

United States

# Road trip around Lake Michigan

Four states, 900 miles and plenty of adventures — from the skyscrapers of downtown Chicago to sleepy towns in Michigan and the wilds of Wisconsin. **Tom Chesshyre** hits the highways

On a boat on Chicago River, the Windy City is more than living up to its nickname. Kevin, the guide for our architectural tour, is clutching his umbrella as rain sweeps across the deck. Despite the great gusts, he maintains his commentary, telling us about the Corn Cobs (twin skyscrapers), the Willis Tower (once the world's tallest building at 442m) and Rainier Tower (a remarkable structure with a base resembling an inverted pyramid). Huddled beneath an awning, we watch as the boat putters past art deco delights and the shiny mirrored glass of Trump Tower — the president's name inscribed in giant letters on the façade — seeing America's third biggest metropolis from the river that determined its location. By the time we return to the bustle of cafés and hot dog stalls on Navy Pier on Lake Michigan, we've enjoyed an intriguing insight into Chicago's famous high-rises, while Kevin is soaked and his umbrella a crumpled wreck.

So begins my adventure, starting with a couple of days in Chicago before embarking on one of the greatest road trips America has to offer... although few outsiders have heard of, or considered, the route.

I'm about to head off on a circular tour of Lake Michigan, travelling through four states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin), covering more than 900 miles and passing through some of the country's most picturesque scenery. You can obviously go either way round, but I've chosen the anti-clockwise option, hiring a car from a depot right by Trump Tower.

With new Wow air flights from the UK, via Reykjavik in Iceland, starting this month from £358 return, and with Norwegian starting direct flights next spring, Chicago and its environs, America's very own lake district, are attracting Britons who might previously have made a beeline for the skyscrapers and Broadway shows of New York. And what better way to see the region than on the Lake Michigan Circle Tour, which takes about a fortnight. It

even has its own website to plan your journey (lakemichigancircletour.com).

After marvelling over the masterpieces in the Art Institute of Chicago, watching a Cubs baseball game and sampling some of the city's best deep-pan pizza (at Lou Malnati's on North State Street), I go to collect my Hyundai Elantra. It's shiny, royal-blue and rather natty. I slip the key in the ignition and pull out into the tunnel-like streets amid the skyscrapers with a sense of anticipation for the journey ahead.

Just a few minutes later I hit Interstate 94, heading east through the industrial outskirts of Chicago amid a steady flow of trucks, enjoying the liberating feeling of taking to the road in the US. The I94 is a big four-laner, easy to follow, and the Hyundai purrs along nicely.

After about an hour the highway crosses into Indiana, where I stop in the city of Gary. Not many people go to Gary, Indiana, on holiday. It has a dilapidated,

I slip the key in the ignition and pull out into the tunnel-like streets amid the skyscrapers

impoverished look, with half-collapsed buildings, boarded-up shops, Norman Bates-style motels and a handful of Baptist churches. It also happens to be home to the little-visited birthplace of the "king of pop", Michael Jackson. Along Jackson Street, naturally, I come to the small whitewashed clapboard house — beautifully maintained, unlike many neighbouring properties, and behind a metal fence with a stone memorial to the troubled singer.

For those interested in Jackson's inauspicious roots, it's worth the detour, but there's no time for dilly-dallying. Back on the highway, I cross into Michigan and follow a pretty section by the waterfront



Downtown Chicago

SUSANNE KREME/CORNERS IMAGES



Tom Chesshyre was a guest of Choose Chicago (choosechicago.com) and flew with American Airlines (aa.com), which has Chicago returns from £572. Hertz.co.uk has a fortnight's car hire from £510. In Chicago, Swissôtel (swissotel.com/chicago) has double rooms from about £186 (£147), or try the Guesthouse Hotel (www.theguesthousehotel.com), a cool boutique hotel; doubles from about £190. In Traverse City, Bayshore Resort (bayshore-resort.com) has B&B double rooms from \$250. On Mackinac Island, the Chippewa Hotel (chippewahotel.com) has doubles from \$110. In Curtis, Chamberlin's Ole Forest Inn (chamberlinsinn.com) has cosy double rooms from \$90. In Green Bay, the Hyatt Regency (greenbay.regency.hyatt.com) has large double rooms from \$99. In Milwaukee, the Kimpton Journeyman Hotel (journeymanhotel.com) is a hip boutique hotel with rooms from \$239.

before pausing at the lakeside town of St Joseph, with its large sandy beach, carousel and shops selling collectibles.

