



VISIT GUIDE 2026

the Skydeck Chicago

Chicago · From 37.99€

<https://theskydeck.visit-tickets.com/en/> · Skip-the-line tickets & rates



History & experience

ORIGIN & HISTORY

The Vertical Legend of Chicago

GOOGLE **4.6** ★★★★★ 37 976 reviews

TIQETS **4.6** ★★★★★ 2 327 reviews

Built between **1970 and 1973**, the Willis Tower, formerly known as the Sears Tower, marked a milestone in the history of global architecture. Designed by architect Bruce Graham and the engineering firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), this innovative structure challenged the technical limits of its time with its bundled tube design. Its official inauguration on May 3, 1973, immediately made it the world's tallest building, a title it held for a quarter of a century before being surpassed by the Petronas Towers in Malaysia.

The building is much more than a simple tower; it is a historical monument that served as the headquarters of the famous retail chain Sears, Roebuck and Company until 1994. This association gave the building a strong identity in the minds of Americans. In 2009, upon its acquisition by the British broker Willis Group Holdings, it took its current name, although Chicago residents often continue to affectionately call it "Sears". The initial construction cost was \$150 million, a colossal sum for the time, reflecting the ambition to dominate the urban skyline.

Today owned by the Blackstone Group fund since 2015, the tower notably houses the United Airlines headquarters across approximately 20 floors. It remains the third-tallest building in the Americas and the Western Hemisphere, behind One World Trade Center and the Burj Khalifa. Its durability is evidenced by its solid continental status, despite new dizzying constructions elsewhere in the world. It is a living testament to the architectural audacity of 1970s America.

The Skydeck, located on the 103rd floor, was renovated in 2009 to offer a modern experience while respecting the site's heritage. Each year, approximately **1.7 million visitors** pass through its doors, confirming its status as an essential attraction. The tower is visible from Indiana and Michigan on clear days, symbolizing its omnipresent presence in the Lake Michigan landscape. It embodies the pioneering spirit of Chicago, where innovation meets grandeur.

THE EXPERIENCE

The moment you step through the ground-floor doors, the atmosphere changes dramatically. The ascent to the top is not merely a vertical movement but a progressive surge in adrenaline. Among the world's fastest elevators, they propel you at dizzying speeds, skipping intermediate floors in mere seconds. Natural light filters through the vast floor-to-ceiling windows, creating a striking contrast between the human warmth inside and the majestic coldness of the city below.

On the 103rd floor, the air seems lighter, almost electric. The relative silence of the interactive museum sets the stage for the visual shock that awaits you. You are suspended **412 meters** above the ground, where the city becomes a miniature model. It is here that the boundary between earth and sky dissolves, offering a unique sensation of weightlessness. The promise of the visit is kept: you will never see Chicago the same way again, for you have touched the clouds.



PREPARE YOUR VISIT

Practical information

ADDRESS

Loop neighborhood • Metro: Washington (Red/Orange/Purple Lines) or Monroe (Blue/Brown Lines), 5 min walk.

OPENING HOURS

Hours vary by season and school holidays. Please check the official website before visiting.

FARES

Free child admission based on age (check variants). {promo}.

VISIT DURATION

Allow 1h30 to 2h to fully enjoy the interactive museum, the elevators, and especially the time needed to take photos on the Ledge without being rushed by the cr

PHOTOS

Photos are allowed everywhere, including on the Ledge. Avoid using flash inside the museum. The best angle is often at the back of the line to capture the depth

AUDIENCE

Ideal for thrill-seekers and photographers. Children must be accompanied; mild acrophobia is manageable as the platform is secure but very exposed to wind.

