



An exasperated buyer signals his purchase on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade.

photos by JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer



Short-order cooks at the Billy Goat Tavern take a break after handling the noontime crunch.

A whirlwind tour

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city, reduced to the size of a glance in each direction, unfolds like an architectural blanket.

This is almost spoiled though by the cacophony of sound cascading down upon our ears. Taped sightseeing narration blasts from the speakers in front of each window, blaring in the middle of the observatory. It all blends together and the only thing I'm able to pick out clearly is an odd bit of trivia that seems to catch my ear each time one tape repeats:

"THE WRIGLEY family (their namesake building can be seen from the north window) originally started in the soap business. They switched from manufacturing to chewing gum when they discovered it's popularity after giving it away with boxes of soap."

The lone human being at the top of the Sears Tower, excluding visitors, is Brad Stephenson, a traffic reporter for radio station WBBM-AM. Stephenson, 31, is employed by AAA. He's been up here in a computer-filled room not much larger than a closet every weekday morning for 18 months. He's from downstate Illinois.

I ask him what it's like working 1,353 feet above the city.

"It's not that big of a deal when you do it every day," he said. "Besides, it's easy to spot fires from here and it makes sense for a traffic reporter."

Robyn Michaels offers a different perspective on the giant building. We find her sitting on the sidewalk at the base tower, using a clicker to count of the people as they pass by. Michaels has been hired by the city's economic development department to conduct a study on pedestrian traffic patterns. The study may be used to adjust bus and train schedules to benefit commuters.

Michaels, a grad student and dog trimmer, will work 10 hours a day and be paid \$7 per hour for clicking.

In her first hour on the job that day, she's clicked 875 times. I ask her how people react to being "clicked."

"One guy turned around and told me 'It's nice to be counted for something in my life,'" she said.

FROM THE Sears Tower we head to the Chicago Board of Trade on Jackson Boulevard in the financial district.

To describe the Board of Trade as a commodities exchange is a grave injustice. This is like going to an auction in the "Twilight Zone." There's one fast-talking auctioneer for every bidder on the floor. And from our spot on the mezzanine above the trading floor, it looks like they've all ingested large quantities of amphetamines before getting off the "L" and heading in to work.

The buyers, sellers, price reporters and other functionaries are distinguished by their brightly colored coats. There are more hand signals given (five fingers straight up means sell, tilted to the right means buy) than in your average, 9-inning baseball game.

The employees who stalk the trading floor are very secretive about what they do. Two young men representing high-powered conglomerates turn me down for interviews.

Andy Warhol is next on our agenda. Or rather the Warhol exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago in Grant Park. The exhibit, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, ran through Aug. 13 in Chicago. After that, it headed across the Atlantic to London.

As we begin our glide through the more than 250 examples of Campbell's soup cans, Marilyn Monroes, purple cows and floating pillows, I debate the merits of Warhol's modern techniques with my photographer. I hold out for "groundbreaking art," while he maintains the "nothing more than popular garbage" view.

We emerge an hour or so later, calling a truce and starving.

AFTERNOON:

Lunch is at the Billy Goat Tavern, under (yes, under) the street at 430 N. Michigan Ave. This is the place John Belushi and the rest of the old Saturday Night Live crew used as their inspiration for the "Cheezburger, Cheezburger, No Coke, Pepsi" sketch. One look and it's clear Belushi and company didn't have to change much for television.

The Tavern is jammed at the noon hour and the pace is frenetic. People are gathered around the no-nonsense bar in one corner, while order takers call back to the kitchen from a horseshoe-shaped counter in the center.

We dine on (what else) cheezburger-uh-cheezburgers, double patties served on a hard roll bun. They are, said owner Sam Slanis, the house specialty. Self-serve condiments are at the adjacent counter.

Slanis has owned the place for 19 years. He bought it from his uncle, who opened it back in 1934 after emigrating from Greece.

"He had a pet goat and that's how he named it," Slanis said, anticipating my question.

I ask whether he was upset about the place being the butt of a late-night television joke.

"No," he said. "I was actually flattered. And it hasn't been too bad for business either."

Appetites satisfied, we take a cab to 1816 N. Wells, the home of the Second City Theater.

