

29
Travel

Friday Times

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Writer Nelson Algren summed up Chicago best: 'Like loving a woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real.' There's something about this cloud-scraping city - its blend of high culture and earthy pleasures - that bewitches.

Morning art

Energize for the day ahead at Lou Mitchell's near Union Station. The old-school breakfast joint sprang up in Route 66's hey-day, and waitresses still deliver thick-cut French toast and plate-defying omelettes - along with free doughnut holes and Milk Duds - near the fabled road's starting point.

Use that sugar buzz to walk east a mile, under the clackety El train tracks, through downtown's money-spinning core, to the Art Institute of Chicago. The second-largest art museum in the country hangs masterpieces aplenty, especially Impressionist and Post-Impressionist pieces. Georges Seurat's pointillist *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* is

here; so is Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. The Modern Wing puts up Picassos and Mirós by the roomful. You'll be gawking for at least a few hours.

From the museum's third-floor sculpture terrace, a silvery pedestrian bridge arches over to Millennium Park. Where to start amid the mod designs? Pritzker Pavilion, Frank

Gehry's swooping silver band shell, around which the park centres? Crown Fountain, Jaume Plensa's splashy water-work, where video images of locals spout gargoyles-style? Or 'the Bean', Anish Kapoor's 110-ton, silver-drop sculpture? That's the one. Join the masses swarming it to see the skyline's reflection.

