



## Features

### Beachy Keen

Whatever your beach-bum inclinations, one of our favorite lakeside lounges will be worth your sand dollars

July 14, 2005

*Photograph by Calbee Booth*



We love our beaches, but when they're covered by snow six months out of the year, it's hard to tell which ones are worth a visit during our fleeting summer days. Picking one to chill out at gets trickier when you consider the vast stretches of sandy shoreline here: The Chicago Park District recognizes and manages 31 beaches alone. So we've boiled down your lakefront options to six beaches with distinctive, lovable personalities, from the South Side's ginormous Rainbow Beach to dog-friendly Montrose Beach.

Wherever you choose to go, take note: Beaches are open from 9am to 9:30pm. The Park District tests waters for bacteria often, so check [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com) (and click on "Swim Report") for daily updates on weather and water conditions. And put on that sunscreen—the red-lobster look is so out.

#### North Avenue Beach

Seething with sexy singles playing beach sports and muscle-bound men cycling down the lakefront path, North Avenue Beach is the West Coast minus the surf. But if you're not into scoping and getting scoped, you might find this strip of sand—the most crowded in the Chicago area—a bit run-down and dirty. Don't mind that occasional stale beer and fish smell? Then spread your towel at sunset: This spot provides one of the most beautiful skyline views of the city.

**Location:** 1600 North Lake Shore Drive at LaSalle Drive, 312-742-7725.

**Amenities and facilities:** That big boat-shaped building on the beach houses bathrooms, showers and a host of services. Get a beach towel or an umbrella for \$10 a day, or rent a bike for a beachfront ride. You'll also find a newspaper stand, a counter-service cafe called Beachside Burger that offers hot dogs and standard beach fare, and Castaways Bar & Grill (773-281-1200) with a rooftop view of the bikini- and board-shorts-packed beach. Head to the latter for nearly daily cover bands happy to butcher classic rock tunes for your inebriated pleasure, plus daily drink (read: alcohol, legally provided) and food specials. Farther north along the beachfront path is an outdoor Bally's Total Fitness, complete with cardio equipment, free weights and group classes (think Venice Beach, Cali)—all available

for free to members and for \$15 a day for nonmembers. But by far, the biggest attraction on this beach is volleyball. The Chicago Sport and Social Club provides more than 50 nets for registered league play and a few for walk-ons. If volleyball is too soft for your style, NAB Sports features fight-to-the-death dodgeball tournaments and roller hockey on the north end of the beach. Drinking fountains are scattered throughout. This beach is wheelchair- and stroller-accessible.

**Where to eat:** After a long day in the sun, you don't want to exhaust yourself by hunting down a meal. Castaways is open until 11pm for late-night snackers, but if you want to nosh on the beach, be sure to pack a picnic—all the cafes and hot-dog stands close at 5pm.

**Parking and transportation:** Just east of Lake Shore Drive, LaSalle Drive dead-ends at the parking lot. Parking is expensive (one hour is \$6, every additional hour is \$2, three or more hours is \$11), and if you can't find a space in the lot, you'll be hiking from the metered parking along LaSalle. Bus: 22, 36, 72. —*Madeline Nusser*

## **Montrose Beach**

The first thing to know about Montrose Beach is that it's a misnomer. The lakefront activities stretch from Montrose Avenue all the way to Wilson Avenue, and, to further complicate matters, you'll see signs all over the place at the northernmost end that say Lawrence-Wilson Ave. Get over it and roam around—you'll stumble on loads of fun activities. This swath of lakefront attracts on hot days, the beach fills with several hundred sunbathers, swimmers and neighbors catching up on the local goings-on. For a peaceful dip, get to the beach before 10am. During the week, kids in various summer day camps practically rule the place.

**Location:** 7600 South Shore Avenue between 75th and 79th Streets, 312-747-6628.

**Amenities and facilities:** The surrounding park boasts a community garden, baseball diamonds, a soccer field, bike racks, drinking fountains, tennis courts and a new, modern field house with an indoor basketball court that also functions as an event hall for weddings. The entire park is stroller- and wheelchair-accessible. This beach doesn't offer kayaks or canoes; you have to go to 64th Street Beach for that. Kiteboarding and kitesurfing are prohibited. The bike path runs between the beach and the parking lot. During the summer, free youth jazz concerts and screenings of popular films liven things up.

**Where to eat:** A concession stand called Les Eat, just steps from the sand, serves ice cream, drinks and hot dogs. There's also a popular sub shop called Maxwell's (773-734-9901) on 79th at the park entrance.

**Parking and transportation:** Follow the winding drive off 79th and you'll arrive at a spacious parking lot. Bus: 6, 26, 71, 79. Metra: Elec S Chicago Line to Cheltenham.—*John Dugani*

## **Kathy Osterman Beach (a.k.a. Hollywood Beach)**

First of all, nobody calls it Kathy Osterman beach. That's what the Park District renamed this secluded stretch of sand in Edgewater in 1992, after the late 48th Ward alderman and director of the Mayor's Office of Special Events.

But anybody who's anybody still knows it as Hollywood Beach. It's definitely more fitting, because, just like Hollywood, this beach is a little glamorous, a little tacky and ultimately too fabulous for words. The view depends on who you are: Some will take in the cityless view of the bright aquamarine water, the waves tumbling gently onto soft, warm sand; others will note the extreme thong action, which at this beach benefits gay men and straight women, because these bums belong to the boys. Don't get the wrong idea: There are plenty of other folks here, too, including families building sand castles, a bunch of volleyballers and sunbathing gals relieved they don't have to worry about being hit on. When a beach is this tranquil and idyllic, they're not going to let the gay guys have all the fun.

**Location:** 5800 North Lake Shore Drive at Hollywood Avenue, 312-446-4737.

**Amenities and facilities:** Volleyball nets are set up near the back of the beach. Bathrooms, benches and drinking fountains are all available, and the beach is wheelchair- and stroller-accessible. Shopping on Michigan Avenue may be the best prebeach activity, because the 147 bus takes off from Michigan Avenue and Delaware Place and goes straight to Foster Avenue and Lake Shore Drive, about a five-minute stroll from the beach.

**Where to eat:** Del Lana's Deli (773-294-4601), a cute little stand in the back of the beach, serves typical beach grub like burgers, ice cream, juices and Chicago-style hot dogs. And you can get a veggie burger if you're vegetarian or are watching your beach figure.

**Parking and transportation:** Street parking is highly coveted but may be found on and around Foster Avenue. El: Red to Bryn Mawr. Bus: 146, 147, 151 (24 hrs). —*David Tamarkin*