

## Episode 84: St. Louis

### Summary

Our guest Alex talks about his hometown of St. Louis in the United States. He talks about the city's famous arch, its charm and what he thinks of its reputation as the best baseball town in America.

### Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking to my friend Alex, and Alex, you're American and in particular from the city of St. Louis. And where is that?

Alex: That is in the state of Missouri. It's kind of right in the middle of the United States. Umm, uhh, it's known in a region called the midwest which is a bit confusing, umm, but that's, yeah, it's kind of right in the middle.

Nick: Right, because I guess the original settlement in the United States, uhh, was in the east, so it's only later that there's been a lot of movement towards the west and so, I guess, St. Louis was more considered the Gateway to the West, right?

Alex: Well exactly, yeah, so, umm, St. Louis is called the Gateway to the West and we have a big arch, umm, a big monument called the arch, which is massive, and it's sort of supposed to be, umm, people, sort of, symbolised people going through St. Louis to westward expansion.

Nick: And so what kind of era are we talking about in terms of people really coming through that ... the city at that time.

Alex: Ohh, uhh, probably late 1800s, early 1900s maybe.

Nick: Right, so the gateway arch, like you said, it's this huge arch, and you can go up to the top of it, right?

Alex: Yeah.

Nick: And then you have this great view all over St. Louis.

Alex: Yeah, umm, you can take a ... uhh, it's kind of a weird little elevator thing but since it's sort of an arch, like half of the McDonald's M, basically, umm, it sort of has to go up the inside of the arch in a, sort of, a stair pattern. So you go up and then it moves over a little bit, then you go up, then it moves over a little bit. But

then when you're at the top, you can see, umm, you know, downtown St. Louis and over the river into Illinois and stuff like that. So, yeah, it's a lot of fun to do once or twice, you know. Like, it's good, I haven't done it in years but if you go to St. Louis, a lot of people will go up in the arch. Just 'cause it's ... because it's like anything else, you go up in something giant.

Nick: Right, so I didn't actually realise the state border between Missouri and Illinois is right there?

Alex: Yes, yes, the Mississippi River is like ... so downtown St. Louis is right on the Mississippi River, and if you drive over, umm, yeah, I mean, you're in Illinois in two minutes.

Nick: Right, so some of the suburbs are probably in a different state, to a certain degree.

Alex: Yeah, sort of, so for instance, uhh, what's called East St. Louis is actually in Illinois. Umm, a lot of St. Louisans like to not talk about East St. Louis much because it's one of the most dangerous cities in America. So we like to keep ... Illinois can have it.

Nick: And what I wanted to ask you about is that, you know, for outsiders especially I think, a lot of the cities in the United States seem very generic<sup>1</sup>. If, I'm going to pick a couple at random here, but if you think about a city like, I don't know, Atlanta or Houston, they don't really seem to have that much that defines them in the way that a New York or a San Francisco does. So do you think St. Louis is like that or does its own kind of character and its own charm?

Alex: I think that to outsiders St. Louis is probably rightfully like that, kind of a bit nondescript<sup>2</sup>. Umm, you know, they call a lot of the midwest flyover country because you fly over it to get from the east coast to the west coast or vice versa. Umm, but I also, you know, the New York Times wrote an article recently about going to St. Louis for holidays and, umm, you know, people do talk about the midwestern charm, which I think is a thing. It's sort of hard to, umm, be conscious of it, being, when you're in it, you know? But, umm, I think St. Louis has a lot going on for it. I really like it. I mean, I love it, I was born there. Umm, and I think that people that move there, I think the general, sort of, reaction is, 'Oh, this place isn't so bad!' You know, so I don't think anybody's like, 'Oh man, you gotta go to St. Louis, it's great.' But I do think that it's a bit of a ... I don't know, there's some hidden charm and it's a bit of a hidden jewel I think, personally, but obviously I'm very biased, umm, yeah.

