The Best Free and Low-Cost Places to Visit in Springfield, MO

Exploring the Queen City of the Ozarks does not require a massive travel budget. Whether you are planning a weekend road trip, looking **student housing near Missouri State University** for family-friendly outings, or simply want to experience local culture without overspending, Springfield, Missouri, offers plenty of memorable sights that cost nothing—or just a few dollars—to enjoy.

1. Springfield Botanical Gardens at Nathanael Greene/Close Memorial Park

Spanning over 100 acres, the Springfield Botanical Gardens is one of the city's premier outdoor destinations. Admission to the main park and its dozens of themed gardens—including the Roston Native Butterfly House—is completely free. Within the grounds, you can also visit the Mizumoto Japanese Stroll Garden, which features koi ponds, a traditional teahouse, and an iconic moon bridge for a very small seasonal admission fee (and free entry on select days).

2. Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World

Even if you are not shopping for outdoor gear, the original Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World flagship store is a massive, free attraction in its own right. Spanning hundreds of thousands of square feet, the store features giant indoor waterfalls, massive freshwater aquariums, wildlife dioramas, and the free NRA National Sporting Arms Museum and Archery Hall of Fame. You can easily spend a couple of hours wandering the exhibits without spending a dime.

3. Springfield Conservation Nature Center

Located on the southeast side of town, the Springfield Conservation Nature Center offers an immersive look at Ozarks wildlife at zero cost. The facility houses interactive indoor exhibits, live reptiles and amphibians, and an observation deck. Outside, visitors can explore roughly three miles of flat, well-maintained walking trails winding through forests, wetlands, and glades where white-tailed deer and migratory birds are frequently spotted.

4. Missouri Institute of Natural Science

Home to "Henry," the largest Triceratops skeleton ever discovered, the Missouri Institute of Natural Science is a hidden gem for fossil and geology enthusiasts. Located near Riverbluff Cave, this donation-based museum showcases Ice Age fossils, ancient minerals, and fascinating paleontology displays. While admission is free, leaving a small donation helps support ongoing local excavations.

5. Jordan Valley Park and Downtown Sculpture Walk

Situated in the heart of downtown, Jordan Valley Park is a lively green space featuring walking paths, grassy lawns, and an interactive musical fountain plaza that is especially popular in warmer months. From the park, you can easily transition into a self-guided tour of the Sculpture Walk Springfield, an outdoor gallery of rotating sculptures displayed along downtown sidewalks and around Park Central Square.

6. Historic Commercial Street (C-Street)

For a dose of local history and vibrant street art, take a stroll down Historic Commercial Street—known locally as C-Street. This six-block historic district is lined with restored 19th-century architecture, colorful murals, quirky boutiques, and weekend farmers markets. Window shopping and walking the historic Jefferson Avenue Footbridge cost nothing, and you can grab an affordable coffee or pastry at one of the local cafes.

7. Sequiota Park

If you want scenic nature without leaving city limits, Sequiota Park is a local favorite. The park features a picturesque lake populated by ducks and geese, tree-lined trails connecting to the Ozark Greenways network, and a dramatic limestone cave opening you can peer into from the trail. It is an ideal spot for a low-cost afternoon picnic.



8. Budget-Friendly Classics: Fun Acre and 1984 Arcade

When you are ready to spend a few dollars on classic entertainment, Springfield has two standout low-cost spots:

- **Fun Acre:** This nostalgic, cash-only miniature golf course has been a local staple for decades, offering a full round of mini-golf for just a few dollars per person.
- **1984 Arcade:** Located downtown, this retro arcade charges a modest flat admission fee (typically under $10) that sets all classic arcade cabinets to free play for the entire visit.

9. Roadside Quirks: The World's Largest Fork and Route 66

Springfield is recognized as the birthplace of Route 66, and driving the historic corridor through town is a free trip through Americana. While cruising around, swing by Chesterfield Village to snap a photo with The World's Largest Fork—a 35-foot-tall stainless steel sculpture that makes for a fun, zero-cost roadside stop.