St. Louis really comes alive after dark, with the pulse of live music and laughter spilling out of its clubs and pubs. In the Central West End, Soulard, the Delmar Loop, and The Grove, each neighborhood offers its own flavor of nightlife. One moment you might be swaying to soulful blues in a historic tavern, and the next you're rocking out to an indie band at a hip concert hall. Craft breweries and cocktail lounges sit shoulder-to-shoulder with late-night eateries, so you're never far from a cold local brew or a tasty bite.

St. Louis offers plenty of ways to enjoy the outdoors, starting with the iconic Gateway Arch rising gracefully along the riverfront. Take a tram ride to the top of this stainless-steel monument for a panoramic view of the Mississippi River and the sprawling city below or relax in its green park grounds by the water. Not far away, the 1,300-acre Forest Park, bigger even than New York's Central Park, beckons with scenic paths and surprises at every turn. Within this urban oasis, you'll discover everything from tranquil lily ponds and sculpture gardens to the St. Louis Zoo and the Saint Louis Art Museum. When you're ready for more excitement, dive into the city's passionate sports scene: join the sea of red at Busch Stadium to cheer on the Cardinals baseball team.

To taste St. Louis history, step into the Old Courthouse downtown, where echoes of monumental civil rights trials still linger beneath its grand dome. You can also wander through the Missouri History Museum to learn about the city's past, from its French colonial beginnings to the spectacle of the 1904 World's Fair. St. Louis's cultural scene is equally vibrant. Art lovers can admire masterpieces spanning centuries at the Saint Louis Art Museum, and architecture buffs will love catching a show at the Fabulous Fox Theatre, an ornate 1920s movie palace turned live performance venue. After immersing yourself in so much history and culture, treat your taste buds to St. Louis's dynamic dining scene. The city's food culture is a rich blend of old and new flavors, savor handmade toasted ravioli and classic Italian fare in The Hill, indulge in sweet-and-smoky St. Louis-style barbecue at a beloved local joint, or sip a craft beer at a funky microbrewery where the atmosphere is as creative as the brew.

BEYOND THE CITY

MERAMEC CAVERNS, MISSOURI
Meramec Caverns, this legendary cave system hidden in the Ozark hills, about an hour west of St. Louis, has enticed travelers since the heyday of Route 66, when painted barn signs beckoned motorists to "Visit Meramec Caverns." On the guided tour, you'll descend into a cool underground world of towering stalactites, colorful mineral formations, and echoing caverns – even an infamous Jesse James hideout adds a dash of Wild West lore. Above ground, adventurers can zipline through the treetops or take a boat ride on the Meramec River to round out a full day of fun.

HANNIBAL, MISSOURI
Hannibal, Missouri, the riverside hometown of Mark Twain and around two hours north of St. Louis, brims with 19th-century charm and the spirit of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. You can tour Mark Twain's Boyhood Home and see the famous whitewashed fence, wander Main Street's antique shops and museums, and even explore Mark Twain Cave, which inspired scenes in Twain's novels. Hop on a Mississippi River sightseeing cruise aboard a nostalgic paddlewheel boat for a different view of this historic town. After soaking up all that history, enjoy some comfort food at the Mark Twain Dinette, a retro diner known for its frosty homemade root beer and sloppy "Maid-Rite" sandwiches.

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS
Springfield, Illinois's capital city, just ninety minutes northeast of St. Louis, is a must for history buffs and Route 66 enthusiasts alike. The downtown streets are like a living Lincoln Museum, you can visit Abraham Lincoln's preserved home, stand in the Old State Capitol where he gave speeches, and learn even more at the impressive Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. This city was also a classic stop along Route 66, so embrace the Mother Road nostalgia by grabbing lunch at the Cozy Dog Drive-In. This humble eatery invented the corn dog on a stick and still serves this local specialty to travelers. Don't leave town without trying Springfield's other claim-to-fame comfort food, the "horseshoe" sandwich, an open-faced pile of Texas toast, meat, fries, and cheese sauce available at many local pubs.

HERMANN, MISSOURI
Tucked into the rolling hills along the Missouri River about an hour and a half west of St. Louis, Hermann is a picturesque German American town famed for its wineries and Old-World charm. Stroll the brick-paved streets lined with 19th-century buildings, tour the underground cellars of Stone Hill Winery (founded in 1847), and soak up the heritage at small museums or during annual festivals like Maifest and Oktoberfest. The town's hilltop vineyards and river vistas make it feel like a slice of the Rhine Valley in the Midwest, perfect for an afternoon of wine tasting. Before you head back, savor authentic bratwurst and house-made sausages at the Hermann Wurst Haus, a butcher shop turned restaurant where you can feast on German platters and maybe take some smoked goodies to go.

GRAFTON, ILLINOIS
A short, scenic forty-five-minute drive north of St. Louis along the Great River Road leads to Grafton, a quaint river town known for its limestone bluffs and laid-back vibes. Outdoor lovers can hike the wooded trails of nearby Pere Marquette State Park or ride the new SkyTour aerial lift up to a bluff-top winery for a panoramic view where the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers meet. In town, you'll find rustic pubs, gift boutiques, and ice cream stands dotted along Main Street. On warm days, the riverfront comes alive with boaters and motorcyclists enjoying the view. Relax at a lively waterfront bar and enjoy a cold beer and front-row seats to watch barges and riverboats pass by.

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