Nick: Yeah, but maybe it's underrated compared with some other cities.

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<sup>1</sup> generic: standard

<sup>2</sup> nondescript: uninteresting, not special

Alex: Oh, 100 per cent. I think so, yeah. And I think if you were to go to the States and you did a trip that was St. Louis and Memphis and Nashville and New Orleans, sort of that, you can do that pretty easily driving. Umm, New Orleans is a bit of a drive. But, umm, but, yeah, I think you would see part of the country that a lot of people never see, especially overseas travellers, 'cause, you know, rightfully so<sup>3</sup>, they go to the west coast or they go to New York or something like that. And those are all great states and great cities - that have great cities - but I think a lot of people miss a lot of the good parts of America, just a different side of America, umm, by not going to St. Louis and places like that.

Nick: So I spent one night in St. Louis once. And we were there with a couple of other out-of-town people, and one of the things that we realised, or that we thought, was that the downtown, in the evening, there's not really much going on there 'cause it's more like a business district, and you really need to know where the interesting places are. 'Cause there's a lot of cool little suburbs, but if don't really ... if you're not from there, you don't really know where to go.

Alex: That's 100 per cent true, and that's one of the reasons why going there on holidays is a bit tricky. Umm, because it's not like, when you talk about downtown St. Louis, it's not, like, downtown New York - well, that's a bad example because downtown New York's massive, but downtown anywhere, because it's not really one centralised area. And unfortunately a lot of parts of downtown St. Louis are really run-down<sup>4</sup> and underdeveloped, and that's slowly changing, but, umm, and frankly<sup>5</sup>, dangerous. You wouldn't want to be walking around there at night. But there are a ton of cool neighbourhoods, kind of downtown, towards the river, east, more towards the river, that are great to hang out in and stay in, like, umm, The Loop, Central West End, Soulard - all those would be really cool to grab an Air BnB. You know, they're not going to have many hotels. I mean The Loop has one really cool one called the Moonrise. Umm, but, like, you could grab an Air BnB or something like that in one of those areas, you'd have plenty of pubs and cafés to walk around in and you'd be close enough, whether it's taxi or Uber, umm, you know, to get to a lot of other really cool places down in the city. And a lot of younger people move toward the city if they stay in St. Louis. And so it's got a good vibe<sup>6</sup> to it, a lot of culture, and, umm, and - oh yeah, but going back to the taxi/Uber thing, that's another major drawback<sup>7</sup> of St. Louis, is that the public transport is next to nothing. Umm, there's a metro link, uhh, railway system that is very cool, compared ... you know, it doesn't really go out that far. And I think, I'm not positive about this but I think that has a lot to do with the gap between the city and the county which is a big issue in St. Louis in terms of policy-making and funding. Umm, it's kind of separate governments, almost. Umm, and St. Louis is

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<sup>3</sup> rightfully so: with good reason

<sup>4</sup> run-down: neglected, in poor condition

<sup>5</sup> frankly: speaking openly

<sup>6</sup> vibe: feeling, atmosphere

<sup>7</sup> drawback: disadvantage, undesirable feature

one of if not the largest city in America where the city and the county aren't unified in terms of that kind of stuff. So that's a bit frustrating and the bus system isn't ... nobody uses the bus system either, so. Umm, but anyway, enough of the bad stuff, it's really, yeah, there are a lot of really good little pockets that if you know where they are - and it's not like they're hidden or hard to find, you read anything about St. Louis and they'll be in there.

Nick: Cool. Another thing I wanted to talk to you about was baseball. I know you're a big baseball fan.

Alex: Oh, yeah!

Nick: And they call St. Louis the best baseball town in America.

Alex: Yeah.

Nick: Is that true?

