A day in Chicago from Milwaukee works best when the travel part is boring, and the train is the easiest way to keep it that way. Plan the return first, then fill the day around it. Traveling with children changes the plan: snacks, restroom stops and a slower pace all deserve a little extra time.

Know the stops before you go

The Hiawatha stops at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station downtown, the Milwaukee Airport Rail Station, Sturtevant, Glenview and Chicago Union Station. Pick the Milwaukee stop that is easiest for you to reach, because that choice shapes how you get to the platform in the morning.

If you live on the south side or near the airport, the airport rail station can save a trip downtown. If you are already downtown or near a streetcar or bus line, the Intermodal Station is usually the simpler start.

Buy ahead and plan the return

Advance ticket purchase is recommended, and buying before the day of travel avoids a rush at the station. Look at the evening departures first and choose the one that leaves you a comfortable buffer after dinner or a show.

Timetables change with the season and with track work, so check the current schedule the day before and again on the morning of the trip. Weather can also change timing, especially in winter.

Use the ride itself

Seats have free Wi-Fi and power outlets, so the ride can double as quiet work time or a chance to plan the afternoon. Every Hiawatha train has a Quiet Car for travelers who want to read or rest without phone calls nearby.

Bring a snack and a water bottle, and keep your bag small enough to sit comfortably at your seat or overhead. A light bag also makes walking in the Loop much easier later in the day.

A simple day-trip checklist

Confirm both train times, save your tickets on your phone, and note how you will get from Union Station to your first stop. Charge your phone before you leave, because you will lean on it for maps and tickets all day.

On the way home, arrive at the station a little early, find your track, and relax. The best day trips end with an easy ride https://chicago.ghost.io/milwaukee-to-chicago-train-bus-driving-or-a-private-ride/ rather than a sprint for the last train.