

Metropolitan Charisma, Midwestern Charm

Some travelers seek excitement in the great outdoors. Others enjoy visiting attractions. For some, fine dining and lodging are the necessary components of the perfect vacation

For every type of traveler, Springfield, Mo., offers a variety of adventures.

For fans of the outdoors, there is the internationally renowned Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World. Boasting more than 300,000 square feet of outdoor supplies, apparel, and wildlife exhibits, Bass Pro is currently the number one tourist attraction in Missouri with about 4 million annual visitors.

For a tranquil experience, visitors can stroll through 80 acres of native forests and fields at the Springfield-Conservation Nature Center, visit the Mizumoto Stroll Garden at Nathanael Greene Park or camp along one of the many rivers or lakes near Springfield. The city is surrounded by nature with accessible lakes, rivers and streams. The climate, known for its abundance of sunshine and mild temperatures, is conducive to activities of all kinds.

The area also offers many attractions for the adventurous traveler. Visitors can ride through Fantastic Caverns, a 50-minute tour of a huge underground riverbed with spectacular natural rock formations; or visit the Ambler Diversity of Life Center reptile exhibits Dickerson Park Zoo.

Children adore the Discovery Center, an interactive, hands-on opportunity to learn while they play. With everything from a giant eyeball and nose to computers that allow children to produce their own newspapers, the Discovery Center is a delight that entertains with unique educational experiences. The Discovery Center is the first building in southwest Missouri to go “green.” Renovations completed in 2006 incorporated environmentally-friendly elements, many of which are part of the educational display.

For sports fans, the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame has 22,000 square feet of sports memorabilia and educational displays. The Jordan Valley Park offers hockey and ice-skating at Mediacom Ice Park, green space with a unique interactive water feature, walking trails and much more. Just next door is the Hammons Field baseball stadium where the Springfield Cardinals, a Double-A franchise of the St. Louis Cardinals, play. Visitors who enjoy the greens can choose from five public golf courses, including the scenic Rivercut Golf Course.

For history buffs, the History Museum for Springfield-Greene County and Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield are a must. Wilson’s Creek features Civil War exhibits and visitors can walk, bike or drive through the site of the Battle of Wilson’s Creek on a self-guided trail tour. The battlefield also includes General Sweeny’s Museum of Civil War History, displaying thousands of Civil War items. And the city’s history museum features exhibits of local Ozarks history dating from prehistoric times through the 1900s. History lovers also will want to visit the Walnut Street National Historic Register District with more than 150 historic homes and unique shopping and dining experiences.

Visitors should have no problem filling their shopping bags at more than 150 shops at Battlefield

Mall and more than 30 retail centers and dozens of one-of-a-kind antique and gift stores throughout the city.

Finding a place to eat in Springfield is a snap. The city has more than 800 restaurants offering everything from fast food to fine dining. In the downtown area alone, more than 40 restaurants offer an eclectic blend of culture and cuisine including the Gallery Bistro, Springfield Brewing Company, Gilardi's Italian Ristorante, Mille's Turn of the Century Café and many others.

Fine art and culture are also an important part of the Springfield scene. For more than 45 years, the Springfield Art Museum has been host to Watercolor USA, a competitive exhibit with work from artists across the country.

Springfield Ballet, Springfield Symphony, Springfield Opera and Springfield Little Theatre bring the performing arts to life in the historic Landers Theatre, celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2009. The Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts also brings a wide array of high-quality performances – from Broadway plays to children's productions – to the Ozarks. A popular activity for arts enthusiasts is First Friday Art Walk, a monthly event featuring tours of dozens of shops and galleries. And the recently renovated historic Gillioz Theatre is an amazing piece of architecture offering unique performances and entertainment.

Springfield also has a unique mix of events for every season. With spring comes the Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World Spring Fishing Classic, the International Beer Festival, the wacky St. Pat's Parade and Irish Festival, Artsfest on Walnut Street and Mid-America Street Rod Nationals. In the summer, the Ozark Empire Fair offers fun for the entire family. In the fall, hunters can gear up for the Bass Pro Fall Hunting Classic, music fans can attend the Greater Ozarks Blues Fest and families can head downtown for the annual Cider Days celebration. Even in winter, guests can enjoy the Festival of Lights and First Night Springfield.

A mere 35 miles south of Springfield, Branson offers live entertainment and theme parks, and the newly reconstructed U.S. 65 offers a quick route to the travel destination.

In Springfield, visitors can choose from more than 6,000 hotel rooms and they won't have to worry about costs. In the "Corporate Travel Index" produced by "Business Travel News," Springfield ranks among the least expensive cities to visit in the United States.

Those interested in experiencing Springfield can plan their visit with the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau by calling 800-678-8767, 417-881-5300 or visit www.SpringfieldAdventures.com.