

TV Review: ‘The Layover with Anthony Bourdain’ Comes to Chicago

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 19, 2012 - 1:36pm

- [Anthony Bourdain](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Chicago](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Roger Ebert](#) [6]
- [Television](#) [7]
- [The Layover with Anthony Bourdain](#) [8]
- [Travel Channel](#) [9]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [10]

CHICAGO – The great Anthony Bourdain, who entertained viewers for seasons with his foodie adventures around the world on “No Reservations,” has altered his recipe a bit for The Travel Channel’s “The Layover with Anthony Bourdain,” which returns tonight for a second season premiere which finds the chef/personality spending 43 hours in our favorite city in the world, Chicago. The focused approach of “No Reservations” has been discarded for a quantity game in which Bourdain visits dozens of hot spots in the Windy City, speaks to locals about why Chicago rules, and gives viewers an overall feel for the town instead of specifics about it. I wish the show was a little less manic and that Bourdain would spend more than a minute or two at each location but he and his production team made some fantastic choices in terms of where to visit, creating a love letter to hot dogs, Italian beef, great dive bars, and Roger Ebert.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

What do you need to cover in a 43-hour time period in Chicago? You need to drink. You need to eat hot dogs. You need to stop at Billy Goat. You need to talk Cubs vs. Sox. And you need to hit the increasingly interesting restaurant culture in our city. Bourdain really does a lot in “The Layover,” jumping all over Cook County, hitting a bar in Pilsen, a restaurant in the loop, the Billy Goat, and so much more. Highlights of Bourdain’s trip include stops at the Old Town Ale House, Kuma’s Corner, Tank Noodle, The Publican, Simon’s Tavern, Girl & The Goat, Budacki’s, The Green Mill, and Taqueria El Asadero.



The Layover with Anthony Bourdain
Photo credit: The Travel Channel

At each location, he highlights the food (it may not be as eating-centric as “No Reservations” but Bourdain’s first love is always going to be the food) and talks to locals and owners about why they love Chicago. I wish there was even more of this aspect. Bourdain’s a better interviewer than I think his producers or even he may understand. And Chicagoans make great interview subjects. Little bits like who should be named the “President of Chicago” (Roger Ebert is the wonderful choice) and how the Blagojevich situation approached comedy are fantastic.



The Layover with Anthony Bourdain
Photo credit: The Travel Channel

Being a chef, Bourdain's main focus in these programs is always going to be food. He gives Sox v. Cubs a bit of time but seems more interested in interviewing Stephanie Izzard, the "Top Chef" winner who owns Girl & The Goat on Randolph in the West Loop. The show sometimes seems like it's in a bit of a tug of war in that Bourdain is clearly more interested in food than politics or the history of our great city. I loved "No Reservations" because of how clear it made the fact that you can learn so much about a city by the way its people eat. There's part of that in "The Layover" but the shock and awe approach is a little overwhelming. I love the variety of places that Bourdain goes but I would have loved even more if he just hung out at Kuma's for half an hour and spoke to the locals. He spends the most time with the personalities at Old Town Ale House and it's easily the strongest chunk of the program.

It is nice to see how much Anthony Bourdain loves Chicago. How much? "*The greatest city in America.*" The opening ten minutes of "The Layover" are mostly just a variation on the words awesome, fantastic, and greatest (after a nice rip on O'Hare, "*One of the great airport sh*t shows on the planet.*") For the next forty minutes, Bourdain does a nice job offering people who might visit our city dozens of places to visit. And while the piece gets a bit too ADD, it clearly makes the case that Chicago is a city that has something for everyone. Maybe even enough for two layovers.

"The Layover with Anthony Bourdain" returns to The Travel Channel tonight, November 19, 2012, at 8pm CST.



[11]

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