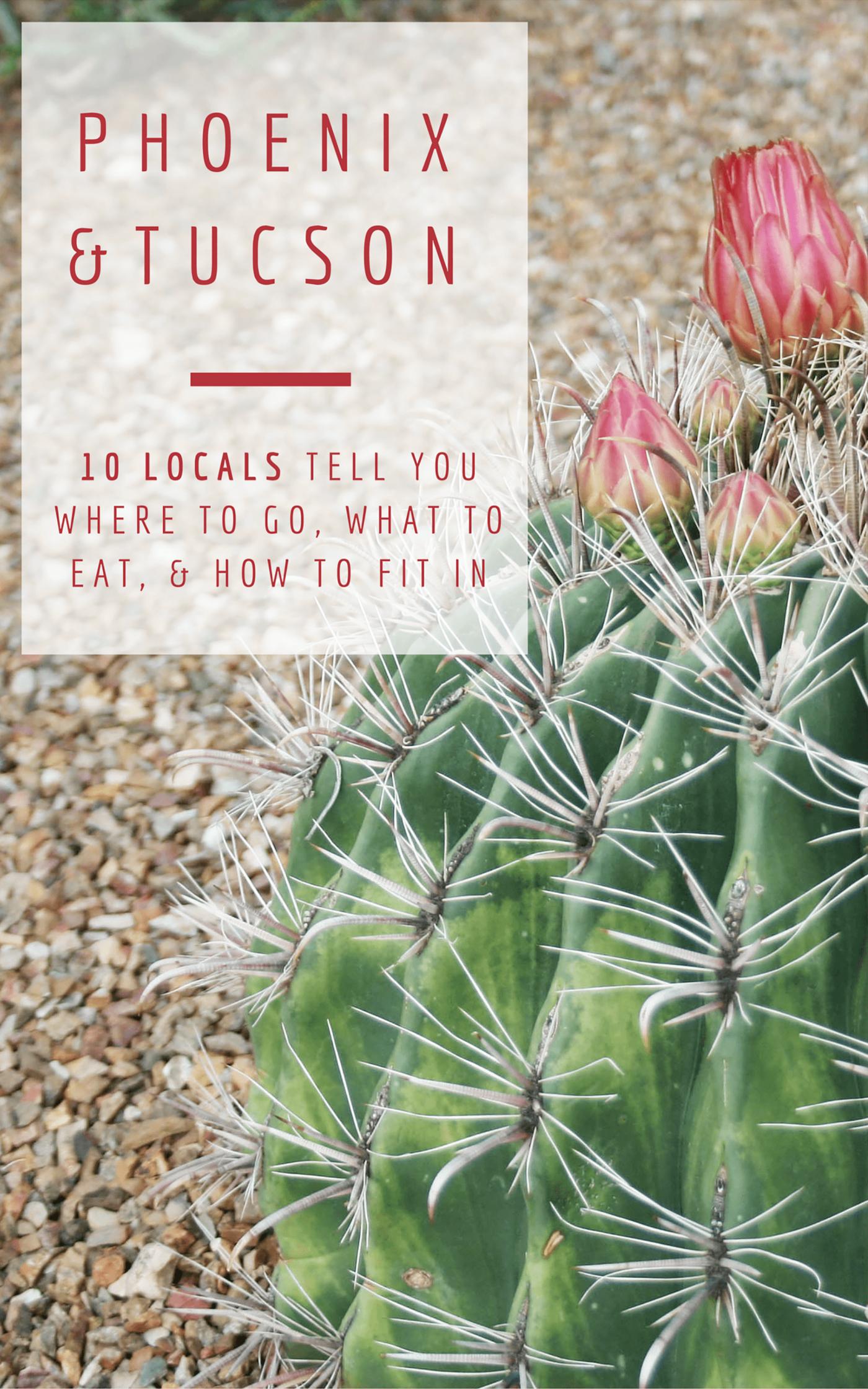


PHOENIX & TUCSON

10 LOCALS TELL YOU
WHERE TO GO, WHAT TO
EAT, & HOW TO FIT IN



PHOENIX & TUCSON

10 Locals Tell You Where to Go,
What to Hike, & How to Fit In



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is for people who want to see another side of Phoenix and Tucson.

To explore the main attractions, certainly, but also find the hidden-away wine bar serving up unique fusion tapas. To discover waterfalls in the desert and cactus forests on a mountainside. To know ahead of time that Tucson is the UNESCO World City for Gastronomy.

In other words, this book is for people who want to get under the skin of a new place. Who want to rent apartments and live in local neighborhoods. Who want to eat in tiny restaurants full of locals in the know. Who want to deepen their experience of this warm, wild part of America.

Think of this as a supplement to your traditional guidebooks. Use those for their handy place histories, lists of local hotels (if that's your style), and restaurant pricing charts. And then use this to go deeper—to figure out how to find the most colorful craft markets, the most delicious restaurants, and that hidden-away waterfall in the middle of the desert.

Getting excited? Me too. (Just wait till you read some of these interviews!)

Now, a little orientation:

This book is split into 11 interviews (I know, the cover says 10, but I couldn't resist sneaking in one more for you) with people who live all over the Phoenix and Tucson areas. Many have lived in their cities and towns for decades. Some were born and raised in the re-gion. And all of them love showing travelers the best their place has to offer.

Throughout the book, below each person's name, you'll see a short bio designed to help you understand his or her background. If you are passionate about food, look for someone whose short bio includes "foodie" or "chef." If you're a culture lover, look for a culture lover. And so on and so forth.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Many of the interviewees are also tour guides, artists, business owners, or bloggers. Watch for web addresses under their interviews if you'd like to learn more about their art, blogs, tours, or businesses.

Now, then, into the book...

ON TRAVELING LIKE A LOCAL

Like many well-touristed places, Phoenix and Tucson have two faces.

There's the face that most tourists see, full of busy shopping streets, crowded viewpoints, and well-known spas.

Many of these things are worth seeing and experiencing (as many of my interviewees will tell you); they're world-famous for a reason.

BUT.

They aren't the whole story of Southern Arizona.

There's another face, another story—one that the locals live every day—full of up-and-coming wine bars, authentic Mexican food, and less-trafficked hiking trails.

For me, the goal of any travel is to experience this other side of an area, to slip into the culture, to try to understand it, to feel—even if I am only there for a few days—like I am truly living in that place, experiencing it like a local would.

I'm sure many of you feel the same.

Which is, of course, the whole point of this book.

In over 16 years of short-term international trips and nearly four years of traveling full-time, I've come up with a routine that makes me feel more like a local. And the most important thing I've found is simply this: **the best way to live like a local is to ask locals.**

Which is why, for those of us who don't have a local friend to show us around, I've collected these interviews and written this book.

Before you dive into the interviews, though, here are four more ways to experience Arizona (or any place, really) in a fresh, authentic, local-centric way:

ON TRAVELING LIKE A LOCAL

1. Travel slowly. Spend some real time in a place. The only way to see all of a city's hidden corners is to spend time exploring it.

2. Rent apartments, preferably in a neighborhood full of local people. (Not sure how to find the right neighborhood? I've asked locals to tell us in the interviews you'll find in this book. Not sure how to find apartments? My personal starting point is *airbnb.com*.)

3. Shop at fresh markets, small butcher shops, and neighborhood bakeries. This is where you'll find the best food (as opposed to the grocery store).

4. Make friends with people who live there. Ask people about their lives, their thoughts, and their backgrounds. Expats and locals are both incredibly fascinating, and every conversation will teach you a lot.

It is these principles and this type of travel that I've molded the questions in this book around. So, if you, too, want to slow down and experience Arizona in a different way, these interviews are for you.

THE INTERVIEWS



John Dzurka

Expert Hiker. Business Owner.

About John

I was born, raised, and educated in Canada, where I became the owner/operator/pharmacist of a successful chain of pharmacies. I began exploring the state of Arizona in the early '80s with my wife Wendy and we moved our family into the USA permanently in 2008, making our home in Fountain Hills.

In 2013, after many years of research, I opened an outdoor adventure company, called Arizona Hiking Adventures. I have traveled, explored, hiked, and backpacked throughout Arizona, covering the state from east to west and north to south. I have trekked thousands of miles and enjoy sharing stories from my hiking adventures around the world. My passion is in educating our guests on the wonders of the desert and challenging those that travel with me to achieve the highest level of success during their journey.

In addition to being an experienced guide, I have completed wilderness survival training under Cody Lundin at the Aboriginal Living Skills School in northern Arizona.

I can proudly say that I have covered most of the major trail systems in Arizona more than once and spend most of my free time exploring lesser-known trails throughout the state. When not out on the local trails, I enjoy researching and planning international adventures. I have partners in Peru, Tanzania, and Nepal and am about to launch a company called Guiding Peru, which will offer unique routes through the Andes into Machu Picchu with my indigenous partners.

[Editor's note: John has given us info on hikes all over Arizona. The ones closest to Phoenix and Tucson **bolded** throughout the interview.]

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For Beginning Hikers

The West Fork Trail at Oak Creek in Sedona is one of the best trails in the state and is often listed as one of the top 10 trails in the US. It's six-miles round trip and is relatively easy. There are a number of stream crossings, which are aided with stepping stones and logs. At the trail's end, you'll find a pool of water surrounded by red sandstone cliffs. It's possible to travel another 11 miles upstream if you want, though that requires boulder hopping, wading through waist-deep water and some swimming, adding to the difficulty. The extended version usually requires an overnight stay at the end of the trail before returning back to the trailhead.

Bell Rock/Courthouse Butte Loop Trail (also in Sedona) is the best and most popular introduction to Sedona's myriad of red-rock hiking opportunities. This is an easy four-mile loop that provides great views at every turn. The trail begins directly off Route 179 in the Village of Oak Creek, which is only a few miles south of Sedona. The colorful scenery and terraced landscape will amaze! Unfortunately, there are plenty of other hikers, too.

There is something irresistible about waterfalls in the desert, and on the **Seven Falls Trail in Tucson** you get more than enough falls to satisfy any craving to cool off on a hot desert day. The 7.8-mile (there and back) trail is in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area northeast of the city. It's a must if you're in the area and want to spend a day in the wilderness.

Peralta Trail, east of Phoenix in the Superstition Mountains, is located on the southwestern edge of the Superstition Wilderness. It stretches 6.2 miles through two diversely vegetated canyons highlighted by Weavers Needle—a 4,553-foot spire that towers over the landscape. The trail begins at the mouth of Peralta Canyon and climbs steadily on a rugged, heavily vegetated path. Oak and mesquite cover portions of the trail along the canyon's seasonally flowing creek. The trail follows Boulder Canyon Creek past several backcountry campsites and leads to the Peralta and Dutchman trail junction on the floor of Boulder Canyon.

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Piestewa Peak Summit in Paradise Valley (often called Squaw Peak by the locals) is a 2.4-mile trail that is considered easy in the lower portions of the trail and becomes much more difficult as the steepness increases in the upper portion. The 2,608-foot Piestewa Peak is not only one of the most prominent landmarks in the valley, it is also one of the most popular hiking areas. Over half a million hikers visit the summit annually and Piestewa is second only to the Grand Canyon's Bright Angel Trail as the most visited hiking trail in Arizona.

Dixie Mine Trail in Fountain Hills is a 4.25-mile return trip hike that leads hikers into an abandoned mine (that is now little more than a gated shaft) and to a high point in the foothills that offers terrific views across the McDowell Mountains, river valley, and cottonwood-lined canyon in which a wonderful petroglyph panel exists.

Butcher Jones Trail, (east of Phoenix in the Superstition Mountains) is a five-mile return trip trail that runs along a section of Saguaro Lake's northern shore. This reservoir is the closest lake to Phoenix and draws many visitors seeking views of the colorful mountains. It offers many scenic overlooks of the lake and the surrounding Superstition Mountain Range. Burro Cove, the turnaround point, has impressive views of the Four Peaks across the lake. And wild horses are often spotted drinking along the lake edge.

