



TRIP TIP
The Toll Road Skyway is the quickest route in and out of Chicago—if you have correct change.

Go for Broke

A weekend in the Windy City that will blow you away.

BY LIZ JOSS

A friend used to say that for any vacation, you should pack half as much stuff and twice as much money. This is especially true for a weekend on Chicago's Gold Coast, where the retailers, hotels and restaurants are pricey—but worth every penny.

WHAT TO DO Shop, shop, shop. Though Indy's retail choices are steadily improving, the Gold Coast's world-class retailers—Gucci, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Barneys, Tod's—are all dressed up and fully stocked in preparation for the holiday season. And there are the grand department stores: Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's, Marshall Field's, and a Saks and Nordstrom that put Indy's to shame. (For city info: Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, www.meetinchicago.com; *Chicago Tribune* readers' and reviewers' opinions, www.metromix.com.)

WHERE TO STAY The Peninsula Chicago (108 E. Superior St., 312-337-2888, www.peninsula.com) is ideally located between the hustle of Michigan Avenue and the bustle of Rush Street, but even if it were in the middle of nowhere, we'd love staying there. The rooms, \$445 to \$5,800 a night, are spacious and well-appointed, as they should be at such prices—but the hotel's real beauty is that your every need has been anticipated.

WHERE TO EAT Inside the Peninsula is the innovative Avenues (312-573-6754), which food writers from the *Chicago Tribune* to *Vogue* have called one of the best eateries in America. And just outside is the noisy, casual Giordano's (312-951-0747), which serves thick, crusty Chicago-style pizza and locally brewed beers. For a more refined meal, walk the couple of blocks to Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab—an offshoot of the famous Miami Beach spot. The stone-crab claws are fine, but no dinner at Joe's is complete without the meaty, rich crabcakes and the authentic Key lime pie. (Joe's isn't too busy at lunch, but dinner reservations are a good idea: 312-379-5637.) And on Friday and Saturday nights, the Peninsula's Lobby restaurant (312-573-6760) hosts a decadent chocolate buffet—way better than a mint on the pillow.

DON'T MISS Millennium Park (at Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street): architecture by Frank Gehry, gardens galore, a 110-ton stainless-steel sculpture titled *Cloud Gate* (known locally as the giant jelly bean) and two crowd-pleasing 50-foot-tall glass-block video screens/fountains that display the faces of Chicagoans, those lucky devils who live here year-round. ●

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