The joy of driving the eastern shore of Lake Michigan — the world's fifth largest lake and the biggest entirely within America's borders — is calling in at places such as St Joseph, a long-time favourite with Chicagoans seeking R&R. The Victorian-era streets are quiet on my visit, though, and it's a pleasure to sit on a bench, soaking up sunshine in sleepy, small-town USA.

On the outskirts of St Joseph I pass the worldwide HQ of Whirlpool, the home appliances company, and continue along the coast, pulling up at a collectibles fair in Grand Haven. Flea markets seem to be the rage in these parts, and this one is especially well-stocked. All sorts of Americana is on offer: old cowboy boots, 1960s Coke and Pepsi adverts, vintage Budweiser mirrors, plates featuring portraits of former presidents, great piles of baseball cards.

Unable to resist buying an amusing original Schlitz beer advert from the 1940s promoting revolutionary new "pop top" cans — "The whole country's poppin' this new top!" — I drive on. But not for long. About half an hour north I stop for yet another blast of America as it once was.

Dog n Suds is a "carhop" chain serving

hot dogs and root beer to drivers who place orders via a speaker system after pulling into parking bays. It dates from the 1950s and there used to be 600 in the country; now there are about a dozen. Its motto is: "Where everything's so dog-gone good." I place my order for a "World Famous" Coney Dog and a root beer. Five minutes later a waitress dressed in red and yellow arrives and attaches a tray to the car window. "We used to do this on roller-skates," she says. The hot dog and the root beer are delicious (not bad for five bucks).

I'm staying overnight in Traverse City, an hour farther up the coast. Before getting there, however, the landscape changes. Thick forest emerges. A dead deer lies in the road. A roadside sign asks: "Where are you going? Heaven or hell?" Pick-up trucks are everywhere and the local radio station starts playing ZZ Top hits, as well as patriotic folk songs with the refrains such as: "We're in America now."

We certainly are — and in a very certain type of America. Michigan and Wisconsin, which is soon to come, switched from Democrat to Republican at the most recent presidential election. It all feels a far cry from Illinois, where almost a million more people voted for Hillary Clinton than for Donald Trump.

Yet Traverse City turns out to be an arty oasis amid all the pick-up trucks with gun boxes. Chilled-out cafés, pleasant restaurants and bars selling craft beers line Main Street. A delightful old-fashioned movie theatre has been restored by enthusiasts, including the left-wing documentary maker Michael Moore (he's from Michigan, although definitely not a Trump voter). It's a lovely old town and a perfect base for exploring the enormous and quite spectacular nearby Sleeping Bear Dunes — once voted the most beautiful place in the country by viewers of *Good Morning America* — as well as the tranquil fishing village of Leland, with its restored 19th-century fish shanties.

And then it's onwards to Mackinac Island. Mackinac is a must-visit on any driving tour of Lake Michigan, found on a



strait that connects to Lake Huron. No cars are allowed, so you must park and catch a ferry, landing at a dock by a row of Victorian buildings dominated by the massive hillside Grand Hotel. The island is famous for its history (it was captured by the British in 1812), its many bars, its horse-drawn carriages, its biennial Republican Party leadership conference (held at the Grand, which has an extraordinary 200m porch) and its fudge. You can't avoid the latter, which is sold in shops by the dock.

After an enjoyable night out accompanied by the manager of my hotel (the Chippewa) and his friend Megan, I walk around the island in the morning — a very pleasant, peaceful and car-less eight miles. Then I hit the road to "UP". This stands for Upper Peninsula, which is still in Michigan. People from UP are known as "Yoopers" and they have a reputation for doing things their own way. They're also known to be suspicious of outsiders, and as I roll into the little town of Curtis, with its couple of grocery stores and single bar, the Shipwreck Inn, I sense eyes upon me. I'm just about the only person not driving a pick-up and I stick out like a sore thumb.