Finally, Fossil Creek Wilderness Hike, north of Payson, is home of one of only two official Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) in Arizona. It seems to appear out of nowhere, gushing out of a series of springs at the bottom of a 1,700-foot deep canyon. Emerald green and aqua blue water cascade over multiple falls and deep, clear pools of water creating a beautiful oasis. It is a rare wet area within an otherwise arid landscape. Most people come to Fossil Creek to sunbathe, wade, hike, and bird watch. It's also a photographer's paradise. While you're here, keep your eyes open for javelina, beaver, otter, leopard frogs, and black hawks.

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For Advanced Hikers

The South Kaibab Trail, which starts at the Grand Canyon's south rim, offers better views than the more popular Bright Angel Trail and has much less traffic. It's great for day hikers and is the preferred downhill route for anyone heading to Phantom Ranch for the night. This is a strenuous hike even if you go only a mile or so down the trail. Remember, the trip back is all uphill, and you should plan on taking twice as long to get up as you did to go down.

Reavis Ranch Trail, east of Phoenix, is a pleasant hike through the Superstition Mountains to the old abandoned Reavis Ranch homestead. From Rogers Trough Trailhead, take the Reavis Ranch Trail north into Rogers Canyon. Continue downhill to pass the West Pinto Trail. At about 5.5 miles, you'll cross the creek and at six miles you'll arrive at the Fire Line Trail intersection. From here, you quickly enter the main meadow where the ranch is. There's an abundance of camping spots in this popular area. This is the turn-around point and a great place to explore the apple orchards and many scenic spots along the creek during a well-deserved lunch break.

Also in Phoenix, **Alta Trail in South Mountain Park** (a park that covers more than 16,000 acres with over 51 miles of trails for hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking) is considered one of the most challenging hiking trails within the park, but the steep climb to the ridgeline from either end rewards hikers with a striking view of the desert landscape below. At just over 4.5-mile round trip, this hike is considered difficult but is inviting to those who prefer to hike undisturbed, as the majority of guests prefer the less challenging trails within this park.

Still in Phoenix, **Paradise Valley's Camelback Mountain** is the best-known hiking destination in the valley. It's unique in the sense that you have an amazing mountain hike right in the middle of the city. Unfortunately, due to its popularity it's also one of the busiest and most crowded trails in the area. There are two trails: Echo Canyon and Cholla. Both are rated as moderately difficult. Echo Canyon is steeper and Cholla is slightly longer. Towering 1,400 feet above its base, Camelback

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mimics the shape of a gigantic camel that appears to be admiring the amazing views across the Valley below.

In southern Arizona, near Tucson, **Cathedral Rock** takes you up a trail of one of the Santa Catalina Mountains' most prominent summits. If hiked in its entirety, it is one of the most difficult trails in southern Arizona. The hike can be partitioned into three legs: the first (approximately three miles) ends at a prominent saddle called Cardiac Gap. The next leg follows Esperero Canyon to Bridalveil falls (for five miles). The first two legs make for a great destination or turnaround point. The last leg of the hike is the most difficult. It is very steep, overgrown, and can be extremely difficult to navigate. Look for cairns (rock piles): these markers will lead you to the summit.

Superstition Mountains Four Peaks Summit, east of Phoenix, rise dramatically out of the desert, ascending over 5,000 feet from the desert floor. On a clear day, they can be seen from downtown Phoenix. This is the premier climb in the area. It consists of both easy trails and class three scrambling up a scree filled crevasse. From Brown's Peak (the highest of the four peaks), the view is truly amazing. One can see not only Saguaro Lake to the south and Roosevelt Lake to the north, but about one fourth of the state from the top!

On a good day, you can even see Humphrey's peak near Flagstaff. Four Peaks Wilderness is home to abundant wildlife, including black bear, ring-tailed cats, skunks, coyotes, deer, javelinas, and mountain lions, not to mention rattlesnakes and scorpions.

Speaking of Mount Humphreys, this Flagstaff mountain is Arizona's premier high altitude climbing experience. 9.4 miles round-trip, the trail starts in a nice flat meadow at 9,300 feet, but quickly gains elevation as it ascends in a series of long switchbacks. The elevation gain of 3,300 feet ends at a 12,633-foot peak. This is not an easy hike by any standards, but when you make it to the top, you are standing on the state's highest peak and are rewarded with a 360° panoramic view that is

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unparalleled in the state, spanning hundreds of square miles on a clear day.

The Barnhardt Trail, north of Fountain Hills is a 14-mile-out-and-back hike that takes you on a scenic trail that leads deep into the Mazatzal Wilderness. It provides great views into deep gorges, up rugged mountains, and across rolling hills. You will come across spectacular waterfalls in the wet season, which add to the dramatic landscape. The Mazatzals are a massive range that exceeds 7,000 feet in elevation and are a nice location for hiking during Arizona's hot summer months.

Finally, **Reavis Falls**, also in the Superstition Mountains, is a 140+ foot waterfall—the end destination for the 13.5-mile-out-and-back hike of the same name. North of Phoenix in the Superstition Range, the Reavis Creek meanders through deep valleys before tumbling down a sheer cliff to form a spectacular waterfall. When conditions are good, after a rainfall, the falls flow with much force; at other times, they may be a small trickle. Tall cliffs and rocky slopes surround the falls and they're a great place for a picnic and rest before heading home. The climb out of the canyon (1,600 feet) is much tougher than the hike in.

John's Personal Favorite Hikes

For me, any day on most trails is a great day and I have yet to find a trail that totally sucks (well unless there happen to be 100s of others using it on same day as me). That being said, I do particularly like:

Tom's Thumb on the north side of Scottsdale: a 4.2-mile moderately difficult trail that weaves in and out of gorgeous vegetation providing breathtaking views of the Four Peaks and Camelback Mountain. The most interesting feature of this trail is the iconic Tom's Thumb, a large granite bump on the McDowell Mountain Range. Make sure to check out Ogre's Den, a natural cave featuring rock art located below and to the west of the thumb. The summit offers the best viewpoint in the McDowell Mountains.

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Sunrise Peak, also near Scottsdale, is located in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve area and features an easy-to-follow trail with clearly signposted junctions through the Sonoran Desert. It is 6.2 miles round-trip and considered moderately difficult. From the peak, you have unobstructed views of Scottsdale, Fountain Hills, the four peaks, Weavers Needle, Camelback Mountain, and the mountain range. Although this trail begins only a few miles outside Scottsdale, it has a nice wilderness feel to it, lined with many saguaro and cholla cactus, as well as scrub grasses, palo verde, and ocotillo.

Finally, there's **Roger's Canyon Trail** in the Superstition Mountains. The long, rough ride into Roger's Canyon is worth the trip in and of itself. The nine-mile-out-and-back trail leads down into the stunning 1,000-foot canyon, traveling alongside shady stream-side trails that lead to well-preserved Salado cliff dwellings. These ancient cliff dwellings are easily accessible from the trail and are over 700 years old. The trail ends at Angel's Basin, which leads into additional trails in the Superstitions.

Multi-day favorites include the Superstition Mountains (see below) and Paria Canyon/Buckskin Gulch (also see below).

Recommended Multi-Day Hikes

My top four multi-day hikes in Arizona include:

The Superstition Mountains: situated 50 miles east of Phoenix, this is one of the best hiking areas within an hour's drive of any major city in the US. Ranging in elevation from 2,000 to 6,265 feet, the Superstition Wilderness Area has 160,000 acres of protected National Forest. Formed by volcanic eruptions 30 million years ago, the mountains are home to impressive rock walls, jagged hoodoos of rock, and narrow twisting canyons.

As with most of the terrain surrounding the Phoenix area, the Superstitions have a desert climate with high summer temperatures often reaching 110 F. The best time for hiking is October through May, although cold nights, torrential rain, and snowstorms can occasionally occur. This is a true desert hiking area,

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and although it's close to a city it doesn't mean the preparation should be any less than if you were traveling in any other wilderness area.

There is a network of over 180 miles of National Forest System Trails serving this wilderness area and the surrounding region. Trail conditions vary from excellent to poor. Signs are installed at all junctions, but many have been vandalized or stolen. In addition, there are many miles of non-maintained paths on maps that may be anything from abandoned roadbeds to the remains of old wildlife trails.

Overnight backpacking trips here range from a single overnight to four nights. Highlights include the Salado Indian Cave Dwellings (well-preserved, 600-year-old ruins), Reavis Falls (the 200-foot waterfall mentioned above), and Sinagua Indian Circlestone Ruins (an ancient solstice/equinox station rarely visited). Expect solitude on trails and at campsites, wildlife sightings galore, and a quintessential backcountry experience.

Paria Canyon/Buckskin Gulch: in northern Arizona, on the Utah border, this trek is ranked in the top five North American hikes by National Geographic. It's a very adventurous hike and requires many river crossings.

Paria Canyon is famous for its colorful deep slot canyons. Buckskin Gulch is among the longest and deepest slot canyons in the world. The hike will take you through narrow gorges, past unique rock formations, beautifully sculpted walls, natural springs, ancient petroglyphs, and the world's seventh longest natural arch, spanning over 200 feet in length. Be prepared to get wet during this 43+ mile hike, as you will be hiking a portion of the canyon through waist-deep water in the Paria River.

Booking this trip early is important, as advanced permits are required for entry into the canyon. Only 30 hikers are allowed to camp overnight in the entire canyon each day and these permits are sold four months in advance. The best time for hiking the canyon is from early March through mid-June or

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mid-September through end of November. Flash flooding is common during the summer months due to monsoons. Temperatures in the winter months become too cold to comfortably hike through the waters of the Paria.

Overnight backpacking trips here range from three to four nights. Highlights include colorful, narrow, deep slot canyons, red sandstone cliffs, ancient petroglyphs, wildlife sightings, solitude, Wrather's Natural Arch, and 400+ water crossings.

Havasupai Falls in the Grand Canyon: located in northwestern Arizona, Havasu Canyon is a paradise nestled deep, (5,000+ feet) within the Grand Canyon. It's an area of towering red walls, turquoise-colored travertine pools, and stunning cascades. There are many waterfalls and aquamarine-colored streams lined with giant cottonwoods that thrive below the shade of the majestic red sandstone walls. Here you will have the opportunity to get up close to Havasupai Canyon's three major waterfalls—Havasupai Falls, Mooney Falls, and Navajo Falls—and explore the depths of the Grand Canyon floor along the mighty Colorado River.

In Havasupai, you'll witness a diversity of life, including over 1,500 plant varieties and more than 500 types of animals. The hike winds through an area of undisturbed natural habitat over a range of elevations from desert to mountain forests on the rims. Supai has around 450 Native Americans that call this area their home on the Havasupai Reservation. The Havasupai have lived in the canyon for hundreds of years, farming the fertile soil, raising maize, squash, and beans, and tending their livestock. The best time for hiking here is March through October; during the winter months, temperatures become too cold to enjoy the wonders of the canyon.

Overnight trips range from a single overnight to four nights. Highlights include descending 5,000 feet into (and hiking 5,000 feet back out of) the Grand Canyon, swimming in turquoise-colored travertine pools, and witnessing majestic waterfalls, native culture, and solitude along the Colorado River.

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The Arizona National Scenic Trail is a continuous, 800+ mile diverse and scenic trail running south to north across Arizona, linking deserts, mountains, canyons, and communities. Along the trail, you'll be close to many friendly, scenic communities that are fun to explore, including old mining towns and large metropolitan areas. It offers a variety of experiences for the outdoor enthusiast and takes multiple weeks to complete the entire trail.

Starting at the US-Mexico border, the trail climbs and descends from one mountain range to another, gaining and losing thousands of feet in elevation and traversing regions ranging from desert to boreal forest. Continuing across the Sonoran Desert, the route crosses the Gila River and winds through the Superstition Mountains and the Mazatzal Wilderness on its way to the Mogollon Rim and San Francisco Peaks. The trail north takes travelers across the Grand Canyon through billions of years of geology. Climbing out on the North Rim, ponderosa pine forests line the Kaibab Plateau, eventually leading to red sandstone as the trail nears the Utah border on the edge of the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument.

