

The Budweiser Clydesdale stables is a big hit at Anheuser-Busch Brewery.

A Fun & Frothy Toast To St. Louis

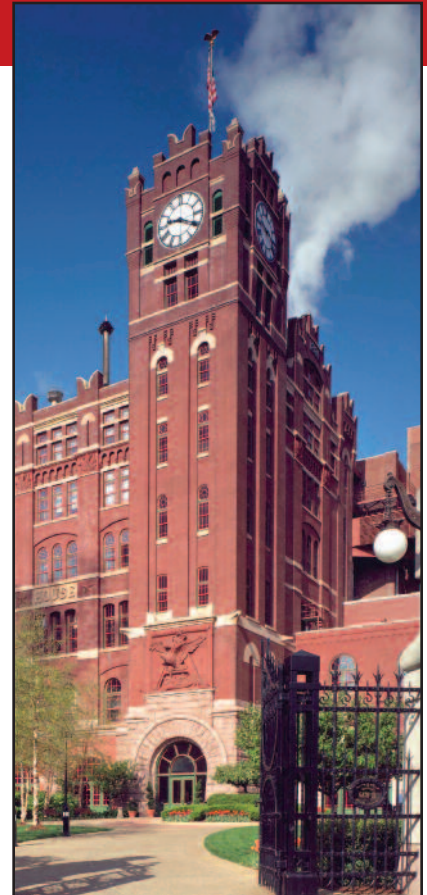
Free tours give visitors a peek at what's brewing in this Mississippi River city

I'm always on the lookout for locally made food and drink, and a recent trip to St. Louis was no exception. As soon as my son and I crossed the Mississippi River from Illinois, we made a beeline to **Anheuser-Busch Brewery**, the home of Budweiser beer, and caught the 3:10 p.m. tour. Walking between massive red-brick buildings in a group of 50 or so, we took in heady whiffs of malted barley and learned how they mix grain, hops, water and yeast to brew the "King of Beers."

Our free tour, one of the most popular factory tours in America, started at the Budweiser Clydesdale stables, a National Historic Landmark, where we saw a few of the iconic 2,000-pound horses that pull the bright red beer wagon in parades around the country. Then we toured the beechwood aging

cellar, where each huge tank, lined on the bottom with beechwood chips, holds the equivalent of 200,000 six-packs. The tour also includes the stately 1891 Brew House and the 1917 packaging plant, where cans and bottles are filled on a vast network of conveyors. The complex is located just south of downtown.

After boarding a trolley taking us back to the visitor center, we were rewarded with product sampling in the hospitality room, the place everyone was waiting for. We could choose from eight different beers on tap, including Anheuser-Busch brands like Shock Top, Beach Bum and Michelob as well as different styles of Budweiser. The limit is two drinks per guest; soft drinks are available for youngsters and non-drinkers.



Groups see where beer is made in Anheuser-Busch's 1891 Brew House.

on location: midwest ❖

Then it's on to the gift shop, which sells everything from Budweiser T-shirts and other logo wear to beer glasses, coaster sets and Clydesdale stuffed animals. We put together a six-pack of assorted beers made by Anheuser-Busch and affiliated units throughout the world, choosing exotic brands like Leffe (a Belgian ale), Czechvar from the Czech Republic and Wild Blue, a blueberry brew.

brewing giant's ties to St. Louis, but Anheuser-Busch hasn't owned the Cardinals ball club since 1996.)

Groups of 15 or more need to make reservations for the daily tours, which can accommodate up to 50 people from one group. Larger groups will need to split up. In addition to the free tours, the special Beermaster Tour, limited to 10 visitors, provides behind-the-scenes peeks and a few gifts. Cost is \$25; offered several times daily. (314-577-2626, budweisertours.com)

Another beer fan's option is **Schlafly Bottleworks**, a small-batch craft brewery in suburban Maplewood. The free, one-hour public tour, offered Friday through Sunday, is limited to 25 guests, but special group tours can be arranged Monday through Thursday (email tours@schlafly.com). Tours include exhibits on St. Louis brewing history and time for sampling the lagers and ales. Groups can eat in the open-kitchen dining room or beer garden. A popular menu item: beer-cheese soup. Schlafly beers are distributed in Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

(314-241-2337, schlafly.com)

Root beer takes center stage at **Fitz's American Grill & Bottling Works** in the Delmar Loop neighborhood, a lively dining/entertainment hub. Free tours of the nostalgia-filled restaurant, especially popular with student groups, include watching the vintage root beer bottling line, which mixes, fills, caps and labels every single soft drink the company produces. (Check ahead for the operating schedule.) Dating back to the 1940s, the rare equipment is easily viewed from the main dining room. An introductory presentation covers the history of the Loop and of root beer.

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Your group will probably want to stay for lunch and enjoy a burger and root beer float. We feasted on the classic House Float, a four-scoop pyramid of vanilla ice cream perched on a glass mug with 11 ounces of Fitz's creamy smooth root beer, a brew sweetened with cane sugar, not corn syrup. As soon as they arrived, we whipped out our cameras. The Mississippi Float uses chocolate ice cream, while the Java has cappuccino.

