

CHICAGO  
**TRAVEL**  
GUIDE

**HECA 2026 Annual Conference**  
A Curated Chicago Experience



**HECA**  
2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
JUNE 15-17  
**CHICAGO**  
Building Futures, Together We Rise



# WELCOME TO THE WINDY CITY!

June is one of the best times to experience Chicago — and we're thrilled you'll be here. The city comes alive in the summer, with lakefront views, neighborhood festivals, and energy on every corner.

Consider this your insider guide to exploring like a local, from can't-miss classics to tucked-away favorites full of character.



# TRAVEL & LODGING

## Intl. Airports

Getting to Chicago is simple with two airport options: O'Hare (ORD) and Midway (MDW). **We recommend O'Hare**—it's only 3 miles from the conference hotel. Rideshare, taxis, and rental cars are plentiful, and the **Loews runs a complimentary shuttle from O'Hare: Terminal 2 every 15 minutes.**

<https://www.loewshotels.com/chicago-ohare/discover/airport-shuttle>

## Hotel Information

The host hotel for the conference is the Loews Chicago O'Hare. The hotel is within walking distance of Rosemont's dining, shopping, and entertainment district. Guests can enjoy on-site dining, a fitness center, an art gallery, complimentary Wi-Fi, and free 24/7 shuttle rides to O'Hare Airport

For all road trippers, HECA hotel guests receive a 25% discount on prevailing self-parking rates at the Loews Hotel.

**Group name:** HECA Annual Conference

**Group rate dates:** June 15 - June 17

**Rate:** \$219 + tax/night

**Group rate expires:** May 15

[Click here for more information](#)

***There's plenty to explore just steps from the hotel, from local Chicago eateries to a comedy club to shopping at Fashion Outlets and more!***

[Click here to explore what's nearby!](#)

## Transportation

Rosemont is easy to explore on foot, with plenty of spots to unwind after the conference. No car? No problem. The nearby Rosemont Metra station is under a mile away and offers a classic train ride into downtown Chicago's Union Station in the West Loop.



# GETTING AROUND CHICAGO

## CTA "L" TRAIN

- Blue Line runs directly from Rosemont to Downtown Chicago
- Fast, affordable, and safe during normal hours
- Connects to other lines to reach all sides of the city (Red, Green, Purple, Orange, Pink, & Brown)

### Free Apps:

- [CTA Train Tracker](#)
- [Ventra App](#) (tickets for CTA + Metra)
- Google Maps (excellent for real-time routing)



\*You can pay for CTA buses and trains with Google, Apple, or Samsung Pay



## METRA (Commuter Rail)

- The North Central service line is < 1 mile from the Loews hotel
- Line stops at Union Station in Chicago's downtown West Loop

### Free Apps:

- [Ventra App](#) (tickets for CTA + Metra)

## RIDESHARE

- Uber & Lyft are plentiful in Rosemont and downtown
- Often easiest for late evenings or groups
- Many iconic neighborhoods in Chicago are within 30 minutes from the hotel



# ICONIC & TOURIST-FRIENDLY CHICAGO

*First-time must-sees · Safe · Walkable · Classic Chicago*

**Millennium Park:**

Home of “The Bean,” skyline selfies, city centerpiece.

**Navy Pier:**

Lake views, Ferris wheel, festive waterfront energy & fireworks.

**Chicago Riverwalk:**

Urban waterfront stroll with skyline magic.

**Wrigley Field:**

Historic ballpark, lively neighborhood vibes.

**Magnificent Mile:**

Iconic architecture meets upscale shopping.

**Chicago Architecture Boat Tour:**

The best way to understand the skyline.

**Museum Campus**

57-acre park along Lake Michigan, hosting the Adler Planetarium, Shedd Aquarium, Field Museum of Natural History, Soldier Field (home of ‘Da’ Chicago Bears) & the Lakeside Center of McCormick Place.

**360 Chicago:**

55-mile views from the Hancock Tower.

**Skydeck Chicago:**

Stand on glass above the city at Willis Tower.

**Art Institute of Chicago:**

World-class art steps from Grant Park.

**Chicago Cultural Center:**

Stunning Tiffany dome, free entry.

**Buckingham Fountain:**

Grand Beaux-Arts fountain with dramatic hourly water shows on the lakefront.

**Chicago Botanic Garden:**

Peaceful lakeside gardens north of the city. A few miles from Lake Forest College.

**The Rookery (Frank Lloyd Wright Tour):**

Hidden architectural masterpiece downtown.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

**Visit:**

*Daley Plaza (The Picasso)*



Stand beneath Chicago’s bold, abstract Picasso sculpture – a striking piece of public art framed by the city’s downtown skyline.



**Then go to:**

*The Italian Village*



Just a few blocks away, one of Chicago’s oldest Italian restaurants with twinkle lights, muraled walls, and classic old-school charm.



# UNDERGROUND / LOCAL ICONIC CHICAGO

## **The 606 Trail**

Defunct train line converted to an elevated trail with skyline views and neighborhood energy.

## **Lincoln Park Conservatory**

Free glasshouse oasis filled with tropical calm and unique features like the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool

## **Andersonville**

Independent shops, cozy cafés, Scandinavian roots.

## **Wicker Park**

Chicago's premier "hipster" neighborhood with trendy boutiques, murals, and a creative vibe.

## **Oz Park**

Stroll through the Emerald Garden & enjoy whimsical Wizard of Oz sculptures in a charming park.

## **Lincoln Park Zoo**

Free, historic zoo nestled along the lakefront — wildlife, gardens, and skyline views all in one stroll

## **Millennium Park Summer Music Series**

Kicking off on June 15th, enjoy picnic-style entertainment from established and emerging artists at the iconic Jay Pritzker Pavilion.

## **Randolph Street Market Festival**

Vintage finds & indie makers (seasonal market)

## **AIRE Ancient Baths Chicago**

Candlelit thermal baths in a restored River West warehouse; quiet luxury escape.

## **Driehaus Museum**

Gilded Age mansion showcasing decorative arts in opulent surroundings.

## **Kings Spa**

Not in Chicago proper, but the areas only true Korean Spa

## **The Hideout**

Unpretentious neighborhood music venue tucked into an industrial pocket

## **Gallagher Way**

Outdoor plaza next to Wrigley Field with summer markets, movie nights, and local events.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

### **Visit:**

*The 606*



Walk the elevated trail for skyline views and creative neighborhood energy. Exit the trail's eastern entrance at Damen Avenue, then head south a couple of blocks.



### **Then go to:**

*Big Star in Wicker Park*



Grab tacos and margaritas on a lively patio just steps from the trail. It's relaxed, social, and very Wicker Park — the perfect post-walk reward.



# RESTAURANTS (CHICAGO STANDOUTS)

*Top-rated · Unique · Worth the Trip*

## **Girl & the Goat**

Bold, shareable plates in Chicago's trendiest dining district.

## **Au Cheval**

The burger everyone talks about (for good reason).

## **The Purple Pig**

Mediterranean small plates, steps from the Mag Mile.

## **Quartino Ristorante**

Italian tapas, bustling and perfect for groups.

## **Pequod's Pizza**

Deep dish with caramelized crust locals swear by.

## **Tango Sur**

Cozy Argentine steakhouse, BYOB charm.

## **The Berghoff**

Historic Chicago landmark (open since 1898), beloved for hearty German-American classics and old-world atmosphere.

## **Café Ba-Ba-Reeba!**

Festive Spanish tapas and sangria pitchers.

## **Celeste**

Multi-level cocktail bar & dining with a romantic rooftop glow.

## **Beatnik on the River**

Bohemian riverfront dining with global flavors.

## **Smyth**

Michelin-starred, intimate, hyper-seasonal experience.

## **Chicago Cut Steakhouse**

Power-dining on the river with skyline views.

## **Kasama**

Michelin Filipino tasting menus by night, pastry cult-following by day.

## **Carnivale**

Art-filled, high-energy Latin-inspired restaurant with bold flavors and live entertainment.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

### Visit:

3 Arts Club Café



Dine beneath a soaring glass atrium inside Restoration Hardware's historic Gold Coast mansion, surrounded by plants, chandeliers, fountains, and elegance.



### Then go to:

Oak Street Beach



Just a short walk east brings you to sweeping lake views and skyline splendor. Stroll the shoreline, watch sailboats drift by, and drop in for a game of sand volleyball.



# RESTAURANTS- DA CHICAGO CLASSICS

*Street food, beefs, dogs, gyros — no reservations, no fuss.*

## **Johnnie's Beef**

Legendary Italian beef, dipped and messy (10–15 min from Rosemont). \*Cash only since 1961!

## **Portillo's**

The iconic Chicago dog + chocolate cake shake combo.

## **Al's Beef on Taylor St.**

The original beef stand has decades of history. Be sure to cross the street for Mario's Italian ice.

## **Gene & Jude's**

Depression-style hot dogs, no ketchup ever. \*10 mins from Loews O'Hare!

## **Billy Goat Tavern**

No-frills Chicago legend famous for its classic "cheezborger" featured on SNL!

## **Superdawg Drive-In**

Retro drive-in with giant hot dog mascots on the roof.

## **Central Gyros**

Classic Chicago-style gyros and fries, served for decades.

## **Jim's Original**

Maxwell Street Polish at 2 a.m. (a rite of passage).

## **Chicago Pizza Oven Grinder Co.**

Cozy Lincoln Park staple known for its iconic upside-down pizza pot pie — gooey, hearty, and uniquely Chicago.

## **Manny's Cafeteria & Delicatessen**

Chicago deli known for mile-high corned beef, matzo ball soup, and comforting, old-school fare.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

### **Visit:**

*The Wiener's Circle*  
(stand - no dine-in)



Tasty dogs and legendary sass (as seen on Conan) — late-night visits not for the faint of heart!



### **Then go to:**

*Lincoln Park Zoo*



Just a few minutes away, stroll through one of the only free zoos in the country — lakefront paths, skyline views, and a surprisingly peaceful reset after the chaos of Clark Street.



# BAKERIES

*Classic Chicago + Trendy favorites · Top-rated · Worth the detour*

## **Weber's Bakery**

Old-school Chicago bakery (since 1930) known for legendary donuts and cakes.

## **Ferrara Bakery**

Historic Little Italy pastry shop serving classic Italian desserts and espresso since 1892, best known for its cannoli, tiramisu, and old-world charm.

## **Oak Mill Bakery**

European-style tortes, pastries, and cookies- several northwest suburb locations (close to Lowes O'Hare!)

## **Lost Larson**

Cardamom buns and Scandinavian pastries locals line up for.

## **Floriol Cafe & Bakery**

Rustic French-inspired breads and croissants near the park.

## **Jennivee's Bakery**

Colorful layer cakes and nostalgic buttercream joy.

## **Do-Rite Donuts**

Elevated donuts and great coffee with multiple city locations.

## **Alliance Bakery**

European-style sweets in the heart of Wicker Park.

## **Forest View Bakery**

A long-standing, Polish family-owned bakery known for beautifully decorated cakes and classic European-style desserts.

## **The Bakery Box**

A neighborhood favorite featuring a 24-hour cupcake ATM.

## **Publican Quality Bread**

Sourdough, breakfast pastries, and serious bread craft.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

### **Visit:**

*Toni Patisserie & Café*



Located on the lower level of Union Station Great Hall, this refined French café serves flaky croissants and elegant pastries beneath one of Chicago's most cinematic ceilings.



### **Then go to:**

*Chicago Riverwalk*



Step outside and wander toward the river for skyline reflections, boats drifting by, and golden-hour light on the water — a sweet start followed by one of the city's most beautiful walks.



# LIVE MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT

## **Chicago Theatre**

Iconic marquee and big-stage performances in a legendary setting.

## **House of Blues Chicago**

Blues, rock, and soul along the river in the heart of downtown.

## **Old Town School of Folk Music**

Intimate concerts celebrating folk, roots, and global sounds.

## **Kingston Mines**

Chicago's oldest blues club (since 1968) with dueling stages and late-night energy.

## **Rosa's Lounge**

Mama Rosa sadly passed in 2025, but her no-frills, authentic blues in a neighborhood setting still thrives.

## **The Second City**

Legendary improv comedy that launched countless SNL stars.

## **Buddy Guy's Legends**

Owned by blues icon Buddy Guy — live music with serious Chicago pedigree.

## **Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Symphony Center)**

One of the finest orchestras in the world, right in the Loop.

## **Joffrey Ballet**

Contemporary and classical ballet in a sleek downtown venue.

## **The Salt Shed**

Massive 2 newer riverfront concert venues in one, built inside a historic Morton Salt warehouse.

## **Green Mill Cocktail Lounge**

Historic jazz club frequented by Al Capone. \*Cash only since 1935!

## **Huntington Bank Pavilion at Northerly Island**

'Venue with a View' overlooking Lake Michigan, Soldier Field, and Burnham Harbor.

## The Real Chicago Pairing

### **Visit:**

*Unabridged Bookstore*



Wander the shelves of this beloved independent bookstore on Broadway — literary treasure hunting in the heart of Lakeview.



### **Then go to:**

*Kingston Mines*



Just a short walk away, step into Chicago's oldest blues club— two alternating stages of live music and a tucked-away soul food kitchen in the back serving late-night comfort classics. It's gritty, lively, and unapologetically Chicago.



# CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE!

*Prefer to build your own Chicago story? These trusted local guides help you piece together a Chicago experience that fits your style.*



## Do312

The go-to local hub for concerts, comedy, pop-ups, festivals, and what's happening this week.



## Thrillist Chicago

Curated guides to restaurants, rooftops, neighborhood experiences, and insider picks.



CHOOSE CHICAGO

## Choose Chicago

Official tourism site with attraction guides and seasonal highlights.



## TimeOut Chicago

Best-of lists for dining, nightlife, and events.



## Eater Chicago

Where to eat right now, neighborhood maps, and top-rated spots.



## Chicago Reader

Arts, culture, indie music, and under-the-radar happenings.



## WBEZ's Jazz & Blues Calendar

Operating out of the College of DuPage — a local NPR trusted calendar of Chicago jazz and blues events.



# CRAFT YOUR CHICAGO EXPERIENCE

*Chicago rewards curiosity. Use this space to map out your must-sees, hidden gems, and the moments you don't want to miss.*

## **I Plan to Explore:**

- Iconic Chicago
- Hidden Gems
- Foodie Favorites
- Live Music
- Just Wandering

## **Top 3 Stops I Don't Want to Miss:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Where I'm Eating:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **One Local Recommendation I Heard:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **If I Have Extra Time:**

\_\_\_\_\_



# See You in Chicago!

Chicago is a collection of neighborhoods and stories, rich in culture and memorable moments. Whether you follow the must-sees or wander off the map, we hope this guide helps you experience the city in your own way.

*Enjoy HECA 2026 — and make a little time to explore.*