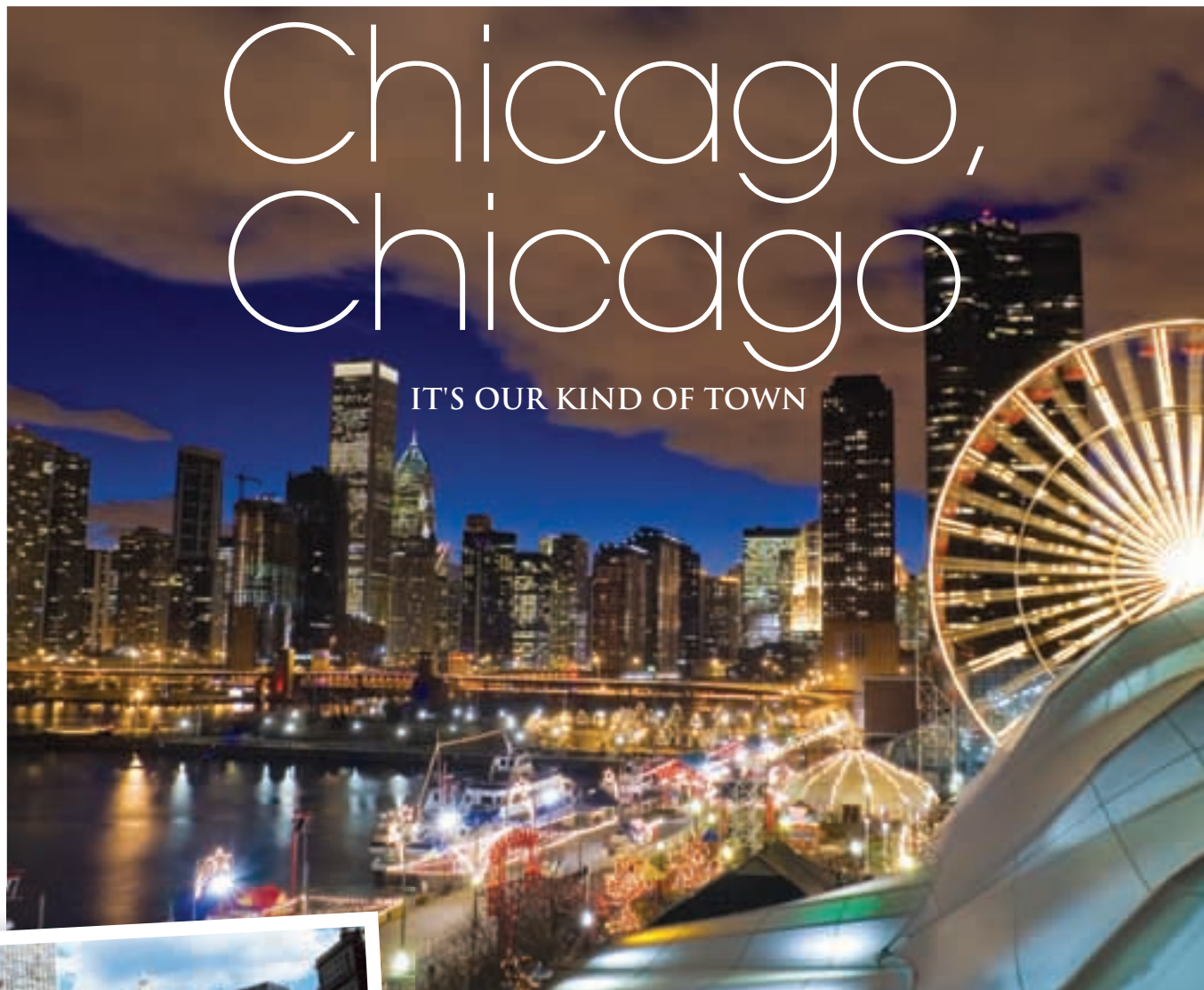


# Chicago, Chicago

IT'S OUR KIND OF TOWN



TOP Chicago's Navy Pier and Lake Michigan skyline at night

MIDDLE Cruises along the Chicago River provide information on Chicago's architectural treasures

BOTTOM A Segway tour pauses at Grant Park's Buckingham Fountain

With its cloud-piercing skyscrapers, attraction-lined lakefront and great museums, music and shopping, Chicago – poet Carl Sandberg's 'City of the Big Shoulders' – has long been popular with American and foreign visitors alike. Among its fans is **PAUL WADE**, who recently returned to America's 'Second City' a second time.

**WHEN I FIRST VISITED AMERICA'S 'SECOND CITY'** (acknowledging New York as the first), it was love at first sight – the soaring skyscrapers and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (his home in Oak Park is a must-see); the jazz and blues clubs (I have always been a fan of Buddy Guy); the Art Institute of Chicago, with its world-class collection of Impressionist paintings (the home of Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*); and some of the best small restaurants in the USA. But, most of all, I liked the Chicagoans themselves. As one fellow British visitor told me: "It's like New York, but the people are friendlier."

