



Dear all Global ICS Fellows:

The International Museum of Surgical Science (IMSS), a Division of the ICS International parent body, has just been named #16 on *Time Out Chicago Magazine's* "The 25 Best Museums in Chicago"! Per the words of Michelle Rinard, Director of Museum Operations, this recognition reflects our commitment to blending medical history with contemporary art through rotating exhibitions, artist residencies, and innovative public programs that spark curiosity and build community. We couldn't have done it without the support of our visitors, artists, volunteers, and staff—thank you for helping us continue to make the IMSS a truly unique Chicago experience. We look forward to welcoming you soon!

Your Museum (IMSS) is "in good company," as Art Institute of Chicago (#1), Field Museum (#2), and Museum of Science and Industry (#3), for example, are Internationally renowned

entities, which are widely acclaimed
and highly honored.

Sincerely,

Max Downham

Executive Director

International College of Surgeons

**25 BEST MUSEUMS
CHICAGO**



Photograph: Lucy Hewett

The 25 best museums in Chicago

Learn about art, science, history and beyond at the best museums Chicago has to offer.

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Edited by Jeffy Mal

Editor, Time Out Chicago

Written by: Zach Long, Lindsay Eanet & Isaiah Reynolds

Some of the world's most famous collections and exhibits can be found in Chicago. Want to see premier pieces from famous artists? Book your tickets for the Art Institute of Chicago or Museum of Contemporary Art. Obsessed with the deep unknown of the space? Take a trip to the Shedd Aquarium or Adler Planetarium, which are two of the **best children's museums**. Whether you enjoy art, science, history or architecture, Chicago's many museums are some of the **top Chicago attractions** and provide a great way to spend an afternoon. They're also among the **best things to do with kids in Chicago**. So spend a day exploring the best museums in Chicago.

1. Art Institute of Chicago

Museums

Art and design

Grant Park



Photograph: Jaclyn Rivas for Time Out

One of the city's most well-known cultural buildings—thanks to the iconic pair of bronze lions that flank grand steps leading up to the entrance—the Art Institute of Chicago is just as impressive once you make your way inside. With almost 300,000 artworks in its permanent collection, you'll find thousands of paintings, sculptures, photos and drawings displayed throughout a sprawling complex of galleries and halls. If you're a first-time guest, make a beeline for Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte* (as seen in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*—high and low culture is the best combo, after all) and the contemporary collection in the Modern Wing. Returning visitors can explore the Thorne Miniatures Rooms (reportedly a favorite of director Wes Anderson) in the museum's basement, as well as traveling exhibits devoted to the likes of Pablo Picasso and Van Gogh. There's arguably too much to see at this institution—at least, too much for one day—but we're not complaining.

2. The Field Museum

Museums

Science and technology

Museum Campus



Photograph: Lucy Hewett

Originally founded to house the biological and anthropological collections assembled for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, this massive natural history museum still packs 'em in with more than 20 permanent exhibitions covering 480,000 square feet. Guests come from all around the world to see towering dinos, marvel at ancient artifacts from a royal Egyptian tomb or see a Chinese rock garden hidden inside the Cyrus Tang Hall of China. While a giant titanosaur skeleton named Máximo now guards the lobby, you'll find the former greeter, SUE the T. rex, residing in the "Evolving Planet" exhibit. The something for everyone, and you can easily spend an entire day here.

