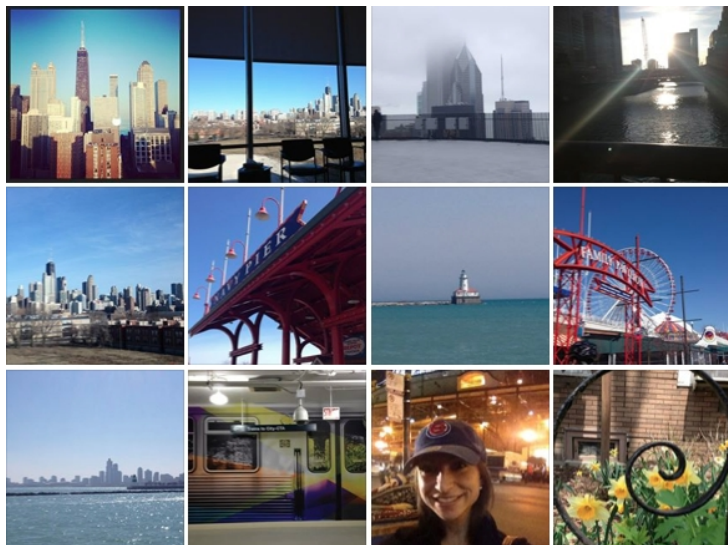


1 Eye-Opening Year in Chicago



Tomorrow is officially one year since I flew to Chicago on a one-way ticket. But, Saturdays aren't often high rankers for blog reading and well, it's also Yom Kippur, which means most of my audience will be occupied as will I, spending time with family and reflecting on the past year with the Jewish community. So, a Friday post it is!

Tonight, I compiled an album of iconic Chicago photos I snapped over the last 365 days. Okay, let's face it, most of them were taken in the last 3.5 months (June-September) when the weather was sunny and warm - perfect for exploring this still-new city I now call home. I was impressed with everything my eyes, and camera, saw over the past year. Growing up in El Paso, Texas, and then spending nearly 10 years in mid-sized-but-growing-exponentially Austin, Texas, I didn't know what it was like to live in The City of Big Shoulders. And, I'm proud to say, I now understand what that means.

While I came from Austin, a very innovative, high-tech, education, government-focused and young city, Chicago, by contrast, has a rich history whose story is told through the architecture, art, music, theatre, and culture that shapes and is shaped by the robust skyline and its 200 neighborhoods and 77 community areas. (Fun Fact: The Chicago Marathon runs through 29 neighborhoods - also why it is such a unifying event throughout the city.)

Thank you to everyone who welcomed me with open arms, including new friends, Austin connections, and even Social Media Club Chicago, those who gave me directions when I was lost, and those who gave me the scoop on Chicago restaurants. And thanks for dealing with my complaints about the cold climate! (I am fully aware that two years ago Lake Shore Drive got snowed in and that last year's St. Patty's day was 80 degrees and sunny, in contrast to freezing temperatures this year.) Looking back on Year 1, I thought I'd highlight some key moments and important Chicago-specific lessons I learned:

1. When I chose an apartment within hours before zipping up to the North Shore to stand by some of my best friends for their wedding (Happy Anniversary, Sami and Daniel!), then found out that my Chicagoan cousin Alana lived in the same building when she moved to Chicago from Austin. I knew it was meant to be. All of it.
2. Moving on Rosh Hashanah, unpacking in the morning, and attending an Apples 'n Honey gathering at a temple in the afternoon

where I met some fabulous friends that I still see often (on Day 1)! This was also the day that I was invited to join the Windy City Pizza Club, and the reason for gaining winter weight, plus the inspiration for my Chicago Pizza Series. Thank you, David!



First deep dish pizza. Pequod's is known for the burnt cheesy crust.

3. When a band whose music is close to my heart and played my blog's first birthday party in 2009, Courier, showed up at my apartment building's door to play a private acoustic show for every friend I had met in my first month in Chicago (about 12). (By the way, check out their incredible tour photos on their documentary site, [For the Love, For the Road](#))



Courier's Chicago stop in my building on their Acoustic Home Tour - so lucky!

4. When I learned to make eye contact with others entering revolving doors when you enter them to avoid getting stuck or whacked.
5. When I felt like I was discovering an entirely new city with the flowers in bloom and the warm sun shining in mid-June.
6. When my family visited on the 4th of July!
7. My first and second visit to The Second City comedy club.

8. When I discovered ear muffs really do make a difference and are a small investment that will save you from burning ears in the cold.

9. When I learned not to use an umbrella in the snow. (I still stand by my belief that it is logical, but I refrain for fear of public humiliation - or office ridicule.)

10. When I realized I only turned on my A/C for 5 days total in 1 year - and they were all in the last 2 months. (I'm pretty sure I made up for my energy consumption savings with my heater usage.)

11. When I learned that haircuts are less expensive in Texas and months of cold, dry weather, wind, and extreme humidity levels require their place in my budget.

12. When I learned what hockey was. And the Stanley Cup. (Go, Hawks!) And, major league sports. Also, I'm still confused as to why baseball and hockey season overlap...

13. When I experienced major withdrawal from authentic tacos. I've since found a few reliable Chicago taco spots.

14. When I saw neon green hot dog relish for the first time. (I did not try it, just observed with wonder.)

15. When I realized that after a year, The City of Broad Shoulders still has so much to explore, so much to experience, so many people to meet and continue friendships with, and feels like a canvas of opportunity on which I have just touched the surface.

I'm so lucky to have so many new incredible people in my life, to be fulfilled and thrilled to be working with the talented digital marketing team at Digital Third Coast, and to have survived my first "real" winter. Thank you to my family for your support, encouragement, and trips to visit. Thank you to my Chicago family for making Chicago feel like home. And thank you, Chicago, for a majestic year in a majestic city. I promise to support your local businesses, keep riding public transit (it's so easy and cost-effective!), and blogging about you when I discover something that shouldn't go un-noticed. And to myself, I say, "Chicago on!" And to friends and family near and far, I love visitors...just sayin'.