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Hot new Italian restaurants

Checkerboard Lounge: A blues legend returns

Out & About in Chinatown

Plus!

Little Women, Pompeii, Comedy Fest and more!



16 fab ways to turn up the heat **Winter 101**

Cocoa and cookies at Hot Chocolate in Wicker Park

JANUARY 2006

SHOPPING + DINING + ENTERTAINMENT + MAPS

CHILLS AND THRILLS

16 ways to beat the cold and
have a blast in Chicago

Who says Windy City winters have to be a drag? From free ice skating and cozy fireplaces to frolicking zoo animals and mugs of decadent gourmet cocoa, Chicago has plenty to taste, see and do for visitors in search of a little cold-weather fun. Here are some great places to start.

BY J.P. ANDERSON, ELISA DRAKE AND MEGHAN McEWEN

↳ "Let's Go Outside" and
"Fun and Games"

LET'S GO OUTSIDE

It may be below freezing out there, but downtown Chicago still offers plenty of outdoor activities for hardy souls unfazed by the January chill. One of our favorite ways to get in a winter workout is to take a spin at Millennium Park's **McCormick Tribune Ice Rink** (Michigan Avenue and Washington Street, 312-742-5222), a gleaming, 16,000-square-foot facility where kids and adults alike can twirl to their hearts' delight free of charge. Facilities include skate rental, warming lobby, restrooms and public lockers; the on-site Park Grill restaurant has a great burger, and a great view of the action.

The animals at Chicago's **Lincoln Park Zoo** (2001 N. Clark St., 773-742-2000) sure don't mind the cold. After a long, sleepy summer of taking shelter from the heat, the zoo's many cold-weather animals—frisky Malayan Sun bears, growling Amur tigers and Chilean flamingos among them—are ready to play, often putting on impromptu shows for the smaller crowds who brave the chill. New to the nearly 140-year-old institution is the Pritzker Children's Zoo, another wintertime treat that hops with otters, beavers, bears and wolves in a kid-friendly environment that encourages play and discovery. Best of all, the zoo is free, and open 365 days a year.

Locals still debate the stylistic merits of the new Soldier Field, but everybody's a big fan of the stadium's **sledding hill** (1410 S. Museum Campus Dr., 312-235-7000). Located on the parkland east of the field, the 33-foot hill has a slope of 220 feet. It's not Everest, but it is a sure bet for wintertime fun. Bring your own sled; if there's not enough snow on the ground, the Chicago Park District breaks out snowmaking machines to keep the hill sleddable.



From top: The Chicago Botanic Garden's lovely Japanese Garden; see winter-loving Chilean flamingoes, Amur tigers, otters and Sun bears at the Lincoln Park Zoo; the Millennium Park ice skating rink.

Want a little romance with your winter sightseeing? Bundle up with your beloved and take a **horse-drawn carriage ride** through downtown Chicago. JC Cutters Ltd. saddles up horses for tours of up to an hour, passing favorite city sights like the lakefront, State Street and Buckingham Fountain. Make a reservation, or just mosey over to the stand at Michigan and Chestnut (\$30-\$120 plus gratuity, 888-664-6014).

The bold colors of summer and fall have long faded away, but the **Chicago Botanic Garden** (1000 Lake Cook Rd., Glencoe, 847-835-5540) is still blooming. The 385-acre garden's rich blue dwarf conifers and majestic evergreens show their true beauty under a light cover of snow; the Japanese Garden, too, is loveliest in winter, its three Zen-like islands beckoning with ice-covered branches, snow-shrouded pines, and delicate arrangements of perennials and shrubs arranged along secluded winding paths.

WARM IT UP

If there's one thing Chicago visitors need to know, it's where to take shelter when the mercury drops. Our advice? Settle in with a pint in front of the fireplace at **Celtic Crossings** (751 N. Clark St., 312-337-1005), a convivial pub that's as cozy as any in the city. Spare and low-lit with nary a TV in sight, this authentically Irish hangout is ideal for conversation—and with Guinness, Smithwick's and 11 other European imports on tap, you'll be warm and toasty in no time.



One of the best winter brunch spots in the city, **North Pond** (2610 N. Cannon Dr., 773-477-5845) is a jewel box of Prairie-style architecture on a lovely pond in the heart of Lincoln Park. The contemporary fare is simple and excellent (honey-scented pancakes with maple sage sausage; poached egg with rosemary French toast); just as enchanting is the view from the front dining area, where a stone and copper-lined fireplace blazes, and 9-foot-high glass French doors look out onto the tranquil, often snow-covered landscape.



