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Posted August 17, 2011, 2:16 pm MT

Why I heart CityPASS, from a recent Chicago trip

By KYLE WAGNER

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Just came back from a trip to Chicago, doing the college visits, showing my daughters a city that I spent some time in when I lived farther north – in Lake Villa, near Gurnee and Six Flags – for a spell during my own college years.

We wanted to do some of the touristy things downtown – visit the Bean, check out the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), hang with the jellies and the beluga whales at [Shedd Aquarium](#) – but couldn't have been there during a more hectic time: Lollapalooza was raging, the Cubs were playing, it was the last hurrah for many looking to get shopping in for school clothes and take in the sights during last-minute Magnificent Mile mini-vacations. It was standing-room-only in the streets.

The biggest eye-opener for this family from one of the smaller big cities – the great thing about Denver is that while places may get packed, everything is eventually doable – was that lines to get into some attractions were taking longer to get through than visiting the attractions themselves. For instance, first thing on a Thursday, the queue for Shedd was an hour and a half...in 90-plus temps, at about 95 percent humidity.

Ugh.

The good news for us was that we had [CityPASSes](#), which for Chicago cost \$76 per adult (\$59 ages 3-11) and allow the holders to do some pretty fabulous things, like completely bypass the ridiculous lines and head straight in through the air-conditioned back door. No line, no unbearable heat. Not to mention that we saved 52 percent off the regular admission fees.



Courtesy Shedd Aquarium
The beluga whales are a huge attraction at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium.

The places and the savings vary from city to city – right now, CityPASS is available in 10 cities, including New York, Atlanta, Toronto and San Francisco, as well as a Southern California version that involves 32 percent off admission to Disneyland – but the premise is the same: save some dough, walk right in.

Obviously, this doesn't make sense if you weren't already going to hit some of these spots. But we made our money back in the first three places (the Chicago booklet also includes the [Field Museum](#) and your choice of the [John Hancock Observatory](#) or the [Museum of Science and Industry](#)) and saved hours of time by avoiding the hot lines.

A few things to keep in mind: the passes are valid nine days from the first day you start to use them (there are no blackout days), and you can either have them mailed to you or issued as an e-ticket. And some of them include extras like a free cup of coffee or an IMAX movie.

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Kyle Wagner

Travel Editor

Kyle Wagner has been at the Post since 2002, when she joined the paper as the restaurant critic and food writer after nine years as restaurant critic for *Westword*. Her passions for mountain biking, hiking, snowboarding, skiing, river rafting, exploring the world — and anything that gets her out of the office — made transitioning into travel a perfect fit.

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