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EXPERIENCING

# AMERICA'S

## FIVE BIGGEST SPORTS

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Americans take their sports very seriously, even though the rest of the world hasn't quite caught onto them in the same way. For first-timers, experiencing American football, basketball and ice hockey live is like nothing you've ever seen before. To help prepare you ahead of your next trip stateside, LTG have put together a brief guide to America's five most-watched sports, including a basic summary of the rules and the big hitters in each. Our guide takes you from New York to Dallas, for those looking to absorb the sporting aspects of American culture.

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**AMERICAN FOOTBALL (NFL)**

**WHAT IS IT?**

American football is the most-watched sport in the United States, making it one of the most financially lucrative sports in the world. The aim of the game is for the attacking team to get the ball into their opponent's end zone to score a touchdown (worth six points). Touchdowns are the primary way to gain points, though there are a few other ways to score up to three. At the end of the season, the two best sides play in a match called the Super Bowl – one of the world's most-watched annual sporting events – to crown that year's champions.



**WHERE CAN I SEE A GAME?**

The Dallas Cowboys are one of the most successful teams in the NFL, which is reflected in their supporters' adoration of their team; in 2018, they drew an average crowd of 91,619 to their home matches at AT&T Arena, ensuring a raucous atmosphere. At the Cowboys, regular season tickets start at \$85 and can peak at \$410 for a single game. In pre-season, it is possible to pick up a ticket for around \$35. There are 32 NFL teams which can be found in almost every popular city with tourists, though there are some vast regions of the country that aren't represented in the NFL.

Away from Texas, the New England Patriots are the current Super Bowl champions and are the best team in NFL history, having reached 11 Super Bowls and won six. The two biggest cities, New York and Los Angeles, both have two teams, though the only way the cross-city rivals could meet competitively would be at the Super Bowl – something that has never happened before. Chicago is also a city with an NFL obsession for their team, the Bears.



**WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

One of the most significant aspects of a NFL game day is the food. Before entering the stadium, fans enjoy barbeques and beer at tailgate parties in car parks near stadiums (explaining the name – fans cook, drink, play games and even watch TV around the open tailgates of their SUVs). Unlike some other sports, there's no need for the fans of opposing teams to be segregated, which leads to a friendly, communal atmosphere. Once inside the stadium, popular foods in the stadium include nachos and hot dogs, though every city has its own specialty.

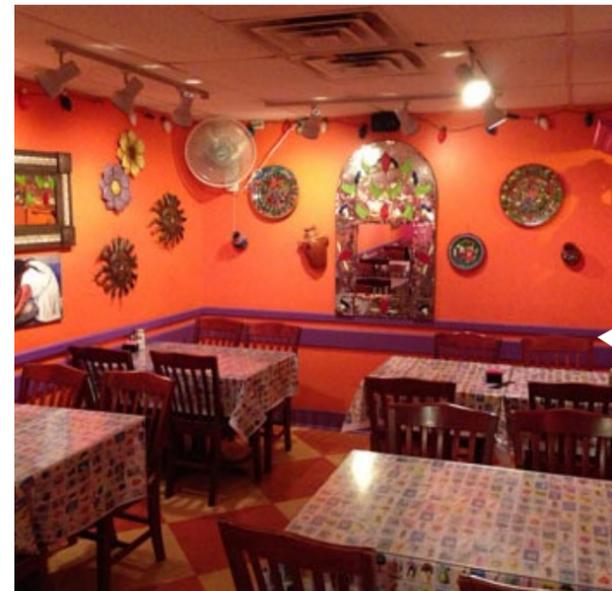
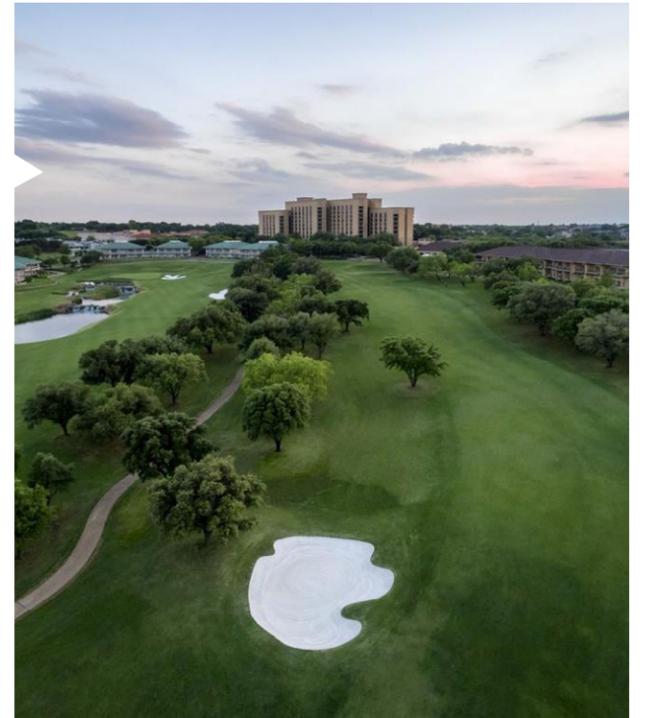
Another NFL ritual you'll soon discover is that every fan will be decked out in their team's colours. In order to blend in, you can pick up a piece of merchandise (even if it's just a cap) without too much difficulty or expense, and it helps get you into the spirit of things and gives you a team to cheer for! Games often take up to three hours, despite there only being four 15-minute quarters, so entertainment is provided to pique your interest during the breaks in play.



**WHERE TO STAY**

**Four Seasons Resort & Club Dallas at Las Colinas**

To continue the sporting theme of your time in Dallas, the Four Seasons Resort at Las Colinas has an 18-hole golf course (that used to form part of the PGA Tour), an extensive sport and recreation club and their bespoke Well & Being Spa. Their signature restaurant, Law, offers 'land, air and water' fine dining options.



**WHERE TO EAT**

**Mia's Tex-Mex**

One of the defining aspects of Texan culture is Tex-Mex cuisine, which combines the best aspects of Mexican and American food. Other restaurants in Dallas may be more deluxe, but for an authentic experience of Texas you can't go wrong with Mia's. Their brisket tacos are a specialty, though you should try and keep room to try their quesadillas and chimichangas.

**TOP CITY ATTRACTION**

**Reunion Tower**

As well as being a striking building to look at from the outside, Reunion Tower provides its visitors with some of the best views in Texas from the revolving, 360-degree viewing platform. If that's not enough, celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck's Five Sixty Restaurant is at the top of the tower for the ultimate food-and-view combination.





**BASKETBALL (NBA)**

**WHAT IS IT?**

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is a 30-team basketball competition, widely regarded as the world's best league. Several American basketball players, past and present, such as LeBron James, Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant have eclipsed the sport to become some of the world's best-known athletes. The scoring system is relatively straightforward: the amount of points a successful shot earns depends on the distance of the thrower. The teams are divided into two conferences (east and west). The best eight teams from each conference qualify for the Play-Offs, with the victorious team from the east tipping off against the winner from the west to determine the national champion.



**WHERE CAN I SEE A GAME?**

The California-based Golden State Warriors have been the dominant force in NBA over the last five years but following the big-name signings of three All Stars in Kevin Durant, Kyrie Irving and DeAndre Jordan, Brooklyn Nets could be the team to follow in the 2019/20 season. Those willing to splash out extra money for courtside seats may find themselves brushing shoulders with celebrities such as Jay Z and Beyonce. Their home arena, the Barclays Center, is located in central Brooklyn, conveniently located near some of the city's best restaurants and bars for pre and post-game entertainment.

If you are heading north of the border, the Toronto Raptors are the current NBA champions so catching an action-packed, high-quality game at the Scotiabank Arena would also be a safe bet. Alternatively, most major American cities have an NBA arena close by for you to catch a game (unless you happen to be in the north-west, where the Dakotas and their surrounding states are still not represented).



**WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

Due to the small size of a basketball court in comparison to a football field, NBA stadiums are smaller, normally holding around 20,000 spectators. This leads to a much more intimidating atmosphere for the players to contend with, particularly during the Play-Offs. The Nets' Barclays Center is located in the heart of Brooklyn, and their matches against the Manhattan-based New York Knicks create a particularly lively backdrop for the action.

