and square footage of the unit will vary drastically depending on what neighborhood you're looking in.

Typical Rental Setups

- High-rise with amenities (doorman, gym, etc.)
- Vintage walk-ups / courtyard buildings
- 2–4 flat “classic Chicago” apartments
- Newer mid-rise buildings with modern finishes

Costs You'll See Often

- First month's rent
- Sometimes a **move-in fee** instead of a security deposit
- Pet fees if you have pets
- Parking is typically an extra monthly fee
- Application & credit/background check fees

Helpful Things to Know

- Peak rental season: generally **spring through early fall**
- Many leases start/renew in **spring and summer**, so that's when you'll see the most options

- Some buildings include heat or water; always ask what's included in rent
 - Renting in Chicago can be difficult without using an agent- and typically there is no cost to you to use once since commission is typically paid by landlords.
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Buying in Chicago: Big Picture Overview

If you're thinking about *owning* here, this is your quick mental framework. With rent prices starting to increase, owning can definitely be the smarter option. Especially for first time home buyers who only need to put down 3-5%.

Common City Property Types

- Condos (with HOA fees)
- Townhomes / row homes
- Single-family homes (more common further from the core)
- 2-4 unit buildings (you live in one, rent the others)

What Affects Price the Most

- Neighborhood + exact location on the block
- Proximity to the train and lake
- HOA fees and building amenities (for condos)
- Condition / age of the building and unit

When to Start Looking

- Ideally **60-120 days before** you want to be here if you're buying.
 - Step 1 is always: **talk to a lender** so you know your price range, monthly payment, and what's realistic.
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What No One Tells You About Living Here (But You'll Be Glad You Knew)

- **Parking rules change by block.** You will eventually get a parking ticket. It's like a Chicago rite of passage.
- **The lakefront is free therapy.** Even if you don't "need" to live right by the water, being within a quick ride of the lake is a huge quality-of-life upgrade.

- **Winters are easier when you embrace them.** Saunas on the lake, comedy shows, speakeasies, museum days, winter and holiday pop-ups — the people who enjoy winter here don't hide from it; they plan for it.
 - **Neighborhood loyalty is real.** Once you fall in love with a neighborhood, it's hard to leave. That's why getting your first place in the *right* area matters.
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How to Start Your Search Without Overwhelm

Here's what I recommend my relocation clients do:

1. **Pick your top 2–3 priorities.**
Examples: “Walk to train,” “Near lake,” “Need parking,” “Want calmer streets,” “Short commute to the Loop.”
 2. **Decide: rent or buy first.**
 - Many people rent for a year, learn the city, then buy.
 - Others know they want to plant roots and go straight into a purchase. Either is valid.
 3. **Narrow to 3–5 neighborhoods to explore.**
Walk them, have dinner, go at night and during the day. You'll feel quickly what clicks.
 4. **Get your numbers.**
 - If renting: set a clear budget range (monthly rent + realistic utilities).
 - If buying: get pre-approved so you know your comfort zone. Make sure to set aside extra for closing costs, furniture, appliances, etc... These things are forgotten but add up very quickly.
 5. **Build a short list of places.**
This is where I come in — I help you match neighborhoods + actual homes/units to your lifestyle and budget.
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Want Neighborhoods Tailored to You?

If you send me these 3 things:

1. **Budget range** (rent or purchase price)
2. **Timeline** (month you want to be here)
3. **What you want your day-to-day to feel like**
(ex: “I want to walk to coffee + gym,” “I want calmer streets and easy parking,” “I want to be near the lake and nightlife,” etc.)

...I'll send back **personalized neighborhood suggestions** and a starting list of areas to explore.

