

# St. Louis, Missouri

## *The City Beneath the Arch*



From its beginnings as a simple French village founded in 1764, St. Louis has evolved into one of the most diverse and exciting visitor destinations in the country. Its charming and character-filled neighborhoods, entertainment opportunities and more than 100 major attractions, make this a fun-filled vacation for the entire family. Of special interest are two new tourism programs for visitors seeking a unique way to explore the contributions of St. Louis' African-American heritage.

Historic verbal and written accounts of the Underground Railroad, tell of slaves who sought ways to escape the inhumane treatment of bondage with a secret travel system that promised refuge in the north. Several stops along the path in St. Louis have been identified and are packaged as travel tours.

The Greater St. Louis Black Tourism Network offers a three-hour tour that traces the African-American presence in St. Louis from 1769 to the turn of the 20th century. As a unique twist, the tour presentation includes an ensemble of live actors who bring the stories of St. Louis' African ancestors to life. The Network's director, Angela daSilva, points to the infamous story of Frankle and Johnny as an example. "Everyone knows the legend of these two lovers. We learned it from film, music and the stage, but they were cast as Irish characters. The truth is that Frankle and Johnny were Black and they lived in St. Louis."

The history of St. Louis' Black entrepreneurship also helps shape the historic tours by providing stories about people such as Madame Pelagie Rutgers who became a major St. Louis land owner during the 1840s and rented her buildings to White businessmen. The tour also tells the story of the famous Dred Scott slavery trials which began in St. Louis' historic Old Courthouse.

The neighborhoods of St. Louis reflect the charm and diversity of its people. Take a horse-drawn carriage ride through the cobblestone streets of the Laclede's Landing district, named for St. Louis' founder, Pierre Laclede. The nine-square-block historic area just north of the Gateway Arch is a step back into the city's past. Ornate brick warehouses offer sustenance for hungry diners with a thirst for live music. The district also plays host to a number of

annual special events, including the St. Louis Blues Heritage Festival held Labor Day weekend.

St. Louis' most historically significant African-American neighborhood, the Ville, is home to Sumner High School - the first school west of the Mississippi to provide secondary education for Black students. Sumner's illustrious graduates include opera diva Grace Bumbry, rock-n-roll legend Chuck Berry, singer Tina Turner, and tennis great Arthur Ashe. The Ville is also home to the former Homer G. Phillips Hospital, which was one of the first medical institutions in the country to train Black physicians, and the Annie Malone Children's Home, founded by one of the first African-American millionaires in the nation. Each year the community turns out in force to remember the legacy of Annie Malone and celebrate the neighborhood's spirit with a May Day parade.

Those who love a little history with their music should know that the blues is fused together in the minds of music lovers by W.C. Handy's immortal "St. Louis Blues." This tune has gone on to become the most recorded blues song in history. Handy's contemporary, ragtime king Scott Joplin, was a regular in the night spots of St. Louis around the time of the 1904 World's Fair. The house bearing his name is a state historic site in St. Louis.

There is still much more to do and see in St. Louis. Forest Park, recently named one of the top ten urban parks in the nation, is a haven for joggers, bikers and rollerbladers as they whiz past the park's Missouri History Museum where St. Louis' past comes to life. The St. Louis Zoo - one of the few remaining free zoos in the world, welcomes visitors with a roar. In the St. Louis Science Center, life-size dinosaurs lure guest into galleries which explore the physical world. Other significant sites are the Six-Flags Over Mid-America theme park, a participatory children's museum called The Magic House, riverboat rides on the Mississippi, casino gaming, and shopping for antiques, collectibles and high fashion apparel.

Whatever you choose to do, remember to enjoy the culture and diversity of St. Louis, the city beneath the Arch that welcomes you with open arms.

(Visitor information Hotline 1-800-916-0040; photographs courtesy of the St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission)