



Arch madness

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

No time to rest in the Gateway to the West

BY CAITLIN MORIARITY PHOTOS BY DAVID GARCIA

ST. LOUIS' TIME as the Gateway to the West during the westward expansion of the 19th century left its mark on the city, and not just that huge honkin' piece of metal known as the Arch. Plenty of people who were headed further west dug it so much they never left, filling the city with a diverse mix of people and cultures. More than just an overnight stop on your road trip from coast to coast, St. Louis is a great Midwestern metropolis to explore. Between its shops, parks, and access to tons of free entertainment, this über-cosmopolitan city in the "Show Me" state is sure to show you a good time.

Start your visit at the **U-City Loop** (www.ucityloop.com). Just south of Washington University, the Loop is home to an eclectic mix of college students, artists, and free spirits of all kinds. For music, books, and movies, take a stroll along Delmar. The best place on the Loop (and in town) to buy new and used CDs and zines is **Vintage Vinyl** (6610 Delmar). Just a few blocks down, check out the latest alternative and indie comics at **Star Clipper** (6392 Delmar), or see a movie at the **Tivoli** (6350 Delmar), a restored 1924 theater that shows a great mix of foreign, indie, and limited-release

films, and sells beer and wine, so you can catch the new buzz flick and a buzz at the same time.

When it comes to shopping, thrifty girls should rifle the racks at **Rag-O-Rama** (6388 Delmar) for vintage duds at reasonable prices. If the heady '60s is your retro era of choice, **Sunshine Daydream** (6608 Delmar) is a daydream come true for eye-blinding tie-dye, quirky jewelry, and all the incense you can burn. Find unique gifts like offbeat greeting cards, kanji earrings, DIY library kits, and *The Anti-Bride Guide* at **Phoenix Rising** (6331 Delmar).

The restaurant/concert venue **Blueberry Hill** (6504 Delmar) is not to be missed. The food and atmosphere have garnered it a shitload of awards. Known for having

the best burgers in town, it attracts everyone from the college students and artists who frequent the Loop to middle-aged professionals reliving their glory days spent at Blueberry Hill. Play a game of chess or Scrabble on the inlaid board games at your table, or just look at all the cool crap on the walls, from mounted deer and bison heads to a collection of Wurlitzer jukeboxes.

Forgot to pack reading material? St. Louis' largest independent bookstore, **Left Bank Books** (399 N. Euclid) in the Central West End has a great selection of new and used books. As you browse the dusty wooden shelves in the basement, you might meet the store's resident cat roaming the aisles or curled up in corner. After you've finished cruising the stacks, head down a few blocks to **The Grind** (56 Maryland Plaza) for a cup of joe. Much quieter than the nearby Coffee Cartel (the name should be enough of a warning), The Grind has a laid-back, unpretentious atmosphere, where you can shoot a game of pool or use their wireless connection to blog about how awesome your St. Louis trip is.

For eats, **Ichiban** (12388 Olive Blvd.) serves up generous portions of sushi and sashimi. The daily specials, extended hours, and great service make this one of my favorite places to eat after a long week. Vegetarians and carnivores alike love **Gokul's** (10633-B Page Ave.). It's St. Louis' only 100 percent vegetarian Indian restaurant, and probably the only place in town where you can take in an undubbed Bollywood movie while you chow down on saag paneer. If you



Talking shop in Phoenix Rising



Left Bank is one for the books



E'rebody in the Hill get tipsy



Retro retail at Rag-O-Rama

haven't left the Loop, try **Fitz's** (6605 Delmar), a restaurant run by the St. Louis soda company of the same name. It's a great place for soda snobs (like me) who like their carbonation in glass bottles, because you can actually watch the root beer getting bottled while you eat. And don't forget to save room for dessert: **Ted Drewes Frozen Custard** (6726 Chippewa) is a St. Louis icon.

You can satisfy your other appetite at **Cheap TRX** (3211 South Grand). This rad sex shop will have everything you need—from condoms and flavored lube to restraints—in case you're planning on picking up a cute, soulful artist. Or just pick up a vibrator or dildo and forget the artist altogether!

Once you've filled up your shopping bag and your belly, it's time to play. **City Museum** (701 North 15th St.) is like a playground on acid. Interactive exhibits include a surreal metallic environment called MonstroCity, a conglomeration of aircraft fuselages, a castle turret, a bunch of giant climbable slinkies, and The Museum of Mirth, Mystery and Mayhem, which captures the old school traveling carnie spirit. Don't forget to tip the busker playing Cure covers.

Before you head out for the night, pick up a copy of *The Riverfront Times*, St. Louis' alternative weekly newspaper (at coffeehouses and stores around town) for its list of goings-on, or check out www.36demons.com, a website maintained by a group of St. Louis punk/industrial/goth promoters. If live music is your thing, **The Hi-Pointe** (1001 McCausland Ave.) (not to be confused with the next-door theater of the same name) features alternative and punk acts. Divided into

two floors, the upstairs has comfy couches, an intimate atmosphere, and walls that look like punk counterculture exploded in there. **RT Weiler's** (201 N. Main St.), a bar with walls covered in crazy dog stuff (hence the name) in Old Town St. Charles, is not a sushi bar, but a bar that serves sushi. In theory, there's a menu. In practice, Chris the sushi chef will tell you what he has on hand and what he can make for you, and ask everyone at your table to chip in X amount of dollars. If you're in the mood for a gay old time, head on over to **Magnolia's** (5 South Vandeventer Ave.), a gay bar with karaoke, darts, and female impersonators. The third Monday of every month is "Revolution," when the goths invade with a great mix of industrial/darkwave/ '80s/punk music, so paint your nails black and throw your hands up in the air.

After a night of partying, refuel with a day of art and nature. **Forest Park** is a favorite with locals and visitors alike. You can hike, bike, and boat to your heart's content in the 1,293-acre park, site of the 1904 World's Fair. You can also take in live theater at **The Muny** (Theatre Drive in Forest Park), walk around the 90-acre **St. Louis Zoo** (1 Government Dr.), or indulge your inner geek at **The St. Louis Science Center** (5050 Oakland Ave.). The best part is that, with the exception of The Muny, all this stuff is free!

If you want a more low-key nature experience, take a stroll in the **Missouri Botanical Gardens** (4344 Shaw Blvd.), which contain the largest professionally maintained Japanese gardens in North America. If you visit over Labor Day weekend, don't miss the Japanese Festival, where you can buy a kimono at



Discover the curiosity of MonstroCity

an open-air market, snack on green tea ice cream, and watch live sumo wrestling. Definitely make time to see the Japanese Tea Ceremony—but be prepared to camp out for tickets. It's very popular and each ceremony can only accommodate 12 people.



Custard's vast stand