

Escape

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Hotdog heaven awaits in Chicago

JOHN BISHOP

CHICAGO is a special place, notorious for gangsters and political corruption, home of electric blues, the first city of skyscrapers and full of the world's fiercest sports fans, and their beloved hot dog. What's not to like?

The biggest problem for the tourist is working out what to do first. I went for some retail therapy down the Miracle Mile, Michigan Ave, the heart of the city and very nearly a mile long with all the name brands you'd expect.

Down there you'll find the John Hancock Building, Chicago's tallest (the Trump Tower is second), and on the top floor there is a bar, which is free to visit, where you can sip a drink while whirling helicopters land on the roofs below.

The stunning architecture of the city is best seen from the river, and there are cruises aplenty. Running around the river is one of the city's most prized possessions – a walking track about a metre wide that is permanently open to the public even as it passes lavish homes built to the water's edge.

Chicago is noted for two

types of food: deep dish pizza and the Chicago hot dog. Both directly and deliberately contrast with the same products produced in New York.

The New York hot dog is just a frankfurter in a bun with some mustard squirted over it.

The Chicago dog is a work of art: A white sesame seed bun with a Vienna beef sausage and then seven additives (some say they must be put on in this order, others are less fanatical). The bun is steamed and the sausage is boiled (not fried or grilled).

Mustard, chopped onions, relish, sliced red tomato, kosher pickle and sport peppers, celery salt (and never ketchup). That's called "dragged through the garden" in local jargon.

I ate at both Max's and Portillo's, two of the highest rating dog houses in the city. They were remarkably tasty.

Much like the Vienna beef dog is steeped in Chicago history (the first frankfurter was created in 1893), so is its music. From the 1870s onwards African Americans started moving up from the south of the US seeking better jobs and leaving racial discrimination and prejudice behind. They were only



CITY STYLE: Cloud Gate in Millennium Park. The Cloud Gate is a major tourist attraction and a gate to the traditional Chicago Jazz Festival.

Photo: roman_slavik



See the helicopters flying over Chicago from the Hancock building (left). The city prides itself on its classic dogs (middle). Buddy Guy's Legends is a classic blues club in downtown (right).

Photos: iStock



partly successful, but they brought their music with them, blues and also jazz.

In the 1940s a fresh wave of migration post World War II brought electric blues to the city in the person of Muddy

Waters, Howling Wolf and many others. They lived on the south side, the poorest area of the city, but rich in music.

That tradition is still alive, and the club owned by the legendary Buddy Guy is at the

centre of it. But take note; it is now a tourist joint. The music is still authentic, but each night busloads of mainly white middle aged, foreign tourists arrive, get their one drink that is part of their package and enjoy

the scene for about an hour before departing.

I visited the Exchequer bar, which can genuinely claim gangster Al Capone was a regular. The secret exit out the back is still there.

The Italian Village, still serving Italian food the old way, has a secret exit too.

While there I sampled the Italian meat sandwich – a bread roll with meat, which is then dipped in juice and served at tables covered in butcher's paper. I took mine dry, but you can have it wet or very wet. Quite an experience.

Food, music, politics and architecture; in Chicago they just have their own way of doing things, and they like it like that.

John Bishop took several tours of Chicago on his own dime. For more visit eatdrinktravel.co.nz.

The Windy City is mighty pretty with a certain charm Aussies love

FRANK Sinatra called it "my kind of town". To millions of residents and visitors, the verdict is in: Chicago is a knockout.

The third most-populated city in the US holds an irresistible mix of big city swagger and mid-western charm that will appeal to Aussies.

When's the best time to visit?

Weather conditions should be considered when planning a Chicago visit. The long winters are freezing and windy (hence the nickname, the Windy City), while summer has its share of scorches. The autumn months of September through November are the mildest, while April and May



produce some stellar spring days.

How do I get there?

Chicago's O'Hare International Airport is the second busiest airport in the world, so chances are you can connect to Chicago from wherever you fly into the US.

What should I eat there?

Chicago is known for great food, from high-end restaurants to local favourites, including deep-dish pizza. In fact, there are almost 5000 restaurants in Chicago, with more elite chefs than you can wave a James Beard Award at. Pizza-loving Chicagoans will direct you either to Lou Malnati's Pizzeria or Giordano's for the thick-crust "pie". Be sure to snack on a Chicago-style hot dog, or an Italian beef sandwich (juicy, sliced roast beef in a long roll). Chicago mix popcorn is a tasty combo of caramel and cheese-flavoured popcorn.

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BEWARE: A sign at a hot dog stand at Millennium Park warns people of the evils of putting ketchup on a hot dog. A respectable Chicagoan would never do such a thing. INSET: A deep dish pizza. Photos: iStock