

St. Louis: Fun for next to nothing

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Here are some free things you can do in this lively town on the Mississippi River.

Gateway Arch

It dominates the city's skyline and represents its pivotal past. At one time, St. Louis was the gateway to the West, where pioneers and adventurers began their journeys into the great unknown. This stunning ribbon of steel soars 630 feet above the ground. After your neck gets tired of craning to see the top, descend underground on a gradual ramp into the free Museum of Westward Expansion, which helps you understand how this feat of engineering was accomplished. If you want to know more, you can pry \$7 from your wallet (\$2.50 for kids, who won't appreciate it) for an amazing film, made during the arch's construction (worth the money if you're the curious type). If you're feeling wealthy, you can pay for a ride to the top, \$14 per person. Caveats: Don't do this if you are claustrophobic or afraid of heights. Five people cram into each egg-shaped conveyance for the ride (think of five yolks in one shell) and once you're at the top, it's hard to see out of the aged window panels.

Contact: gatewayarch.com

Citygarden

This urban Eden is filled with plants, flowers, trees, sculptures and murals. It's a great place to relax, people-watch and take photos. Sit near Igor Mitoraj's sculpture of a hollow, decapitated head lying on its side (more whimsical than grim) and catch shots of people who go inside it and peek out of the eyes.

Contact: citygardenstl.org

Saint Louis Zoo

Among the nation's older, highly rated and lushly planted zoos, it offers a day full of animal-watching — free. That's right, just walk on in. Get an early start; parking is free from 9 to 10 a.m., and after that it jumps to \$15. There's also much free street parking nearby. The zoo has well-marked, easy paths (handicapped accessible) leading to the usual suspects, from primates to big cats to giraffes and elephants. They also have a children's zoo with programs (that's \$4, unless you arrive before 10 a.m., then it's free) and a little red Zooline Train that chugs around the zoo (another \$5 per person — kids 2 and younger



Photos by Rick DuVal

A bear statue greets visitors at the entrance of the Westward Expansion Museum in the Gateway Arch complex.

free). There's also a stingray show (\$3) and a sea lion show (\$4), a movie and some other special attractions. If you plan to do all those, buy a Safari Pass for \$10; that gets you into everything, including the carousel ride (\$3, or free before 10 a.m.). But you don't have to spend a cent to have a really good time here.

Contact: stlzoo.org

Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis

If you never set foot in another church, make time to stop and see this one. It is spectacular, rivaling any of the great old churches of Europe. Every inch of its 83,000-square-foot interior is covered with glass mosaics; the installation lasted from 1912 to 1988. It shines, glimmers and glows with 41 million pieces of tesserae in 8,000 colors, lovely beyond words. See for yourself.

Contact: cathedralstl.org

Saint Louis Art Museum

Located in Forest Park, home of the 1904 World's Fair ("Meet Me in St. Louis"), this free museum outshines many other city museums that charge admission. The spectacular historic building — itself an immaculate work of marble and gilt — houses a



Saint Louis Zoo visitors enjoy a view of cavorting seals from a tunnel inside the aquarium.

variety of genres, including great European masters and relics of the Ming Dynasty. Check out family Sundays, with free hands-on activities for kids. Don't miss the statue of St. Louis out front. Here, you can park and grab a free shuttle to other attractions in the park.

Contact: slam.org

Missouri History Museum

Also in Forest Park, this museum includes an exhibit devoted to that famous

World's Fair, as well as pre-historic displays, the mountain man days, the historic Dred Scott decision, the history of the blues and some of its musicians, famous sports figures (such as Stan Musial) and much more. Always free, it's also a good place to have a gourmet lunch (hardly free, but delicious).

Contact: mohistory.org

Saint Louis Science Center

You'll likely come to a



A penguin ponders the cooings of zoo visitors.

dead stop when you enter this popular Forest Park attraction. A three-story metal maze of tracks has moving parts that will fascinate young and old.

There's lots of interactive stuff going on — kids digging for fossils, playing with microscopes and checking out the Boeing Space Station at the McDonnell Planetarium. Big kids welcome, too.

Contact: www.sisc.org

Linda DuVal is a freelance writer in Colorado Springs.

More freebies and deals in St. Louis

We've covered the biggies, but there are more fun ways to travel inexpensively in St. Louis. They include:

St. Louis Municipal Opera:

The Muny, as it's dubbed by locals, boasts the nation's oldest and largest outdoor theater, with 12,000 seats. Each summer, it presents Broadway shows with famous performers, and 1,000 of those seats are free each night on a first-come, first-served basis. muny.org

Shakespeare Glen:

This natural outdoor amphitheater near the art museum is the site of an annual Shakespeare Festival. Free tickets are available for every performance. sfstl.com

Grant's Farm:

The former home of Ulysses S. Grant is one of the area's foremost historic sites. It features a log cabin built by the American president, as well as grounds for Civil War re-enactments. It's also a wildlife preserve, operated by Anheuser-Busch. Always free. grantsfarm.com

Anheuser-Busch: Get a free tour and taste some of the fresh-brewed beer at the original factory, now a National Historic Landmark. budweisertours.com. Also stop by Busch Stadium downtown and check out the statues of famous baseball players (and maybe get some last-minute, deeply discounted tickets to that night's game, in season).

St. Louis Walk of Fame:

Head to the Loop area of St. Louis, stop in for a drink at Blueberry Hill and wander the walk, which includes stars embedded in the sidewalk, honoring such celebs as Chuck Berry (who still performs occasionally at the club), actor Kevin Kline, *Joy of Cooking* author Irma Rombauer, Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, entertainer Josephine Baker, playwright Tennessee Williams and sex therapists Masters and Johnson. For more information on visiting St. Louis, visit explorestlouis.com.

Resorts keep Alpine hikers happy even during winter

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Stay: Hotel Valaisia (www.hotel-valaisia.ch) offers cozy rooms with mountain views.

Guided hiking: Colombire (colombire.ch), "the hamlet," has mountain guides who offer walks.

Riederalp

The antithesis of glitzy ski resorts such as Zermatt or St. Moritz, everyone walks in this tiny village high in the mountains. Hard-packed snow trails make it easy.

You'll see people pulling children or groceries or both on toboggans. From the village, ride one of several cable cars up to a walking trail with spectacular views over the Aletsch Glacier, the longest ice flow in the Alps at 14 miles.

A hike from Moosfluh station back to Riederalp takes about 2.5 hours and winds alongside the glacier before descending into pine-scented forest.

Stay: Walliser Spycher is a beautifully furnished family-run hotel. walliser-spycher.ch; Zurschmitten Tea-Room rents rooms with small

kitchens. Email a.zurschmitten@bluewin.ch

Leukerbad

Famous for the hot mineral water that bubbles out of the ground and birthed spa tourism, Leukerbad also offers excellent winter hiking. The Gemmi pass is an old Roman road and trading route that links Leukerbad with Kandersteg in the next valley.

In winter, a well-groomed path hugs the side of one mountain and is wide enough for three or four people to walk abreast. Spectacular views unfold along the 5.5-mile trail. Stop for lunch at the historic Hotel Schwarenbach, where Pablo Picasso stayed with friends in 1933.

Stay: Grichting-Badnerhof Hotel is family-run with an excellent restaurant, specializing in local cuisine such as trout from the Rhone River and Petite Arvine, a wine made from grapes grown in the valley below. hotel-grichting.ch

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Suzanne Morphet/Special Contributor

Hikers enjoy a well-maintained winter trail in Riederalp, a tiny, car-free village high in the Swiss Alps.