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Visiting St. Louis

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Introduction

St. Louis, a vibrant city nestled along the western banks of the Mississippi River, offers a unique blend of history, culture, and modern attractions, making it an ideal destination for tourists seeking a diverse travel experience. Often referred to as the "Gateway to the West," this city proudly showcases its rich heritage and embraces the future with a bustling arts scene, world-class museums, and a variety of entertainment and leisure options that attract visitors from across the globe.

In crafting 'Visiting St. Louis: A Guide for Tourists,' this book aims to provide prospective travelers with an insightful and detailed exploration of what makes this city a must-visit destination. With its iconic Gateway Arch painting a striking silhouette against the skyline, the city invites tourists to delve deeper into its myriad offerings beyond the well-known landmarks. This guide is particularly tailored for those who wish to experience St. Louis in its entirety, delving into not just its attractions, but the vibrant neighborhoods, local cuisine, and the community spirit that flourishes in each of its many districts.

Every trip to St. Louis is mapped with a multitude of choices and experiences. Here, tourists can find themselves marveling at the expansive collections in renowned museums or wandering through the lively streets of unique neighborhoods, each boasting its own character and local flair. This guide endeavors to present a comprehensive picture of both the popular and lesser-known sites, ensuring that travelers have the information needed to tailor their visit to suit their personal interests and preferences.

Food lovers will find this guide especially useful as it highlights the culinary gems that St. Louis offers. From its signature toasted ravioli to gooey butter cake, the city's culinary landscape is a flavor-filled journey waiting to be explored. Additionally, the growing local craft beer scene adds another dimension to the dining experience, offering unique brews that pair perfectly with regional dishes.

Moreover, 'Visiting St. Louis' provides practical information to help tourists navigate the city with ease. It covers everything from transportation options, and accommodation suggestions, to useful safety tips. Understanding the city's weather and knowing the best times to visit can vastly enhance the travel experience, which this guide diligently addresses.

Ultimately, this book is designed to serve as an essential companion for those embarking on an adventure to St. Louis, ensuring they return home with not only memories but a profound appreciation of this dynamic city's charm and vitality.

Whether you're a history enthusiast, a foodie, a culture aficionado, or simply a traveler in search of new experiences, St. Louis promises to exceed your expectations, offering something special for every visitor.

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CHAPTER ONE: Getting to St. Louis: Transportation Options

Welcome to St. Louis! Before you can dive into toasted ravioli, gaze up at the Gateway Arch, or catch a Cardinals game, you first need to actually get here. Fortunately, thanks to its prime location smack-dab in the middle of the United States, reaching St. Louis is generally straightforward, with a variety of options available to suit different budgets, timelines, and travel styles. Whether you prefer soaring through the clouds, cruising down the highway, riding the rails, or saving a few bucks on the bus, this chapter will guide you through the primary ways to arrive in the Gateway City.

Let's start with the most common method for long-distance travelers: flying. The main aerial gateway to the region is **St. Louis Lambert International Airport (STL)**. Named after Albert Bond Lambert, an early St. Louis aviator and Olympic silver medalist in golf (a man of many talents, apparently), STL is located about 14 miles northwest of downtown St. Louis. It's not the sprawling mega-hub you might find in larger coastal cities, which can actually be a blessing, often making navigation and security processes a bit less overwhelming than its bigger cousins. However, it's certainly large and busy enough to handle significant passenger traffic and serves numerous domestic destinations, along with a handful of international routes.

Lambert consists of two main terminals: Terminal 1 and Terminal 2. It's essential to know which terminal your airline uses before you arrive or arrange for pick-up. Terminal 1 is the larger and older of the two, serving airlines such as Air Canada, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Cape Air, Delta Air Lines, Southern Airways Express, Spirit Airlines, United Airlines, and charter flights. It features four concourses (A, B, C, and D), though Concourses B and D have seen reduced operations or different uses over time. Most domestic carriers operate out of Concourses A and C in Terminal 1.

