

Southwest Hot Spots

Desert View on the
South Rim of Grand
Canyon National Park
(Grant Ordeltjeide)



From saguaro arms reaching toward a brilliant blue sky to delicious cocktails and sparkling lakes, this mesmerizing road trip is one for the books.



The first thing your eyes are drawn toward when you drive through the Sonoran Desert surrounding Phoenix is the saguaro cactus. You'll see these weird and wonderful desert flora everywhere from the hillsides of Lost Dutchman State Park to the grocery store parking lot. But that's not the only reason you'll notice them.

There's this magnetic energy that saguaros lend to a landscape. Maybe it's their wise presence: Saguaros only grow 1-1.5 inches per year, so many of the towering specimens you're seeing are more than 100 years old. Or perhaps it's the symbolism they hold of a romanticized American Southwest. Whatever the case, they lend a certain *je ne sais quois* to the harsh and lovely desert.

On this road trip, you'll discover more desert mysteries than just saguaros. Eat locally grown Arizona produce that showcases the remarkable resilience of desert agriculture. Find sparkling lakes and rivers to paddle on, including one that goes to a winery. Pass red rocks offset by striking green junipers as you make your way into the high, ponderosa pine forests. This route heading toward the national park reveals surprises at every turn.

The canyon itself might be the greatest mystery this part of the state has to offer, from its striated walls, colors ever changing as the sun moves through the sky, to the hardy plants and animals that call this place home. Whether it's the mighty saguaro or the tiniest pinprick of light in the heavens above at this International Dark Sky Park, you'll find that there's so much more to Arizona than you could have ever expected.



Downtown Ocotillo (Slaven Gujic, courtesy of Visit Chandler)

Basecamp Chandler

Twenty minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, this city is a great place to start your Arizona adventure. With close proximity to the metro area and beautiful outdoor recreation, this urban space with a decidedly small town feel offers awesome restaurants, shopping and events. Here are four reasons to visit.

By Mikaela Ruland

■ Explore Downtown Chandler

Spend the day strolling Chandler's very walkable, tree-lined downtown district. It's hard to believe you're in Arizona's fifth largest city with its surprisingly small town vibe. Stop in Blue Planet Outdoors, a locally owned boutique with apparel and outdoor gear. Just down the street, visit d'Vine Gourmet to pick up Arizona-made souvenirs and goodies like jams, mustards and hot sauces. When it's time for dinner, you'll find everything from conveyor belt sushi to grab-and-go tacos to the upscale Elliott's Steakhouse. Basecamp your stay at the Crowne Plaza Phoenix Chandler Golf Resort. Boasting Arizona's first manicured grass golf course, this resort built in 1913 has everything you could want from convenient downtown walkability to a large pool with cabanas.

■ Eat Local

Try Singing Pandas, a fun, family friendly Chinese restaurant with a robust live music calendar. Craft 64 made the 50 Top Pizza List for Arizona, and Feringhee is the state's only fine dining Indian restaurant. For a different kind of evening, head to Merchant Square, an indoor antique mall with more than 400 local vendors and Chandler's best barbeque. American Way Smokehouse serves house-smoked meats and sides with a distinctly Arizona bent. Try the chili verde pulled pork sandwich, or the unique smoked egg salad sandwich.

■ Get Out in Nature

It's easy to hit the trails and explore the beautiful Sonoran Desert from Chandler. South Mountain Park and Preserve is just 15 minutes west of downtown. Immerse yourself in saguaro cacti, rocky peaks and sweeping views as you climb the 5-mile roundtrip Holbert Trail to Dobbins Lookout. Be sure to bring plenty of water with you when you set off, start early and avoid hiking in the summer months. Another way to get out and experience nature is to go on a free guided bird walk with the Desert Rivers Audubon at Veterans Oasis Park, November through April. More than 150 species of birds call this park home throughout the year. Binoculars are provided, so all you have to do is show up. Hour-long excursions start at 8 a.m. on the first Saturday of the month at the Red-Tailed Hawk Pavilion and are family friendly.

■ Grab a Drink Any Time of Day

Start your morning at one of the city's many coffee shops. Momentto Caffe is a Wi-Fi-free and digital-free, family owned shop that makes for a great place to disconnect in West Chandler. Make sure to say hi to Jax, the resident corgi. In the evenings, check out SanTan Brewing for dinner and a craft beer, or make plans to visit SanTan Gardens, Arizona's biggest combination brewery/distillery. Book a weekend tour to see how the beers and spirits are made at the East Warner Road location. Or, check out the new Warren Supper Club for an upscale cocktail alongside dinner in a fun, swanky setting. It's an excuse to dress up, have a memorable night out and listen to frequent live jazz.

Learn more at VisitChandler.com.

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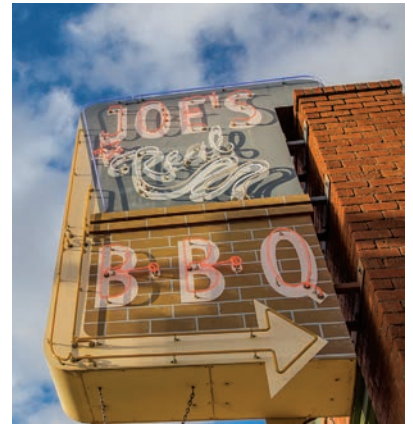


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A Farm-to-Table Weekend

The Sonoran Desert meets a verdant oasis in the Phoenix suburb of Gilbert.

By Susanna Klingenberg

Just a scenic four-hour drive from Grand Canyon National Park, Gilbert's focus on urban agriculture may surprise some visitors. In this welcoming small town, agrotourism gets a modern glow up and everybody benefits—locals, tourists and the planet. We've curated a collection of eats, hikes, shopping and local culture so you can explore a bit of what this intriguing town has to offer.

Check in to one of the many well-appointed vacation rentals or hotels in the area, and strike out immediately for the most unique feature of Gilbert: **Agritopia**. Gilbert pioneered the "agrihood," creating the nation's first farm-centric neighborhood, with farm-to-table restaurants, a winery and independent boutiques. Don't miss the **Farm Store** and **farm tour**, where you'll see desert micro-farming at its finest. "This land has gone from homesteading, to monocrop farming to today being the heart of this community," says Christy Davis, executive director of the Arizona Urban Agriculture Foundation.

While you're there, grab a meal at **Joe's Farm Grill**. The menu reflects their motto, "Common food, done uncommonly well." Enjoy burgers, sandwiches and fries with super-local, hyper-fresh touches from Agritopia's farm. Other restaurants you can't miss include **Snooze A.M. Eatery** for breakfast bliss, **Liberty Market** for



chilaquiles and vintage charm, **Arizona Wilderness Brewing Company** for burgers and brews and **Fire & Brimstone** for hearty wood-fired pizza. You can order your pizza to be delivered next door to **Garage-East** winery and enjoy the combo on the patio with live music. Close out the day at **Sotol Modern Cocktail Kitchen** for desert inspired libations and rooftop views.

The recently renovated heart of Gilbert is the downtown **Heritage District**. Poke around the shops, restaurants and studios, where there's a palpable sense of place. If you happen to be in the Heritage District on Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon, don't miss the **Gilbert Farmers Market**, where you'll find more than 100 vendors, no matter the season.

If you're ready to move, go for a hike at **Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch**. This 110-acre wetland wildlife sanctuary has several short, accessible hikes, plus plenty of birds and desert critters. "It's a great introduction to the Sonoran Desert flora and fauna," says Glenn Schlottman of the Gilbert Office of Economic Development.

Another favorite is **Lost Dutchman State Park**, where saguaro cacti reach for the sky.

Want to keep the good vibes going? **Arizona Goat Yoga**, founded in Gilbert, has become a sensation, locally and nationally. Goats and alpacas interact with participants while an instructor leads you through basic yoga poses.

Get a taste of culture at **Hale Center Theatre**, a theater-in-the-round venue where there's not a bad seat in the house. The performances range from Broadway favorites like *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* to big name concerts in an intimate setting. Gaze upward at the **Gilbert Rotary Centennial Observatory**, which gives visitors easy, in-town access to the cosmos on weekend nights from sundown to 9:30 p.m.

Learn more at DiscoverGilbert.com/Adventure

PHOTOS: Arizona Goat Yoga, Joe's Farm Grill sign, The Farm at Agritopia (Images courtesy Discover Gilbert)

SONORAN DESERT ADVENTURE

Discover the Sonoran Desert's wide-open spaces with Gilbert as your home base.

When the hiking, biking and exploring is done for the day, take a stroll through the charming Heritage District, stopping for photo ops at one of the many Instagram-worthy backdrops, and enjoy the delicious takeout and restaurant patio offerings found only in Gilbert.

Learn more at DiscoverGilbert.com/Adventure





Gateway to Grand

Five reasons to explore the peaceful town of Tusayan on Grand Canyon's doorstep—from hiking in Kaibab National Forest to flying over the canyon.

By Amelia Arvesen

1 Wander the Woods

The Kaibab National Forest surrounds the whole town, offering ample opportunities for wandering. Opened in spring 2025, the Tusayan Forest Trails have two loops that take you through the forest and a sliver of the new Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument. The shorter of the two trails is the 4.4-mile Tusayan Loop. The longer option is the 7.3-mile Montane Loop. Both trails are considered moderately difficult, with rocky terrain at 6,800 feet of elevation. Find the trailheads from the southern roundabout in Tusayan or from the Tusayan-Montane Campground.

2 Go Camping

Just four miles from the South Entrance to the national park, Tusayan-Montane Campground is situated in a peaceful ponderosa pine and gambel oak forest on the Colorado Plateau. With 142 standard nonelectric campsites spread across five different loops, and 18 double campsites for groups up to 14 people, there's plenty of room to set up basecamp for your stay. Its proximity to the park means campsites are generally

reserved six months in advance on Recreation.gov. But 30 sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis for spontaneous travelers.

3 Take an Air Tour

Tusayan is home to the Grand Canyon National Park Airport, where numerous tour companies—Grand Canyon Airlines, Maverick Airstar and Papillon Airways—run helicopter and airplane sightseeing flights over the enormous hole in the earth. Buckle up and get an aerial view of the Colorado River, South and North rims, and possibly even Lake Mead and the Hoover Dam. You'll see more in a few hours than you can reach in a full week.

4 Bike to the Park

Right from town, hop on two wheels and pedal north on the Tusayan Greenway Trail, which is 70% gravel and 30% paved. It's 6.6 miles one way to Mather Point on the South Rim, and you can either lock up your bike and roam the historic village or continue riding in the park. To get back to



Tusayan, bike back the way you came, or board the Purple Route shuttle which has bike racks. Don't forget to purchase a pass—\$20 per bicycle—at the Visitor Center IMAX. Bring your own bikes or rent them nearby from Canyon Adventures Bike Tours & Cafe.

5 Join a Star Party

Every July and August in Tusayan, local astronomers host Astronomy Nights, an educational exploration into the solar system. Get all your burning questions answered about constellations, planets and distant galaxies—and maybe even catch a shooting star if you're lucky. Events happen every second Thursday and Sunday after dusk at the Tusayan-Montane Campground, or every fourth Thursday and Sunday at the Tusayan Sports Complex.

For a full list of businesses and to learn more visit Explore.Tusayan-AZ.gov.

PHOTOS: Grand Canyon Viewpoint, Biking the Tusayan Greenway Trail (Images courtesy of Town of Tusayan)



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The CLOSEST TOWN to the South Rim of
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This Is the Spot

Stop and stay on the doorstep to the Grand Canyon's South Rim at these two places.

By Amelia Arvesen and Mikaela Ruland

GRAND CANYON VISITOR CENTER & IMAX

Nothing can properly prepare you for the heart-pumping magnificence of the Grand Canyon—except maybe a visit to the Grand Canyon Visitor Center and IMAX in Tusayan (Too-Say-Ann) located just 1.5 miles from the South Entrance to the national park.

On the giant, six-story IMAX screen, catch the movie *Grand Canyon: Rivers of Time*. The breathtaking 37-minute film takes you through the 1.7-billion-year history and culture of one of the world's greatest natural landscapes—no backpack required.

Beyond the theater, the visitor center includes the Explorer's Café for pizza and deli sandwich pickup, adventure store with souvenirs and maps, and friendly local staff ready to answer your questions. Park passes are available on site, as well as electric vehicle charging stations.

Want to go deeper into the park? Sign up for a Pink Jeep Tour from the visitor center to reach some of the most dramatic viewpoints in the Grand Canyon.

Tip: Save up to 20% when you buy IMAX tickets online at [ExploreTheCanyon.com](https://www.explorethecanyon.com)

RED FEATHER LODGE

If you're looking for the best access to the South Rim, but don't want to pay the price of park lodging, Red Feather Lodge is the perfect option. The first hotel built in Tusayan in 1964, it's still owned and operated by the same family. Today, you'll find modern hotel and motel rooms along with a fitness center, seasonal outdoor pool and hot tub and amenities to make your vacation a bit easier.

The hotel's best tip? Visit in June, July or August. The park sees fewer crowds and rates

are more affordable. Days can be warm, but nights are cool, offering opportunities for stargazing.

Tusayan's many restaurants are within walking distance of the lodge, but look no further than Plaza Bonita Restaurant, which is on site. You'll find Mexican and American fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The restaurant has a full bar as well, including great margaritas.

Learn more at [RedFeatherLodge.com](https://www.RedFeatherLodge.com).

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Capture the Moment

By Mikaela Ruland

Photos by Ken Hubbard

With its multi-colored canyon walls, constantly shifting light and panoramic vistas, the Grand Canyon is a paradise, and a challenge, for photographers. With more than 50 viewpoints, it can be difficult to narrow down where to shoot sunrise, sunset and the Milky Way. These are four of our favorites, plus tips from our friends at Tamron on how to pull off the perfect shot.



Mather Point

F/22; ISO 200; 1/13 second

Perhaps the most popular viewpoint on the South Rim, you certainly won't be alone taking photos from Mather Point, but it's worth a stop all the same. Easily accessible via a short walk from the Grand Canyon Visitor Center, the paved and flat point offers guardrails helping to ensure a sense of safety even when setting up in the dark. Arrive early if you plan to shoot sunrise or sunset here to claim a good spot. From the point you can see more than 60 miles in some directions, and peering down into the canyon below you'll spot Phantom Ranch, plus the serpentine bends of several trails winding their way into the depths.



F/9; ISO 640; 1/15 second

Grandview Point

Stop at this viewpoint, one of the highest along the South Rim at 7,400 feet as you're driving from Grand Canyon Village to Desert View. From this spot, you'll get a panoramic view of the canyon from east to west, making it a great location for either sunrise or sunset. The different colored bands in the walls are particularly pronounced here and you'll be able to spot several bends in the Colorado River. Be cautious of the steep drop offs, especially if you're arriving or leaving in the dark.

Lipan Point

No matter what type of photography you like best, Lipan Point, along the South Rim's Desert View Drive, is an ideal spot to set up. With some of the widest perspectives of the canyon and views of various formations all the way down to the Colorado River below, it's a great choice for sunrise or sunset, but also makes for a nice spot to try your hand at night sky photography. The point has a paved trail leading to it and a relatively flat area to set up a tripod, but use caution in the dark as there are no guardrails here. Visiting in the daytime? Keep an eye out for raptors, which frequently use this spot as a migration route between the North and South rims, and give wildlife photography a try.



F/11; ISO 200; 1/40 second



F/16; ISO 100; 1/25 second

Moran Point

Located just up Desert View Drive from Lipan Point, this spot provides a unique perspective of the canyon's geology. It's one of only a few rim viewpoints where all three of the canyon's main rock groups can be spotted (sedimentary, Grand Canyon Supergroup and Vishnu basement rock). Head here for sunrise or sunset, and you can capture the stunning views that the point's namesake, Thomas Moran, did in 1873 after joining John Wesley Powell on his expedition down the Colorado River. The resulting painting hung in the U.S. Capitol and is now at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. After photographing to your heart's content, head to the Yavapai Geology Museum to learn more about the different rock types you saw.