The trail has been developed in passages throughout the state, creating a network of trails that offer a taste of Arizona's diverse terrain. Most of the passages are ideal for weekend trips, offering up the Arizona Trail to hikers in manageable pieces as opposed to taking on the whole 800+ mile route at one time.

Arizona Hiking & Wilderness Safety

Arizona provides the greatest number of outdoor terrain and weather variables within the shortest travel distance of any geographic region in North or South America. From all four North American deserts to snow-covered alpine tundra, our topography and climate changes demand proper preparation. So, what is proper preparation? I recommend the following:

1. Pick a hike that matches your physical condition and give yourself enough time to complete that hike.

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2. Bring a good hiking guidebook or topographic map showing your selected route.
3. Check the weather before you head out and bring the right clothes for that weather. And if the weather changes during your hike? Consider turning back and try again another day.
4. Always let someone (who is not traveling with you) know where you're going and when you expect to return.
5. Bring someone along or, if you are hiking alone, choose a popular trail where others can offer assistance if you need it.
6. Pay attention to landmarks and consult your map often. Turning around from time to time to see the trail from another angle can help you stay on track on your way back.
7. Don't let your group get separated.
8. Always carry maps, a compass, seasonal clothing, a flashlight, water, a knife, food, something for water purification, and an emergency blanket or tarp.

Arizona Hiking Etiquette

Observe the rules and guidelines posted at trailheads.

Share the trail (mountain bikers yield to hikers and horses, hikers yield to horses, hikers going downhill yield to hikers going uphill, group hikers yield to singles or doubles, and slower hikers yield to faster hikers or trail runners).

Stay on the trail (this means: do not cut between switchbacks or take shortcuts, stay to the right on wider paths, pass on the left, and, if you are in a group, hike single file or two abreast in the middle of the trail). Also, when stopping for a view or rest, exit the trail so it is free for others. When selecting a spot for a rest, exit the trail in a well-used area.

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Leave the trail as you found it. This means if you bring it in, you need to bring it back out. Don't leave any markers (stone piles, aka cairns) when hiking off-trail. And, we've all heard the adage: take only memories, stories, and photos and leave only footprints.

Finally, be respectful of others on the trail.

Legal Concerns

Arizona's hiking trails are located within City Preserves, State Parks, and National Parks and there are specific rules and regulations that hikers must adhere to in each region, including wild camping and campfires or seasonal fire bans.

Many hiking trails require permits for entry and may be limited in numbers. Make sure to check the entry requirements and plan ahead, as some regions in Arizona sell entry permits many months ahead and these often sell out quickly during the popular hiking seasons.

For the Arizona State Parks, visit azstateparks.com. For the US National Parks, go to nps.gov. For the USA Department of the Interior, Arizona Bureau of Land Management, check blm.gov. Or Google the city preserve of your choice (there are too many to list).

When to Go

Arizona's weather is dependent on the altitude, which varies greatly from south to north. Southern Arizona's altitude is near sea level, central Arizona (Phoenix) is at 1,750 feet above sea level and Northern Arizona is well above 7,000 feet.

In the south and greater Phoenix area, the months of October through April are considered ideal, with daytime temperatures at 80 F and nighttime lows around 45.

At that same time of year in Northern Arizona, you can expect temperatures below freezing with snow and ice conditions. The reverse is true during the months of May through September. Hiking is ideal in Northern Arizona's summer months (May – Sep-

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tember), with daytime highs in the mid-70s and evening lows in the mid 40s. Temperatures soar in Southern Arizona and Phoenix at that time, with daytime highs reaching 115 F and evening lows still well above 80.

Arizona is in a very dry climate, statewide and year-round. As with all activities here, it is essential to bring and drink lots of fluids. Water, water, and more water should be a priority when packing your supplies for your hike.

Find John at arizonahikingadventures.com.

THE INTERVIEWS



Chef Cullen Campbell

Award-Winning Chef-Owner at Crudo, Phoenix.

About Chef Cullen

I'm a self trained chef with two small independent restaurants. The first—Crudo—I started in a hair salon with a small café, focusing on coffee and sandwiches during the day and my Crudo menu at night.

My food philosophy is based on unique ingredients of the best quality cooked gently and simply to accentuate their flavors. I'm from Memphis and grew up on BBQ, so I love cooking with fire and smoke.

Local Dishes to Try in Arizona

The bacon-wrapped hot dogs from the Nogales Dogs stand (1945 E. Indian School Road) are something everyone should try. They serve Sonoran-style hot dogs...a type of hot dog buried in a big bun and served with bacon, pinto beans, and some Mexican-inspired spices and veggies.

Hidden Gems for Food-Lovers

My favorite hidden gem is Crepe Bar (at 7520 S. Rural Road in Tempe). Its a little crepe place that serves a bunch of awesome snacks while you're waiting on the food.

Arizona Food Trends

We have a lot of small local farmers around town, which is great because 10 years ago we had to get the majority of our produce from California. Now we're seeing a lot of chefs doing interesting farm-inspired dishes.

The Chef's Favorite Arizona Restaurants

My favorites in and around Phoenix are:

Pizzeria Bianco T&C (with multiple locations at pizzeriabianco.com), which is known for its pizza, but is fantastic for pasta and

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wine, as well. The food here is simple with the best quality ingredients around;

Hana Japanese Eatery (5524 N. 7th Avenue; phone: 602.973.1238);

The Gladly (2201 E. Camelback Road, #106; phone: 602.759.8132), with its really fun menu options, including BBQ egg rolls, chicken pate, and a really great burger;

Posh (7167 E. Rancho Vista Drive, #111 in Scottsdale; phone: 480.663.7674), where instead of a menu, they have you just tell them things you don't like and they surprise you at every course;

Binkley's (6920 E. Cave Creek Road; phone: 480.437.1072), which features the ultimate multi-course tasting menu in town;

Virtu (3701 N. Marshall Way in Scottsdale; phone: 480.946.3477), where the wine list, pastas, appetizers, entrees, and bar snacks are all great;

And The Parlor (1916 E. Camelback Road; phone: 602.248.2480), which is one of my favorite casual places in town for a good pizza (I particularly like the Calabrian pizza, with its burrata, watercress, and spicy salumi and they also have great pastas and a good burger).

For authentic Arizona versions of Mexican cuisine, Tee Pee (4144 E. Indian School Road in Phoenix), and Los Dos Molinos (with multiple locations at losdosmolinosphoenix.com) will definitely do the trick.

Final Notes & Other Tips

Always search out the small independent restaurants. They are the ones doing the really fun stuff that you won't find anywhere else.

Find Chef Cullen at crudoaz.com.

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Chef Kelly Fletcher

Award-Winning Chef.

About Chef Kelly

As a chef, I think looking in and around yourself for inspiration and evolution is more than half the battle. Surrounding yourself by other people that feel the same way, in all walks of life, feeds that hunger. Inspiration can be found anywhere.

I got my start in the kitchen from my mom. She's my biggest fan and my core of support. I would cook with her as a kid and watch everything she did. I noticed everything. When she was diagnosed with high blood pressure, she stopped using salt; even at a young age, I could tell the food wasn't the same.

Formerly at El Chorro, I'm currently working for a brand new about-to-open restaurant called Zen Culinary, an Asian-fusion restaurant in Scottsdale. We're scheduled to open in mid-September 2016.

Local Dishes to Try in Arizona

I love Little Miss BBQ (4301 E. University Drive in Phoenix). I've traveled all throughout Texas and that place rivals any bar-beque I've ever had.

Arizona is also a citrus-producing area, so keep an eye out for local lemons, tangerines, oranges, and grapefruit.

At El Chorro, definitely try the sticky buns.

Arizona Food Trends

Comfort food is the newest up-and-coming trend in Arizona; the restaurant scene is pushing away from fine dining.

The Chef's Favorite Arizona Restaurants

In Phoenix, I definitely recommended Citizen Public House (7111 E. 5th Avenue in Scottsdale; phone: 480.398.4208), where you should order the pork belly pastrami, Desoto's Market (915

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N. Central Avenue in Phoenix), Bink's Midtown (2320 E. Osborn Road in Phoenix; phone: 602.388.4874), and Café Elote (771 AZ 179 in Sedona; phone: 928.203.0105).

All of the chefs at the restaurants above are comrades; we share the same passion for food, wine, culture, and integrity. That's the food I want to eat, the food that I want other people to experience. If you want to eat like a chef, experience dining like chefs do? Go where chefs go. We usually go to the places our friends own.

Final Notes & Other Tips

Seek diversity. Arizona is a cultural melting pot. We have some of the best Korean and Mexican food in the country.

Find Chef Kelly at elchorro.com.

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PHOENIX

Arizona's sprawling capitol.

FIND WI-FI HERE: Co+Hoots co-working space, Burton Barr Library, Shea 32, Lux, Lola, Giant Coffee Shop, Cartel Coffee Shop, Mod, & Sip and Brew.



Rebekah Cancino

Content Strategist. Hiker. Lover of Quirky Local Scenes.

About Rebekah

I grew up in a sleepy little town called Palatka in Florida. When I was 17, my family moved to Tucson to be closer to my grandparents. I went to school at University of Arizona and, after graduating, headed a few hours north to take a job in editorial department of a corporate magazine in downtown Phoenix.

It was 2007 and construction on the light rail system that now connects the west and east valley was just underway. My desk, on the 11th floor of a corporate tower, looked right over the Willo historic district with its charming Craftsman- and Tudor Revival-style bungalows. I used to daydream that one day I would live in one of those cheery little homes...and now I do, with my dog-child, Pomar Jackson—a lemon beagle with bad attitude and a big heart.

These days, I work as an independent content strategist and user experience consultant. Which is really just a fancy way of saying that I help organizations overcome tough content challenges and figure out how to make their digital products and services less confusing and more useful.

The warm weather and amazing outdoors in Arizona makes for an endless parade of new things to try and do. Right now

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some of my favorites include: hiking, going to shows, camping, reading, woodworking, writing, cooking, record collecting, antique shopping, and flying kites whenever I can.

What to do in Phoenix (the Basics)

The Phoenix Botanical Garden is a beautiful oasis and worthwhile attraction. Walking along pristine paths lined with cacti, cottonwood trees, and other native plants, you almost forget you're in the heart of a major metropolitan city. Each year, starting in the fall and running through early summer, they feature a light installation with a different artist that brings the desert landscape to life. It's a favorite with locals and visitors alike.

Camelback Mountain is a great place to fit in an urban hike. There are two trails to explore: the moderately difficult Cholla Trail and the more popular but pretty intense Echo Canyon. Both trails are appropriate for novice hikers who are in reasonable shape and are up for a challenge. Echo Canyon is full of fun and offers plenty of opportunities for rock scrambling as you make your way to the summit and one of the best views the city has to offer.

The Heard Museum is the best place to learn about the valley's native heritage and experience Native American art and music. In addition to their expansive home collection, they often feature interesting traveling exhibits that explore thought-provoking cultural themes, like the Frida Kahlo photography exhibit this year.

The Arizona Science Center is a fun and interactive way to spend the day learning about science and feeding your imagination. Whether you are visiting with kids or are just a kid at heart yourself, it's hard to resist their blend of education and entertainment. There you can spend the afternoon taking in the stunning modern architecture, playing with hands-on exhibits, and watching science explorations on a huge overhead IMAX theater screen. Plus, it's located in the heart of the historic Heritage Square, which is also home to the award-

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winning Bianco Pizzeria (623 E. Adams Street), the perfect spot to grab a bite.

Finally, no matter what side of town you're on, there are stadiums all across the valley that host major league baseball spring training games. There's no better way to enjoy some of Phoenix's best weather than laid out in the lawn seats with an ice cold beer and a few friends. Just don't forget the sunscreen; even though it's only spring and highs hover in the 80s, the desert sun is still in full effect.

As for my not-worth-it list? It starts with the Phoenix Zoo. It's underwhelming, boring, and not a particularly spectacular exhibit of Arizona wildlife. (The desert museum in Tucson is a *much* better experience). Unless you have animal-obsessed little ones, I'd skip this.

