



Wicker Park, Bucktown & Logan Square

Just a stone's throw from Chicago's city center are three neighborhoods well worth a shopping visit.

by Cindy-Lou Dale

Wicker Park seamlessly melds into Bucktown, its neighbor to the north acquiring its name at the turn of the last century when immigrant families kept goats in their front yards. Today, Wicker Park is polished and chic while Bucktown is arty and laid-back. Similarly, the leafy neighborhood of Logan Square, an uber-ethnic cultural mix is on the verge of being gentrified.

Between the three neighborhoods, you'll find top fashion lines and indie boutiques, gourmet restaurants, artisan grab-and-go spots, live music, art galleries—all delivered in an innovative vibe. Pick a direction and you're bound to find an indie music store, a new cocktail, or a life-changing taco—probably all in one shop!

WALK AROUND TOWN

Make the most of your visit and book a free walking tour with Chicago Greeters. It's a popular Chicago-wide service operated by local volunteers who'll take you on a two to four-hour excursion uniquely customized to your particular interests. My Chicago Greeter, Laurel, gave me the insider view of Logan Square, Wicker Park and Bucktown, and introduced me to a host of interesting shops.

We picked at a few sample items at Goddess and Grocer an upscale gourmet shop and full-service deli in Wicker Park, then tried on a few hats at Goorin Brothers, a men's hat shop and did a bit of more picking at Lil' Guys who sells all things homemade and gourmet. We looked in at Piece Brewery for a pint of something nice and immediately got the munchies when we spotted their thin crust New-Haven styled pizza. Another craft beer followed it at Revolution Brewing. For vintage-inspired shopping hit Havlan & West. I found arty shoes at Bucketfeet, and at Psychobaby there's a bit of rock-n-roll attitude in children's wear. We rounded the day off with an elegant cocktail at the dimly lit Violet Hour, with its high-backed chairs, marble bar and crystal chandeliers.

ART, BOOZE AND MORE

At Logan Square, we took in a show at the art-deco Logan Theater, and then visited the Comfort Station, a tiny multi-disciplinary art spot in the heart of Logan

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Square's green space. At Your Happy Place Liquors, David explained his concept of art-meets-booze-meets-cigars-meets-neighborhood-hangout. His shop features rotating local artists and a selection of liqueurs, wine, and beer that you'll struggle to find anywhere in Chicago; for a kick in the pants, try his Icelandic schnapps, Brennivin!

Wolfbait & B-girls is not only where Chicago shops, but where Chicago sells local talent. It's a one-stop shop for unique and practical clothing, playful accessories, and one-of-a-kind handcrafted treasures. Then there's Uncharted Books, a laid-back used bookshop bursting with must reads. Take your time to dig, then have a seat at the vintage table. Shop owner Tanner McSwain, and the shop dog, Ramona, host occasional author events.

VINTAGE HIPSTERISM

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Should you be in the mood for southeast Asian fusion, try Fat Rice. Alternatively, there's Trike, sushi and Thai restaurant, or Park & Field, a former car repair workshop turned trendy eatery. Otherwise, there's tapas at Azucar, which is directly beside a comic book store. Your dessert must be a wedge of key lime pie at Bang Bang Pie Shop, followed by a "Tusk at Dusk" soda at the Same Day Café, a trendy a soda bar and hipster eatery with a 1950s farm to fork menu. Finally, have yourself a long drink and take the rest of the night to enjoy Rosa's Blues Bar.

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LUNCH AT LOGAN SQUARE

Lula's Café is a pioneer in the farm to fork movement. Their young, mostly self-taught

chefs have taken to cooking outside the boundaries. Sometimes it's risky, yet always grounded. There's no pretense about this Bohemian, slightly disheveled, bistro which overlooks Logan Square's park. Some twenty years ago, they opened a small storefront with a four-burner home stove and a dented collection of thrift shop pots and pans. Now they stretch across three storefronts and have upgraded their pots.

As a card-carrying vegetarian for +22 years, I critically examine the menu, seeking out options I could eat. Then I smelled it—the deep, warm and comforting aromas of garlic and chili. A sullen waiter wafts past, delivering a plate with what looks like a crispy pancake with an egg on top to the table in the shop-front window.

"I'll have one of those," I said as the waiter made his retreat. "What does it contain?" He brightens up and clears his throat, pleased to deliver good news. "That, madam, is a Potato Crepe on top of beef short-rib that's been massaged with chilies and garlic then slow cooked for 24 hours using the sous-vide technique. It's prepared with sautéed cauliflower florets, fennel confit and Manchego cheese. Our chef then places a wafer-thin potato crepe on top and a sunny egg on top of that."

I felt foolish for asking but had to inquire after a vegetarian option of the same dish. Of course, there was none—the beef was the star of the show. I looked at my fellow diner's plate, sought solace from the Norwegian Lutheran church beyond, then threw caution to the wind. "Oh, what the heck, bring it on!"

I ease the oozing, dark, luscious meat onto my fork. On my tongue, its succulence melts away. It tastes exactly as it smells—spicy, salty, sweet, comforting. This is a religious experience—one that converts the reformed.

Of course, I'd literally dropped a cluster bomb in my stomach and paid for my sins later—but it was worth every delicious morsel.

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