A Chicago tradition for 30 years, high tea at **The Drake Hotel** (140 E. Walton Pl., 312-787-2200) is an indulgent, elegant treat—and a perfect excuse to take shelter from the winter winds whipping down Michigan Avenue. Served each afternoon in the intimate Palm Court adjacent to the hotel lobby, tea service includes finger sandwiches, fruit breads, scones with jam and whipped or Devonshire cream, and a pot of tea, all to the strains of live harp music (\$26.50; children \$15.50).

Top: The fireplace beckons in North Pond's enchanting front dining room.
Bottom: The elegant Drake Hotel.

Nothing heats things up like a little romance, and you'll find it in spades at **Geja's Café** (340 W. Armitage Ave., 773-281-9101), an oh-so-cozy fondue restaurant in Lincoln Park. Candles flicker, couples cuddle, and the sensuous sounds of live flamenco guitar fill the air at this low-ceilinged, subterranean spot, which happens to be a favorite place for locals to pop the question. The menu is just as seductive, with platters of lobster tail, beef tenderloin, fruit and more waiting to be dipped in bubbling pots of hot oil, Gruyère cheese, or chocolate.

Coffee's fine, and whiskey works, but the perfect winter beverage will always be a steaming mug of hot cocoa. Forget Swiss Miss—when you feel a craving coming on, high-tail it to Bucktown's fittingly named **Hot Chocolate** (1747 N. Damen Ave., 773-489-1747), where former MK pastry chef Mindy Segal has set up a stylish little shop serving light, luscious fare—think green curry mussels and seared Kobe beef sandwiches—along with five kinds of cocoa, each served with puffy house-made marshmallows. Our favorite? The Black & Tan, a blend of two-thirds hot chocolate and one-third hot fudge. Sinful.

FUN AND GAMES

When Jack Frost starts to nip, give him the cold shoulder and head indoors, where you'll find some of the city's best interactive entertainment. Thaw out those frigid fingers with a friendly game at **10pin Bowling Lounge** (330 N. State St., 312-644-0300). A far cry from your grandfather's grungy bowling hangout, 10pin is a hip combo of state-of-the-art bowling and upscale lounge, complete with trendy bowling shoes. Even alley food favorites are elevated from greasy to gourmet, with tapas-size items like popcorn shrimp with cilantro

PERFECT WINTER PAMPERING

Take the edge off that January chill with one of these soothing, warming spa treatments.

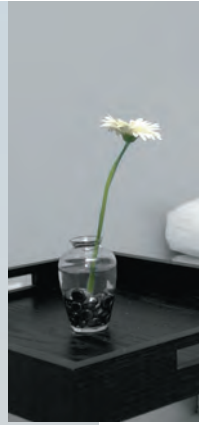
» **Milk Paraffin Cocoon.** This mega-moisturizing therapy starts with an invigorating body exfoliation, followed by a good drizzling of melted body butter and a layer of silky body-milk lotion. Finally, you're wrapped with heated, paraffin-soaked gauze strips and enveloped in an insulating foil blanket. While your body savors the warmth, the therapist seals the deal with a head and face massage. Don't be surprised if you doze off. *Kiva Day Spa*, 196 E. Pearson St., 312-840-8120.

» **Cleopatra Bath.** Want to bathe like an Egyptian? The Queen of the Nile herself was said to sink into this luxurious milk whey bath. It'll do wonders to restore and rejuvenate dry, moisture-deprived skin and replenish the skin's protective layer. *Spa Nordstrom, The Shops at North Bridge*, 520 N. Michigan Ave., 312-379-4300.

» **Soul Awakening.** This holistic, three-step treatment is sure to inspire positive resolutions for 2006. Auratherapy measures the shapes and colors of your personal electromagnetic field, providing insight into your chakra (energy) system. A numerology session reveals deep-down personal, professional, emotional and spiritual desires. And an energy healing builds on the auratherapy, identifying stress spots and adjusting energy imbalances. Finally, a comp makeup application pretties your face to match your renewed soul. *Ruby Room*, 1743-45 W. Division St., 773-235-2323.

» **Swedish Massage.** For a soothing, simply perfect rub-down, we love Urban Oasis. Those tight shoulders, scrunched against the "lake-effect" wind? Top-notch therapists do the trick every time, kneading out knots and relaxing tense muscles. Each massage comes with your choice of showers: steam, European (with multiple side-body sprays) and, our favorite, the warm, peaceful rain shower. *Urban Oasis*, 12 W. Maple St., 312-587-3500.