3. Griffin Museum of Science and Industry

Museums

Science and technology

Hyde Park

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Photograph: Zach Long

Packed with exhibits that allow you to step inside a simulated tornado or navigate a maze lined with mirrors, the Museum of Science and Industry has no shortage of interactive bells and whistles that will appeal to younger and older visitors alike. Even if you graduated high school decades ago, displays featuring a restored 1915 U.S. Navy submarine, a simulated coal mine and a recreation of a Chicago street circa 1910 might make you feel like you're on a school field trip again, a good one, and with a better lunch! Keep in mind that you're walking through a building that was originally created for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

4. Shedd Aquarium

Attractions

Zoo and aquariums

Museum Campus

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📷 Photograph: Brenna Hernandez

Anchoring the aquatic offerings at this Chicago institution are enduring favorites such as piranhas, frogs and snakes of the Amazon; rays and turtles of the Caribbean; frightening predator sharks, mesmerizing jellies, adorable penguins (including the famous rockhoppers Wellington, Edward and Annie) and marine mammals like sea lions, otters and the beloved beluga whales. The aquarium boasts a number of permanent exhibits, making it easy to spend an entire day wandering through the Shedd. We recommend identifying a handful of must-see exhibits before you go to prioritize your time. Or just make a list and tick off others on your next visit!

5. Adler Planetarium

Museums

Science and technology

Museum Campus

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Photograph: Nick Olivieri

The first planetarium in the western hemisphere is one of the city's most popular attractions. After you've explored the permanent exhibits and the dazzling shows in the Grainger Sky Theater, apply what you've learned about the sky by visiting the Doane Observatory, home to the largest telescope available for public viewing in Chicago.

6. Museum of Contemporary Art

Museums

Art and design

Streeterville



Photograph: Callie Lipkin Photography, Inc.

Among the largest institutions in the world dedicated to art created post-1945, the Museum of Contemporary Art is best known for hosting major touring exhibitions, including past exhibitions celebrating luminaries like Virgil Abloh, David Bowie, and Takashi Murakami. Throughout the MCA's galleries, you'll also find exhibits dedicated to rising local and international artists (including the museum's Chicago Works series). Once you're finished strolling through the galleries, be sure to exit through the well-curated gift shop.

7. Chicago History Museum

Museums

History

Lincoln Park



📷 Photograph: Jaclyn Rivas for Time Out

Formerly known as the Chicago Historical Society, this lively museum commemorates the past through the exhibitions that explore historical figures like Abraham Lincoln and local delicacies such as the Chicago-style hot dog—rare. Guests can climb aboard a vintage "L" car in "Chicago: Crossroads of America" or gaze at lithographs of the city that were created in the 1860s. If you're working on a project that draws on the history of Chicago, you can register for access to the museum's Research Library, which houses thousands of photographs, publications, and artifacts that document the city's past. It's situated just inside Lincoln Park near Old Town, so it's an ideal spot to kick off a nice long stroll along the lakefront.

8. Chicago Cultural Center

Museums

Art and design

Loop



Photograph: Martha Williams for Time Out

On any given day at the Chicago Cultural Center, you might find a free classical concert being performed, an art exhibition on display in one of the building's galleries or tourists marveling at the world's largest stained glass Tiffany dome. Don't worry about paying for admission—nearly everything that happens in the building is free and open to the public. Housed in a structure that's as wide as an entire city block and dates back to 1897 (when it originally housed the Chicago Public Library), the Chicago Cultural Center provides a place for citizens and visitors alike to experience amazing art and beautiful architecture without spending a cent.

9. Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center

Things to do

Literary events

Skokie

\$



Photograph: Courtesy Illinois Holocaust Museum

Dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Holocaust, this 65,000-square-foot museum designed by renowned architect Stanley Tigerman houses more than 20,000 items donated by survivors and their descendants. Visitors can explore topics of genocide and human rights through exhibits that range from interactive holograms and virtual reality experiences to the Zev & Shifra Karkomi Holocaust Exhibition, which details the lives of survivors before, during and after the war.

10. National Museum of Mexican Art

Museums

Art and design

Lower West Side



📷 Photograph: Zach Long

You can see bright, colorful murals by walking through the streets of Pilsen there's even more amazing art on display at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Harrison Park. One of the largest Latinx cultural organizations in the U.S., the museum's exhibitions draw from a permanent collection of more than 10,000 works, highlighting the creativity of artists on both sides of the border. Start with the permanent exhibit "Nuestra Historias," which includes everything from 18th-century religious paintings to a tricked-out lawn mower. Admission is always free, and new shows debut regularly.

