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Here's how to score those elusive NFL tickets; [Chicago Final Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

- Minnesota Vikings: Getting a ticket to see a game in the loudest stadium in the NFL can be tricky, but there is an option that can get you in the door. The Vikings offer fans the opportunity to purchase a VIP Tent Ticket Package. This package--starting at \$275 per person--includes game ticket, buffet with complimentary bar, parking, a Viking alumni autograph session and a gift from the team. Accommodations are not included. Call the Minnesota Vikings Ticket Office at 612-338-4537 to book your tickets, or visit the team's Web site at www.vikings.com for more information.

Full Text (898 words)

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If you are an NFL fan wanting to see your favorite pro football team play this season and don't already have tickets, you might want to think again--or at least re-think your travel plans.

Individual game tickets are getting harder and harder to come by. In fact, some NFL teams, such as the Green Bay Packers, don't even sell individual tickets. Lambeau Field, home to the Packers, has been sold out on a season-ticket basis since 1960.

But there's still a way to get into Lambeau Field and other sold-out NFL stadiums without paying outrageous amounts of money to ticket brokers: Book a hotel or special package that includes game tickets.

Most NFL cities have a hotel (some with links to the team) that offers packages that include a room, parking, tickets and sometimes even a meal. Check out the packages below for details on how to see some Midwest teams in action this season.

- Chicago Bears: With the Bears playing in the new Soldier Field, game tickets are going for as much as \$750 on some ticket brokers' Web sites. A cheaper way to see a game at the refashioned stadium is to book a hotel package through Essex Inn at 800 S. Michigan Ave. in downtown Chicago. Packages for two start at \$299 (\$149.50 per person) and include a one-night stay (either Saturday or Sunday), two game tickets, parking at the hotel (Soldier Field is within walking distance) and two complimentary drinks. The package price also includes all taxes. However, if you are interested, don't delay as packages remain for only the final three home games on Nov. 30, Dec. 14 and Dec. 21. Information is available online at www.essexinn.com, but packages can be booked only by calling 800-621-6909.

- Green Bay Packers: Possibly the hardest ticket in all of the NFL to get your hands on--unless you know where to look. Log onto www.packerfantours.com to book yourself a Packer Tour Package for both home and away Green Bay games. Home game packages for two start at \$578 and include two tickets to the game and one-night hotel stay. But better book quick (or stash this information away for next year); many home packages are already sold out for 2003.

- Indianapolis Colts: Although Colts tickets are not as hard to come by as Bears or Packer seats, booking a hotel package is a convenient way to enjoy a game at the RCA Dome. The Adam's Mark Hotel and Suites, located downtown near the dome, offers its patrons the Colts Play Action Package. For \$199 (\$99.50 per person), you get two lower-level tickets to a Colts game and deluxe overnight accommodations. You also have the option to add on brunch for two at the hotel's Deco Restaurant for an additional \$40. Parking is not included and will run you \$9 per night. This package can be booked only by calling the hotel directly at 317-972-0600 and asking for the in-house

reservations department.

- Minnesota Vikings: Getting a ticket to see a game in the loudest stadium in the NFL can be tricky, but there is an option that can get you in the door. The Vikings offer fans the opportunity to purchase a VIP Tent Ticket Package. This package--starting at \$275 per person--includes game ticket, buffet with complimentary bar, parking, a Viking alumni autograph session and a gift from the team. Accommodations are not included. Call the Minnesota Vikings Ticket Office at 612-338-4537 to book your tickets, or visit the team's Web site at www.vikings.com for more information.

- Other options/other teams: In some cities neither the team nor area hotels offer travel packages. But often there's still a way to see a game. Sports travel sites such as TheFootballTicket.com, Tele-Sports.com, SportsTravel.com and RoadTrips.com offer vacation packages to see all 32 NFL teams. These travel sites not only get you into the stadium, but they can also arrange your hotel accommodations, flights and ground transfers (although many times you will save money by booking your own air travel, as you can be more selective in who you fly with).

In St. Louis, for instance, SportsTravel.com offers a two-night package at the Marriott Downtown St. Louis with two tickets to a Rams game and an NFL souvenir starting at \$680 (\$340 a person).

Or in Cleveland, RoadTrip.com has a package that includes two Browns game tickets and two nights hotel accommodations at the Radisson Hotel at Gateway starting at \$698 (\$349 per person).

True sports fans will also be interested to know that most of these sports travel Web sites not only offer packages to see NFL games, but also have options to purchase packages to see college bowl games, the Super Bowl and other professional sporting events, such as NASCAR, NBA basketball and NHL hockey.

If you really aren't interested in a hotel or travel package and still want to see a game this season, you can also check online auctions, such as eBay, although many times ticket prices here become just as expensive as purchasing from ticket brokers.

And here's a thought: Have you actually tried calling the team or their ticket representatives, such as Ticketmaster (or Tickets.com for Buffalo and Oakland tickets) to purchase tickets? Sometimes even "sold-out" games still have tickets available, especially as it gets closer to the date of the game. Except, of course, for Green Bay.

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