Alex: Uhh, I hate that terminology because, umm, websites like Deadspin and other people like to joke, tear it apart a little bit for that. I think it's a bit corny<sup>8</sup> to be honest. Umm, I love it, I think it is a baseball town and we've had a ton of success and the town really likes the Cardinals and the numbers, the attendance numbers are always huge even when we're not, uhh, even when we're not in a playoff year, for example. Umm, so it's definitely a baseball town in the sense of baseball comes first, second and third in terms of sports. Umm, I think it would be rare to find somebody in St. Louis who doesn't regularly watch Cardinals games or isn't at least up on how they're doing or, you know, goes to a few games a year. Umm, so, no, you would never catch me saying, especially recorded, that it's the best baseball town in America, umm, or baseball heaven, or best fans in baseball and all that garbage. I think that's all quite silly. But I do, you know, a lot of players do say that the fans are really knowledgeable about the game. That might just be lip service<sup>9</sup>, I don't know. But, you know, I do think they care a lot, and the sports coverage of baseball is crazy year-round<sup>10</sup>, pretty much.

Nick: It is interesting how, yeah, different cities are into different sports more, even though it's all within the same country. Umm, and there are a few, yeah, really good baseball towns and St. Louis is definitely one of them, even if we're not going to say it's the best one. Umm, but you have a brand new stadium as well for the baseball team.

Alex: Yeah, it's been there for probably ten-ish years now, and it's ... but it's funny you say brand new, because it feels like it's always been the stadium. I mean, I grew up going to old Busch (Stadium), which is Busch 2, and I loved it, growing

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<sup>8</sup> corny: lame, tiresome

<sup>9</sup> lip service: insincere positive words

<sup>10</sup> year-round: for the entire year

up. But I was too young to really know what made a good or bad venue for a sporting event. Umm, it was all metal and concrete, you know, the concourses were crappy and ... but, like, in a good way, I guess in a normal way. And, but now Busch (Stadium) 3 really feels like a, you know, it feels like it belongs with all the stadiums these days that have been getting built in the last ten-fifteen years. Umm, yeah, it's great.

Nick: Alright, thanks a lot for talking to us.

Alex: Not a problem. Thanks Nick.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why does St. Louis have a giant arch?
2. What is the public transport like in St. Louis, according to Alex?
3. Why doesn't Alex like to call St. Louis the best baseball town in America?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. The major \_\_\_\_\_ of London is the weather. It's grey and rainy for most of the year.
2. A major redevelopment plan is underway to restore some of the \_\_\_\_\_ buildings in the historic centre of the city.
3. In the tropics, you can swim \_\_\_\_\_ because it's always sunny and the water stays warm.
4. He's always late for work and \_\_\_\_\_, I'm sick of it.
5. The President is surrounded by people who tell him how great he is, but that's mostly just \_\_\_\_\_, because they have their jobs thanks to him.
6. There's a new bar in town with lots of funky lights, cool music and a great \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The plane was delayed by 12 hours and, \_\_\_\_\_, the passengers demanded a partial refund of cost of the ticket.
8. He always says the same \_\_\_\_\_ joke over and over again. He thinks it's hilarious but no one else does.
9. From the outside, it just looks like another \_\_\_\_\_ building like all the others. But inside, it's a completely different story.
10. I never liked any of the \_\_\_\_\_ brands of toothpaste but I finally found one that I liked at the health food store.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to go to St. Louis? Why or why not?
2. Would you like to do a trip like Alex mentioned, going to places like St. Louis, Memphis, Nashville and New Orleans and seeing a different side of America? Or would you prefer to go to New York, LA, San Francisco etc?
3. Alex refers to St. Louis as a baseball town. What do you know about baseball and do you like it?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. The arch symbolises westward expansion, with St. Louis known as the Gateway to the West.
2. He said the public transport is not good at all.
3. He thinks the name is corny and doesn't like how people can use it to make fun of the town and the team.

### Exercises

1. drawback
2. run-down
3. year-round
4. frankly
5. lip service
6. vibe
7. rightfully so
8. corny
9. nondescript
10. generic