



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO



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**CHOOSE CHICAGO IS OFFICIAL**

*Chicago Named Second Best City in North America as Re-imagined Tourism Organization Launches, Opens New International Offices, and Continues Outstanding Hotel Occupancy and Tourism Numbers*

Choose Chicago, the new official tourism organization for Chicago, officially launched on July 1 with a streamlined organizational structure, new international offices, and a renewed focus on attracting out of market visitors to Chicago.

"I am committed to making sure Chicago has one strategy to attract visitors, and that we are working together to showcase this most American of American cities to everyone in the world and create jobs and economic opportunity for our residents," said Mayor Emanuel. "By focusing our tourism efforts we have saved millions of dollars that we can reinvest into advertising and other attraction efforts."

The reimagined tourism organization "Choose Chicago" combines the Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau and the tourism portion of Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture. The reduction in overlapping services and costs has saved nearly \$2 million a year, which will be reinvested into annual marketing advertising efforts to attract out of market visitation.

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One of the first orders of business for Choose Chicago was to improve the City's visitor centers. The Choose Chicago team worked quickly, developing interior designs to make the space more functional and visually appealing to support visitor inquiries including technology improvements such as digital touch screens, as well as teams of tourism ambassadors outfitted with iPads. The ambassadors offer assistance to tourists on Michigan Avenue outside of the Cultural Center and on North Michigan Avenue outside the other visitor center located at the Chicago WaterWorks.

Additionally, Choose Chicago is focused on overseas visitors, and has opened several new overseas offices, including recent openings in Brazil, Japan and Belgium (serving the BeNeLux region). The Belgian office was opened following the preparations for the NATO summit, during which the Choose Chicago team realized there was an opportunity to easily and affordably open an office there. These offices bring to eight the total number of worldwide tourism offices promoting Chicago.

This year, Choose Chicago also launched Chicago's first-ever summer regional advertising campaign promoting travel to Chicago during the summer. The \$1.2 million Television and digital campaign is designed to increase visitation from six key drive markets, including Cincinnati, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and St. Louis. The twelve-week advertising campaign launched May 29th and will run consecutively through August 19th and is supported by proactive media relations and a targeted distribution of Chicago's Official Visitors Guide.

“The creation of a single tourism organization for Chicago is the first step in driving increased visitation to Chicago. Our goal of 50 million visitors to Chicago by 2020 and increasing Chicago's share of international travel to the United States is an achievable goal and will drive significant economic benefits for the city,” said Don Welsh, President and CEO of Choose Chicago. “Our organization will aggressively work to drive increased visitation to Chicago including meetings and convention business as well as regional, national and international leisure visitation.”



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Additionally today, *Travel and Leisure* magazine named Chicago the second best city in the United States and Canada, up one spot from 2011. The recognition came as part of the magazine's annual "World's Best Awards" readers' poll. The second place finish is Chicago's highest-ranking ever in the 17 years of the survey.

"*Travel and Leisure's* readers know what we do -- that Chicago is the most American of American cities and a wonderful destination for business and pleasure," said Mayor Emanuel. "The visitors to our city create jobs and economic opportunity in our neighborhood, and we look forward to continuing to gain this sort of recognition from people around the world as Chicago grows and prospers."

Further good news from the *Travel and Leisure* survey: The Waldorf Astoria Chicago is the No. 1 Large City Hotel in the continental United States, one of six Chicago hotels are ranked in the top 50.

Welsh indicated that one of his first orders of business as CEO of Choose Chicago was to create a new leadership team for the organization. This team includes: Warren Wilkinson, Chief Marketing Officer; Cathy Domanico, Vice President of Tourism; and the newly appointed Melissa Hayes Cherry as Vice President for Cultural Tourism & Neighborhoods. This brand new position is designed specifically to promote Chicago as a cultural destination and get visitors into the neighborhoods.

The multiple strategies for promoting tourism in Chicago have worked: hotel rates in June topped out at over 90 percent, marking the first time in years that the City has had a month this optimistic. More than \$3.25 billion in new or renewed trade shows and conventions have been booked since last fall, when Mayor Emanuel spearheaded a compromise between labor unions and McCormick Place to improve the business climate for conventions and trade shows.

The Mayor has set forth a goal of 50 million visitors a year by 2020, with a particular focus on international visitors. International visitors spend an average of \$4,000 per trip to Chicago.

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