Another to-skip is the Phoenix Museum of Art. If you've visited famous museums like the Chicago Institute of Art or the Guggenheim, it'll be hard for this little museum to compete. Unlike the Heard Museum with its distinct southwestern experience, the Phoenix Art Museum doesn't offer anything terribly unique. Save the art excursions for major urban cities with really impressive collections.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

Taliesin West is a stunning landmark designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. If you appreciate midcentury modern architecture and gorgeous desert landscaping, you won't be disappointed. Their tours are engaging, educational, and give a sense of reality to the work and stories of this American Architectural genius.

Also in the vein of architecture, the Arizona Biltmore Hotel is a beautiful and historic property that gives you a feel of the classic Phoenix glamor of days gone by and the opportunity to take in some stunning art deco structures. Their 1920s lobby is the perfect place to grab a quiet cocktail, and their pools are one of the valley's best places to cool off and soak up some sunshine at the same time.

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Another favorite is the Farm at South Mountain. It's a real working farm right in the middle of Phoenix. (No, really.) Not only can you get a glimpse of some pretty cute chickens, but there are several restaurants on-site, ranging from casual cafes to upscale farm-fresh dining. It's a lovely spot for a picnic on the weekend when the weather's nice, too.

Roosevelt Row is a funky little spot in downtown Phoenix full of art murals, quirky bars and cafes, and the city's first urban grow house with a seasonal vegetable garden and bees that produce local honey. You can start off by exploring Roosevelt Row on foot, then rent a Grid Bike to go on a tour of the city's many murals.

The Joya Spa is the best of the spa scene in all of Phoenix/Scottsdale. It's simply gorgeous and they offer the most decadent amenities (like a hot/wet sauna circuit followed by a cold water deluge, a private spa pool with gorgeous views of the mountains, and a nap room!)...It's the ultimate way to treat yourself.

I'm also really into quirky, hip local scenes and little shops with unique stuff. In case you're like me, some of my favorite hangs are: Cobra Arcade Bar, Melinda's Alley Speakeasy, Stinkweed's Record Store, Rebel Lounge, Film Bar Indie Theater, Yucca Taproom (a live music mecca with a rad selection of beers), Buffalo Exchange, Crescent Ballroom, Francis Vintage, and the Changing Hands Bookstore (which also happens to be a beer and wine bar!).

Where to Stay

Around downtown/midtown, you would be lucky to snag an Airbnb in any of these bikeable, walkable neighborhoods: Willo (walking distance to Heard Museum and Phoenix Art Museum), Roosevelt (walking distance to Phoenix Public Burton Barr Library and Deck Park), FQ Story (with its cute little Craftsman and Tudor Revival style homes), Encanto (a bigger, fancier version of FQ Story and Willo, next to Encanto Park), or Coronado (a

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grittier, still up-and-coming historic neighborhood with smaller homes and plenty of personality).

Note: During the spring and fall, many of these historic neighborhoods feature their own neighborhood tours with food trucks, live music, and open-house tours of some of the most stunning historic homes.

Outside downtown I recommend Biltmore. It's a part of central Phoenix full of historic estates, the Biltmore Fashion Square, the Wrigley Mansion, golf courses, and great higher-end restaurants. In my opinion, this is a better alternative to Scottsdale because it offers luxury, but you're still in the heart of the city.

Also outside downtown, I like North Arcadia, just south of Biltmore and a little less luxurious, but still full of some of the city's best local restaurants, bars, and bakeries.

Finally, there's Downtown Tempe—a bikeable, walkable university area with fun restaurants and bars and unique shopping spots.

Day Trips

Tucson is a funky little university town surrounded by gorgeous desert and mountains with plenty to see, eat, drink, and do. Catch a lively music act at the Rialto or Hotel Congress, explore downtown nightlife, hit up the quirky thrift shops and cute cafes on 4th Avenue, and get your fill of sweeping sunsets and beautiful desert hikes. Plus, when things get too hot in the valley, you're just a 45-minute drive from cooler temps and pine-filled forests at Mt. Lemmon.

Back in the old days, Jerome was a thriving mining town... before it was largely abandoned, earning its place in history as America's largest ghost town. These days it still can't quite shake that spooky abandoned feeling, but that's part of its charm. Take a day trip there and you'll be rewarded with a slice of the real wild west. Highlights include wine tasting, one of the largest antique junk yards in existence, cute art galleries,

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a haunted hotel (that used to be an asylum), and cute little mountaintop shops.

Sedona is the perfect little place to grab those stunning Arizona pictures with bright red rock formations in the background. Aside from all the fantastic nature trails, swimming holes, and hiking paths, Sedona has plenty of art galleries, spas, and fine dining, too.

Where to Walk

Murphy's Bridle Path, Papago Park, Margaret T. Hance Park (also known as Deck Park), and South Mountain Park are the nicest places around.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

I love the tres leche French toast from Paz Cantina Food Truck, chiles en nogada from Barrio Café (2814 N. 16th Street), Orange Blossom Wheat Beer from Papago Brewery (7107 E. McDowell Road), tacos from La Santísima Gourmet Taco Shop (1919 N. 16th Street), coffee or espresso from Cartel Coffee (multiple locations: cartelcoffeelab.com), and pastries from La Grande Orange (4410 N. 40th Street).

As for my favorite restaurants, I adore:

Chelsea's Kitchen (5040 N. 40th Street; phone: 602.957.2555), with its warm inviting atmosphere, fun southwestern-inspired menu, amazing brunch, and to-die-for cookies;

The *super* classic downtown staple steakhouse, Durant's (2611 N. Central Avenue; phone: 602.264.5967), which feels like it's right out of a mobster movie;

Valley Bar (in the rear basement at 130 N. Central Avenue)—a hip underground bar tucked behind an alleyway with board games, pool tables, and rad live music acts all week;

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Matt's Big Breakfast (825 N. 1st Street—the best old-fashioned breakfast joint, complete with local, high quality ingredients, and a long, long wait line on weekends;

And the aforementioned Pizzeria Bianco at Heritage Square, with its amazing wood-fired pizza, fresh, local ingredients, and great local wine list. Pro tip: the interior is small and the lines are long, so plan ahead.

Budget Tips

Happy hours and weekly specials at Joyride Taco Shop (5202 N. Central Avenue), Windsor (5223 N. Central Avenue), Federal Pizza (5210 N. Central Avenue), and Postino (multiple locations: postinowinecafe.com) are all really, really good deals. In particular, Postino, Joyride, and Federal all have stellar Monday and Tuesday specials...like \$2 tacos all day at Joyride on Tuesday or a bottle of wine and a whole board of bruschetta at Postino or a bottle of wine and a pizza at Federal after 8 p.m. on Monday or Tuesday for only \$20.

Fez (105 W. Portland Street), located just off the light rail downtown, has great drink specials and wallet-friendly bar items, too.

First Friday is the art walk night in downtown Phoenix. You can catch free trolley rides that take you to gallery hubs from the Phoenix Art Museum.

And every Saturday there's an open-air farmer's market downtown that's pretty cool.

How to Fit In

Don't wear traditional Native American stuff; it's considered cultural appropriation. You might get away with wearing a headdress at Coachella (an art and music festival across the border in California), but not here. Same thing goes for sombreros.

Arizona might have reputation for being a gun-loving, ultra-conservative state, but in Phoenix and other urban areas if you

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actually carry a gun around out in public, people would be pretty freaked out. I mean, unless you're out on a ranch or a shooting range or something.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

Join a meetup group for anything from work-related events to hiking and photography; there's a thriving meetup community in Phoenix.

Volunteer and cultivate a green thumb at PHX Renews or Growhouse.

Visit a church like New City Phoenix or Roosevelt Community Church—both of which are connected to the city's art scene and downtown community.

Join a bike group and pedal your way around the city.

Or get involved in a creative group like AIGA Arizona or Arizona Storytellers.

Best Places to Take a Photo

The Phoenix Botanical Garden, with its cactus galore and really pretty natural desert landscape is a good choice, as are:

Tempe Town Lake (with its rad lighting at night, especially the colors along the bridge);

Goldfield Ghost Town (for Instagram-worthy old western pics);

The summit of Echo Canyon Trail at Camelback Mountain (a towering view above the whole city!);

And Compass Arizona Grill (a spinning rooftop restaurant with 360-degree views of downtown).

Find Rebekah at rebekahcancino.com.

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Shelley Glasow

eBook Publisher. Photographer. Traveler.

About Shelley

I'm a home-based ebook publisher residing in the picturesque Sonoran Foothills of Phoenix. I'm also a 4th generation native of Arizona, although I spent 17 years of my childhood in Littleton, Colorado, where I attended grade school through college.

In my free time, my main hobby is photography (with a focus on travel and art). I also have a lot of wanderlust and am currently planning an 18-month trip around the world. Travel is my life, the air I breathe. I also love quaint towns, good food, mixed cocktails, local hangouts and musicians, dive bars, and boutique ambiance.

What to do in Phoenix (the Basics)

Arizona is the ultimate resort vacation destination, so the first thing to do is check into a resort. The golfing, swimming, and spas are unsurpassed here. I staycation in state frequently with friends and loved ones. My favorite resorts are Omni Intercontinental Montelucia Resort and Spa and Sanctuary Camelback.

Phoenix also has a distinct western culture full of cowboys and Indians. For a taste of history, explore the Heard Museum (where you'll find lots of special events and wine galas). The Wrigley Museum is also a unique local icon worth touring. And don't miss our botanic gardens for a one-of-a-kind display of cacti and desert blooms. The wafting scent of a cactus flower after a spring rain is the most heavenly thing.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

Rent a boat with some friends at the lakes at Superstition Springs.

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For the best pie in Arizona, head north past Anthem to the Rock Springs Café (35769 Old Black Canyon Highway in Black Canyon City), where lines wind out the door.

For a great afternoon of food, delicious coffee, microbrews, and brewing lessons, head to Le Grand Orange Grocery (4410 N. 40th Street).

For local music and wine with deli-style grub on a dog-friendly patio, get a “nooner” at Duck and Decanter (1651 E. Camelback Road) or catch an evening show at the historic Orpheum Theater downtown.

Where to Stay

If you're looking for a fun vibe and some historical gems (like the quaint brunch at the infamous brat pack art-deco Arizona Biltmore, where you can play garden chess and sip champagne with the most amazing buffet selection), I recommend staying in the central corridor around Camelback Mountain. The Biltmore—along with a few other resorts—offers pool party events and dive-in movies by the pool. And my top picks for resorts are Montelucia Resort, Sanctuary Camelback, or Valley Ho. Valley Ho has a fun vibe. Biltmore is historical. And both are retro.

Day Trips

My favorite spot is the breathtaking slot canyons up north in Page. They're full of amazing natural sculptures and history and light. Tours are about 90 minutes and are an easy hike around the crevices. [Editor's note: the drive is about four hours, so plan on staying at least overnight if you're heading to the slot canyons.]

Sedona is also always a great destination, with picturesque red rocks, river swims, cooler weather than Phoenix, and an artsy feel, complete with palm readings and crystals.

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Or head south to Bisbee and Tombstone for a unique western experience including cowboys, gun shows, and horseback rides.

Another option for adventurers is to grab your passport and head 3.5 hours south of the border to Puerto Peñasco, Mexico, also known as Arizona's beach, Rocky Point. Many Phoenix folks own property along these beaches and nearly all the locals speak English. It's a great place for water skiing, parasailing, and partying.

And if you're coming to Arizona for a cowboy vibe, head to Cave Creek and don't miss the bull-riding, BBQ, fish-fry, and beer every Wednesday and Friday night at much-loved Buffalo Chip Saloon (6811 E. Cave Creek Road). There's also two-stepping and fair-style rides.

Where to Walk

If you're near Camelback Mountain, climb the mountain's well-maintained trails. They're a local favorite.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

Two words: Mexican food! My favorite restaurant is Tia Rosa's (at 891 N. Higley Road; phone: 480.396.8787 and 1249 N. Greenfield Road, #104; phone: 480.659.8790). I also love Spotted Donkey Cantina (8220 N. Hayden Road; phone: 480.922.1400). And on Camelback, you can get superior Mexican cuisine at Los Dos Molinos (1044 E. Camelback Road; phone: 602.528.3535).