Terminal 2 is exclusively used by Southwest Airlines, which has a major presence at STL. If you're flying Southwest, your destination within the airport is simple: Terminal 2. Both terminals offer the standard array of airport amenities, including restaurants ranging from quick bites to sit-down meals, bars, newsstands, gift shops, and free Wi-Fi access throughout. While perhaps not a culinary destination in itself, you can certainly grab a pre-flight meal or a post-flight snack without issue. The airport also features rotating art exhibits, showcasing local and national artists, which can provide a pleasant distraction during layovers or while waiting.

Getting from St. Louis Lambert International Airport to your accommodation or your first stop in the city is covered by several ground transportation options. The

MetroLink light rail system has stations at both Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, offering a direct and economical connection to downtown St. Louis, Clayton (a major business district), the Central West End, Forest Park, and points beyond, even extending into Illinois. This is often the most convenient and budget-friendly way to reach the central corridor of the city. We'll delve deeper into using MetroLink and other ways of getting around St. Louis in Chapter 2, but know that this efficient option awaits you right at the airport.

Beyond the light rail, you'll find dedicated pick-up areas for taxis, ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft, and pre-booked shuttle services. Taxi stands are located outside baggage claim at both terminals. Ride-sharing pick-up zones are clearly marked, usually requiring a short walk following the signs within the terminal. Several shuttle companies also operate, offering shared rides or private van services to various parts of the city and surrounding suburbs; these often require advance booking. Rental car facilities are also readily available at the airport, with counters typically located in Terminal 1, though shuttle buses serve both terminals to connect passengers to the rental car lots.

While STL is the primary airport, travelers might occasionally encounter **MidAmerica St. Louis Airport (BLV)**, located across the Mississippi River in Mascoutah, Illinois, about 25 miles east of downtown St. Louis. BLV primarily handles cargo and military flights (it shares runways with Scott Air Force Base) and offers very limited commercial passenger service, typically only through Allegiant Air to a few leisure destinations. Unless you find an incredibly specific and convenient flight on Allegiant that works for your itinerary, virtually all visitors flying to St. Louis will arrive via Lambert (STL). The distance and limited ground transport options from BLV make it less practical for most tourists heading to St. Louis city proper.

For many visitors, particularly those coming from surrounding states or enjoying a classic American road trip, driving is the preferred method of arrival. St. Louis sits at the crossroads of several major Interstate highways, making it highly accessible by car. **Interstate 70 (I-70)** runs east-west through the city, connecting it to Kansas City and Denver to the west, and Indianapolis and Columbus to the east. **Interstate 55 (I-55)** travels north-south, linking St. Louis with Chicago to the north and Memphis and New Orleans to the south. **Interstate 44 (I-44)** heads southwest towards Springfield, Missouri, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City. Lastly, **Interstate 64 (I-64)**, known locally as Highway 40 (its former designation), runs east-west, connecting St. Louis to Louisville and Lexington, Kentucky, to the east, and extending westward through Missouri.

Navigating the highway system around St. Louis is generally manageable, but like any major metropolitan area, it experiences significant rush hour congestion. Be prepared for slowdowns, particularly during morning (typically 7:00 AM - 9:00 AM) and evening (4:00 PM - 6:00 PM) commutes. Key choke points often include the Poplar Street

Bridge complex carrying I-55, I-64, and formerly I-70 traffic across the Mississippi River downtown, sections of I-64/Highway 40 through the central corridor, and the I-270 beltway that encircles much of the suburban area. If you're arriving during peak times, building some buffer time into your schedule is wise. Radio stations provide frequent traffic updates, and navigation apps are essential tools for identifying delays and potential alternate routes.

Crossing the Mississippi River is a defining feature of entering St. Louis from the east. Several impressive bridges span the river, including the iconic Eads Bridge (now primarily carrying MetroLink and pedestrians/cyclists), the Martin Luther King Bridge, the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge (carrying I-70 traffic), and the aforementioned Poplar Street Bridge. Approaching the city skyline, often first glimpsed as you crest a hill or round a bend on the interstate, with the Gateway Arch gleaming in the distance, is a memorable part of the arrival experience for many drivers.