» **Winter Vacation.** From nose to toes, this treatment package leaves you feeling like you've spent a week in the tropics. A signature facial deep-cleans and exfoliates, a paraffin mask hydrates and balances. Hands and feet are exfoliated and also dipped in warm paraffin wax. Last, but not least, your whole body is coated in nourishing, fragrant body butter and massaged with heated stones. Ahhhh—that'll prepare you to face the winter weather. *Spa Space*, 161 N. Canal St., 312-466-9585.





orange sauce, and mini cheeseburgers with caramelized onions. Warm up your insides with a chi-chi cocktail; our sweet tooth favors the banana split martini.

Looking for some family fun? **Navy Pier** (600 E. Grand Ave., 312-595-PIER) is the perfect spot to spend a chilly day. Hop on the Time Escape 3-D ride for a trip back into Chicago's past, or spend a few hours at the Chicago Children's Museum; aimed at toddlers to 10-year-olds, it's packed with hands-on exhibits like "Dinosaur Expedition" and "Under Construction." In the shopping mood? There are dozens of shops like Build-A-Bear Workshop, Ryba's Fudge Shop and the Underdog Pet Boutique. Or duck into a heated theater for a flick: The soaring 60-by-80-foot IMAX Theatre is showing *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* through Jan. 29. Afterward, eight sit-down restaurants and a food court offer plenty of dining options.

For smaller-scale movie-going, venture north of downtown to Lincoln Park's unique **Music Box Theatre** (3733 N. Southport Ave., 773-871-6604). We love this charming, 1929 restored movie palace for its open-air, Italian palazzo feel, complete with a ceiling of twinkling stars and moving clouds. Two intimate theaters screen independent films, documentaries, foreign films, and cult and black-and-white classics.

If you'd rather a live show, you're in luck. Chicago has some of the best in the country. The hottest ticket in town is **Wicked**, at the Oriental Theatre (24 W. Randolph St., 312-902-1400). Starting Jan. 24 at the Cadillac Palace Theatre (151 W. Randolph St. 312-902-1400) is **Little Women-The Musical**, starring Grammy-winning Maureen McGovern. Always good for laughs is skit comedy club **Second City** (1616 N. Wells St., 312-337-3992), which launched the careers of funny celebs like Jim Belushi, Tina Fey, Bonnie Hunt and Mike Meyers. Or



From top: Take the chill out of winter at one of Chicago's top-notch spas; Glinda and Elphaba face off in "Wicked" at the Oriental Theatre; and the music is always hot at Blue Chicago, where one price gets you admission to two nearby locations. Got kids? Take them along for the no-alcohol, no-smoking show every Saturday.

Winterize Your Wardrobe

To keep warm, cozy and oh-so-current, grab these stylish Chicago winter must-haves.

» Wrap a **cashmere ruffle** around your neck this year. A more practical, modern take on the Edwardian collar ruff, Anthropologie's elastic-y scarf comes in mocha, purple and freshly cut-grass green (\$98). 1120 N. State St., 312-255-1848.

» Face it: Ugg boots are a fashion trend of the past. But Ugg's raspberry suede and shearling aviator-style **winter cap** (\$120) and fluffy **slippers** (\$69.95) provide the same warmth that made the Australian brand a hit in the first place. Nordstrom, 24 N. State St., 312-658-0430.

» Heat up with Napa **driving gloves** with suede whipstitching. Lined in silk cashmere, they're available in a tantalizing menu of colors: olive, chocolate, berry and mustard (\$35). Bloomingdale's, 900 N. Michigan Ave., 312-440-4460.

» **Sweaters** by New Scotland combine super-soft cashmere with fun, casual designs and unexpected colors, like a light-gray crew style with exposed green seams (\$241). Lili, 1543 N. Wells St., 312-654-8511.

» Fur is back this season. Instead of a traditional jacket, opt for a **fur vest** for a more sporty-chic look. Chicago Fur Mart carries a gorgeous navy blue sheared beaver vest (regularly \$4,000; ask for special pricing). 166 E. Superior St., 312-951-5000.



catch the ever-popular antics of **Blue Man Group** (3133 N. Halsted St., 773-348-4000).

Vegas-style performances at the **Baton Show Lounge** (436 N. Clark St., 312-644-5269) get pulses racing and crowds of bachelorettes hooting, as female impersonators strut their gorgeous stuff, lip-synching to divas like Donna Summer, Madonna and Janet Jackson. Outrageous costumes (think low-cut tops and leather skirts) and good-natured flirting make for a racy show, but it's all good clean fun (no swearing; no nudity). Weekend shows sell out, so call ahead.

For a quintessential Chicago music experience, check out **Blue Chicago** (736 N. Clark St., 312-642-6261, and 536 N. Clark St., 312-661-0100). Between the two locations, there are live blues performances seven nights a week. Plus, admission is a steal at eight bucks, which covers both clubs. Even kids can get the blues at the "down in the basement" all-ages shows on Saturdays from 8 pm till midnight. **W**