I also love a good dive bar and Irish pub. My favorite bars to frequent are Rosie McCaffrey's Irish Pub & Restaurant (906 E. Camelback Road) and Tim Finnegan's Irish Pub (9201 N. 29th Avenue).

If you'd like to do a bit more upscale, try our local brews at Four Peaks Brewery (15745 N. Hayden Road in Scottsdale). In any season except summer, head to the outdoor grill pits at the Monastery (4810 E. McKellips Road in Mesa). And for an ultimate southwest visit, don't forget our local icon Dierks Bent-

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ley's Whiskey Row (4420 N. Saddlebag Trail) for some country western line dancing fun.

Budget Tips

Enjoy our gorgeous weather year-round and get outdoors. There are plenty of free trails and lakes!

How to Fit In

I live near a resort and the oddest thing I have seen is travelers taking selfies with the local javelina (an animal that looks like a wild boar). Don't! Javelinas travel in packs and fiercely protect their young. Also, don't play with the cactus! We do have jumping cholla cactus and we always hear about our guests getting too close. The jumping cactus is attracted to static and they'll cover you with hundreds of tiny spines. Beware!

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

We have fun groups around town for just about any interest at [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)...or try making friends on the hiking trails!

Best Places to Take a Photo

One of the most popular photo spots is our city's Love Sculpture in Scottsdale, but the best views of the city are seen with your hiking boots, so make it an early morning and head up Camelback Mountain for the most breathtaking views. There are several breaking points for less advanced hikers, but the top is steep and not for the faint of heart. For photo opps, of course, you also can't go wrong anywhere in nature with our unsurpassed sunsets.

Final Notes & Other Tips

Never plan a trip to Phoenix in the summer. If you're not used to our dry heat (around 110 -115 F), it will be hotter than you think. Phoenix is a great place to get outdoors and enjoy nature and sunsets, just not May - September. October, February, and March are the best months to visit.

Find Shelley at [goodlifeguide.com](https://www.goodlifeguide.com).

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Quinn Whissen

Yogi. City-Lover. Design & Marketing Consultant.

About Quinn

I grew up in sunny Phoenix, went away to college in Los Angeles, and studied in London. I never thought I would come back to Phoenix, but here I am, loving what this city has become.

I work for myself as a design and marketing consultant. I focus locally, working with clients on their brand identity, web design, and digital marketing initiatives. I also travel around the country teaching on behalf of one of my clients, helping people learn how content marketing can transform their business.

In my free time (if you can call it that!), I run a community organization called This Could Be PHX. We are an urban awareness group working to promote livability downtown, a place that was forgotten long ago and is now experiencing a revitalization. We put on community events and educate people on the benefits of urban living.

In my free(er) time, I practice yoga and mentor homeless kids in a weekly art therapy group.

What to do in Phoenix (the Basics)

Well, I have a soft spot for downtown Phoenix and I highly recommend giving it a visit. You can see everything by walking, biking, or a taking short light rail trip. One highlight in the area is the Roosevelt Row Arts District—one of the top arts districts in the country. RoRo (as locals call it) is a place bursting with colorful murals, independent coffee shops, boutiques, and galleries. If you're around on the first Friday of the month, you'll see thousands of people walking around the area.

My neighborhood is the historic Roosevelt Neighborhood and a delightful place to see turn-of-the-century buildings amidst modern developments. Also, just down the road in Civic Space

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Park is a great light sculpture—called Her Secret is Patience—that is lovely during the day but even better lit up at night.

Outside downtown, I highly recommend the Desert Botanical Garden. It's a beautiful landscape of desert plants and they produce some really amazing events at nighttime with music and performances.

Phoenix is known for its mountains, so you can't go wrong with hiking. Favorites trails are Camelback, Piestewa, South Mountain, and, further afield, Tom's Thumb.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

Spring training is big here in Phoenix, being one of two locations in the country where baseball teams get ready for the season. Come March, the whole city becomes a baseball town and you can catch a game any day of the week.

Phoenix also has a bike share system that is relatively new and riding around central Phoenix could be a great travel memory.

Where to Stay

You have to remember Phoenix is huge! So figure out what you're interested in before deciding where you want to stay. I recommend staying in midtown or downtown Phoenix. The light rail runs right through it, so you can get a long way without jumping in a car and tons of fun things are happening along the route.

Day Trips

My favorite day trip is to Jerome. It's a quaint old mining town on top of a mountain with beautiful views overlooking a valley. Some claim it's haunted, so you'll find plenty of lore, but you'll also experience great wine tasting rooms, art galleries, and lively people.

Where to Walk

South Mountain: This is one of the largest urban parks in the world and it's beautiful. It's a desert park at the southern edge

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of Phoenix that has something for everyone, from leisurely walks to hiking to mountain biking. I highly recommend taking the Mormon Loop Trail to squeeze through some rocks called Fat Man's Pass. On the other side, you'll be treated to some otherworldly rocks in the Hidden Valley.

Bridal Path: An old horse path, this great dirt walking path extends for a few miles up Central Avenue next to beautiful old homes and covered by shade trees. Walking there is like being transported to an east coast city and you'll come across cyclists, runners, and other walkers along the way.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

I could go on all day about food. I've traveled a lot, but always feel spoiled in Phoenix. Oddly enough, Phoenix has a ton of good Neapolitan style pizza that can't be missed. I also bet you we're getting close to rivaling Seattle with our independent coffee scene...another thing you wouldn't expect!

So, some favorites: Valley Bar (130 N. Central Avenue) is the quintessential Arizona-themed bar, but in a speak-easy style basement, complete with a concert hall and cocktails named after local politicians.

Then there's Forno 301 (301 W. Roosevelt Street). We have a lot of pizza in Phoenix, but this quaint little spot is owned by Italians who turn the music up and dance when they're having a good night. Also, the pizza is delicious and they have a great selection of wine. It's simple, fun, and authentic.

Next up: Lux Coffee (4402 N. Central Avenue) is the hippest of hip coffee shops and just so happens to have quality everything...coffee, food, and drinks. Look past the hipster-ness and enjoy the people watching. Try the mac & cheese with jalapeno!

Desoto Central Market (915 N. Central Avenue) is a really interesting new place in a restored Chrysler dealership from the '20s. It's a modern-style food court with multiple vendors in one building, including an oyster and champagne bar, Asian-

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Mexican fusion, a burger bar, a juice bar, and a coffee shop. Plus, this is really a community gathering space where you'll come across happy hours, meetings, and yoga classes all in one cool two-level spot. You also can't beat the patio with ping pong, corn toss, and an outdoor bar.

Finally, I like Bitter & Twisted Cocktail Parlour (1 W. Jefferson Street) for its strong cocktails and menu the size of a magazine. This was recently voted one of the best bars in the country. You will most likely have to wait, so put your name in and walk across the street to the Cityscape high rise for people-watching.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

Get connected with Downtown Phoenix Inc. and Roosevelt Row. They produce and promote local events on social media and via email, so it's a great way to stay up-to-date. Happy hours, bike rides, and other events in the area are all great places to spark a connection.

Best Places to Take a Photo

Great options include on the top of Camelback and Piastewa mountains, under the Her Secret is Patience light sculpture in Civic Space Park, or from the rooftop of one of the downtown hotels!

Final Notes & Other Tips

Phoenix is rapidly transforming and is on the verge of becoming a really great city for travelers. Unfortunately, Phoenix (and Arizona as a whole) doesn't normally get a lot of great national press, but the people here are friendly and are working hard toward positive change, especially in the downtown area.

Find Quinn at thiscouldbephx.com.

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Dena Roché

Luxury Wellness Travel Consultant. Journalist.

About Dena

I grew up in Milwaukee, which is a great city, but cold! I came to Scottsdale, where I've lived for 17 years, to warm up.

I work as a luxury wellness travel consultant and journalist. I write for luxury lifestyle publications and help brands learn how to play in the lucrative luxury wellness travel space. In my spare time, you can find me on the hiking trail, at events around town, or sipping a glass of wine with friends at one of the city's numerous happy hour hot spots.

I'm also the editor of The Travel Diet—a website that brings readers the best in luxury travel with a wellness twist.

What to do in Phoenix (the Basics)

If you like museums, go to the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM). It's so unique. Same with the Heard Museum or Taliesin West.

People often come to soak up the sun and relax and I'd argue that Scottsdale has the best concentration of spas anywhere. I particularly like the Joya Spa and Fairmont Well & Being for a spa day (seriously, go. And invite me to tag along).

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

For foodies, tour Arizona's only olive mill, Queen Creek Olive Mill, check out the downtown Phoenix Public Market, or do a day trip to the Verde Valley and visit the wineries up there. Outdoor lovers will enjoy renting a bike and cycling the 100-mile canal network.

Where to Stay

For a resort experience, there are great five-star properties in Scottsdale. For someone wanting more of a city escape, I suggest the new Camby in the Biltmore area.

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Day Trips

The Grand Canyon is obvious, but I actually like Sedona a bit more for anyone who has already seen the canyon. It is truly God's country. The red rocks are stunning and the area is great for hiking, doing a jeep tour, or simply finding out if what they say about all the energy vortexes in the area is true. If you want to spend the night, choose Enchantment Resort or L'Auberge.

Where to Walk

In town, my favorite hike is the Gateway Loop Trail. It's about four miles and is a moderate hike. For a challenge, hike Tom's Thumb or Camelback.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

Most people enjoy trying Mexican or Southwestern food, but I have to admit this isn't my favorite cuisine. If it's yours, I suggest Barrio Café (2814 N. 16th Street; phone: 602.636.0240).

Drink-wise, people like trying a prickly pear margarita. Other than that, Arizona food isn't about one type of cuisine. The food scene here has elevated in the last five years, so it's more about choosing great restaurants instead of seeking out the best burrito.

Some local favorites include FnB (7125 E. 5th Avenue, #31; phone: 480.284.4777), Cowboy Ciao (7133 E. Stetson Drive; phone: 480.946.3111), Crudo (3603 E. Indian School Road; phone: 602.358.8666), and Beckett's Table (3717 E. Indian School Road; phone: 602.954.1700).

My own favorite restaurant, Binkley's, is re-opening up in mid-town later this year (2320 E. Osborn Road; phone: 602.388.4874). That is the splurge restaurant not to miss.

Other favorites include Virtu (3701 N. Marshall Way; phone: 480.946.3477). Esquire named it a top table and the octopus appetizer is the best in the city. Reservations highly recommended.

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Sister restaurants, Cowboy Ciao (7133 E. Stetson Drive; phone: 480.946.3111) and The Gladly (2201 E. Camelback Road; phone: 602.759.8132) have the best chopped salads you've ever had and if you go to the Gladly's happy hour, you can get it for happy hour pricing.

I'm a sushi lover and recommend Roka Akor (7299 N. Scottsdale Road; phone: 480.428.0051) for a splurge and Stingray Sushi (2502 E. Camelback Road; phone: 602.955.2008) for a cheap but good happy hour.

Some of the hot bars right now are Bitter & Twisted (1 W. Jefferson), The Bees Knees (2222 N. 16th Street), and Pedal Haus Brewery (730 S. Mill Avenue, #102).

Budget Tips

If you don't mind the heat, come in summer. \$500 hotel rooms can be had for about \$150 - 200 and you'll find some great discounts on golf, as well.

There are also lots of great happy hours in the area. If you're like me and not a big eater, they can be a money-saving approach to dinner.

How to Fit In

Don't drive like a snail and please don't wear shorts when it's 40 degrees here in winter. That will brand you as a tourist, because us locals are bundled up when the mercury hits 60!

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

I don't think Phoenix is the easiest town in which to strike up a conversation with a stranger. My best advice is to jump on *meetup.com*, find something that interests you, and go. With a group activity with like-minded people, you're sure to find a friend.

Best Places to Take a Photo

The Valley of the Sun serves up some great Instagramable sunrises and sunsets and the best vantage points for these are on top of a mountain. Pick a hike you like, bring your camera,

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and time it right and you'll have an Ansel Adams-worthy picture to post.