Before taking a peak at the rehearsal, we get a rundown on Second City from producer Joyce Sloan, who

has been around since the year after the improvisational troupe was formed in 1959. Sloan's discourse on the group's history is like a walking tour through the Henry Ford Museum of modern comedy.

The theater alumni — in addition to Saturday Night Live and SCTV regulars — include comedians Jack Avery Schreiber (of Burns and Schreiber) and actress Betty Thomas, formerly of "Hill Street Blues."

Today, one of the improvisational troupes is rehearsing for a road show they will take to Atlantic City later this summer.

Having been socially enlightened during the first part of our afternoon, it can only be time for one thing. Shopping.

We take a walking tour of the Magnificent Mile, a mile-long stretch of Michigan Avenue devoted to pleasing all tastes and credit cards. Marshall Fields, I. Magnin, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bonwit Teller's, Tiffany's and a host of smaller, but equally pricey shops abound.

WE STOP IN at Burberrys, or, to use the proper name Burberrys Limited. What reporter worth his salt hasn't dreamed of going out on assignment in a trench coat supplied by the world famous United Kingdom clothier?

When I clue store general manager Cary McIlvoy in on my fantasy — to try on Burberrys' top-of-the-line model — she smiles. It turns out the anchors and top reporters from Chicago's television stations are regular customers.

I guess we're all trying to look like Humphrey Bogart, who wore a Burberry coat in "Deadline U.S.A." I guess we're all trying to look like Humphrey Bogart, who wore a Burberry coat in "Deadline U.S.A." I guess we're all trying to look like Humphrey Bogart, who wore a Burberry coat in "Deadline U.S.A."

At \$995, it should last a lifetime, right? "Well, not quite," said Daggers, in his clipped, South London accent. "You can expect many years of wear, but it may have to be reconditioned or you might eventually need a new one."

And, he said, the store's "bargain basement" model is priced at \$320.

My American Express card starts to tingle, but stays in the pocket.

Next on our agenda is the "Here's Chicago" exhibit. This show in the old pumping station on Michigan Avenue promises to give us a little bit of the town's history, specifically the Chicago Fire of 1906 and the 1920s Gangster era. No vacation is complete, I reason, without getting a little local history. After all, we could have gone to Somerset Mall, if all we wanted was an exotic shopping extravaganza.

THIS TURNED out to be a mistake. What we got was another hokey "multi-media" presentation and a separate tour through a room filled with mannequins and a perky tour guide. All that for \$4.75 a head.

Next time, I think I'll run to the library before heading out of town in order to satisfy my lust for vacation background material.

EARLY EVENING:

Before dinner, we decide to head over to Rush Street to check out the local bar scene. Only Rush Street, we discover, isn't the hot spot that all the tour books tout it as.

It used to be, according to an informal poll of several pedestrians, but now the best bars and nightclubs are a short hop away of State and Division streets. Oh well.

For a check of what's going on musically (and since our plane leaves before most clubs get going for the evening), I talk to Shawn Johnson, co-manager of the Music World store on State.

"There's the 'Batman' soundtrack by Prince, that's our top selling album," he said. "And in the clubs, House Music (An urban, post rap sound) has come out from underground and is getting a lot of attention."

Dinner is at Gino's East, 160 E. Superior, home of Chicago-style pizza. Gino's, with its graffiti-etched tables and high-backed wooden booths is reminiscent of a campus hangout.

We're talking real pizza pie here. The pan pizza is a good 2 1/2 inches thick. (A hint for Detroiters: Order double cheese if you want it like you get it at home. For some reason, Detroit's pizza makes go heavy on the cheese while the rest of the world goes big on the tomato sauce.)

AFTER DINNER and before heading back to the airport we have one more stop — the subway. Being from Motown, where mass transit is only a pipe dream, I have this odd desire to prove a viable mass transit system can indeed exist.

Chicago's "People Mover" combines below ground subway cars with an above ground elevated railway system, or "L." It's actually possible to go from downtown out to Northwestern University in suburban Evanston (some 10 miles) and beyond.

For our purposes, we ride from the north end of Michigan Avenue back to the Loop. The fare is \$1. The stations are well marked and relatively clean. There are security guards in each car.

Well, what do you know, it works.