HOW TO GET THERE

Access & transport

**Metro**

: Union Station — 5 min à pied

Union Station Jackson Boulevard Entrance (7 min) • Millennium Station (9 min)

**Bus**

: Adams & Canal (Union Station) — 4 min à pied

Union Station Jackson Boulevard Entrance (9 min) • Millennium Station (12 min)

**Car**

Union Station Jackson Boulevard Entrance (4 min) • Millennium Station (7 min)

**Bike**

Union Station Jackson Boulevard Entrance (3 min) • Millennium Station (7 min)

LOCALISATION

Où se trouve the Skydeck Chicago ?



📍 233, South Wacker Drive — 60606 Chicago

🌐 41°52.733' N, 87°38.155' O



ORGANIZATION

Understanding the Tour Structure

Level 0 (Ground Floor)

This is where the adventure begins, with reception and ticket sales. The Catalog shopping center occupies several adjacent levels, offering shops and restaurants. Visitors can check practical information and pick up an audioguide if needed. The atmosphere is lively, mixing tourists and local residents.

Level 103 (Skydeck)

The heart of the experience, accessible via ultra-fast elevators. This level features an interactive museum detailing the history of the tower and Chicago. Touchscreens and immersive exhibits explain the building's construction and architectural impact. It also serves as the starting point for accessing the Ledge.

Level 105 (The Ledge)

The suspended outdoor glass platform, located 1,353 feet above the ground. Accessible only via the Skydeck, this space offers an unobstructed 360-degree panoramic view. The transparent floor allows you to see directly down to the street below, creating the illusion of walking on air. It is Chicago's most iconic photo spot.

ACCESSIBILITY

**Disabled Access**

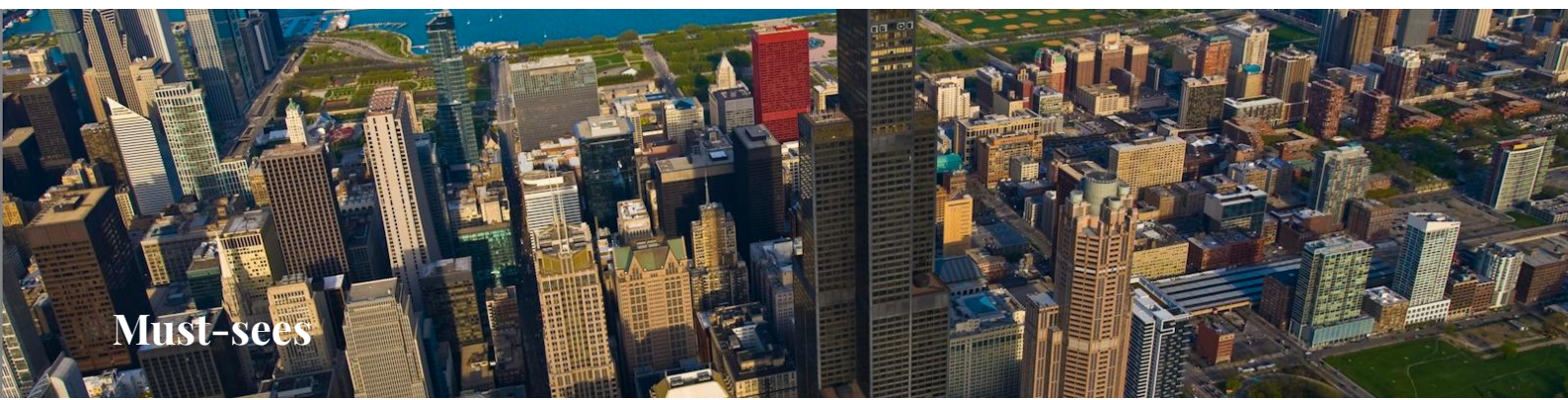
Full access to floors 103 and 105 via adapted elevators; the Ledge is accessible but demanding.

**Families**

Ideal for teens and adults; young children must be closely supervised on the platform.