Final Notes & Other Tips

The stat that always blows people's mind is that Phoenix is the 6th largest city in the country and they're always surprised that Scottsdale is more L.A.-style than wild wild west.

Find Dena at thetraveldiet.com & [instagram.com/denaroche](https://www.instagram.com/denaroche).

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SURPRISE

A retirement haven with a clever name.

FIND WI-FI HERE: Starbucks.



Wendy Ramirez

Teacher. Hiker. Cook.

About Wendy

I moved to Surprise from California 12 years ago to buy a house (since it was a lot cheaper here). I work as a middle school teacher. And in my free time, I like to hike, cook, and hang out with my family.

What to do in Surprise (the Basics)

The best time to come is in the spring. We have baseball spring training for about six weeks; going to see training is a pretty popular and fun thing to do.

If you like to golf, we have golfing all year long. In summer, you'll want to go real early or in the evenings (since the heat in the middle of the day is intense).

The White Tank Mountains are a popular hiking ground. And Lake Pleasant, which is about 15 minutes from here on the highway, is excellent for hikers as well.

There is wildlife zoo, which can be a blast if you have children. If not, skip it.

Where to Stay

Marley Park is a pretty popular neighborhood. They have a nice community park and pool. Also, anything near the Sur-

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prise Stadium. It has a community pool with slides and a man-made pond where you can fish.

Day Trips

The Grand Canyon is about 3.5 hours by car and you can go early in the morning and come back that same night. If you can do a longer stay, make sure to stay for the sunset. It's amazing! Stay overnight in Flagstaff and then head down to Sedona the next morning. In Sedona, hike at Cathedral Rock, one of the best hikes I've ever done. And don't miss another amazing sunset. It's about two hours back to Surprise from there.

Where to Walk

The White Tank Mountains have nice hiking paths. And pretty much all the subdivisions here have walking paths and bike trails in or around them.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

I love the family-owned Nick's Diner (with two locations at 15693 N. Reems Boulevard and 14010 N. Litchfield Road). It's a Greek place, but they also serve typical American dishes. The prices are great and the portions are big.

If you want Mexican food, the best place is Rio Mirage (with two locations at 13863 W. Bell Road and 12245 W. Santa Fe Lane). Try the shrimp enchiladas. They're to die for!

Other good food spots include:

Babbo Italian Eatery (15609 W. Bell Road, #100; phone: 623.825.1919), which is where I go when I want good Italian food and friendly atmosphere. I always get fettuccini alfredo with a salad and they have delicious bread to go with it. I also love their pizzas, which are fresh and made to order.

Vogue Bistro (15411 W. Waddell Road, #108; phone: 623.544.9109), which is very popular for both drinks and food. Start with the onion soup, then get the filet mignon with potatoes and

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veggies. It's to-die-for. My second favorite thing on the menu is the Alaskan salmon.

Saigon Kitchen (14071 W. Bell Road; 623.544.6400), which is my teen daughter's favorite place to eat. She loves their Soy Garlic Cornish Hen with fried rice and I always order calamari. It's very tasty.

Lakeside Bar and Grill (9980 W. Happy Valley Road), which is a family restaurant with an upbeat feel, tasty fries, and good tuna melts and pasta primavera.

As for bars, try Brookside Sports Bar (15170 W. Bell Road, #115) for a sports bar vibe and dancing (and if you're hungry, try the Caesar salad or burgers), Vogue Bistro (address above), Irish Wolfhound (16811 N. Litchfield Road, #104) for a good happy hour, potato leek soup, and the Irish-style turkey burger with bacon and chipotle mayo, and Booty's Wings, Burgers, & Beer (15557 W. Bell Road, #405) to watch the game and have a few drinks (and, if you're hungry, a bacon burger with fries and ranch dressing, or spicy wings).

How to Fit In

People make fun of the name Surprise. It gets annoying after hearing it all day.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

There are several meetup groups you can join. And *couchsurfing.org* is always a good place to meet people.

Best Places to Take a Photo

The best picture I have ever taken was at the Grand Canyon at sunset. In Surprise, it's always fun to take pictures at spring training. If you don't attend, you can still go to the stadium or the area and take some pictures.

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TUCSON

Land of cactus, canyons, & Mexican cuisine.

FIND WI-FI HERE: Local libraries, Cola Coworking, Bentley's, Raging Sage, Café Luce, Revolutionary Grounds, Café Passe, Shot in the Dark Café, & Epic Cafe.



Chance Agrella

Media Designer. Photographer.

About Chance

I'm originally from Prescott in Northern Arizona and now I live in Tucson. I'm a media designer and photographer in both my work and free time. I created the websites *freerangestock.com* and *vintagestockphotos.com*, among others, to give away photos for free.

What to do in Tucson (the Basics)

Tucson is a modern city in the middle of a desert, but it's one of oldest continually inhabited areas in the United States. Both the Native American and Mexican cultures still have influence. So I suggest you start by exploring the nature and culture unique to this area.

I always recommend the Mission San Xavier del Bac, which was founded in the 1790s and has been a central part of life on the Tohono O'odham reservation for 300 years. I'm not a religious person, but the mission makes me feel reverential and the historical aura is powerful. It's a short trip from downtown, but feels totally isolated from the modern world.

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I also love the barrio areas around downtown where adobe buildings still stand. These were the historic neighborhoods of the mostly Mexican population of the late 1800s. Some are restored, some are crumbling. There's a lot of gentrification and infill, but a lot of the modern infill is environmentally responsible and architecturally appropriate to the historic area, and a lot of the restorations are quite lovely. These are great places to explore on foot, so find a place to park and wander around taking in the colors and details of various barrios.

Speaking of exploring on foot: Tucson's downtown area has been extensively redeveloped in the last 15 years and the boom is ongoing, if not accelerating. Congress Street is a beehive of activity with a lot of great restaurants and bars, two beautifully restored art-deco theaters and several other entertainment venues like the historic Hotel Congress.

A major component of the redevelopment is the SunLink modern streetcar, which travels a four-mile route through five districts from the University of Arizona through Fourth Avenue and downtown to the Mercado san Augustin west of the freeway. A streetcar ride is a great way to see some of each area and move from district to district without worrying about parking.

My favorite outdoor area is Saguaro National Park East. Even if you just do the Cactus Forest Loop drive, it's totally worth it. And you don't even have to get out of your car if you don't want to.

If you do get out of the car (and you should), there are a bunch of places to stop and take short hikes or just enjoy the view. There's no other place on earth where you'll see a similar Saguaro forest.

Sabino Canyon is an amazing hike, as well; there's even a tram to the top (though, honestly, I think that's a bit silly). The trams are noisy little motorized bus/cart things with speakers for the driver to talk during the trip and they're packed with people. But it's a way to cover a lot of ground. The main road is a four-

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mile paved path over nine stone bridges into the canyon. There are quite a few walkers (and the trams) on this road, but it's very scenic and follows flowing water the whole way. More adventurous hikers can follow miles of paths elsewhere through the park and even connect with other nearby recreational areas.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is a world-class wildlife facility. It's basically a zoo, but specific to the region in a way that's unlike anything else. It's an amazing institution with a lot to see, especially in the cooler months when the animals are more likely to be out during the day. During the hot summers they host a lot of nighttime events, like blacklight scorpion searches.

The Pima Air and Space Museum is great, even if you're not a military buff. Check out the large hangars full of aerospace history; they're very impressive. It's attached to the famous Air Force aircraft boneyard where thousands of military planes are mothballed in the dry desert. These planes will eventually be redeployed or decommissioned, but while waiting they sit out in the desert and the facility can be toured.

The Reid Park Zoo is a very nice small zoo, lovely if the weather is nice. They've continually added animals and exhibits and it's a perfect size zoo for a few-hour visit.

Old Tucson is a popular tourist thing; it's sort of an old west theme park. Not my cup of tea, but a lot of old movies were filmed there in the heyday of westerns. Much of the historic parts were burned in a fire in 1995, but it has been rebuilt. There are daily gunfights and other shows. It's a good family experience and it's as close to a theme park as you'll get in town.

Biosphere 2 is also pretty neat, depending on the level of access you have. The building itself is amazing, but I've never taken the official tour. Certainly take a look at the online information and if you're headed north of the city, think about a visit. It's owned by the University of Arizona now and there is a lot of science going on there; since it has biomes replicating

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every type of climate in the world, there are a lot of scientific possibilities.

Finally, one newer attraction is the Mini Time Machine, an incredible museum of miniatures. The building is new, was built for the collection, and is very well done.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

There are a lot of amazing hikes that don't get a lot of publicity. The Pima Canyon Trail is beautiful. Tohono Chul Park is a treasure, as is the Tucson Botanical Garden, both of which are mostly outdoor and delve into the botany of the region.

For a real hidden gem, take young kids to Valley of the Moon, which is a volunteer-run fairyland, originally built by one man on a few acres in the middle of town. It's quite charming.

If you can be in town for Tucson's All Souls Procession, it's a must-see event celebrating the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) and it's otherworldly. Many in the community spend all year preparing, and many locals dress up and march in the procession either to honor a departed relative or a cause. Tens of thousands of people, many also made up as skeletons, pack the processional route, which culminates in a huge celebration and the burning of a giant urn full of prayers gathered along the route.

Where to Stay

Stay downtown or midtown if you can. Accommodations get less interesting as you travel east. If you're looking for a resort stay, there are many world-class resorts north of the city in the Catalina Foothills and you'll still have easy access to the city.

Day Trips

Tucson is completely surrounded by mountain and wilderness areas. To the north are the Catalina Mountains with Mt. Lemmon as the main peak. The village on top of Mt. Lemmon is Summerhaven, with a ski area that's open during much of the winter. West is Tucson Mountain Park and Saguaro National Park West. East is Saguaro National Park East and further east is

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Chiricahua National Monument, another amazing wilderness area with large rock formations. There are several mountain ranges to the south and a highlight is Madera Canyon, a hiker and birdwatcher paradise.

My favorite day trip is to Bisbee, a mining town to the southwest that's built into a canyon. It's become a destination for artists and gallery owners with good food and a lot of western mining history.

That same general direction can take you to the famous Tombstone—the town too tough to die—and the OK Corral. It relies on its old west history, but it's fun to see. The small lovely towns of Patagonia and Sonoita are also nearby, with another birdwatcher's hotspot, the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve.

Where to Walk

Around the city is The Loop, which is 130 miles of connected paths and river parks that circle the entire city.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

Tucson is the first city in the United States to be named a UNESCO World City of Gastronomy for our approach to local food and our food heritage. From innovative Mexican food at Cafe Poca Cosa (110 E. Pennington Street; phone: 520.622.6400) to great traditional food at El Charro (311 N. Court Avenue; phone: 520.622.1922) to amazing street corner Sonoran Hot Dogs (try one, trust me), there's a huge range.

We have truly amazing local bread from Don Guerra at Barrio Bread (order and find multiple pickup locations at barriobread.com) and amazing local breakfast gems like Baja Café (7002 E. Broadway Boulevard; phone: 520.495.4772), Mother Hubbard's (14 W. Grant Road in the Grantstone Supermarket; phone: 520.623.7976), and Bobos (2938 E. Grant Road; phone: 520.326.6163).

My favorite local lunches are at small, hidden Mexican places near downtown, like Anita Street Market (849 N. Anita Avenue),

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which has the best tortillas on earth, The Little One (also known as the Little Poca Cosa, at 151 N. Stone Avenue), and Tania's 33 (614 N. Grande Avenue).

And there are so many places to get a great dinner. Feast (3719 E. Speedway Boulevard; phone: 520.326.9363) is fantastic. Hacienda del Sol (5501 N. Hacienda Del Sol Road; phone: 520.299.1501) is great, as is Downtown Kitchen and Cocktails (135 S. 6th Avenue; phone: 520.623.7700).

Check out Falora Pizza (3000 E. Broadway Boulevard) and the adjacent Sidecar Bar (139 S. Eastbourne Avenue) for drinks and pizza.

And the aforementioned Cafe Poca Cosa (110 E. Pennington Street; phone: 520.622.6400) is an amazing meal.