This is where I'm staying the night, at a creaky little hotel on the edge of town (population 400). After dropping off my bag I go to eat at the Shipwreck Inn. Pot-bellied guys with baseball caps and straw cowboy hats line the bar along with a handful of women drinking Bud Lights. Their voices drop when I pass (although I catch a snatch of conversation that includes "those sons of bitches"). It is "Taco Tuesday". A waitress in a tight pink T-shirt delivers a tasty plateful, along with a beer,

smiling faintly as she does. I seem to have been — just about — accepted.

Later I talk to a local man who asks not to be named and who describes his politics as liberal. "When I came here I couldn't get anyone to service my Toyota because it's not American," he says. "I put up an Obama election sign two elections ago and now I'm still nicknamed 'Obama.'" He adds that if he is talking politics to a like-minded person in the post office and anyone else walks in, they have to change the subject to fishing. This really is Trump-land.



Lighthouse on the north pier at St Joseph

Pot-bellied guys with baseball caps and straw hats line the bar on "Taco Tuesday"

My drive takes me round the top of the lake into Wisconsin. I pause for lunch at a gas station at Cedar River where bumper stickers with messages are sold: "Prayer is the best way to meet the Lord. Trespassing is faster." And: "Baiting deer is illegal. This corn pile is intended for squirrels. Any deer found eating this will be shot."

Afterwards, I stop for a night in Green Bay, home of the American football team the Green Bay Packers. The city is Packers-mad. I do what everyone does and go to see their enormous, amazing home stadium, before checking out the locomotives at the excellent National Railroad Museum.

Then I reach Milwaukee. What an interesting place. This working-class city, which became home to many German immigrants in the 19th century, has long been a centre for brewing — MillerCoors is based here and there are loads of microbreweries. *Happy Days* was filmed in Milwaukee; there's a downtown bronze of the Fonz. There's also a brilliant Harley-Davidson Museum — the motorbike is manufactured here — the Milwaukee Art Museum and an upbeat atmosphere; many millennials who cannot afford to live in Chicago are moving in.

All that's left from here is the drive to Chicago, via my first traffic jam on a fly-over. It feels as though I'm coming home as I drop off my car by Chicago River and go for a final pizza at Lou Malnati's, just round the corner from the Magnificent Mile of upmarket shops. For a taste of so many different aspects of America — a slice of modern-day USA, if you like — hit the highways round Lake Michigan. It's an adventure... and it's also a wonderful drive.

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### Itinerary

Date	Port
07-Jan	London Tilbury
08-Jan	Amsterdam (Netherlands)
11-Jan	Lisbon (Portugal)
13-Jan	Funchal (Madeira)
16-Jan	Mindelo (Cape Verde)
21-Jan	Fazendinha Pilot Station†
22-Jan	Santarém (Brazil)
23-Jan	Boca Da Valeria (Brazil)
24-Jan	Manaus (Brazil)
25-Jan	Manaus (Brazil)
26-Jan	Parintins (Brazil) ↓
27-Jan	Alter do Chão (Brazil) ↓
28-Jan	Cruising Amazon River
29-Jan	Icoaraci for Belem (Brazil) ↓
31-Jan	Îles du Salut (French Guyana) ↓
02-Feb	Scarborough (Tobago)
03-Feb	St Georges (Grenada)
04-Feb	Bridgetown (Barbados)
05-Feb	Castries (St Lucia)
06-Feb	St Johns (Antigua)
12-Feb	Horta (Azores)
13-Feb	Ponta Delgada (Azores)
18-Feb	London Tilbury

### Ship Overview

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3	Superior Inner	£7189	FREE	£3595	-	-
OG	Voyager <sup>^</sup> Ocean View	£7729	FREE	£3865	-	-
9	Superior Ocean View	£9579	FREE	£4789	£250	Yes
11	Superior Plus Ocean View	£10379	FREE	£5189	£500	Yes
12	Premium Ocean View	£11179	FREE	£5589	£750	Yes