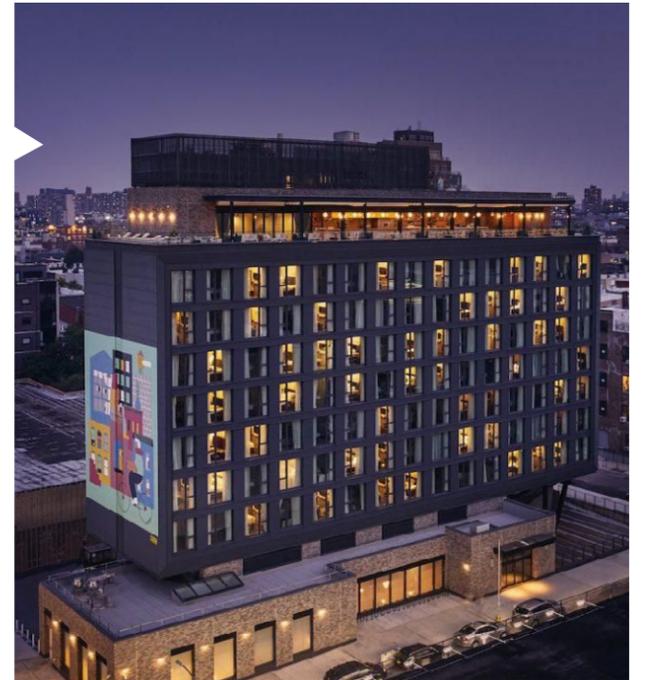
Basketball is a very fast-paced sport, and the athletes can only be truly appreciated when you watch them play live. Games are also very high-scoring, providing excellent entertainment value. As with most other US sports teams, the basketball itself is only one aspect of going to a Nets game; there's plenty of family entertainment pre-game as well as during intervals and time outs. In addition, the club's anthem 'Brooklyn: Something To Lean On' will be stuck in your head long after you have left the Barclays Centre.



**WHERE TO STAY**

**The Hoxton Williamsburg**

Opened in 2018, The Hoxton Williamsburg offers an authentic local experience. It features rooms adorning eye-catching bedding from Brooklyn-based designers Dusen Dusen, a restaurant menu carefully curated by two well-respected Williamsburg restaurateurs, Jud Mongell and Zeb Stewart, and a retail offering which showcases the area's creativity by stocking a limited edition range of local products.



**WHERE TO EAT**

**Lilia Caffé Ristorante**

The Williamsburg neighbourhood is home to some of Brooklyn's best restaurants, including Lilia. This Italian restaurant is best-known for its homemade pasta dishes, though its seafood (inspired by seaside restaurants in Italy) is also exquisite. The restaurant has become so popular with locals that it would certainly be worth booking in advance of your visit to the Nets to avoid disappointment.



**TOP CITY ATTRACTION**

**Crossing the Brooklyn Bridge**

The Brooklyn Bridge is an architectural landmark that links Brooklyn and Manhattan. The bridge is just over a mile long, and the views of the city's skyline means you should take your time crossing it. In Lower Manhattan, there are countless other things to take in, including the 9/11 Memorial Garden and the observation deck of One World Trade Center.





**BASEBALL (MLB)**

**WHAT IS IT?**

In North America and parts of Asia, baseball is an incredibly popular sport, though it hasn't quite taken hold in Europe or on other continents in the same way. Cricket or rounders would be the closest point of comparison to those not familiar with baseball, because it's based on a pitcher throwing a ball to a batsman. The defending team try to get the batsman 'out,' while the batting team try to score as many runs as possible. Major League Baseball is made up of 29 American teams and one Canadian team trying to qualify for an annual postseason tournament (ironically) called the World Series to determine that year's winner.



**WHERE CAN I SEE A GAME?**

The Boston Red Sox are one of MLB's most recognisable teams, having won the World Series nine times. Red Sox play at Fenway Park, which is the league's oldest baseball ground – the reputation of the team and the heritage of the stadium make them the perfect team for baseball beginners to watch their first game. Other world-renowned teams include the New York Yankees (you can probably see their logo on baseball caps on every continent), the San Francisco Giants, the Chicago Cubs and the Los Angeles Dodgers.

To guarantee a home fixture, be sure to visit Fenway Park on Patriot's Day – a public holiday celebrated in New England on the third Monday in April to commemorate the battles of Lexington and Concord at the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. The Red Sox have been scheduled to play at home on Patriot's Day every year since 1959, even moving the start time to 11am since 1969 to allow fans to see the end of the famous Boston Marathon after the game.



**WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

If you're sitting in the right (or wrong, depending on how you look at it) part of the stadium, one thing you can expect is stray ball and bats to fly towards you from the field. If you catch a ball, it's yours to keep as a souvenir! Just be aware of your surroundings, particularly if there are warning signs around you or if you sit in outfield or upper deck bleachers.