How to Fit In

Wear sunblock and drink water. It's often quite dry.

Tucson is a very casual city, so it's nearly impossible to find yourself underdressed, even in nicer restaurants. If your shirt has buttons on it, you're set for an outing, unless you are in the trendier campus area, in which case you're overdressed.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

Much of the city is very spread out, but there's a lot going on in the city core. Ride the SunLink streetcar, talk to people, hop off on Fourth Avenue, and hang out. Walk or ride the SunLink further downtown and hang out some more. When you're ready for a break, get back on the streetcar and ride to the Mercado San Augustin, which is the end of the line, for a snack or drink. You'll meet people.

If you happen to be in town for one of Tucson's many fairs and festivals—The Fourth Avenue Street Fair, Festival of Books, Tucson Meet Yourself, etc.—go to those to meet locals. Downtown also hosts a big event with a lot of live music and tons of food on the second Saturday of every month.

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Best Places to Take a Photo

Head to Saguaro National Park East (the cactus forest) for iconic saguaro cactus photos or Sabino Canyon for saguaros and canyons/mountains. From the top of A Mountain, near downtown, you can shoot the iconic view over the city.

Find Chance at freerangestock.com and vintagestockphotos.com.

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Geoff Boyce

Hiker. Gardener. Geographer. Musician.

About Geoff

I grew up in the Detroit area, moved out to Arizona in January 2001 to begin an undergraduate degree, and have lived in Tucson since August 2005. I'm presently finishing a PhD in Geography at the University of Arizona, one of the top geography programs in the country.

In my free time, I like to hike, garden, and play music. I also participate in a great deal of community work and activism in southern Arizona, ranging from work on food sovereignty and environmental conservation to racial justice, immigrant rights, and human rights work.

What to do in Tucson (the Basics)

Recreation in Tucson is all about getting out into the beautiful desert and mountains that surround us. The city itself is ringed by four mountain ranges: the Catalinas to the north, the Rincons to the east, the Santa Ritas to the south, and the Tucson Mountains to the west. When visiting, you can always orient yourself by paying attention to the mountains around you (except at night, of course). Each of these mountain ranges provides breathtaking scenery and numerous hiking and camping opportunities.

In addition, you can drive most of the way up the Santa Ritas through Madera Canyon (itself one of the premier bird-watching sites in North America) and you can drive all the way up the Catalinas on Mt. Lemmon Highway. And, in the winter, Mt. Lemmon features a multi-run ski hill...the southernmost in the US. You can ski in the morning and bask in the sun and 70-degree weather in the afternoon.

If you're new to the area, it's worth stopping by Antigone Books on 4th Avenue or Bookmans (with multiple stores throughout the city) to purchase a trail guide, especially if you're really into

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outdoor recreation or otherwise just want to get off of the beaten path.

The classic hikes—Bear Canyon, Seven Falls, Sabino Canyon—are all worthwhile, and Sabino Canyon is especially friendly to people with physical disabilities or limited mobility, as you can take a tram most of the way up the canyon and climb on or off as you like.

Another trail worth exploring is the David Yetman Trail in the Tucson Mountains, which you can reach from Camino del Oeste or from the Marriott Star Pass Resort (a favorite thing to do is to hike from the Yetman trailhead to the bar at Star Pass for sunset. The bar features a beautiful patio and view of the desert, and people cannot believe that you can hike through Tucson Mountain Park and end up directly at a bar!).

Finally, believe it or not, we have a number of great swimming holes in the area. From Catalina State Park you can hike up about two miles into the mountains and reach a series of waterfalls and pools. It's an uphill hike and should definitely be approached with caution in the middle of the summer. But its well worth the effort.

For an easier hike, you can drive out most of the way to the Tanque Verde Falls and pools with just a little bit of scrambling along the way at the end. Just drive out east on the speedway past the point where it becomes a dirt road and begins to weave up into the Rincon Mountains. Eventually you'll see a series of turnoff parking areas to the left and the falls are to your right/south a short distance. Keep in mind: people like to jump off the surrounding cliffs into the pools below, but this can be incredibly dangerous and every year people are either killed or have to be helicoptered out of this area after a cliff jump gone wrong. Also, the Tanque Verde pools are known to be a cruising area for gay men, so don't be surprised if you are propositioned there; just be polite and decline (assuming you are uninterested).

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Traveling beyond the immediate vicinity of Tucson, there are no shortage of additional areas to explore only a short drive away. Picacho Peak, Chiricahua National Monument, the Huachuca Mountains, and Patagonia Mountains are particularly worth visiting.

Hidden Gems for Seasoned Travelers

It's worth spending a morning at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum—a wildlife rehabilitation center, environmental history museum, and native species zoo that is a delight for adults and children alike. They also produce important scientific research and promote wildlife and habitat conservation. And it's a great way to learn about our region.

Pauly Shore jokes aside, the Biosphere 2 is also an interesting day trip and an important site of ongoing scientific research.

If you are near downtown, there are some really good museums and galleries, including the Tucson Museum of Art and the Tucson Modern Art Museum. Both are small but excellent and feature rotating exhibits that can bring nationally- or internationally-recognized artists.

If you have a vehicle, it's also worth spending a few hours at the DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun. Ted DeGrazia was a brilliant local artist and his gallery is housed at the site of his former studio, which he designed and built by hand and is itself architecturally noteworthy.

For anyone interested in regional or Spanish colonial history, southern Arizona features three of a chain of 24 mission churches established by Padre Eusebio Kino in the late 17th century. Two of these are easy to access. One is now the site of Tumacacori National Historic Park, south of Tubac. And the other, San Xavier del Bac, is still an active mission church only a few miles south of Tucson, located on the land of the Tohono O'odham Nation.

Finally, I cannot recommend enough a visit to the Titan Missile Museum, although I think this should be approached with a

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great deal more solemnity and seriousness than the guides typically offer. During the height of the Cold War, Tucson was one of three cities in the US to host the Titan II Intercontinental Ballistic Missile program. The city was ringed by 20 or so Titan II missile silos aimed at Soviet cities and primed to launch any time at a moment's notice. One of these missile silos is preserved in the Titan Missile Museum, about 20 minutes down I-19 just outside of Green Valley. At the museum, you can participate in a one-hour tour of the missile site, where you'll be immersed in the technology and mentality of the 20th century nuclear arms race. It's a worthwhile reminder of how close we have been (and to this day remain) to total nuclear annihilation. And it's an incredible artifact of the Cold War right in our back yard. I consider it equivalent to having a chunk of the Berlin Wall or something like that running straight through the heart of Tucson.

Where to Stay

Stay downtown or near 4th Avenue. There are tons of hotels, guesthouses, and B&Bs near both. But seriously, stay downtown. If you find that you need a car for hangouts, restaurants, or nightlife, you are doing Tucson wrong.

If you stay downtown or near 4th Avenue, you should be able to walk most places you'd want to be, at least for cafes, music, hanging out, restaurants, bars, nightlife, etc. Tucson just built a new modern streetcar that you can take from the Menlo Park neighborhood through downtown and 4th Avenue and up to the university. But it's expensive, gimmicky and slow. Frequently you can walk faster than the streetcar will take you. So just plan to walk or rent a bike (which you can do pretty cheaply at BICAS, a neighborhood bicycle coop, salvage warehouse and education center).

Day Trips

Bisbee, a former mining town-turned artist's colony, is definitely worth a day trip. The city is really scenic and has all kinds of funky places to eat, drink, and hang out.

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Patagonia and Patagonia Lake are also nice places to visit, particularly if you're into bird-watching. It's also pretty inexpensive to rent a pontoon boat for four or eight hours on the lake, which makes for a great afternoon of swimming, fishing (though only if you have a license), or whatever.

For those over 21 and more adventurous, take a day or evening trip out to Cow Town. I won't say more here. Just look it up. You won't be sorry that you did.

If you have an international passport and can cross the border, it's fun to spend an afternoon or evening in Nogales, Mexico (just an hour south of Tucson on I-19). Nogales is a fun border town, and there are plenty of great shops, bars, and restaurants to explore. If you're into a crazy nightlife, you can find it there, but it's also easy to avoid if you're not (for more low-key drinks and karaoke, check out Pancho Villa's Bar. Just be polite to the locals and don't hog the karaoke mic).

For an overnight in Nogales, I recommend the Fray Marcos hotel (the tallest building in the city). It's worth it to pester the hotel staff to let you up onto the roof just for the view, although they're not officially supposed to take you up there. At the bottom of the Fray Marcos, outside on the street on weekend evenings is easily the best taqueria in town, with great hand-made tortillas. But you can find great tacos on almost every street corner. And you can complement those tacos with really cheap dental work...another reason loads of Tucsonans travel to Nogales.

Unless you're up for a really kitschy, artificial cowboy experience, skip Tombstone (although, you know, you could put yourself through it, just for the experience). Also, Sierra Vista doesn't have a whole lot going for it other than the Army Base (although there is a great French bakery there, and like most military towns, it offers really good Korean and Vietnamese food).

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Where to Walk

There are really great bike and walking paths along both the Santa Cruz River (which parallels I-10 through downtown) and the Rillito River, with farmer's markets located along each in rotating locations, depending on the day of the week (the Santa Cruz farmer's market is on Thursday afternoons and there are two Rillito River markets on Sunday mornings).

Another good walking trail with a view is Tumamoc Hill. This is a paved walkway that goes 1.5 miles up to a peak just outside downtown. Particularly in the early mornings, it's full of locals working out.

Finally, bear in mind that because of its warm, dry climate, Tucson becomes home in the winter months to lots of folks who are houseless and they tend to congregate in the river areas near the walking trails. So don't be surprised if you take advantage of these excellent trails and cross paths with lots of folks who are urban camping. Be kind and friendly and bear in mind that most of these folks would just as soon rather be left alone.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

If you eat meat, you have to try a Sonoran hot dog. It's the iconic local dish. *A hotdog?* you say. *You want me to try a hotdog?* Yes, I do! Forget about Chicago. Forget about soggy-ass Detroit Coney Dogs. You have never had a hotdog until you've had a Sonoran hot dog. Wrapped in bacon. Grilled. Stuffed in a bolillo roll (never a bun), with pinto beans, tomatoes, raw and grilled onion, green chiles, cheese, mayo, mustard, and salsa. And any decent place will also have mushrooms, cabbage, guacamole, grilled chile güeros, and more grilled onion, cheese, and salsa that you could possibly add.

The classic places to order a Sonoran hotdog are El Güero Canelo (with two Tucson locations: elguerocanelo.com) and BK Tacos (2680 N. 1st Avenue). Personally, I prefer BK for the salsa bar alone, plus they serve beer.

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That said, by far, the best hotdogs are at the Ruiz Brothers' hotdog cart on the corner of 6th Avenue and 22nd Street (about a 15-minute walk from downtown).

Beyond the Sonoran doggie, Tucson is full of Mexican cuisine from Sonora (characterized by large thin flour tortillas, carne asada, and vegetarian dishes like chiles rellenos, nopales, and calabacitas). There are tons of excellent taquerias all around.

One of the best restaurants in town is La Indita (622 N. 4th Avenue), which is also super-friendly to vegetarians and vegans (although they have plenty of dishes for carnivores, as well). For another vegan and veggie-friendly taqueria, I recommend Tania's 33(614 N. Grande Avenue).

Tucson is also home to a growing foodie scene, which is honestly a little obnoxious, over-priced, and frequently mediocre (if you're downtown, you may end up spending \$20 for a hamburger or \$16 for three tacos or any other dish you could easily find for \$7 or \$10 somewhere else). BUT...if you're interested in going the foodie route, the newer locales I'd recommend include Proper (300 E. Congress Street; phone: 520.396.3357), Pasco (820 E. University Boulevard; phone: 520.882.8013), and Diablo Burger (312 E. Congress Street; phone: 520.882.2007). All three serve great food and source much of their meat and produce locally, supporting a burgeoning regional food economy that has led Tucson to recently be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage City of Gastronomy.

