St. Louis, Missouri, was founded in 1764 by French-born fur traders who journeyed upriver from New Orleans and named the city for the French King Louis IX. The city was built on a high bluff near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and became part of the United States through President Thomas Jefferson’s 1803 Louisiana Purchase.

The Gateway Arch, which symbolizes the westward expansion of the United States, and the Old Courthouse are part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Located underground on the Gateway Arch grounds, the Museum of Westward Expansion chronicles the Lewis & Clark expedition and pioneer life.

St. Louis is home to the following museums: St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri History Museum, Contemporary Art Museum, Saint Louis Science Center, Griot Museum of Black History and Culture, Campbell House Museum, Soldiers Memorial Museum, Memories Museum at the St. Louis Union Station, and Eugene Field House and St. Louis Toy Museum.

St. Louis offers many performing arts options. Whether traditional or alternative in style, plays and musicals are performed by the AVALON Theatre Company, The Muny, ArtLoft, Stray Dog Theatre at Tower Grove Abbey, Kramer’s Marionnette Theatre, The Black Rep at Emerson Performance Center at Harris-Stowe State University, Kurnat Kall, First Run Theatre, COCA, HotCity Theatre, Metro Theater Company, New Line Theatre, Tin Ceiling, West End Players, Fabulous Fox Theatre, and St. Louis Shakespeare. An annual summer Shakespeare Festival takes place in Forest Park. Equally diverse musical concerts are performed at the Sheldon Memorial, Peabody Opera House, BR’s Jazz Blues and Soups, Soulard Preservation Hall, and The Pageant. Local performing groups include BandTogether, Ambassadors of Harmony, African Musical Arts, Inc., Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Union Avenue Opera, Saint Louis Brass Band, St. Louis Metro Singers, and CHAIRS. Local dance presentations are performed by the Saint Louis Ballet and MADICO. Dance St. Louis sponsors performances by traveling dance companies. Student productions and other performances are held at Washington University’s Edison Theatre, St. Louis University’s University Theatre in Xavier Hall, and University of Missouri St. Louis Touhill Performing Arts Center.

NEIGHBORHOODS

St. Louis has several downtown residential areas, such as the Cupples Station and Washington Avenue neighborhoods, which feature loft apartments located in restored historic warehouses and industrial buildings. Several historic districts are convenient to the city’s hospitals. The Central West End borders Forest Park and features tree-lined private streets with large homes dating from the late 1800s. Italian Renaissance, Tudor Revival, Georgian Revival, Victorian Revival, French Eclectic, and Colonial Revival homes situated on private tree lined streets can be found in the Kingsbury-Washington Terrace neighborhood, which is known for its entrance gates. The majority of houses in the Lafayette Square district, which is built around Lafayette Park, were constructed before 1900 in Second Empire-style Victorian style; others were built in the Italianate style or display a Germanic influence. Although laid out as a planned residential development in 1889 with wide setbacks, curving streets, and deed restrictions, many of the large houses in Compton Heights were built as a result of the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Tower Grove East also dates from the World’s Fair period and offers red brick single-family homes, duplexes, and apartments on small lots near Tower Grove Park.

PARKS AND RECREATION

St. Louis has 111 parks with amenities that include archery; skating rinks; outdoor and indoor swimming pools; baseball, football, rugby, soccer, softball, and multipurpose fields; basketball, handball, horseshoe, tennis, racquetball, and volleyball courts; playground; bike and walking trails; dog parks; a velodrome for track cycling; boathouses; lakes; and recreational centers.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DAN DONOVAN, ST. LOUIS CONVENTION & VISITORS COMMISSION.

FOREST PARK, the city’s largest park, is home to the St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri History Museum, St. Louis Zoo, Saint Louis Science Center, The Muny, and Steinberg Ice Skating Rink. Other park amenities include archery; handball, racquetball, tennis, and volleyball courts; rugby, soccer, and softball fields; lakes; monuments; memorials; and trails. The Jewel Box, which contains floral displays, and the 1876 Cabanne House are also located on park grounds. Tower Grove Park features the Piper Palm House (a historic greenhouse); a farmers’ market; playgrounds; wading pool; tennis and horsehoe courts; and baseball, softball, cornball, and soccer fields. The adjacent Missouri Botanical Garden includes a Japanese strolling garden, Henry Shaw’s original 1850 estate home, and a collection of rare and endangered orchids.

Professional sports teams include the St. Louis Cardinals (baseball), St. Louis Rams (football), and St. Louis Blues (hockey).

EDUCATION

St. Louis Public schools educate approximately 25,000 students in 46 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, and 16 high schools. The district offers magnet and school choice programs. Many opportunities for higher education are available. The University of Missouri-St. Louis has bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees, including programs in the colleges of nursing and optometry. Washington University in St. Louis is a private research university that offers bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degree programs and also has a medical school. Fontbonne University and Saint Louis University are Catholic universities that offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs; Saint Louis University also has a medical school, advanced dental school, and nursing school. Harris-Stowe State University is the area’s only historically black university and offers many degree programs, including teacher education. Ranken Technical College specializes in automotive, construction, electrical, information technology, and manufacturing education. Sanford-Brown offers short-term programs and hands-on training in select health care fields. St. Louis Community College’s Forest Park Campus focuses on health technology and hospitality industry training.

HEALTH CARE

St. Louis is served by three hospital systems with almost 2,500 beds. The VA St. Louis Health Care System provides medical, surgical, psychiatric, rehabilitation, and other services for veterans. The city is also served by a long-term acute care facility and two psychiatric hospitals.

CITY STATS

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<tr>
<td>City Population</td>
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Photograph courtesy of Dan Donovan, St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission.