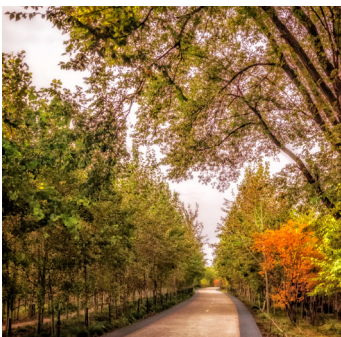


MOON

52 THINGS TO DO IN CHICAGO



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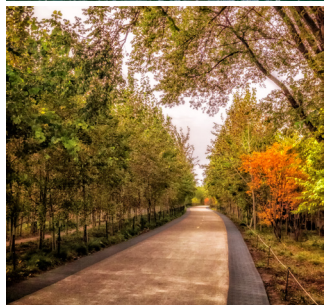
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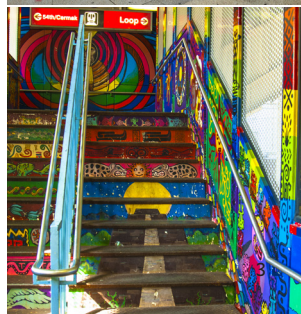
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Best of 52 Things to Do in Chicago

Best of Chicago Food

- Wander the Multicultural Mix of Rogers Park
- Taste Gourmet Southern Cooking on 53rd Street
- Scoop up Unique Sweets
- Savor Southside BBQ
- Taste Senegalese Comfort Food
- Sip at Singular Chicago Cafés
- Bite into Deep-Dish Pizza (and Other Classic Chicago Eats)
- Taste Chicago's Sweet Candy History





Best Outdoor Adventures

- Kayak the Chicago River
- Dream of Japan at Garden of the Phoenix
- Hike the 606 Elevated Trail
- Traverse Promontory Point
- Trek the Riverwalk
- Surf Montrose Beach
- Bike the Morton Arboretum
- Explore the Urban Wilderness of the Burnham Wildlife Corridor



1 Wander the Urban Canvas of the Wabash Arts Corridor

Neighborhoods • City Streets • Arts and Culture

Why Go: Find art in unexpected places in this neighborhood mural gallery.

Where: <http://wabashartscorridor.org>

Timing: Walk the mile of murals and allow about 2-3 hours.

The first time I stumbled on a mural in the **Wabash Arts Corridor**, I was rushing to a meeting. Glimpsing splashes of color on an alley wall, I stopped to gawk. Blue and slime-green splatters poured out of a soft blue volcano with a smiling face. I had to scurry off to my meeting but made a mental note to come back and investigate. Why was this weird painting in an alley? What did it mean?

I learned that the mural, fittingly called **Slime Mountain** (623 S. Wabash Ave.), was by Columbia College alumna Heidi Unkefer and part of an initiative started by the college in 2013 to bring the arts into the urban experience. A “living urban canvas,” the Wabash Arts Corridor is intended to grow and evolve. Combining different art forms, works currently cover over 40 buildings in the South Loop. Local and internationally acclaimed artists have joined students and alumni to create the arresting pieces. What’s so enjoyable about the Wabash Arts Corridor is that many of the murals are woven into the architectural landscape in ways that surprise—you might spot one as you’re walking into a parking garage, looking out a window, or gazing at the sky.

Sauntering down State Street one breezy summer day, I paused at a stoplight. Looming over the Gap store and staring back at me was a portrait of **Muddy Waters** (17 N. State St.). It felt like the father of Chicago blues was watching over the city, and I was moved to tears. Painted in vibrant blocks of color, the mural had the hallmarks of one of my favorite artists, Brazilian street artist Eduardo Kobra. It turns out Kobra is just one of many notable artists who have contributed to the Wabash Arts Corridor. Another is Never 2501, an Italian artist famous



1: Magnolia 2: Downtown Nashville 3: Music City 4: Nashville sign

for murals that interact with walls and viewers in interesting ways. His geometric, 8100-foot mural, **Almost Full** (59 E. Van Buren St.), covers an art deco building overlooking a parking garage. Black and white shapes cascade over a maroon and burgundy backdrop, commanding attention yet almost appearing to be an extension of the structure.