For pizza, I recommend Empire Pizza (137 E. Congress Street; phone: 520.882.7499) or Rocco's Little Chicago Pizza (2707 E. Broadway Boulevard; phone: 520.321.1860) out on Broadway. It's particularly friendly to vegetarians, vegans, and folks who are gluten-free.

Finally, for drinks: downtown Tucson is full of start-up breweries. Some of the best are Public House (4340 N. Campbell Avenue)—a great hang-out spot that also serves homemade non-alcoholic beverages, which makes it friendly for ladies who are expecting or for folks who are in the program. Pueblo

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Vida (115 E. Broadway Boulevard) and Borderlands Brewery (119 E. Toole Avenue). Also, the Dragoon Brewery (1859 W. Grant Road, #111) is excellent, and you can find their beer on tap at most bars and restaurants in the city.

If you like whiskey, try the local Whiskey Del Bac, available at many bars and restaurants downtown. It's excellent!

I recommend skipping Barrio Brewery, Nimbus, or Thunder Canyon Brewery, as well as the World of Beer restaurant downtown (which has been known to be sexist and homophobic toward patrons).

Other favorites include Johnny Gibson's Downtown Market (11 S. 6th Avenue), Seis Tacos (130 S. Avenida del Convento, #100), Maico Restaurant (835 E. 22nd Street), Tacos Apson (3501 S. 12th Avenue), Taco Fish (with multiple locations at *tacofishtucson.com*), and La Cocina (201 N. Court Avenue; phone: 520.622.0351) for outdoor hangout space, a decent menu, good drinks, and dancing! Saturday night, in particular, is a queer-friendly dance night and an all-around good time.

On Monday nights after 9 p.m., Elliott's (135 E. Congress Street; phone: 520.622.5500) has live jazz and great drink specials.

For cafes and other hangout space, my recommendations are Café Passe (415 N. 4th Avenue), Bentley's (1730 E. Speedway Boulevard), and Raging Sage (2458 N. Campbell Avenue). And Revolutionary Grounds (606 N. 4th Avenue) is a quiet café with a great little political bookstore.

Budget Tips

Don't try to eat or drink downtown (unless you go to Empire Pizza or Johnny Gibson's).

Most of the best things to do around town (hiking!) are entirely free. The Museum of Art is free on Sunday afternoons. D&D Pinball, off 4th Avenue, is like a living museum of vintage pinball machines and is a great place to kill some time if you have a

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few quarters to burn. Also, the Shot in the Dark Café downtown is a good 24-hour hangout spot with cheap food, cheap coffee, and an interesting crowd.

Tucson is also the birthplace and the home of freecycle (*free cycle.org*), a well-known website where you can get all kinds of goodies that folks are trading or giving away. Craigslist and ride-share are also good options. Hitch-hiking and train-hopping around Arizona can be tricky (as they are anywhere, really), but possible; the southern-pacific train route runs right through downtown. All over the south side, you can find Mexican shuttle services that will take you to Nogales or Phoenix for \$10 - \$15. Also, Amtrak has a regular service and a one-way ticket to LA purchased at least a week in advance can be as cheap as \$36.

How to Fit In

In Tucson, like much of the western United States, strangers tend to make eye contact, smile, and say hello, whether when passing someone on the street or having any other routine interaction.

Things happen slower here. The city is casual and people dress casually (most of the time it is hot! And people generally find it more appropriate to be comfortable than to be fashionable), and things rarely happen when they're supposed to happen (locals call it "Tucson Time"); if you have a meeting or appointment, don't be surprised if everybody shows up five or 10 minutes late.

So just be friendly and patient. And bear in mind that almost half of Tucson's population of one million people grew-up speaking Spanish in their homes. This is a thoroughly bi-lingual and bi-cultural city. And it is decidedly unfriendly to the bigoted anti-immigrant attitudes commonly associated with the state of Arizona. In fact, nothing may piss off locals more than insensitivity to this issue (or insensitivity to the myriad of other ways we like to presume that we are very different from Phoenix).

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When you come to our city, expect that people will be proud of their Mexican-American, Yaqui, or Tohono O'ohdam heritage. Many people around you will speak Spanish. If you are unable to understand them, be patient. Most people can comfortably switch between languages and if English is your primary language, its best to approach people in English first.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

Check out local music and events, go to a farmer's market, or get involved in a local organization. There are no shortage of groups to volunteer with, from BICAS to No More Deaths (a humanitarian aid organization that works on the border) to the Sky Island Alliance and the Pima County Food Bank (which runs an excellent home and neighborhood garden program). To learn about local events, check out the Tucson Peace Calendar (peacecalendar.org) or just go to the 4th Avenue Food Conspiracy Coop and check out the events board there.

Best Places to Take a Photo

You can hike Tumamoc Hill or drive up Sentinal Peak (locals refer to it as "A Mountain") and take a photo of downtown. Also, I like the Veinte de Agosto Park and its statue of Mexican Revolutionary hero Pancho Villa.

Final Notes & Other Tips

Most of the city is planned as a grid and, in the downtown area, both streets and avenues are numbered. Numbered streets run east-west, start at Speedway, and continue southward, with 1st Street being one block south of Speedway, 2nd Street two blocks south, and so on. Numbered avenues run north-south and start at Euclid, with 1st Avenue being one block west of Euclid, 2nd Avenue two blocks west, and so on. The numbered streets and avenues can be confusing, but when giving directions, locals always list the avenue first, followed by the street. So, if somebody gives you directions, (for example: "to 4th and 7th") you can assume they mean avenue, then street (in this case: 4th Avenue and 7th Street).

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If you are a foreigner or have immigration status issues, bear in mind that the Tucson area is surrounded by immigration checkpoints, particularly on northbound highways south of the city. If you don't have immigration paperwork, it's best not to travel south anywhere from Tucson. And if you are a foreign citizen and you do have papers, make sure to bring these with you. Also, Tucson is full of Border Patrol agents and the police frequently work closely with them. This is something else to be aware of. If by any chance you run into difficulties, Tucson is home to a Mexican and a Guatemalan consulate, and there are NGOs that can help you, like the Coalición de Derechos Humanos (520.770.1373).

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Joan Boldt

Volunteer. Hiker. Cyclist. Kayaker.

About Joan

I am originally from Regina in Saskatchewan, Canada, and spent most of the next years raising six kids on a dairy farm just north of Saskatoon. In 2004, after we sold the dairy, we came down to Tucson to do some voluntary service work with Mennonite Voluntary Service at Community Home Repair Projects of Arizona (CHSPA) with our youngest four children. After our term was over, my husband and I split up; he moved back to Canada and I stayed here in Tucson. I had my social work degree so was able to get a TN VISA and work in direct care (for mentally and physically disabled people, as well as the elderly) for Southern Arizona Family Services.

In my free time, I hike, walk, bike, kayak, read, garden, dance, work with my partner in his construction company, host couch surfers, travel to Canada to see kids, grandkids, and other family and friends, host parties, play games, and enjoy life!

What to do in Tucson (the Basics)

Must-sees include the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum (with its two miles of desert hiking trails), the hikes of Sabino Canyon (a natural desert oasis located in Tucson's Coronado National Forest), De Grazia Gallery of the Sun (which showcases the art and life of Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia), and San Xavier Mission (a beautiful old mission-style church).

I also enjoy the Mini Time Machine (a museum of miniatures), Tucson Museum of Art, Gaslight Theatre (an old western-style theater featuring nightly comedies), Arizona Theatre (for plays), Tucson Symphony, and Old Tucson Studios (a movie studio and theme park that is pricey but fun).

For lovers of the outdoors, other great places to see desert flora include Tucson Botanical Gardens and Tohono Chul Park.

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Saguaro National Parks east and west are great! And Colossal Caves is an interesting peek into a dead cave with lots of history.

Where to Stay

There are some B&Bs downtown in the older barrio district that are very interesting. Staying with couchsurfers anywhere will give you a taste of what different parts of Tucson are like.

Day Trips

Most people have heard of Tombstone and for wild west lovers, it's definitely interesting.

About 40 minutes further, the town of Bisbee is one of my favorite places. It's an old mining town with a hippy, artsy, cool vibe and an awesome Blues Festival in the fall.

There is this very kitschy but interesting set of hot springs called Essence of Tranquility in Safford where, for about \$10, you can soak in a series of cement pools with water of different temperatures.

Kartchner Caverns is a world-class limestone cave that's worth seeing.

You can dash into Nogales, Mexico, only a little over an hour away if you want to experience a border town and all that has to offer. I have gone more or less regularly for all the years I have lived here and never had any trouble.

Go kayaking or canoeing on Pena Blanca Lake, about an hour south of Tucson, on the way to Nogales. There's also Lake Patagonia and Parker Canyon Lake, which have fishing and swimming beaches.

Finally, Summerhaven up on Mt. Lemmon is a nice little community. There are cute restaurants and great hiking trails, and it's usually 20 degrees cooler up there.

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Where to Walk

Tucson has miles of river bike/walking paths along the rivers (which are dry most of the year) in the city.

Then there's Tumamoc—a hill that many locals walk up regularly. It is fairly steep, but a paved path switchbacks you up to the top, for a pretty a three-mile round trip. At the top, you get a beautiful view of the city.

Sabino Canyon has miles of trails, as do the Saguaro National Parks east and west. South of the city, you can hike up Mt. Wrightson.

Finally, go on either of the Meet Me at Maynard's walks—Monday nights starting at the Congress Hotel or Wednesday nights at La Elcantada Mall.

What & Where to Eat & Drink

Since Tucson is so close to Mexico, we have a large number of amazing Mexican restaurants. If you haven't ever had horchata (a refreshing rice drink, perfect for a hot day), this is the place to do it. If you don't like the first glass you try, go to a different place; the variety and quality are very different from place to place.

There are also hotdog stands throughout the city and everyone should try a Sonoran hot dog. A large number of food trucks have sprung up recently, so downtown on a Friday or Saturday night you can try any number of local flavors.

Fry bread and other native foods are available at the San Xavier Mission every day.

For my favorite places to eat, Baja Café (7002 E. Broadway Boulevard), Teresa's Mosaic Cafe (2456 N. Silver Mosaic Drive; phone: 520.624.4512), and Five Points (756 S. Stone Avenue) are my top picks.

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As for bars, Chicago Bar (5954 E. Speedway Boulevard), with its live music every night and its excellent blues band on Wednesdays, Monterey Court (505 W. Miracle Mile), also featuring live music and good food, and Boondocks (3306 N. 1st Avenue), with its live blues and rock music every night, are the best.

Budget Tips

Ride bikes, camp, or couchsurf. Hiking is free. DeGrazia Gallery is free (and a wonderful place). There are farmer's markets on most days (in different parts of the city) where you can get fresh, local food. And there are Markets on the Move that pop up around the city where, for \$10, you can get 60 pounds of produce.

How to Fit In

Most people in Tucson are very casual in dress and manners, so pretty much anything goes. As a transplanted Canadian, I find the fact that most people do not take off their shoes when entering someone's house very strange. I've gotten used to it though, so, keep your boots on and relax when in Tucson.

How to Meet Locals & Make Friends

Meet Me at Maynard's walks on Monday nights downtown and Wednesday nights up at La Encantada are a great place to meet people, as is *couchsurfing.org* (either stay in someone's home or just ask people to meet up).

Best Places to Take a Photo

The top of a mountain or Tumamoc Hill are always good options. On any of the hiking trails, you'll get pictures of our iconic saguaro cacti. Mount Lemmon and San Xavier Mission are stunning. And for sunset pictures, head to Gates Pass.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gigi Griffis is a world-traveling entrepreneur and writer with a special love for inspiring stories, new places, and living in the moment. In May 2012, she sold her stuff and took to the road full-time with her freelance business and her pint-sized pooch, Luna. These days, she's still traveling, with plans to spend six months in Canada in 2016 and the upcoming winter in southern Italy with her traveling dog and techy boyfriend.

Gigi is the author of nine books, including 100 Locals travel guides for Italy, Paris, Prague, Barcelona, Switzerland, France, New York City, and, now, Phoenix & Tucson.

Love what you read here? Find more at gigigriffis.com.

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