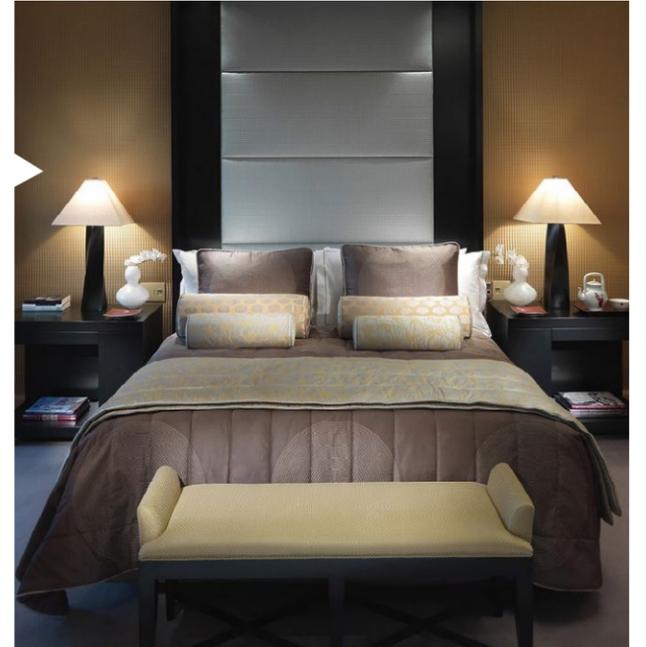
Baseball games last for nine innings or more, and can sometimes last upwards of three hours. This makes food and drink a vital part of visiting a baseball stadium; popular snacks are foot-long hotdogs, peanuts and Cracker Jack – a mixture of caramel-coated popcorn and peanuts. Vendors walking around in the stadium can top up your beer and snacks throughout the game without even having to leave your seat, though this does involve trusting the people sitting next to you to pass your cash and snacks to and from the vendor.



**WHERE TO STAY**

**Mandarin Oriental**

Mandarin Oriental has the best spa in Massachusetts, offering an array of treatments utilising modern techniques and eastern therapies. Their sophisticated and relaxed deluxe rooms offer a choice of city or courtyard views. The hotel is located in Back Bay, one of Boston's primary commercial neighbourhoods, the perfect place to pass the time before and after your Red Sox experience.



**WHERE TO EAT**

**Giacomo's Ristorante**

The small family-owned restaurant offers a casual, no thrills setting with a fast service and a high table turnover rate, yet it still entices an eager crowd with the promise of simple, good quality Italian cuisine. Fresh, homemade linguini is at the heart of the menu. Diners can top their linguini with a vast range of seafood options or, for the more indecisive, opt for the Zuppa di Pesce – a massive two-person sharer brimming with clams, mussels, shrimp, scallops, calamari and lobster.



**TOP CITY ATTRACTION**

**The Freedom Trail**

Boston played an important role in the origins of the United States and is considered by many to be the birthplace of the American Revolution. This is perfectly encapsulated along the Freedom Trail – a 2.5 mile stretch featuring 16 historic sights linked to some of the most important players and key moments in the Nation's history.





**SOCCER (MLS)**

**WHAT IS IT?**

Association football (or as the Americans insist, soccer) has come on leaps and bounds in the United States over the past few years. Internationally, their women's team has enjoyed a period of sustained success led by players like Carli Lloyd and Abby Wambach, culminating in four World Cup wins. Domestically, the men's game has grown considerably, with big-name international stars such as David Villa and Kakà turning out for Major League Soccer (MLS) sides. The introduction of new franchises, such as Atlanta United and David Beckham's high-profile Club Internacional de Fútbol Miami (Inter Miami), is further helping the league reach new international audiences.



**WHERE CAN I SEE A GAME?**

If Beckham and co.'s project stays on schedule, supporters will be able to watch Inter Miami at the Lockhart Stadium in Fort Lauderdale in the 2020 MLS season. New franchises such as Inter Miami are continually popping up throughout the United States, with Los Angeles FC joining LA Galaxy on the west coast; New York City FC becoming the second NY-based soccer club in 2015; and Atlanta United joining and then winning the MLS Cup in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

Atlanta's Mercedes Benz Stadium is by far the most impressive stadium in MLS – it even has a five-storey tall 360-degree screen, meaning the action can be replayed in exceedingly clear quality. With the way the league has expanded in recent years, professional, high-level soccer can be found across America (and in three Canadian cities too). Tickets for MLS games can be purchased for as little as \$20 or upwards of \$250, depending on the team and the type of seat you opt for.



**WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

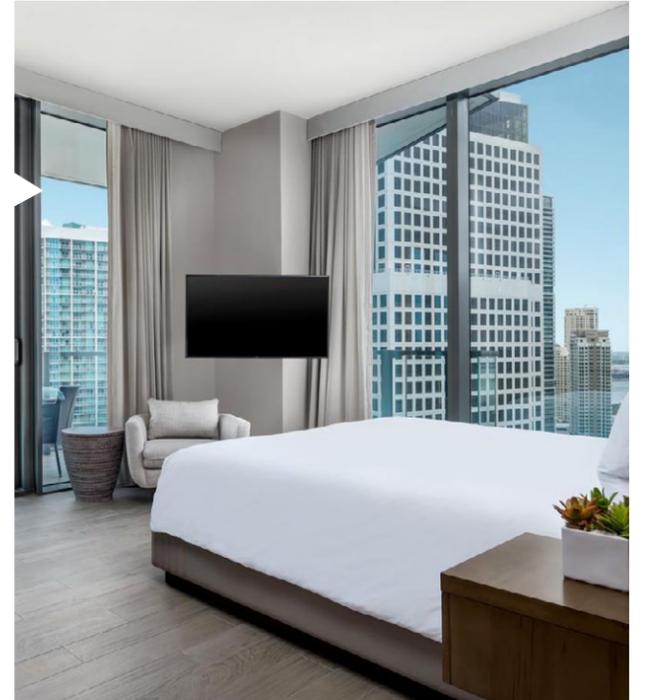
As no player has ever kicked a ball in an Inter Miami shirt yet, the exact atmosphere of a game there is yet to be revealed, though the global appeal of Beckham's name alongside the raising standards of MLS will guarantee some big-name players in the Magic City. Besides, what could be better than taking in a soccer match underneath the Florida sun?

More generally, although the sport in the United States still has a reputation for being a 'retirement home' for past-their-prime footballers, the truth is that you will see a high standard of football in MLS. Players like Zlatan Ibrahimović, Wayne Rooney and Josef Martínez currently all play in MLS and are helping raise the standard of play even further to rid the league of these negative stereotypes. Some clubs have developed remarkable traditions to enhance the match day experience further; every time Portland Timbers score, 'Timber Joey' uses a chainsaw to cut a slab of from a log to present to the goalscorer after the game. While unorthodox, every rev of the chainsaw helps get the fans on their feet.



**WHERE TO STAY**  
**EAST Miami**

EAST Miami, a glass-fronted 352-room hotel in the city's financial district, comes with exceptional views over Miami. The hotel has an outdoor deck offering four different 'pool experiences' and a well-equipped gym. Hotel guests share the 40th-floor Balinese-inspired rooftop bar with the district's financial workers, adding a sense of Miami authenticity to the stunning city views.



**WHERE TO EAT**  
**La Mar by Gastón Acurio**

If you decide to be one of the first to watch Beckham's Miami franchise in action, it's worth staying in central Miami (despite the 30-mile journey to the stadium in Fort Lauderdale) for the food. La Mar by Gastón Acurio is a charming Peruvian restaurant set next to ocean, though the immaculately-presented food is enough to rival any sea views.

**TOP CITY ATTRACTION**  
**Little Havana**

Cuban immigration has had a significant impact on the city's culture, as emphasised by Little Havana just west of downtown Miami. The area contains an abundance of Cuban restaurants and Latin American galleries and boutiques. Wherever you go in Little Havana, you'll be followed by the rich scent of Cuban coffee and cigars from the myriad of cafés and tobacco shops.





**ICE HOCKEY (NHL)**

**WHAT IS IT?**

The National Hockey League, which features 24 American teams and seven from Canada, is perhaps the best ice hockey league in the world. The 2019-20 season commenced in October and will draw to a close in June 2020 with the Stanley Cup Final. Ice hockey players are incredibly talented, as they are able to both skate very well and dribble past players and shoot at high speeds. Ice hockey has also been associated with violence, and fighting has been an accepted part of the sport for almost a century as a way for players to realise the consequences of overstepping the mark with foul play.



