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Visuals:

[Photos/video available here](#)

Chicago Architecture Center River Cruise aboard First Lady

Kicks Off 2026 Season on March 15

Tickets now on sale for the #1 Boat Tour in the U.S., available online, by phone or in-person

CHICAGO – Chicago's most celebrated architectural experience, the [Chicago Architecture Center \(CAC\) River Cruise aboard First Lady](#), kicks off its 2026 cruise season on Sunday, March 15, continuing its legacy. Crowned the #1 boat tour in the U.S. in 2025 by [USA Today 10 Best readers](#) and [Chicago Reader's Best Tour](#) for more than 10 years, the CAC River Cruise continues to set the standard for expert-led exploration of Chicago's legendary skyline along the river. The season launch marks the return of one of the city's iconic experiences.

For 90 captivating minutes, guests travel all three branches of the Chicago River, surrounded by open-air, 360-degree views and the stories behind more than 50 iconic buildings. Along the way, passengers glide beneath 13 historic bascule bridges and learn about the visionary architects and engineers who shaped Chicago's skyline. From art deco and neoclassical landmarks to mid-century modern and postmodern towers, the tour reveals how bold ideas helped shape one of the world's most influential architectural cities.

The CAC River Cruise aboard First Lady is the only Chicago architecture cruise led by CAC-certified docents. Each docent completes nearly 100 hours of intensive training plus an additional 12 weeks of study before leading the CAC River Cruise. Because each docent brings their own perspective and storytelling style, no two tours are exactly alike. Even long-time Chicagoans and repeat guests discover something new as the city's architectural landscape continues to evolve.

Beyond offering breathtaking views and expert insights, the CAC River Cruise supports the future of architecture and design. A portion of ticket proceeds supports CAC's nonprofit mission and helps provide design education programs and tools to tens of thousands of Chicagoans each year. Support also helps fund CAC's youth programs such as Girls Build! and We Build! camps and classes, Teen Fellows and the annual Engineering Fest, all offered at no cost to students interested in learning about architecture and design.

CAC River Cruise 2026 Boarding and Ticket Information

- **Location:** Northeast corner of Michigan Ave. and E. Wacker Dr ([112 E. Wacker Drive](#)). Look for the black awning at the stairway entrance.
- **Pricing:** Tickets start at \$57 and can be purchased in person, via phone or online through [architecturecruise.com](#).

- **Note:** Because tours frequently sell out, advanced ticket purchase is recommended, especially on weekends, on holidays and evening tours.
- **Ticket Upgrade:** Visit the award-winning [CAC for an](#) additional \$5 (regular price \$15) by adding a ticket as an event extra in your Ticketmaster cart.
- **Priority Boarding:** Tickets start at \$72 and include access to an exclusive early boarding period and admission to the Chicago Architecture Center Exhibits.

For additional information on the 2026 season, tickets, boarding location, parking, and other details, please visit architecturecruise.com.

About First Lady

A cornerstone of the city's Riverwalk for over 90 years, First Lady is a fourth-generation, family-owned and operated cruise line. It is home to the CAC River Cruise aboard First Lady, which has earned national acclaim, consistently recognized as one of the best boat tours in North America (USA Today Readers' Choice 2025 Awards), Top Experiences in the U.S. (2025 Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards) and voted the Best Tour and Best Outdoor Attraction (Chicago Reader 2025). Building on decades of first-class experiences, trust and recognition, First Lady continues to innovate, providing unique experiences on Chicago's waterways from the CAC River Cruise architecture cruise to a variety of family-friendly sightseeing cruises, including the beloved Canine Cruise. Committed to sustainability and excellence, First Lady operates a fleet of nine luxuriously appointed vessels, available for private charters and special events, accommodating groups from two to 250 guests, with premium catering and beverage options. All vessels are powered by cleaner energy sources and operated by a U.S. Coast Guard-licensed captain and crew. For cruise schedules and more information, visit firstlady.com or call 847-358-1330.

About the Chicago Architecture Center

The Chicago Architecture Center (CAC), a nonprofit celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2026, is dedicated to inspiring people to discover why design matters. A national leader in architecture and design education, the CAC offers tours, programs, exhibitions and more that are part of a dynamic journey of lifelong learning.

Opened to the public in 2018, its riverfront location is in the heart of the city, where Michigan Avenue meets the Chicago River, featuring nearly 10,000 square feet of exhibition space with views of a century of iconic skyscrapers.

Through partnerships with schools and youth-serving organizations, the CAC reaches approximately 5,000 K-12 students annually, while teacher workshops provide educators with tools and resources they need to advance STEM curricula in their classrooms. Committed to serving under-represented communities in construction, engineering and design professions, the CAC offers many of its education programs — and all its programs for teens — at no cost to participants. CAC programs for adults and members include talks with acclaimed authors and practicing

architects, in-depth presentations on issues and trends in urbanism and classes unlocking subjects related to the built environment.

Proceeds from programs, tours and the CAC Design Store, as well as from grants, sponsorships and donations, support its educational mission. Visit architecture.org to learn more and follow @chiarchitecture and #chiarchitecture on social media.

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