11. DuSable Museum of African American History

Things to do

Literary events

Washington Park



 Photograph: CC/Wikimedia Commons/TonyTheTiger

Open since 1961, this Hyde Park cultural hub is the oldest independent African American museum in the country, housing documents and artifacts from the collection of movers and shakers like activist Ida B. Wells and poet Langston Hughes. You'll even find Chance the Rapper's Grammy award for best rap album on display.

12. National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture

Museums

Art and design

Humboldt Park



Photograph: Courtesy NMPRAC

This free Humboldt Park museum showcases Puerto Rican culture and art as hosts workshops and special events. Housed within Humboldt Park, the museum's rotating collection showcases local and international talent that tell creative stories related to the Puerto Rican identity. It's a great place to add to your walking tour of the sprawling park and unbeatable local eateries.

13. Robie House

Attractions

Historic buildings and sites

Hyde Park

\$



Photograph: Shutterstock

Frank Lloyd Wright once described this Hyde Park home "a cornerstone of architecture," and it still lives up to the self-imposed reputation. Though it fell into disrepair and was slated for demolition on more than one occasion, it underwent an extensive interior restoration. One of the last buildings conceived in Wright's Oak Park studio, it's considered a prime example of the Prairie style—the cornerstone of modern architecture. The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust's guided tour takes you inside the classic structure, where you can admire the original art accents, restored furniture and a fireplace that divides the home's living and dining areas.

14. Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa

Things to do

Literary events

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Photograph: Anna R. Ressman

For more than 100 years, the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa (formerly the Oriental Institute) at the University of Chicago has been leading excavations and research projects in the SWANA (South West Asia and North Africa) region to understand our collective human history. Going back as far as 6,000 years, artifacts include an ancient saddle, various ceramic items such as jugs, bowls and incense burners, and some of the famous **Megiddo Ivories**. Also on display are objects from ancient Assyria, Anatolia, Israel, Egypt, Persia and in the Mesopotamian gallery, a stunning, hard-to-miss 40-ton huge headed winged bull sculpture from Khorsabad.

15. American Writers Museum

Museums

Loop



Photograph: Courtesy American Writers Museum

The written word and some of our nation's best literary minds take the spotlight at the American Writers Museum, an institution that is dedicated to educating the public about American writers, past and present. Guests can walk through a series of rotating, state-of-the-art exhibitions, including a hall that pays tribute to notable American writers and an area where anyone can sit behind a typewriter and contribute to a story created by museum attendees.

16. International Museum of Surgical Science

Things to do

Literary events

Gold Coast



📷 Photograph: Courtesy International Museum of Surgical Science

You don't have to be pre-med to appreciate the strange assortment of surg related artifacts at this unusual museum. Shudder at the sight of a 3,000-yr-old Peruvian skull drill or a Civil War-era amputee kit. There's also a rare, work lung, a recreated X-ray lab featuring Emil Grubbe's turn-of-the-century equip and a gallery space with revolving anatomy- and surgery-related art exhibiti

17. Chicago Architecture Center

Art

Architecture

Loop



Photograph: James Steinkamp

In 2018, the Chicago Architecture Center moved into its riverfront headquarters which appropriately boasts views of skyline institutions like the Wrigley Building and Tribune Tower. The stunning venue serves as a museum with two floors of fascinating exhibits. Inside, you'll find an interactive scale model of Chicago that depicts more than 4,200 structures plus super-sized models of tall buildings around the globe and a preview of what Chicago could look like in 2050. Outside the center also acts as a starting point for the foundation's **fan-favorite boat walking and bus tours**, which are led by CAC-certified volunteer docents.

