



# Chicago Sets, Spikes!

The Second City comes in first with fitness options



## UNSUSPECTING TRAVELERS MAY

**ENCOUNTER THE MYTH** that Chicago is called the Windy City because of the strong breezes. Don't fall for it. It was so named in 1885 in reference to the hot air blown by grandstanding politicians. But say what you will about Chicago's public servants, one of the smartest moves they ever made was to sanction nearly 20 miles of Lake Michigan frontage as Chicago Park District territory. The park stretches north to south with nearly continuous paved and crushed-gravel trails that are traversed by runners, inline skaters, cyclists, and strollers. In fact, Chicago has the largest park district in the United States.

Surprisingly, the city also boasts the largest beach volleyball league in the country. Every summer, 20,000 people play under the auspices of Chicago Sport and Social Club (312.335.9596; [chicagosocial.com](http://chicagosocial.com)), which manages 1,200 teams. The teams form months in advance, but according to Jason Erkes, president of Chicago Sport and Social, it's easy to get into a game at the last minute.

"Recreational teams require six players," says Erkes, "and there's always someone who doesn't show up." There are coed teams of two, four, and six players (twos are ranked competitive, sixes are beginners). Games are played at two downtown locations: North Avenue Beach, Monday to Friday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Oak Street Beach, Tuesday and Wednesday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Sunday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Show up a half hour early and simply ask around, or stop by the Chicago Sport and Social tent. There's no cost for drop-in players.

A wetter way to enjoy Chicago's waterfront is by kayaking on the lake and along the Chicago River. Kayak Chicago (630.336.7245; [kayakchicago.com](http://kayakchicago.com)) launches its craft into Lake Michigan from the North Pier Athletic Club (474 N. Lake Shore Drive), Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Kayaking on the lake can be more challenging than on the river because paddlers share the water with sailboats and speedboats. For \$30, the Kayak Chicago Architecture Tour (630.336.7245; [kayakchicago.com](http://kayakchicago.com)) will take you on a two-hour Wednesday evening paddle through the canyon of skyscrapers. No experience is necessary, and each excursion starts with a 15-minute introduction on paddling technique and water safety.

Some prefer pedaling to paddling, and luckily for them, the lakefront path is an ideal place to ride. Rent bikes downtown by the hour, day, or week from the Millennium Park Bicycle Station (888.245.3929; [chicagobikestation.com](http://chicagobikestation.com)). Rates range from \$9 per hour for beach cruisers to \$14 per hour for road bikes. Start your ride at Randolph Street and head about 6 miles south toward the Museum of Science and Industry, where the crowds thin and the trails become smoother.

Chicago also has its own version of Muscle Beach through Bally Total Fitness, an outdoor version of their health club located on Oak Street Beach. Pump iron in the open air using the club's free weights, get Zen in a yoga class, or become a lean, mean bicycle machine in spin class. You can obtain a free guest pass by going to [ballytotalfitness.com](http://ballytotalfitness.com) and entering zip code 60611.

When the weather just won't cooperate, fit in a rainy day workout at Gold Coast Multiplex (1030 N. Clark St.; 312.944.1030), which offers out-of-state travelers unlimited use of its facilities and classes for \$20 per day, or \$38 per week. It's also a wi-fi hot spot for travelers who want to surf while they sweat. Surfing in Chicago? That's a possibility, too. With all of Chicago's fitness options, don't rule out packing your wetsuit.

—JoAnn Milivojevic

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