



CITY OF CHICAGO

CLOSER LOOK:



KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Chicago Air & Water Show

The military fighter jet flew sideways directly over my head, so close I could see the pilot's face framed by his helmet. For a split second our eyes locked, and then he was gone, the jet screaming across Lake Michigan trailing a white plume of smoke against the Chicago skyline.

The engine blast reverberated in my chest and my breath caught in my throat, not just from the thrill of witnessing the maneuver but from pride in the U.S. Armed Forces. That man in the cockpit—he's one of ours.

Wide Open and Free

The Chicago Air & Water Show is the largest free show of its kind in the U.S.—and the longest-running. This year's Aug. 16–17 show will mark its 56th year. Some 2.2 million people usually turn out to watch, though attendance dipped last year when military aircraft were not part of the program

because of the federal budget sequester. The full lineup for this year hasn't been announced, but the military will be back in force, including the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and the U.S. Army Golden Knights parachute team.

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Vintage- and military-aircraft pilots join civilian aviators in daredevil aerobatics and tight formations. Planes take off from Gary/Chicago International Airport in Indiana and are closely monitored for safety by the show's own air traffic controller.

Unlike some landlocked air shows, the Chicago Air & Water Show has no admission charge and can be seen for miles on the lakefront. It began as a program for a park day camp, with water skiers, a diving competition and a demonstration of the U.S. Coast Guard Air-Sea Rescue operation. The Coast Guard is still a featured participant, but the number of water acts has declined over the years because of Lake Michigan's unpredictable open waters.

A Summer Ritual

Spectators begin arriving hours before the 10 a.m. start, often bringing coolers, lawn chairs and picnics to the same spot every year. The action is centered on North Avenue Beach, but Oak Street and Ohio Street beaches are good viewing spots, too, as is Navy Pier and the John Hancock Observatory. Outdoor dining terraces at the Hotel Lincoln and W Chicago Lakeshore Hotel make good perches for those who snag a reservation.

The view from the water with Chicago's dramatic skyline serving as a backdrop is perhaps best of all. Wendella and Shoreline sightseeing boats take passengers onto the lake, as do dining cruises aboard *Odyssey*, *Mystic Blue* and *Spirit of Chicago*.

"Out-of-towners build their vacation and summer around the show," said announcer Herb Hunter, a former military and commercial pilot and The Voice of the show for 27 years. Parents have brought their children for generations, and several youngsters were inspired to become pilots. "The show was created to give young people something to dream about," said Hunter, but older folks enjoy it, too. "Airplanes bring out the kid in all of us."

For more information, check with the Chicago Air & Water Show at www.chicagoairandwatershow.us and Choose Chicago at www.choosechicago.com. Plan your trip with a local AAA agent or AAA.com/travel.



KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Chicago Architecture Foundation Tours

When air-show spectators aren't looking at boats and planes, they gawk at the skyline of Chicago, a city noted for its architecture. CAF leads anecdote-filled architecture tours on the Chicago River aboard Chicago's *First Lady*, with certified guides pointing out more than 50 buildings. It also has a full schedule of walking tours and tours by bus, bike, Segway, and Chicago's iconic L rail and subway system.

Writer's Picks

Millennium Park

Many Chicago Air & Water Show visitors pay to park underground here and take the free shuttle to North Avenue Beach, but 25-acre Millennium Park is worth milling around in on its own. Anish Kapoor's stainless-steel sculpture *Cloud Gate*, nicknamed The Bean for its shape, has become an icon. Visitors love to gather around to view their reflection and that of the Michigan Avenue skyline. They also splash in Crown Fountain with its 50-foot, rotating video clips of Chicago faces that periodically "spit" waterfalls, stroll through Lurie Garden and take in concerts, some free, in the steel-ribbed, Frank Gehry-designed Jay Pritzker Pavilion.

Skydeck Chicago

Visitors get a sense of what air-show pilots see when flying over Chicago by heading to the 103rd-floor observation level of Willis Tower, the second-tallest building in North America at 1,450 feet—1,730 feet to the tip of its communications towers. The sweeping views of Chicago and the lakefront take the breath away, but visitors get an extra adrenaline rush when they step onto The Ledge, four retractable clear glass boxes that protrude 4.3 feet from the skyscraper's face. Looking 1,353 feet down to the street is sure to give acrophobes sweaty palms.

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