Once you exit the interstate and navigate onto the city streets, you'll find a mix of grid patterns and more meandering routes, especially in older neighborhoods. Street names can sometimes change unexpectedly, and one-way streets are common, particularly downtown and in areas like Soulard and Lafayette Square. We'll explore driving *within* the city in more detail in the next chapter, including parking tips, but having a GPS or navigation app handy upon arrival is highly recommended. Driving offers the flexibility to explore the wider region and easily transport luggage, making it a popular choice for families or those planning excursions outside the city limits.

For those who prefer a more relaxed journey, letting someone else handle the driving while enjoying the scenery, traveling by train is an excellent option. **Amtrak**, the national passenger rail corporation, provides regular service to St. Louis via the **Gateway Transportation Center**, conveniently located downtown at 430 South 15th Street. This modern, multi-modal facility also serves intercity buses and connects directly to local MetroBus routes and is just a short walk or taxi ride from many downtown hotels and attractions. The station itself is clean and functional, replacing the much grander (but less centrally located for modern rail needs) St. Louis Union Station, which now serves as a hotel, entertainment complex, and aquarium.

Amtrak operates several routes through St. Louis. The **Lincoln Service** offers multiple daily departures connecting St. Louis to Chicago, with stops in Springfield, Illinois, and other communities along the way. The **Texas Eagle** is a long-distance route traveling daily between Chicago and San Antonio, Texas, passing through St. Louis, Little Rock, and Dallas. Portions of the Texas Eagle continue on to Los Angeles three times a week. The **Missouri River Runner** provides twice-daily service across the state, linking St. Louis with Kansas City via Jefferson City (the state capital), Sedalia, and Lee's Summit.

Train travel offers advantages like spacious seating (compared to airlines), the ability to walk around, onboard cafes, and often scenic views, particularly on routes running

alongside rivers or through rolling countryside. It avoids the hassles of airport security and the stresses of highway driving and traffic. Fares can be competitive, especially when booked in advance, though travel times are typically longer than flying. Arriving by train deposits you directly in the heart of the city, making it easy to transition to the next phase of your visit. The Gateway Transportation Center offers waiting areas, restrooms, and ticketing services, providing a comfortable start or end to your rail journey.

Finally, for the budget-conscious traveler or those coming from nearby cities, intercity bus services are a viable alternative. Companies like **Greyhound** and **Megabus** operate routes connecting St. Louis to numerous destinations across the country. Much like Amtrak, these bus services arrive and depart from the Gateway Transportation Center downtown. This centralized location is a major plus, providing easy access to local transportation and the city center upon arrival.

Bus travel is often the most economical way to reach St. Louis, with fares sometimes significantly lower than flying or driving, especially when factoring in gas and parking. Megabus, in particular, is known for its double-decker buses and occasional super-low promotional fares, often utilizing a curbside stop near the Gateway Transportation Center rather than inside the terminal itself, so be sure to check your specific arrival/departure location. Greyhound offers a more extensive network, reaching smaller towns as well as major cities.

The trade-off for the lower cost is typically longer travel times compared to other modes. Buses make frequent stops, and routes may not always be the most direct. Comfort levels vary by carrier and bus model, but modern buses often include amenities like Wi-Fi (though connectivity can be spotty), power outlets, and onboard restrooms. If time is less of a constraint than budget, or if you're traveling relatively short distances (e.g., from Kansas City, Chicago, Indianapolis, Memphis, or Nashville), the bus can be a practical and affordable choice. Arriving at the Gateway Transportation Center means you're well-positioned to begin exploring St. Louis almost immediately.

No matter which method you choose – the speed of flight, the independence of driving, the relaxation of the train, or the economy of the bus – arriving in St. Louis is the first step towards an exciting visit. Planning your journey involves considering factors like cost, travel time, convenience, and personal preference. Knowing the specifics of arriving at Lambert International Airport, navigating the major interstates, or utilizing the downtown Gateway Transportation Center will help ensure a smooth and stress-free start to your St. Louis adventure. The city's central location truly makes it accessible, ready to welcome you however you decide to arrive. Prepare for your Gateway City experience; the journey there is just the beginning.

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