This time – after a five-year absence – my wife and I walked and walked to reacquaint ourselves with the city. The downtown grid pattern made finding our way easy – to the east, we saw empty sky over Lake Michigan; looking west, there was empty sky above the prairies. The stone sculptures and brass plates that adorn the grand buildings testify to the wealth generated in this booming metropolis a century ago and more. At the corner of LaSalle

RIGHT The 'El' circles the downtown area known as 'The Loop'

BELOW Chef Rick Gresh presides over David Burke's Primehouse



**FOOD FACT ONE:**



### WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Chicago is known for its fabulous, tender steaks as well as for processing a vast amount of the meat consumed in the USA. At Primehouse, we discovered from Chef Rick Gresh the merits of indulging in the more expensive steaks that have been dry-aged. The norm across America is now for corn-fed, sweeter-tasting, wet-aged steak. "After 40 days, dry ageing produces a super beefy taste; after 55 days, it is more gamey, like venison. And at 75 days, it is full-on game, with an earthy, blue cheese finish," he explained.

At this stylish restaurant, the beef matures in cellars beneath the diners, in a shivering-cold room lined with blocks of Himalayan salt that absorb moisture and kill off bacteria. "After only 28 days, 20 per cent of its weight evaporates; another 15 per cent is lost from trimming off the hard crust that forms during ageing." That's why a 55-day aged rib eye, bone-in, 20oz steak costs \$62. But it is organic, grass-fed, hormone free – and delicious. Gresh prefers steaks that have been aged between 40 and 55 days, "cooked medium rare, with some salt and pepper".

I tasted a 35-day Kansas City steak that was chewy but not tough, with a deep beefy flavour. My wife's 40-day ribeye was sensational – tender yet still full of flavour. Served with tempura-fried green beans and a chorizo, date and goat's cheese hash, this was a meal to remember. David Burke's Primehouse, 616 North Rush Street, [www.jameshotels.com](http://www.jameshotels.com). 001 (312) 660 6000.

and Jackson Streets, we spotted a plaque commemorating the decision to adopt General Time in 1883. The creation of four time zones enabled clocks to be synchronised across the USA; and in Chicago, the unofficial capital of the Midwest and perfectly placed between the East and West coasts, business benefited.

The downtown area is known as The Loop, the area enclosed by the El, the city's rapid-transit system. Like a giant Meccano set, this overground metro shakes, rattles and rolls its way round the financial district before darting off to the suburbs. Even since our last visit, the Loop has changed. Office blocks have been converted into condos and three universities have developed downtown

ABOVE Jaume Plensa's 50ft-high fountain projects images of locals spitting water into a pool  
BOX OUT A perfectly cooked steak at David Burke's Primehouse

campuses; so, an area that used to die at night now has the buzz of residents and 35,000 students.

We stayed at the Palmer House, a Hilton and one of the grandest American hotels. Built by the very wealthy Mr Potter Palmer, this is the country's oldest continuously-operated hotel, dating back to 1871. Stepping into the lobby is like walking into a movie set, with marble everywhere, 24-carat gold chandeliers and two massive Winged Angel statues. But it is the ceiling with its 21 murals that takes your breath away. For the recent renovation, the hotel flew in Lido Lippi, a restorer, who worked on the Sistine Chapel. "We never closed. He worked through the night, completing about



one square foot at a time,” Ken Price, director of public relations, explained as we chatted in the Lockwood Restaurant, where the trendy thing to order at lunchtime is the lobster meat hot dog.

As Ken told us more about the Palmer family, I began to suspect that he has a crush on Potter’s wife, Bertha. Not only was she beautiful, but this society lady also was very liberated for her time. “She travelled to France, where she met Claude Monet and bought an astonishing 200 French Impressionist paintings,” said Ken. These were bequeathed to Chicago’s Art Institute and became the backbone of the museum’s collection.

### A GREAT MUSEUM, ROUTE 66 AND FAB FOOD

Since my last visit, the USA’s second-largest art museum has opened its Modern Wing. Designed by Renzo Piano, this is the new home for the superb collection of 20th- and 21st-century works. We joined the free tour that traces the history of modern art, along the way viewing a Picasso portrait of Sylvette David, a statue by Rodin, German Expressionists and Dali’s *Venus de Milo*. Think of an artist and he or she is represented here.