For information on places to visit in Chicago call the Chicago Tourism Council, (312) 280-5740. For flight schedules and fares, call Southwest Airlines, 862-1221.

Step back to colonial Mexico at San Miguel

By Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

Q: My wife has been trying to drag me to Mexico for a long time. I hate touristy beaches, so I won't go to places like Acapulco, but I told her I would consider it, if you could recommend a place where we can enjoy Mexican life without being overrun by American beach lovers. Definitely, not Mexico City.

R.M.,
West Bloomfield

A: I don't have to think twice to answer that question! Fly into Mexico City and either rent a car or reserve a seat on one of the first-class buses — destination San Miguel de Allende. It is a two-hour drive northwest of Mexico City in the general direction of Guadalajara, but you won't find either sand or bikinis.

The whole town of San Miguel is a national historic monument, so designated to preserve its authentic colonial character. That is what makes San Miguel and the surrounding towns of Mexico's independence country so attractive to the insiders who travel here.

You can live like a Spanish aristocrat while enjoying the artists and campesinos who are the heart and soul of Mexico. There are no beaches and no high-rise hotels here, only flowered terraces overlooking cobblestone streets.

As you turn down the Little Alley of Allende you get your first real glimpse of the Parroquia, the parish

church on the main plaza. It looks like the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, because it was designed and built by an local Indian architect from postcards of European cathedrals.

There is a small plaque on the house at the corner of the plaza — "Hic Natus Ubique Notus (Somebody of note was born here)." That somebody was Ignacio Allende who held secret meetings in this house until the September day in 1810 when he rode out of town with his fellow rebels to begin the revolution that finally gained Mexico its freedom from Spain in 1821.

The town was renamed San Miguel de Allende. The mayor still shouts "Grito (freedom)" from the balcony of the city hall across the tree plaza on Independence Day.

THERE ARE plazas like this all over colonial Mexico, created by Carlotta, wife of Emperor Maximilian, who converted all the old military marching grounds into tree plazas. On Sunday, everybody is here. Young men in blue jeans, campesinos in straw cowboy hats, peasant women in colorful shawls, carpets and basket sellers, mothers with babies, men and women in fashionable suits.

On the far side of the plaza, people move in and out of the courtyard of Posada San Francisco, once a beautiful Spanish home, now a beautiful inn, considered to be one of the most authentic colonial posadas in Mexico.

A famous local name, Canal, is found on a street



The public market in San Miguel de Allende is awash in colorful fruits and vegetables.

running west out of the plaza and on the house of the Counts of Canal on the northeast corner of the square. The name of this old silver mining family ties modern San Miguel to its Spanish colonial past, its centuries-old reputation as an art center.

Prehistoric Indians lived in this area, but it was Franciscan Father Juan de San Miguel who organized them into villages and taught them the old European crafts after he arrived from Spain in 1539.

The Canal family came two centuries later; their estates on the edge of town are now the site of the Instituto Allende, an important part of the art explosion which revitalized San Miguel for both artists and tourists after World War II.

The Instituto, in an old converted hacienda, attracts

artists and art students from throughout North America to both visual and performing arts classes. All classes are taught in English. More than 1,500 American and Canadian students attend. These artists sell their work side-by-side with the weavers, linens, linens and other craftsmen on Canal Street.

A SECOND well-known art center, the Centro Cultural Ignacio Ramirez, a branch of the Instituto de Bellas Artes de Mexico City, is in the old Convent of the Concepcion and includes both contemporary art and a lovely courtyard garden.

Casa Maxwell, a shop in the center of Canal Street between the plaza and the towers of the Church of the Concepcion, is known throughout Mexico for its varied local crafts and contemporary art work.

None of the shops are open on Sunday, of course. On weekdays, the craft shops along Canal Street are busy and the market brings color and sound to the streets around the Church of San Francisco, but on Sunday the activity is in the plaza and in favorite dining places like Posada San Francisco.

There are several wonderful hotels set in the homes of former Spanish aristocrats. Ask your travel agent if the Casa de Sierra Nevada is still there. You'll love the rooms in the main house or the small suites, with their own terraces. In the houses (owned by the hotel) across the street. Last time I was there, they had a fine dining room and delivered breakfast on your own sunny terrace. It's only one block from the plaza.