

# TRAVEL TALES

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE JEWISH TRAVELLER

By MIKE COHEN

## **SPECTACULAR**

**CHICAGO**([www.choosechicago.com](http://www.choosechicago.com)) is a bustling, energetic city that never stops no matter the season. It's a destination with world-class cultural attractions, diverse neighborhoods and architectural wonders. Chicago is known for critically acclaimed restaurants, world-famous museums, first-class shopping, adventurous nightlife, action-packed sporting events and a thriving theatre scene.

## **PERFORMING**

**ARTS:** Chicago's theatre industry pushes the envelope with cutting-edge performances in historic and state-of-the-art stages. The Chicago Theatre Goodman, LaSalle Bank, Cadillac Palace, Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University and the Ford Center have made visiting downtown a must for theatre lovers. Distinctive theatres can also be found throughout Chicago neighborhoods. Until I visited Chicago for the first time, I always thought one had to travel to New York City to see true Broadway productions. Was I wrong! "Wicked", the Broadway musical phenomenon telling the untold story of the Witches of Oz, continues casting a spell on Chicago in an unprecedented open-ended run at the Ford Center (24 W. Randolph St., Chicago). Music and lyrics come from award winning Jewish songwriter Stephen Schwartz. The dedicated Chicago company opened in June 2005. Even more remarkable,

though, is the show's status as a landmark destination for visitors and tourists - nearly 50 percent of Wicked's audience in Chicago travels from outside the metropolitan area to see the hit musical. Tickets range in price from \$25 to \$90 and should be purchased several weeks in advance. The Broadway In Chicago ticket line is (312) 902-1400 or online at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com). Current and up-to-date ticket information is available at [www.wickedthemusical.com/chicago/tickets.htm](http://www.wickedthemusical.com/chicago/tickets.htm)

## **MUSEUMS :**

Chicago is world-renowned for its diverse collection of museums, which explore a variety of subjects including Chicago history, art, African-American culture, astronomy, natural history and much more. Those visiting Chicago should plan on spending time at Chicago's Museum Campus. The scenic park conveniently joins the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum, the Shedd Aquarium/Oceanarium, and the Field Museum of Natural History with easy access to all three locations. The John G. Shedd Aquarium ([www.sheddaquarium.org](http://www.sheddaquarium.org)), a non-profit institution dedicated to public education and conservation, is known as "The World's Aquarium." Beautifully situated on the shores of Lake Michigan, the facility houses nearly 22,000 aquatic animals representing some 1,500 species of fishes, reptiles,

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amphibians, invertebrates, birds and mammals from waters around the world. Other Chicago museums include the Chicago History Museum (the city's oldest cultural institution), McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum (Chicago's newest museum), the Museum of Science and Industry, the DuSable Museum of African-American History, the Art Institute of Chicago (one of the world's leading art museums), the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

#### WHERE TO STAY:

When you are going to Chicago for an extended stay of 10 nights like we did you want to stay somewhere comfortable, affordable and

conveniently located. Enter the Jewish-owned Homewood Suites (<http://www.homewood-suiteschicago.com>), right in the heart of downtown at 40 East Grand Avenue. Staying at the Homewood Suites Downtown Chicago, owned and managed by the Chicago-based First Hospitality Group, headed by real estate executive Stephen L. Schwartz, will be the easiest decision you'll ever make. The guest suite accommodations are just seconds away from the Chicago Loop area and other business districts.

Guests of this Homewood Suites hotel can overlook Chicago's well known architecture while enjoying the daily compli-

mentary Suite Start hot breakfast or the Welcome Home reception featuring a complimentary light meal and beverages Monday through Thursday evenings. The breakfast is really something special. What is most appreciated by guests is the fact the hotel encourages you to take food back to your room by providing styrofoam containers. The suites are designed with comfortable accommodations for both business and leisure travelers staying for a few days or a few weeks. Guests are well taken care of with the fully equipped kitchens, complete with refrigerators, microwave ovens, stove top burners and cooking utensils. A dishwasher is also provided; however, the Suite-keepers insist on doing the dishes. A large Jewel and Osco grocery store is a mere block and a half away, making it easy to stock the fridge regularly. I met a number of orthodox Jewish guests at the hotel attending a food convention. They raved about the kitchen facilities and the nearby grocer which has a complete kosher section. "It really makes things easier for us to maintain our kosher lifestyle," said one gentleman from Baltimore.

All guest rooms come with high-speed Internet access and a two-line phones with voicemail. Guests can pamper themselves in the indoor pool, located in the 19th floor with panoramic views of the beautiful Windy City or workout in the cardiovascular fitness center. Extensive renovations were completed recently, adding to the beauty of this property. If you are coming with your car, the hotel offers valet parking with unlimited in and out privileges.

Ask for valet manager Rod, one of the friendliest guys you will ever meet who makes a habit of remembering every client's name. You need not worry about your valuables as they offer a safety deposit box for your safekeeping. You will love the room service that the hotel offers while the laundry/valet service and coin laundry services keeps your clothes clean. For more information readers can call 312-644-2222.

#### JEWISH LIFE:

With more than 110 synagogues, eight Jewish community centers and myriad services and agencies, Chicago is an established and thriving Jewish community. There are currently more than 260,000 Jews living in the metropolitan area. About one-third of the area's Jews live in the city of Chicago, with the largest concentration in West Rogers Park and smaller pockets on the South Side. Two-thirds of the area's Jews live in the suburbs, especially on the North Shore from Evanston to Highland Park, and to the northwest from Skokie to Buffalo Grove. There are also significant numbers of

to the west in DuPage County. During the past decade, the Chicago Jewish community has welcomed and resettled more than 19,000 newcomers from Russia and other former Soviet republics. Like the immigrants before them, these new arrivals have quickly adapted to American Jewish life, and have begun to make an

indelible impact on this diverse community. Many Chicago Jews today trace their roots in this city to one or more of these areas. For more information log on to <http://www.juf.org>

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