Baby boomers in St. Louis fondly recall the original Fitz's, a drive-in root beer stand operated for 25 years by James Fitzpatrick. He retired in the early 1970s, but his special root beer recipe was rediscovered in the late '80s and in 1993 Fitz's American Grill opened on Delmar Boulevard.

Fitz's premium root beer is found in stores and restaurants throughout St. Louis. The company also makes cream soda, orange cream, strawberry, grape and ginger ale.

Besides hamburgers, popular menu items at Fitz's include pulled pork and club sandwiches, macaroni and cheese, sweet potato fries, deep-fried pickles and onion rings. Toasted ravioli, those little pillows of pasta that have become a St. Louis signature food, make a good appetizer. The restaurant has an outdoor patio, a counter with stools, and an upstairs bar with billiards and games. (314-726-9555, fitzsrootbeer.com)

Whether your tastes lean toward beer or root beer, St. Louis is the place to lift a glass and watch it made. **LGT**



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

See Randy Mink's article "Eating Your Way Through St. Louis," a report on the city's favorite food destinations. Log on to <http://leisuregrouptravel.com/?p=22089>.



View the vintage bottling works and then indulge in a Fitz's root beer float.

Before or after the brewery tour, guests peruse the exhibit area next to the gift shop. They can view TV and print advertising over the years, admire the German beer stein collection and learn about the history of Anheuser-Busch, founded in 1852. During Prohibition (1919-1933) the St. Louis-based company made non-alcoholic products to stay in business—things like root beer, ginger ale, ice cream and malted barley syrup for baking. (The name of another city landmark, Busch Stadium, also reflects the



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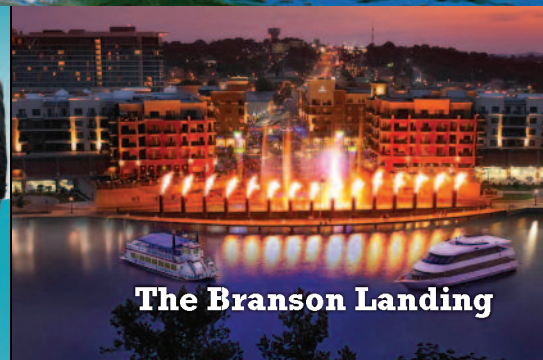
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“They sure celebrate Christmas early here.”

Leave it to my 6-year-old to state an obvious truth in the tourism industry. With the need to fill hotel rooms and theater and restaurant seats, destination holiday celebrations start before most shopping malls can deck the halls, adding a “fifth season” to complement spring, summer, fall and winter offerings.

These holiday events present a unique opportunity for groups to add an early or mid-November departure to their trip schedule. By planning early, you help travelers avoid the mad December holiday travel rush, alleviate some of the concerns of inclement weather playing havoc with travel plans, and allow opportunities for advance holiday shopping.

On a recent fam trip in Branson, we enjoyed the kickoff of the 23rd annual Ozark Mountain Christmas, a celebration that runs from early November to the end of December. We had the chance to see firsthand as the Branson CVB rolled out the proverbial red carpet during the opening event at Branson Landing, one of the area’s newest attraction, shopping and entertainment complexes. Spectators enjoyed live entertainment from local shows, a photo opportunity with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and a water and fire pyrotechnics display grand finale.

But that was just a start. Everywhere we traveled in the city, holiday décor adorned street lights, theaters dressed up in holiday style and restaurants decked

Branson Celebrates its “Fifth Season” in Grand Style

Two months of holiday festivities await groups in this Ozarks entertainment mecca

the walls. Witnessing holiday spirit so early in the season, even the biggest curmudgeon would find a soft spot in his heart for holiday cheer in the self-proclaimed Brightest Place in America.

HOLIDAY SHOWS

Branson’s entertainment is displayed in festive style with themed productions at the area’s 100+ live shows. Some of Branson’s icons make special appearances each Christmas season, and mainstream shows add some holiday spice. On the theater scene, Sight & Sound’s *Miracle of Christmas* traces the lives of Mary and Joseph before the birth of Christ. Spectacular sets, live animals and Broadway-quality actors and music make this a must for any Chris-

The true meaning of the season dramatically unfolds at Sight & Sound’s *Miracle of Christmas* in November-December.

tian travel group. (sight-sound.com.)

At Silver Dollar City a special holiday production of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is authentic as it gets. This inspiring story of redemption features a live band, a talented cast, special effects, stunning Victorian scenery and period costuming.

The entire theme park is in holiday mode as Silver Dollar City presents An Old Time Christmas. Be sure to check out the City’s square, the setting for Christmas on Main Street, the theme park’s biggest light show ever. See the musical five-story Christmas tree as it twinkles and dances in unison with over one million lights adorning the square. Emblazoned in over 100,000 lights, the Gifts of Christmas Holiday Light Parade glides through the streets of the “City” twice each evening. In addition to festive feasts and holiday treats, you can learn new recipes for your Christmas celebrations at Silver Dollar City’s Culinary & Craft School.

The entire town of Branson is transformed into a holiday wonderland in November and December. For details on 2011 festivities, visit explorebranson.com. LGT



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

See Jeff Gayduk’s video interview with Dan Lenning of Branson’s Sight & Sound Theatre, plus behind-the-scenes footage. Log on to <http://leisuregrouptravel.com/?p=21944>