**Audio guide**

French, English, Spanish, German



Must-sees

SELECTION

Skydeck Must-Sees

01

Outdoor Platform Level 105

The Ledge

A glass platform suspended at an altitude of 412 meters, offering a unique perspective of the city. The transparent floor creates a dizzying illusion of walking on nothingness. It is the most photogenic and impressive element of the entire attraction. The absence of visual barriers enhances the sensation of total freedom.

💡 The idea for The Ledge was born from the **impressions of faces** left by visitors pressed against the windows, inspiring the designers to create an open space.

02

Level 103

Willis Tower Interactive Museum

An educational tour detailing the building's construction history and innovative architecture. Touchscreens allow visitors to discover the technical challenges overcome by the engineers. It explains how the tower dominated the global skyline for 25 years. It is an informative and enriching break before heading up to the observation deck.

💡 The museum highlights the role of **Bruce Graham**, whose distinctive design defined Chicago's skyline.

03

North Balcony

View of Lake Michigan

On clear days, visibility extends to Indiana and Michigan on the other side of the lake. The water horizon offers a magnificent contrast with the urban density to the south. It is the ideal spot to observe spectacular sunsets. The natural morning light provides the best photographic contrasts there.

💡 The tower's silhouette is visible from the **Indiana Dunes National Park**, testifying to its continental stature.

04

Central Hall

Ultra-Fast Elevators

Cabins capable of rising at 10 meters per second, minimizing travel time. The ascent is smooth yet intense, psychologically preparing the visitor for the height. The silent mechanism masks the actual speed, creating a pleasant surprise upon arrival. A technological experience in itself.

💡 These elevators are among the most efficient in the world, specifically designed to handle the **massive flow** of 1.7 million annual visitors.

05

Historical Lounge

Sears Historical Exhibition

A tribute to the former owner, Sears, Roebuck and Company, which occupied the building from 1973 to 1994. Artifacts and photos tell the story of the evolution of American commerce through the tower. It reveals the economic impact of this presence on the Loop neighborhood. A fascinating glimpse into Chicago's commercial history.

💡 The name 'Sears Tower' remains commonly used by locals, a testament to their attachment to this **historical identity**.

06

South Balcony

South Panoramic View

This orientation offers an unobstructed view of the dense downtown core and neighboring skyscrapers such as the Franklin Center. The architectural density is particularly striking from this side. The Chicago River can be clearly seen winding between the buildings. It is the preferred angle for understanding the urban geography of Downtown.

💡 From here, one can identify the city's main historical landmarks, offering a **living map** of Chicago.

07

West Balcony

View of Union Station

About a 15-minute walk away, Union Station is visible from certain angles of the balcony. This connects the top of the tower to the city's major railway artery. The constant activity of Metra and Amtrak trains can be observed. A concrete reminder of Chicago's logistical vitality.

💡 Proximity to Union Station facilitates access for visitors coming from the suburbs or other cities via **Amtrak**.

08

Comparative Information

Comparison with 360 CHICAGO

Although not physically present, the Skydeck is often compared to 360 CHICAGO in the John Hancock Center. The Skydeck offers the unique experience of the outdoor Ledge, which its competitor lacks. It is historically more iconic due to its status as the tallest building. The choice depends on a preference for the outdoors or a climate-controlled interior.

💡 Purists claim that only the **Skydeck** offers the true height experience thanks to its open platform.

TIPS

Our Tips for a Successful Visit

TIMING

Aim for just after opening (9 AM) or late in the day (after 5 PM) to avoid crowds and enjoy soft light. At noon, the light is too harsh for photography and lines are long.

TICKET

Be sure to book a 'Timed Entry' ticket online to guarantee your time slot, especially during peak season (June-September). Avoid 'Walk-in' tickets, which may result in long waits.

ROUTE

Start with the interactive museum on the 103rd floor to immerse yourself in the history before heading up to The Ledge. This provides context for the experience and reduces the stress associated with the queue for the observation deck.

PHOTO

Use a lightweight tripod or brace your phone against the railing for sharp images. Position yourself at the back of the line on the Ledge to capture the depth of the lake without obstructions.

