



Generic cereal without milk for breakfast, Ramen noodles for lunch and hot dog surprise, yet again, for dinner: it's official, you're broke. Even if your financial situation hasn't hit "Ramen noodle-status", you probably want to be conservative with your cash in this dire economy. You may be a bit depressed over your bank account, but you can't afford to go out and cheer yourself up, so you spiral into a deeper funk; a seemingly vicious circle. Well, never fear! St. Louis and the surrounding counties are chock full of free and very cheap things to do for fun. Most native St. Louisans, and even most visitors, know about free entertainment staples such as the St. Louis Zoo, the St. Louis Science Center and the St. Louis Art Museum, but our fair city has much more gratis to give.

Ford Free Fridays at the St. Louis Art Museum- Okay, so you already knew that the museum was free, big deal, right? Well, on Fridays (when the museum stays open until 9pm) you get into the special rotating exhibits for free, courtesy of Ford Motor Co. Considering these exhibits usually run about \$10 per person, this is a good deal. Before you go see the exhibit (if you do happen to have a little cash and you're with a date) a glass of wine during sunset at the Boathouse restaurant, down the hill from the museum, is a surefire aphrodisiac.

Lemmon's Free Pizza and a Movie Mondays- Lemmon's a South City bar on Gravois, is a staple of the hip and hungry. Mondays can be lonely when everyone else is still recovering from the weekend, so what better way to pass the time than with a free pizza buffet and a flick? The movies vary week to week, but generally range from campy 80s action to cult classic. The crowd is young, the beer is cheap and plentiful and it beats spending \$20 for a pizza at your own house.

Pop's Mailing List- Pop's bar and concert venue rocks the east side 24/7, and if you sign up for their mailing list, they'll email you free tickets to random shows. Now Pop's isn't everybody's cup of tea, but even if it's free tickets to a Nirvana tribute band, going to a show is a perfect way to meet new people. If nothing else, it will make you feel better about yourself!

Karaoke Bars- Karaoke is another easy way to feel better about yourself. Not by singing, but by thanking the heavens that you don't suck as bad as these hot messes. Honestly, it is entertaining, and it is free. You can always get a group of friends together and make a wager on how many times you're going to hear that "I Kissed a Girl" song or some horrendous Creed cover. Some popular choices in St. Louis are Tom's Bar and Grill and Keith's Tavern, both of which have karaoke on Friday and Saturday nights. Who knows, you may even win a prize for your off-key Pussycat Doll rendition.

Ice Skating- Now while this one isn't free, it is usually only \$5.50 per person and you do get exercise, which is much cheaper than going to the gym. It's an excuse to hold hands and hold hips as you may need your partner to "instruct" you on the ice. If you go to IceZone at the St. Louis Mills mall in Hazelwood, you can watch the Blues and the visiting teams practice. Even if you aren't into hockey, there are some fine players worth watching out there.

Cabins at Mark Twain Lake- Although the lake front cabins at Mark Twain State Park aren't free, the \$55 a night rental fee can be split between six people, the cabin's occupancy limit. So that's three couples, or you and five of your closest pals, each paying less than \$10 each! The cedar cabins are airy and clean, with a loft that sleeps two, a futon in the living room for two and a separate bedroom with a queen-size bed. Although you need to bring your own water and you have to walk to the restrooms, the cabins include heating and cooling, a fridge and a microwave. The front porches overlooking the lake are equipped with seating and all sites have a grill and fire pit. Located in Perry, Missouri, a few hours away from downtown St. Louis, this is ranked one of the best and most scenic campsites in the state. Just because you're poor, doesn't mean you don't deserve a vacation!

Purina Farms- Purina Farms is an animal farm, much like Grant's Farm, but without the crowds of tourists and that little trolley that keeps you at a boring distance from the animals. Located in Gray Summit (out west on highway 44), Purina Farms is like a giant petting zoo for farm animals. They also host regular dog shows and have a cat palace. This is a fun, FREE, place to take kids, or go yourself, to run around in the hay maze. Although admission is free, reservations are required.

St. Louis Symphony On Stage at Powell- Just because you're thrifty, it doesn't mean that you can't also be cultured and classy. As an alternative to the formal, pricey concerts at Powell Hall, the St. Louis Symphony also hosts the On Stage at Powell series, a chance for music lovers to hear the musicians discuss the different types of music they love and then perform for the informal audience. Performing various Wednesday evenings throughout the season, these concerts are free.

Brewery Tours- St. Louis is unquestionably a beer town, and we have some of the best breweries to prove it. St. Louis is such a beer town, that it is a rite of passage for many elementary school kids to take a trip to the Anheuser- Busch brewery to meet the famous Clydesdale horses and dream of the day when they can take some of the brewery's brews. The free tours take you through the factory, the history galleries and the stables. Tours are followed by a tasting of various types of beer. A bit like going through Wonka's chocolate factory for adults, this tour really is a surreal experience. On a smaller scale, the Schlafly Bottleworks in Maplewood offers tours of its brewery throughout the week. Also followed up with a beer tasting, Schlafly's tour has the upper hand on Anheuser- Busch (InBev), because their beer is actually delicious. Because the Bottleworks is also a bar and restaurant, you can sit around and relax after the tour, or walk down Manchester and check out some of Maplewood's local boutiques, bars and cafes.

Winery Tours- The blue-blooded cousin of the brewery tour, the winery tour will probably cost you about \$2.50 per person. Missouri is not just famous for beer, we actually have some award-winning wine produced in the rolling hills of Augusta and Hermann. Stone Hill Winery, in Hermann, is one of these award-winners. For a few dollars you can explore the cavern- like rooms where the wine is fermented, take in the scenery of hills and vines and at the end of the tour, your guide will lead you through a very generous tasting of their finest vintages. If you are with a non-wine drinker, Stone Hill's sparkling juices are phenomenal and reasonably priced. The best part about the wine tours is that you can go from tour to tour, tasting everything that this region has to offer, for much less than you'd spend holed up in some snooty Clayton bar.

Hopefully this list has given you something to do besides watching *Simpsons* re-runs and pining for the glory days of shelling out a \$15 cover charge with the nonchalance of a British playboy. Please feel free to share your own free and cheap things to do in St. Louis, as we're all in this together.