

 Chicago Tribune

5 spots to raise your temperature

Is it hot, or is it just us? Kick-start summer with sizzling people-watching

By Sandra Langeneckert

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Summer's not even officially here but, if you're like most Chicagoans, you've already begun the frantic rush to revisit your favorite warm weather haunts. Hey, we've got to cram a year's worth of outdoor carousing into a measly three months, so it's time to get busy. And what better way to heat things up than with some steamy people-watching? Whether you're out to view the eye candy, find a new love or just toast the season, focus your frenzy on these places that'll get your summer sizzling.

Enjoy the view: Castaways Bar & Grill

Located on the upper deck of the North Avenue Beach Boathouse, this summer standby boasts an enviable view of the lake—as well as of scantily clad Chads and Trixies sunning themselves. If you've worked hard all winter on your summer bod (or just want to ogle those who have), this is the place. In keeping with the theme, there's an array of tropical drinks (\$6-\$7.75), as well as apps, wraps and sandwiches (\$3.95-\$8.95). On Friday nights, enjoy peak hookup potential when the **Chicago Sport and Social Club** hosts Sunset Jams, featuring live bands (\$10 cover).

For a celebration: Cafe Laguardia

2111 W. Armitage Ave. 773-862-5996

Darn you, "Rachael Ray's Tasty Travels" and "Check, Please!" After appearing on those shows (not to mention a featured stop on last fall's 'Hood Hounds Reader Review tour), our favorite secret spot isn't so secret anymore. While a limited amount of outdoor seating (a few sidewalk tables on Armitage Avenue) almost kept Cafe Laguardia off our list of summertime faves, everything else about this warm, friendly place—from fab authentic Cuban fare to great mojitos (\$6; available in nine flavors)—makes it the perfect spot to spend a sultry summer night. In addition to drawing a large weekend crowd, live music keeps Laguardia hopping on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

Find a sugar daddy/mama: Melvin B's

1114 N. State St. 312-751-9897

Grab a refreshing Electric Coolade (melon, amaretto, cranberry juice, fresh OJ, vodka and rum; \$8)--so strong, management set a two- per-person limit--and take a seat on the large patio at this Gold Coast staple. We're guessing it won't be long before you meet a guy or gal who's in his or her early 20s, a recent college grad who hasn't found a job yet but somehow manages to live in a pricey high- rise nearby. Whether your newfound flame is the beneficiary of a trust fund or merely overindulgent parents with boundary issues, play your cards right, and you could spend the rest of summer riding your new catch's coattails.

Hunt for hipsters: Iggy's

1840 W. North Ave. 773-227-4449

This sceney Wicker Park spot boasts plenty of alfresco seating: There's an outdoor patio and garage door-style windows that let breezes through the first-floor dining room, but the real treat is the rooftop deck featuring curtained cabanas. If you have your heart set on a cabana (each seats up to eight), be sure to call ahead; reservations are required on the weekends and are recommended during the week, and minimum food and beverage charges may apply. Never fear: You'll gladly meet the minimum with an ample assortment of pastas (\$10-\$17) or Iggy's renowned egg dishes (\$9-\$12), along with any of 28 or so martinis (\$10-\$11). It's a small price to pay for a tropical paradise in the heart of the city.

For a weeknight date: Japonais' riverside lounge

600 W. Chicago Ave. 312-822-9600

Singletons may want to round up their pals for a little hottie hunting at Japonais' outdoor patio on the weekend, but if you're already attached, we recommend bringing your sig-o on a less-crowded weeknight for a romantic tete a tete. Sitting in a riverfront rocking chair and sipping a cocktail by candlelight while a wispy canopy blows in the wind, you almost forget you're in the Midwest. Nosh some ceviche (\$12), and sip from an assortment of refreshing cocktails, such as the Pimm's No. 1 (Pimm's cuprio 1 and cointreau, with cucumber, mint, fresh lemon juice, and ginger ale; \$11) for an enchanting summer evening.