BREAK

Take a break at the Catalog Restaurant & Bar on the ground floor before heading up, as there is no full dining service on the upper floors. Bring a light bag for your personal items.

CHILDREN

Keep a close eye on young children on the Ledge, as the walkway is narrow and the ground is sloped. Choose off-peak hours to allow them to enjoy the attraction safely.

AUDIOGUIDE

The audioguide is available in French, English, Spanish, and German. It is recommended to delve deeper into the museum's historical details, but optional if you already have a good grasp of the tower's history.

COMFORT

Avoid wearing high heels, as slightly sloped surfaces and narrow pathways make walking difficult. Check the weather forecast, as The Ledge may be closed if wind speeds exceed 40 km/h.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FAQ

Do you really need to book in advance?

Yes, booking is highly recommended during peak season (June-September) and on weekends. Time slots ('timed entry') go quickly, especially for the Ledge. Without a pre-purchased ticket, expect an additional wait of 30 to

What happens if the Ledge is closed?

The Ledge may be closed in case of strong winds (> 40 km/h) or bad weather, which is not always clearly indicated. If so, you retain access to floors 103 and 105. Check local weather conditions before leaving.

Is there a current promotion?

Bundle offers are available through tourist passes like CityPASS. These packages allow you to save up to 50% on multiple attractions. Regularly check the fares page for current seasonal promotions.

What is the difference between Standard and Expedited?

The Expedited Entry option allows you to skip the main line for the elevators and the Ledge. This is crucial if you have little time or want to avoid maximum crowds during peak hours. This expedited service is ideal for

How long does the visit last?

Budget approximately 1h30 for a complete visit including the museum and the Ledge. If you are a photographer, allow more time as access to the Ledge is limited to a few seconds per person during periods of high attendanc

DID YOU KNOW?

Anecdotes & curiosities

Historic world record

The Willis Tower was the tallest building in the world for **25 years**, from 1973 to 1998. It also held the title of the tallest inhabited structure for a long period. This absolute dominance shaped Chicago's international image as the capital of architectural innovation.

Origin of the Ledge

The creation of the Ledge stems from a simple observation: visitors' face prints stuck to the glass. These human imprints inspired the designers to break down the physical barrier between the inside and the outside. It is a direct response to tourists' desire to touch the sky.

Cross-border visibility

On perfectly clear days, the tower is visible from Indiana and Michigan, on the other shore of Lake Michigan. This exceptional visibility testifies to the architectural power of the building. It serves as a beacon in the North American landscape.

Distinctive architecture

Designed by Bruce Graham, the building features an interlocking tube shape that clearly distinguishes it from other skyscrapers. This innovative design, developed with SOM, enabled it to withstand the strong winds of the lake. Its black and gray silhouette has become a symbol of the city's identity.

AROUND THE MUSEUM

Located in the heart of the Loop neighborhood, the Willis Tower benefits from a rich and dynamic urban environment. Just downstairs, the **Catalog Restaurant & Bar** offers a refined gastronomic break before or after the ascent, allowing you to enjoy the view from street level. For a relaxing stroll, the **Chicago Riverwalk** is just a few minutes away, ideal for appreciating the tower's unique silhouette from the water's edge. If you wish to extend your cultural exploration, the **Field Museum of Natural History** is in the immediate vicinity, offering a fascinating contrast between natural history and modern architecture. Finally, for those who prefer nature, Lincoln Park provides a vast and restful green space, perfect for digesting the thrills experienced on the upper floors.



Leaving the Skydeck means carrying with you a new perspective on the metropolis. This experience goes beyond simple tourism; it is a direct confrontation with height and depth. Whether for the perfect photo or the thrill of the void, every moment spent on the Ledge lingers in your memory. Do not miss the opportunity to defy gravity and contemplate the vastness of Lake Michigan from above. It is a moment of pure urban freedom that you will never forget.