Dutch artist Collin van der Sluijs takes the direct approach with a sprawling mural called **From Bloom to Doom** (1006 S. Michigan Ave.), a riveting work that shows two endangered Illinois birds—the yellow-headed blackbird and the red-headed woodpecker—surrounded by branches of spiraling native flowers on the side of a building. Until recently, it was easy to view by walking between buildings—but a 74-story condo is going up that will completely block the mural. That's the reality of a living urban canvas; some of the art is erased by demolished structures or new facades, and new pieces are introduced in other spaces.

An interactive map of the Wabash Arts Corridor can be found on the website, and a casual walk reveals many of the murals. But for an in-depth look as well as to learn about the artists and history, take the 1.5-hour walking tour (623 S. Wabash Ave., summer-fall, \$18 adults, \$12 students and seniors, free for children 5 and under).

Nearby/Connect with:

- Browse Chicago's wonderful independent bookstores (Open Books)
- Explore singular Chicago cafés (Teapotbrew Bakery)
- Munch on classic Chicago eats



▲ caption

21 Celebrate the Black Ensemble Theater

Arts and Culture • Black Chicago • Families and Kids

Why Go: Enjoy engaging musical productions that incorporate Black history at a landmark Chicago theater.

Where: 4450 N. Clark St., 773/769-4451, <http://blackensembletheater.org>

Timing: Productions are year-round, and most Black Ensemble plays run for about two hours.

The first time I entered Black Ensemble Theater, I stepped down into the cramped basement of the Hull House Community Center expecting an amusing play by a small community theater. Instead, I sat electrified in my seat. As a life-long theatergoer, I had never seen a local production capture the essence of Black culture with such authenticity and humor. There was music, there was dance, and there was history expertly melded into an engaging production. The play, *The Other Cinderella*, laid the foundation for the national influence of **Black Ensemble Theater**.



▲ caption

It's impossible to discuss the significance of Black Ensemble Theater without exploring the background of its founder, Jackie Taylor. A legendary Chicago figure, Jackie has appeared in movies like *The Father Clements Story* (1987), *Losing Isaiah* (1995), and *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* (2004) but is most famous for her role in the classic Chicago film, *Cooley High* (1975). The film takes place in the Cabrini-Green housing projects, which she grew up in on the North Side; the film's redeeming portrayal of Black characters inspired her to found Black Ensemble Theater in 1976. Concerned about pervasive stereotypes in the media and racism within the theater and film industry, Jackie focuses on telling stories that illustrate the creativity and resilience of the Black community, as well as supplying consistent jobs within the industry. Black Ensemble began producing original plays combining music and history in that small basement theater in the diverse Uptown neighborhood, and soon the productions were



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▲ caption

selling out. So Jackie raised \$25 million to build and operate the Black Ensemble Theater and Cultural Center, which opened in 2011 a few blocks west of the original location. What began as a small community organization has grown into a 4.5 million enterprise.

Black Ensemble Theater shows frequently document the lives of Black musical legends. Noted productions have included *Don't Make Me Over* (In Tribute to Dionne Warick), *Muddy Waters: The Hoochie-Coochie Man, Don't Shed a Tear* (The Story of Billie Holiday), *A New Attitude: In Tribute to Patti Labelle*, *The Otis Redding Story*, and *The Jackie Wilson Story*, which was so successful that it spurred Jackie to develop a national touring component for the theater. *The Jackie Wilson Story* went on to sell out four weeks at the Apollo Theater in New York.

Years later, in the Black Ensemble's now-sleek, 170-seat theater, I viewed *The Other Cinderella* again. The musical is such a favorite that it's produced every two years. I sank into the roomy seat and prepared to watch familiar scenes—but that wasn't to be: The prince had a Twitter account that he used to locate Cinderella, the fairy godmother danced to Beyoncé, and Cinderella was a pro at taking selfies. The story was similar but the details updated for a fresh take. I wasn't surprised. The Black Ensemble Theater has remained vital for over 45 years by paying attention to change while also honoring history.

Nearby/Connect with:

- Explore Singular Chicago Cafés (page xx)



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