

Best Chicago neighborhoods for dating



The LH rooftop at LondonHouse, at Wacker Drive and Michigan Avenue, is a hot Chicago date-night spot. (Abel Uribe / Chicago Tribune)

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In a city full of bars, restaurants and attractions for every preference, Chicago singles have dozens of date spot options — making that "perfect" first date within reach and elusive all at once.

Dating website Zoosk recently partnered with Yelp to solve the problem.

Zoosk analyzed more than 150,000 user profiles across the country to determine which urban neighborhoods are the best for singles. Then, it turned to Yelp experts to suggest some of Chicago's best date spots in those neighborhoods.

The study found that, among Zoosk users, those under 35 were 20 percent more likely to want to meet Lincoln Park singles.

Singles over 35 were 173 percent more likely to want to meet people on the Near West Side and in the West Loop, according to the study. The data only represents Zoosk users, so we tapped Chicago dating experts to find out if the findings matched their experience.

Stef Safran, founder of matchmaking service Stef and the City, said location does matter to singles. Her clients, especially women, prefer to go to an accessible, well-lit neighborhood close to home, she said.

"One of the biggest things that the women complain about is, when a guy schedules a date, the women have to meet over there (by his place)," Safran said.

Women feel more comfortable at nearby places accessible by cab, Uber or Lyft.

"They want the guys to be courting them," Safran said. "And to be in a place that, whether the date's good or bad, they don't have to pay a \$20 cab to go home."

Anita Chlipala, relationship therapist, and coach and founder of Relationship Reality 312, also faces distance challenges with her clients.

Clients in the city are often not interested in meeting clients from the suburbs, she said. "I do think people sometimes don't want to leave their own 'hood," Chlipala said.

She encourages clients to give everyone a chance and to ask potential partners how bridging the commute might work.

"My clients who live in the suburbs, they are more than willing to come to the city for the dates, or they're (already) in the city often enough," she said. "It's not really an issue for them."

To solve the neighborhood-dating conundrum, Zoosk tapped experts at Yelp to get their picks for dating spots in popular areas.

Here's what Yelp Chicago community director Danny Wurst, Chlipala and Safran recommend:

Neighborhood: Lincoln Park

Restaurant: Batter & Berries

"Chicago is known for great brunch spots," Safran said. "Also, it kind of puts guys on their game because they have to have reservations."

A brunch date also sets the tone for both people on their first meet-up. "Then they know when they're going into something that it's not an alcohol-fueled situation," she said, adding that, on weekends, you can expect a wait at Batter & Berries. "So be ready to talk to your date while you are waiting!"

Neighborhood: Old Town

Restaurant: O'Brien's

"Old Town has a lot more trendy places to eat outside," Safran said, noting that the neighborhood is close to Lincoln Park. "I expect people will be going more and more to Old Town because they've added a lot."

"For example, O'Brien's: A lot of people don't realize it's a hidden gem, where there's free parking with drinks or dinner," she said.

Neighborhood: West Loop

Restaurant: Girl and the Goat

Yelp dubs Girl and the Goat the city's "most delicious celebrity chef restaurant date." Wurst said he envisioned this spot for the over-35 set of the survey, as older adults "are going to have a little more income to kick around on a nice date." Plus, anyone who can score one of the town's toughest reservations surely gets first-date extra credit.

Neighborhood: The Loop

Restaurant: LH Rooftop at LondonHouse

"Anything with an outdoor patio or rooftop drinks is pretty hot in Chicago," Chlipala said, adding that you should consider the noise level of the bar or restaurant, which will vary based on when you go. "You definitely want to be able to hear your date."

LondonHouse boasts a tri-level rooftop experience.

Neighborhood: Lincoln Park

Restaurant: The Barrelhouse Flat

Barrelhouse Flat earned the "most sophisticated date" title from Yelp. Wurst said that the picks were based, in part, on chatter in reviews. "Very often, people do go in and say, 'I went here on a date; this would be a great place to go,'" Wurst said. One peek at Barrelhouse Flat Yelp reviews proves that's true.

Haley Hinkle is a freelancer.