**WHERE CAN I SEE A GAME?**

The professional ice hockey league emerged from Canada in 1917, so it should come as no surprise that the most successful team in the league's history are the Montreal Canadiens with 25 titles. However, the Canadiens haven't won the Stanley Cup since 1993, so it could be worth sticking to the south of the border to see the best current teams in action.

In 2019, the Stanley Cup was claimed for the first time by Missouri's St Louis Blues, who beat the Detroit Red Wings (the second most successful team in the competition's history) in the final. Blues went from 'worst to first' to end their 52-year wait for silverware. While it's yet to be seen if Blues can continue their Cinderella story into the new season, the fans are sure to produce a strong atmosphere throughout the new season to celebrate their team's newfound success. St Louis plays at the 18,000-seat Enterprise Center, where a large suspended screen ensures fans see the game from every angle.



**WHAT CAN I EXPECT?**

Like baseball, it's worth being aware that various pieces of equipment (in this case, the puck) could deflect out of the rink towards spectators, especially if you sit near the front. NHL games consist of three 20-minute periods. With breaks and no overtime, an ice hockey game will usually last around two and a quarter hours, though the games are so fast-paced that it tends to fly by.

For newcomers, the rules can be quite perplexing, but the beauty of ice hockey is you don't fully need to understand what's going on to enjoy the spectacle! The scoring system isn't complicated, and the sight of the 12 players slamming into each other is entertainment enough. At the end of the game, the three designated most valuable players will re-emerge onto the rink, and they often give away souvenirs to the crowd including pucks, shirts and sticks. As with other sports and stadiums, food and drinks will be readily available, and your best bet is to see where the locals go to get the stadium's delicacy.

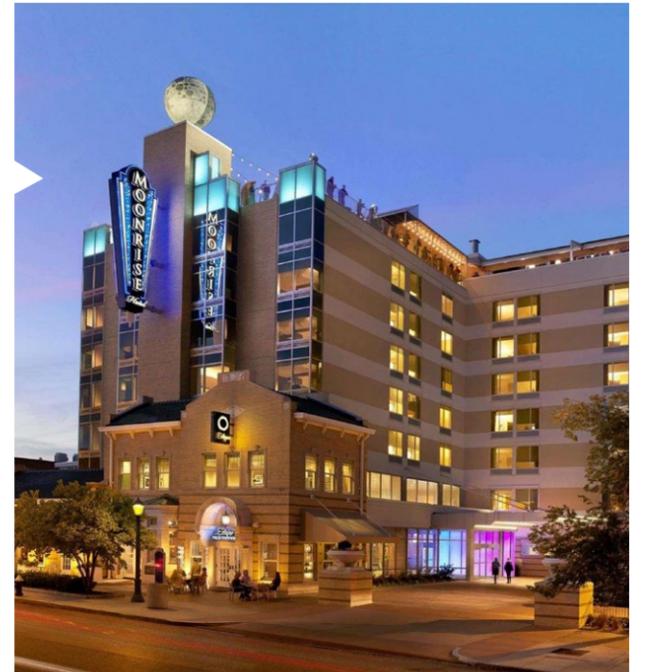


**WHERE TO STAY**

**Moonrise Hotel**



St Louis' colourful Moonrise Hotel features quirky space memorabilia-themed décor alongside luxurious amenities in the bustling Delmar Loop neighbourhood. To get to Enterprise Center, you'll need to take public transport as the hotel is located six miles from the arena, though the distance is made worthwhile by the hotel's picturesque Rooftop Terrace Bar and plush celebrity suites.



**WHERE TO EAT**

**Salt + Smoke**



Missouri is a barbeque state, so it would be wrong to recommend anywhere in St Louis that doesn't serve up the finest smoked BBQ food. Salt +Smoke's chef and pitmaster, Haley Riley, oversees the restaurant's southern-style cooking, including tender beef brisket, flavoursome pulled pork and a range of smoky sandwiches. Salt + Smoke's craft and oak-aged cocktails complete the experience.

**TOP CITY ATTRACTION**

**Gateway Arch**



At a whopping 192 metres tall, the Gateway Arch towers above the rest of St Louis, making it the world's largest arch. The arch was built in 1963 to commemorate the westwards expansion of America to eventually discover California. Visitors can take a tram to the top of the archway, giving them unrivalled views over St Louis.

