



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CHICAGO RECOGNIZED WITH CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER'S 2021 READERS' CHOICE AWARD "#1 BEST BIG CITY IN THE U.S." FOR FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR!**

*This unprecedented recognition as Best Big City in the U.S. solidifies Chicago's reputation as a first-class travel destination among the magazine's discerning readership*

**CHICAGO** – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, Choose Chicago and World Business Chicago today announced *Condé Nast Traveler* recognized Chicago as the #1 Best Big City in the U.S. for the fifth year in a row in the results of its annual [Readers' Choice Awards](#). Since 2017, Chicago has ranked number one in this category for its incredible restaurants, interesting and diverse attractions, and welcoming residents.

"Last year, I said being chosen by Condé Nast four times in a row was truly a testament to rich diversity of our city and an accomplishment unlike any other. Now, we've one-upped ourselves," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "Since 2017, Chicago has rightfully claimed its spot as the Number One Best Big City in the U.S. and I want to thank each of our residents, our world-class restaurants and incredible businesses who continue to represent our city so well. I also want to thank the team at Condé Nast Traveler and its readers for honoring Chicago with this award for five straight years, as well as the countless visitors who come to our city year after year to enjoy the endless attractions we have to offer."

"Chicago is not only the best big city in the U.S. but a reflection of what makes Illinois great – with world-class restaurants, arts and theater, museums and convention centers celebrated here at home and around the world," said Gov. JB Pritzker. "The city's winning streak is no fluke – Chicago has been and will continue to be a global gateway for tourism in Illinois. As we rebuild and recover post-pandemic, my administration is committed to supporting tourism workers and tourism businesses with the resources needed to keep visitors coming back year after year."

More than 800,000 *Condé Nast Traveler* readers submitted responses rating their travel experiences across the globe to provide a full snapshot about the places they can't wait to return to next. The Readers' Choice Awards are the longest-running and most prestigious recognition of excellence in the travel industry. The full list of winners can be found [here](#).



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“Before, during and soon, after, the pandemic, Chicago has earned the moniker of #1 Best Big City in the U.S. for five consecutive years,” said Glenn Eden, chair of Choose Chicago’s Board of Directors. “The momentum and tourism growth that was built pre-COVID is roaring back, largely thanks to the resilience of the City of Big Shoulders and its residents who continue to look out for and support one another throughout a challenging time. This achievement is a testament to all the businesses that contribute to Chicago’s top-tier tourism and hospitality offerings, and the individuals that work silently to provide entertainment and attractions that captivate seasoned travelers, and residents. Five consecutive years is an honor and a bar that is set high, and I couldn’t be more impressed with what our city has accomplished.”

It is a true testament to the determination and enthusiasm of Chicago’s tourism and hospitality industries exhibited in the face of unprecedented challenges over the last year and a half to have the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* choose Chicago as the best big city in the U.S. for a fifth straight year. Businesses, organizations, and residents throughout the city rallied to ensure that the city was ready and able to welcome visitors back to Chicago safely, whether that meant updating infrastructure, processes, or innovating creative offerings. Chicago’s entire tourism and hospitality industry got involved, even the Shedd Aquarium’s penguins joined in taking field trips to different galleries in the aquarium and museums across the city. Based on the feedback from *Condé Nast Traveler* readers, these extraordinary efforts were not only well received but deeply appreciated by visitors.

“Today, Chicagoans are recognizing this achievement as well as the reopening of theatres and live performances with a celebration at Broadway In Chicago’s CIBC Theatre,” said James Meyer, Interim CEO of Choose Chicago. “We are thrilled to see civic, community, and hospitality leaders as well as the many partners of Choose Chicago that were integral to earning this achievement, come together for a for an exciting program featuring special guests, like the cast of *RENT*. This honor is shared by all of Chicago, every neighborhood, every attraction, and even our penguin friends at the Shedd Aquarium are joining in the celebration.”

“This award is a historic distinction for Chicago, and Shedd Aquarium is proud to play a central role in what makes this city one-of-a-kind,” said Dr. Bridget Coughlin, president and CEO of Shedd Aquarium. “As a cultural organization that joyfully welcomes nearly 2 million guests a year, we understand that tourism is an important pathway toward recovery for Chicago and its communities. We are humbled that the videos of the Shedd penguin animal enrichment field trips did more than spread joy to the globe at the height of the pandemic - they centered Chicago at a critical time and sparked continued healing for all.”



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“May today’s announcement remind us that we live and work in one of the best cities in the world,” said Michael Fassnacht, President & CEO, World Business Chicago, Chief Marketing Officer, City of Chicago. “While the past 18 months have been very challenging, let us not forget that throughout our city’s history we’ve overcome crises after crises, building back better and stronger, each and every time. Thank you to Condé Nast Traveler readers for affirming that Chicago is an incredible city to live, work and visit; our economic recovery is strong and getting stronger, we are returning to in-person events, live theatre, conventions and galas; and, our city’s best days are ahead.”

The pandemic also created an opportunity for Chicago to assess ways to further improve the visitor experience for both tourists and businesses. In September, Choose Chicago announced the launch of a new AI-powered chatbot, [The Bean](#), designed to answer visitor questions including where to eat, upcoming events, and generally serve as an online ambassador to the city of Chicago. With the help of this new tool, all of Chicago’s 77 neighborhoods can easily be explored by the city’s first-time and repeat visitors. Earlier, this year, [Healthy Meetings Chicago](#) was also launched offering business travelers the opportunity to see how Chicago’s hospitality and tourism community is protecting their health by working together to create a safe environment to once again meet and network together.

As Chicago moves into the fall and winter, Choose Chicago’s newest campaign, “Capture the Excitement” has kicked off. The multifaceted integrated campaign highlights the cultural offerings of the City as well as the holiday experience.

The 2021 Readers' Choice Awards are published on *Condé Nast Traveler's* website at [cntraveler.com/rca](http://cntraveler.com/rca) and celebrated in the November issue.

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### **Choose Chicago**

Choose Chicago is the official sales and marketing organization responsible for promoting Chicago as a global visitor and meetings destination, leveraging the city’s unmatched assets to ensure the economic vitality of the city and its member business community. Follow @ChooseChicago on Twitter and on Instagram @choosechicago. Like us on Facebook. For more information, visit [www.choosechicago.com](http://www.choosechicago.com). #CaptureChicagoExcitement | #ChicagoHome | #Only1Chicago

### **About World Business Chicago (WBC)**



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World Business Chicago is a public-private, non-profit partnership that drives inclusive economic growth and job creation, supports business, and promotes Chicago as a leading global city. Supported by a council of 250+ local leaders, WBC's Innovation & Venture portfolio drives inclusive growth and opportunity for the city's tech economy and innovation ecosystem. Flagship programs include the Chicago Venture Engine, Startup Chicago, Venture Engine, and ThinkChicago.