18. Richard H. Driehaus Museum

Museums

Art and design

River North

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Photograph: Alexander Vertikoff

Local eccentric fund-manager and philanthropist Driehaus opened this museum to publicly display his expansive collection of Louis Comfort Tiffany lamps and accessories, and other late 19th century furnishings. Housed inside the mansion built by 19th-century liquor-magnate Samuel M Nickerson, the immaculate and rehabbed “marble palace” is also a shining example of building preservation.

19. The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum

Museums

Natural history

Lincoln Park

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Photograph: Chris Strong

Set amid prairies and gardens in Lincoln Park, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum offers a variety of ways to heighten your appreciation of the natural world. Exhibitions explore Chicago's prairie and river ecosystems as well as the behavior of Midwestern birds. Kids will enjoy taking a guided tour of the museum's 1/2-mile outdoor nature trail while guests of all ages will be wowed by the thousands of fluttering beauties that reside within the 2,700-square-foot Judy Istock Butterfly Haven. It's near the middle of Lincoln Park, so it's a great spot to visit mid-summer, too.

20. Museum of Illusions Chicago

Things to do

Exhibitions

Loop

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Photograph: Courtesy Museum of Illusions

Part of a chain of trippy “edutainment” destinations founded in Zagreb, Croatia, the Museum of Illusions is packed with Instagrammable moments. Loaded with more than 80 exhibitions, the interactive experience reveals how your eyes deceive your brain. Visitors can craft quirky, symmetrical versions of themselves in hilarious poses; dangle from a second story window of a classic Chicago hotel and snap mind-boggling photos by swapping different body parts.

21. Medieval Torture Museum

Museums

Loop



Photograph: Emma Krupp

Looking for a light afternoon diversion? Consider paying a visit to the Medieval Torture Museum, an interactive, eight-room tour of history's most gruesome methods. Rather than displaying historical torture devices under glass, the museum takes the approach of creating diorama-like set-ups that show silhouettes—dummies—their visages crafted in the likeness of actors who posed for each scenario—being subjected to medieval-era torture methods both real and apocryphal. Occasionally, guests are invited to try out some of the devices up chests and coffins (usually to find some kind of dismembered body part).

22. Museum of Contemporary Photography

Museums

Art and design

Loop



Photograph: Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Photography

Stop scrolling through Instagram and check out some of the amazing shots line the walls of the Museum of Contemporary Photography. Founded by C College Chicago, the Loop-based gallery hosts multiple shows each year, in groundbreaking new work made by artists around the globe as well as arch prints from the institution's archives. It doesn't take long to see everything display in this relatively small museum, which makes it a perfect place to experience a bit of culture during your lunch break, or between checking on other great museums, galleries and things to do in Chicago.

23. Smart Museum of Art

Museums

Art and design

Hyde Park



📷 Photograph: Chris Strong

Situated on the University of Chicago campus in Hyde Park, the Smart Museum of Art was conceived as an institution where scholars could study the arts and develop exhibitions. Today, it's open to the public (admission is always free) and home to the college's collection of fine art and antiquities, including scrolls and ceramics from China as well as a large-scale sculpture by Haegue Yang. Exhibits devoted to sprawling installations and local art movements are featured in the museum's courtyard sculpture garden.

24. Chicago Sports Museum

Museums

Sport

Streeterville

\$



Photograph: Martha Williams for Time Out

Have you ever wanted to compare your wingspan to Scottie Pippen's or see the remains of the infamous Steve Bartman ball? Then head to this museum at Harry Caray's 7th Inning Stretch restaurant at Water Tower Place. You'll see unique memorabilia from Chicago's various sports teams and get to test your athletic skills in interactive exhibits. Admission to the museum is free with purchase at Harry Caray's.

25. Chicago Fed's Money Museum

Museums

Special interest

Loop



Photograph: Pictor Pictures / Shutterstock

Tucked inside the Federal Reserve of Chicago, the cute, geeky Money Museum holds money-related artifacts in its permanent display. See what \$1 million like or grab a bag of shredded money. Funnily enough, it won't cost you a d

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