Time Passages

Full-day itinerary – From Ottawa to Chicago

Follow in the footsteps of Lincoln, immerse yourself in the life of a French fur trader, and unearth famous fossils.

Start your tour in downtown Ottawa

WHERE TO PARK
Park near Washington Square, 101 W. Lafayette St., Ottawa, IL 61350. Go to the nearby Ottawa Visitors Center, 100 W. Lafayette St., or check their website for tourist information.

Ottawa Visitors Center – 815/434-2737

Situated on the Fox and Illinois rivers, Ottawa was platted by the Canal Commissioners at the same time as Chicago. Ottawa prospered because the canal made it possible to transport the sand, gravel and clay that were mined here. Although this section of the canal is now dry, Ottawa has two of the canal’s most important landmarks – the huge Fox River Aqueduct and the last remaining I&M Canal tollhouse, a tiny wood frame structure on Columbus Street.

Walk the paths in Washington Square and see where Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas began their historic debates over slavery during the 1858 U.S. Senate Race. The site features a commemorative bronze monument to the two men who, on Aug. 21, 1858, argued for three hours before a throng estimated at 10,000 on the subject of the introduction of slavery into new western states.

Head across the street to the ornate Reddick Mansion, 100 W. Lafayette St., which also houses the Ottawa Visitors Center. This Italianate fantasy of red brick and cream limestone was built in the 1850s by William Reddick, a county sheriff, state senator and founder of the local glass industry. Exhibits in the former city library turned museum tell of Reddick’s life and political career, the Lincoln-Douglas debate, and the I&M Canal.

Other points of interest in Ottawa include the nearby Illinois Third District Appellate Court Building, 1004 Columbus St., a splendid example of Greek Revival architecture, and the historic downtown surrounding the impressive LaSalle County Courthouse, 119 W. Madison St., constructed of Joliet limestone.

WHERE TO EAT
The Row House, 728 Columbus St., 815/434-3171
The Lone Buffalo, 812 LaSalle St., 815/324-9549
B.A.S.H. (Burger and Sushi House), 215 W. Jefferson St., 815/434-2274
Corner 230, 230 W. Madison St., 815/434-0000
Jardines Restaurant, 711 LaSalle St., 815/434-2833
Jeremiah Joe Coffee, 807 LaSalle St., 815/434-3572
The Cheese Shop ‘n’ Deli, 1219 Fulton St., 815/433-0478
Sunfield Restaurant, 2754 Columbus St., 815/434-5500
Continue your tour in downtown Morris

WHERE TO PARK
Park near Canal Port Plaza, located at West Illinois Avenue and Wauponsee Street, Morris, IL 60450.

Only 70 miles from Chicago but a world away, Morris is a quintessential rural Midwestern town filled with unique, festive shops, many housed in historic buildings along the I&M Canal, just a stone's throw from the Illinois River. Among them are several newly opened boutiques selling paper goods, clothing, home goods, and vintage furniture.

Eight life-size steel silhouettes as well as interpretive panels in Canal Port Plaza tell the story of the Armstrong family, many of whom had a profound influence on the early history of Morris and Grundy County. Family matriarch Elsie Armstrong traveled to Illinois in 1831 with seven sons, ranging in age from 3 to 19. Plans were underway at that time to construct the I&M Canal and her sons helped build it.

Continue one block west along Illinois Avenue to Canal Port Park. This outdoor site features a wooden play structure representing a to-scale canal freight boat, as well as introductory panels about Morris. Nearby, two more steel silhouettes tell the story of Old Nell, the most famous mule on the canal towpath, and of canal driver John Sullivan.

Four blocks from downtown, the Grundy County Historical Society Museum, 510 W. Illinois Ave., sits along the I&M in a canal-era manufacturing building, circa 1870. Here you’ll encounter nationally known fossil exhibits, Civil War weapons, and unique displays and art about the canal.

Check the Museum’s website for hours and other visitor information.
Grundy County Historical Society Museum – 815/942-4880

WHERE TO EAT
Letty Mae’s Tea Room, 112 E. Washington St., 815/416-1370
Weitz Café, 213 N. Liberty St., 815/942-0686
Morris Chop Shop, 701 N. Liberty St., 815/710-5006
The Greenhorn Saloon & Eatery, 303 Bedford Rd., 815/513-5671
Turtle’s Tap, 1400 N. Division St., 815/942-3664
Maria’s Ristorante & Pizzeria, 1591 N. Division St., 815/942-3351
Boz Hot Dogs, 1824 N. Division St., 815/942-4001
Morris Diner & Pancake House, 1920 N. Division St., 815/942-6887
R-Place Family Eatery, 21 Romines Dr., 815/942-3690
Bellacino’s Pizza & Grinders, 100 Gore Rd., 815/941-1110
La Mex Restaurant, 115 E. Jackson St., 815/941-1075
Head over to Romeoville

WHERE TO PARK
Park at Isle a la Cache Museum, 501 E. Romeo Rd., Romeoville, IL 60446. Check the Museum website for hours, programs, and other visitor information.
Isle a la Cache Museum – 815/886-1467

Explore the relationship between Native Americans and the nation’s early French voyageurs at this 18th century fur trade museum located on an island in the Des Plaines River. Highlights include interactive exhibits of the Great Lakes fur trade of the 1700s, in addition to a replica Native American longhouse. Feel the softness of a beaver pelt, see canoes built out of birch bark, and walk inside a wigwam. The Museum also features a gift shop where visitors can purchase replica arrowheads, Professor Noggin's card games, and books about French and Native American history. The Island Rendezvous, a premier historical re-enactment, is held here every year in June. Nearby walking trails offer beautiful views of the Des Plaines River and the chance to see wildlife such as bald eagles, turtles, and deer.

WHERE TO EAT
At's-A-Nice Pizza, 334 N. Independence Blvd., 815/886-5200
White Fence Farm, 1376 Joliet Rd., 630/739-1720
McWethy's Tavern, 1700 W. Renwick Rd., 815/254-7001
Niko's Breakfast Club, 38 S. Weber Rd., 815/886-3344
Windy City Grill, 300 N. Independence Blvd., 815/293-1000
El Barrio Mexican Restaurant, 336 N. Independence Blvd., 815/372-1100
Mongo McMichaels, 1101 N. Independence Blvd., 630/739-1660
Rosati's Pizza, 463 N. Weber Rd., 815/293-2600
Aodake Sushi & Steak House, 462 N. Weber Rd., 815/886-9888
Fat Ricky's, 660 N. Independence Blvd., 815/293-2900

Finish your tour in Chicago

WHERE TO PARK
Park at Chicago Portage National Historic Site, 4800 S. Harlem Ave., Lyons, IL 60534. Check the website for hours and other visitor information.
Chicago Portage National Historic Site – 773/590-0710

Stand upon the same ground traversed by Native Americans, famed explorers, and early settlers. See the vital crossroads where French fur traders would “portage” their goods across a narrow marshy area separating the waters of the Great Lakes from those of the Mississippi River. Highlights include a must-see monument to Jacques Marquette, Louis Jolliet, and their Native American guides, as well as several interpretive panels.

Available monthly tours last about 90 minutes and involve walking half a mile along the gravel path through the woods. Due to the rustic natural setting of the portage and Mud Lake area, long pants and sturdy walking shoes are recommended attire.