As well as the culture, what I enjoy about Chicago is that real Midwestern, All-American feel of the city. Steps away from the Art Institute, we spotted a brown-and-white road sign – Historic Illinois US 66. This is the official start of Route 66, but many who follow the ‘Mother Road’ actually begin their adventure at nearby Lou Mitchell’s, which, since 1923, has delivered “The best breakfast on the planet served all day!” Within seconds of joining the queue, we were offered freshly-made, bite-sized doughnuts. At our table, we tackled a stack of fluffy pancakes, made the way they used to be. Parents with babes sat next to grandparents; locals were elbow-to-elbow at long tables; refills were so regular that coffee cups were never empty. There was even complimentary

ABOVE Two of Millennium Park’s landmark artworks: Anish Kapoor’s Cloud Gate sculpture, known as ‘The Bean’ and Frank Gehry’s Pritzker Pavilion band shell

vanilla ice cream for dessert and free milk duds (chocolate-covered caramels) for ladies as they left.

Chicago has made major contributions to the American menu. As well as the brownie (see box on page 28), there is the Chicago-style Vienna Beef hot dog, an all-meat snack topped with lurid yellow mustard, green relish, onions, tomato, pickle, peppers and a dash of celery salt – but never, ever ketchup. Then, there is deep-dish pizza, invented by Ike Sewell at Unos back in 1943. The restaurant still stands at the corner of Ohio Street and Wabash Avenue. But there is far more to the Chicago food scene, and to see what’s where we joined a Chicago Food Planet walking tour. In three hours we sipped, munched and tasted as we visited seven shops and restaurants. Both witty and informed, our guides discussed the mysteries of pastrami, tea, olive oil, chocolate, pastries and award-winning stuffed pizza at Bacino’s. But the highlight was The Spice House, with more spices and herbs than we have seen anywhere else in the world.

Evenings are as busy as days in Chicago. As a blues fan, Buddy Guy’s Legends was a must for me. Owned and run by the guitarist who inspired Eric Clapton, among others, the venue is uncomplicated and democratic. It’s first-come, first-served, so settle in by 8pm for icy beers and large portions of Southern and Creole dishes, followed by great big slabs of the blues. If you’re

### TRAVEL NOTES

**GETTING THERE:** American Airlines ([www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com), 0844 499 7300) flies to Chicago up to four times a day from London Heathrow, and daily from Manchester. From £435 return, including taxes.

**GETTING AROUND:** No car is needed, so enjoy unlimited rides on the Chicago Transit Authority metro and bus system with a Three-Day (\$14) or Seven-Day CTA Pass (\$23). [www.transitchicago.com](http://www.transitchicago.com). Start your visit at the Chicago Cultural Center (78 East Washington Street, [www.chicagoculturalcenter.org](http://www.chicagoculturalcenter.org), 001 (312) 744 6630), where you can arrange for a free Chicago Greeter tour ([www.chicagogreeter.com](http://www.chicagogreeter.com)), get free restaurant advice from the Culinary Concierge, and buy your CTA travel pass.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Palmer House, 17 East Monroe Street, Chicago, IL 60603, [www.palmerhousehiltonhotel.com](http://www.palmerhousehiltonhotel.com), (UK) 0870 5 90 90 90). From \$159 a night.

**EATING OUT:** Known for his Mexican food, Rick Bayless is Chicago’s hot chef. His Frontera Grill is posh and expensive but next door, his XOCO is a fun and affordable spot for a light meal (449 North Clark Street at Illinois Street, 001 (312) 334 3688). For great steaks drop by David Burke’s Primehouse (see the box on page 26). I also like 33 Club (1419 N Wells Street, 001 (312) 664 1419) with its fun, 1930s nightclub feel and stylish Modern American dishes, and Nacional 27 (325 W Huron Street, 001 (312) 664 2727) with authentic cuisine from the 27 Central and South American countries. Chicago Food Planet Food Tours, [www.chicagofoodplanet.com](http://www.chicagofoodplanet.com), 001 (212) 209 3370 (US only (800) 979 3370).

**ATTRACTIONS:** Frank Lloyd Wright’s home in Oak Park ([www.gowright.org](http://www.gowright.org)); Buddy Guy’s Legends (700 South Wabash, [www.buddyguys.com](http://www.buddyguys.com)); Art Institute of Chicago ([www.artic.edu](http://www.artic.edu)).

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** The official Chicago and Illinois Tourist Office web site is [www.gochicago.com](http://www.gochicago.com)

there in January, you're in for a special treat for that's when Buddy invites top bluesmen to play during his annual concert series.

On our last night we dashed to Second City, the comedy club that has launched a hundred careers, from Joan Rivers and Bill Murray to Dan Ackroyd and Mike Myers. Sitting next to us was Gillian Bellinger, a comedienne in her own right. "For stand-up and improv, Chicago is still where it's at," she said. Like everyone we talked to in this friendly city, she gave us tips on where to go, what to see and where to eat. "With so much here," she said, "if you are bored in Chicago, it's your own fault."



BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT Buddy Guy is the owner and star of Legends music club; Marathon runners dash through Millennium Park; The renowned Art Institute of Chicago is guarded by lions

FOOD FACT TWO:

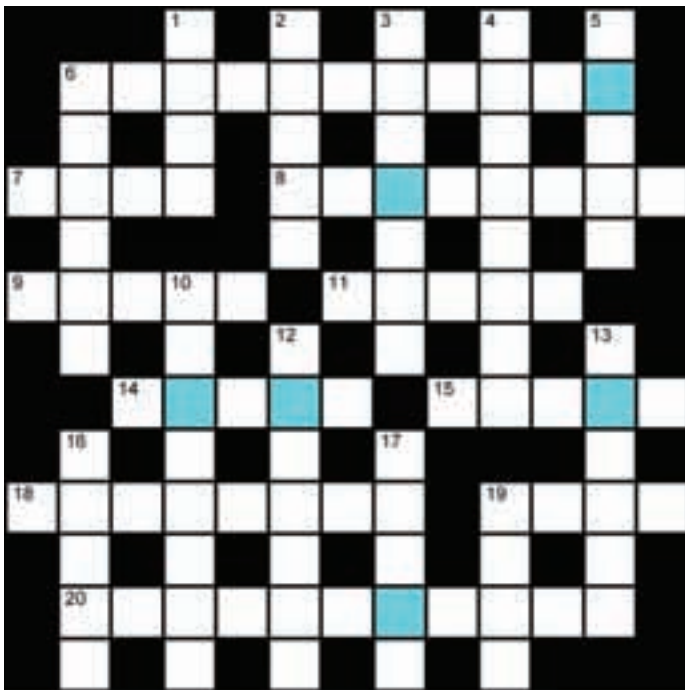
## THE BIRTH OF THE BROWNIE

During Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Bertha Palmer asked the Palmer House chef to create a 'ladies' dessert' for the box lunches at the Fair's Women's Building. As well as being tasty, it had to be easier to eat than a slice of pie. The result was the chocolate-fudge brownie, topped with crushed walnuts. The All-American favourite is still served and sold at the Palmer House.

# COMPETITION

## How well do you know North America?

COMPILED BY ALERIC LINDEN



### CLUES ACROSS

- 6 Where in Minnesota is the Mall of America? (11)
- 7 The Valley \_\_\_\_\_, Maui's nickname (4)
- 8 Mountain resort in South Lake Tahoe (8)
- 9 Method of transport synonymous with Greyhound in North America (5)
- 11 The Mackenzie is Canada's longest one (5)
- 14 New York City is the Big one! (5)
- 15 Famous Colorado ski resort (5)
- 18 \_\_\_\_\_ Range, Idaho mountains (8)
- 19 Acronym used for Denver's lower downtown area (4)
- 20 Located in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, it's the oldest national park in the world (11)

### CLUES DOWN

- 1 San \_\_\_\_\_, it's often referred to as 'Capital of Silicon Valley' (4)
- 2 Nebraska's biggest city (5)
- 3 The smallest of the Great Lakes (7)
- 4 Mount \_\_\_\_\_, volcanic peak in Washington state (2,6)
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ Sam, personification of the US government (5)
- 6 Largest city in Massachusetts (6)
- 10 Regina, Winnipeg and Halifax are all provincial ones in Canada (8)
- 12 What the Americans call liquor (7)
- 13 Space \_\_\_\_\_, famous Seattle landmark (6)
- 16 A department store noted for its annual Thanksgiving Day Parade in NYC (5)
- 17 \_\_\_\_\_ town, a once-prosperous but now abandoned location of the American West (5)
- 19 The \_\_\_\_\_, elevated part of Chicago's train network (4)

Pit your knowledge against our crossword compiler. When you have answered all the questions, take each letter from the shaded squares (going from left to right and top to bottom) to spell out the bonus word. – a Florida city.

Then send the completed crossword – **not just the bonus word** – by 1 December to *Essentially America* Crossword Puzzle EA 79, 55 Hereford Road, London, W25BB. All correct entries will be entered into a draw. The winner will receive a book about North America. Answers will be published in the next, winter 2011 issue of the magazine. (Please note that Crossword contest entries may be sent in one-per-person as photocopies.)

#### ANSWERS TO THE EA 78 CROSSWORD

**Across:** 7. Chesapeake Bay 8. Emerald 9. Mile 10. Tulsa 11. SoHo 14. Open 15. Diner 17. Alto 18. Martha's 19. Subway station **Down:** 1. Accents 2. Beverly 3. Canada 4. Bend 5. Mexico 6. Salem 11. San 12. Anaheim 13. Prisons 14. Ottawa 15. Durham 16. Cajun 18. Mesa **Bonus Word:** Atlanta

NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....

.....

.....

POSTCODE: .....

EMAIL: .....

BONUS WORD: .....