Tamron Tips

- Clean the front element of your lens when shooting into the rising or setting sun. If there's dirt or dust on your front element, you might end up with lens flares in your image.
- Sunrise is usually a high contrast situation, so be sure to expose for the highlights to maintain detail. To create a starburst effect with the rising sun, stop down your aperture to F/16 or F/22 and wait until the sun just crests the horizon.
- When shooting sunset, set your aperture to F/16 or F/22 to maximize your depth of field. If you're utilizing a tripod, use the lowest ISO to maximize quality. If you're hand-holding, set your ISO to the lowest value that allows a fast enough shutter speed to get a clear image.
- A wide-angle zoom lens like the Tamron 17-50mm F/4 Di III VXD or the 28-300mm F/4-7.1 Di III VC VXD is a great choice for both sunrise and sunset, while a fast aperture, ultra wide-angle lens like a Tamron 17-28mm F/2.8 for full-frame or 11-20mm F/2.8 for crop-sensor is best for night photography.
- For night photography, settings will vary based on conditions, but you'll likely want to shoot at F/2.8 at an ISO between 1600-6400 and a shutter speed between 10 and 30 seconds. Be sure to have a stable tripod and shutter release or remote timer so you don't shake your camera while taking a long exposure, and turn off your lens' image stabilization.
- At night, you'll likely need to manually focus as your auto-focus won't be effective in the dark. Use the magnifier on your camera's LCD screen to enlarge a bright star or planet, then move your focus ring back and forth until the point of light is sharp. Zoom in on your first few images to make sure the stars are crisp. You can use a piece of tape to secure the focus ring, so you don't accidentally bump it.

Learn more and find your perfect camera lens at [Tamron-Americas.com](https://www.tamron-americas.com).



Hay There

Mules, the offspring of a male burro and a female horse, have been carrying people and their gear into the Grand Canyon since the late 1800s. These sure-footed creatures are well suited to descending and climbing the steep switchbacks into the canyon and were used by miners with prospecting claims before tourism became the main industry below the rim. When Fred Harvey Co. built Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, everything besides the stone had to be carried in on the backs of these beasts. Today, all supplies for Phantom Ranch are still carried in by mule, and trash and mail are carried back out.

While there were allegations of mistreatment of the mules on the Havasupai Indian Reservation as recently as 2018, the concessionaire that operates the park mules has a much better track record. They even get regular visits from a chiropractor. Visitors can book a mule ride to Phantom Ranch through the park's concessionaire, Xanterra, or catch sight of the mule trains descending into the canyon on the South Kaibab Trail in the mornings.

Mule in Grand Canyon National Park (Taegan Elmer)



Do I Need a Car?

Sure, you could drive to the Grand Canyon, but don't discount another option: public transportation.

By Mikaela Ruland

The remote beauty of Grand Canyon might seem incongruent with the idea of modern rail, but unlike many national parks, it is possible to visit this world wonder without ever sitting behind the wheel. Taking public transportation is less direct than driving, resulting in longer journeys, but it's often cheaper and more climate friendly to get on a bus or a train. Whether you prefer not to drive or are looking for a way to reduce your carbon footprint on your next trip, here's how to get to the Grand Canyon without a car.

Amtrak offers routes to Flagstaff, Arizona from Los Angeles and Chicago. The Los Angeles line takes about 11 hours, and

the Chicago line, 30. Both have overnight options in cabins with beds so you can sleep away the journey. There are also smaller Amtrak stations along the way that will allow you to access Flagstaff, a few near major airports making it easy to fly in and hop on the train including Albuquerque, New Mexico and Kansas City.

Instead of booking your ticket to Flagstaff, book your final destination as Williams, Arizona. While the train doesn't run to Williams, Amtrak offers a connecting shuttle service along the 40-minute route between the two towns. Taking Amtrak from Los Angeles to Williams is affordable, with coach tickets starting at

\$101 one-way in 2025. When you factor in flying to Phoenix or Flagstaff and then renting a car, it may end up being the most affordable option.

Or, it's cheap and easy to access Williams by bus. Simply fly into Phoenix and head to the bus terminal, which is located on the west end of the airport. From there, board a Greyhound bus to Williams. The route only makes four stops, taking four hours—approximately an hour and a half longer than driving directly to Williams. At \$35 per person (one-way) in 2025, it's one of the cheapest ways to get to the park. If you'd prefer not to fly into Phoenix, Greyhound offers bus service from most cities in the U.S. It's going to be a slow journey, but it is possible.

From Williams, board the Grand Canyon Railway for the 75-minute journey to the South Rim. From the train depot on the South Rim, it's easy to catch the free national park shuttle to get to viewpoints, trailheads, hotels and campgrounds in the area, no car needed.

A Welcome Oasis

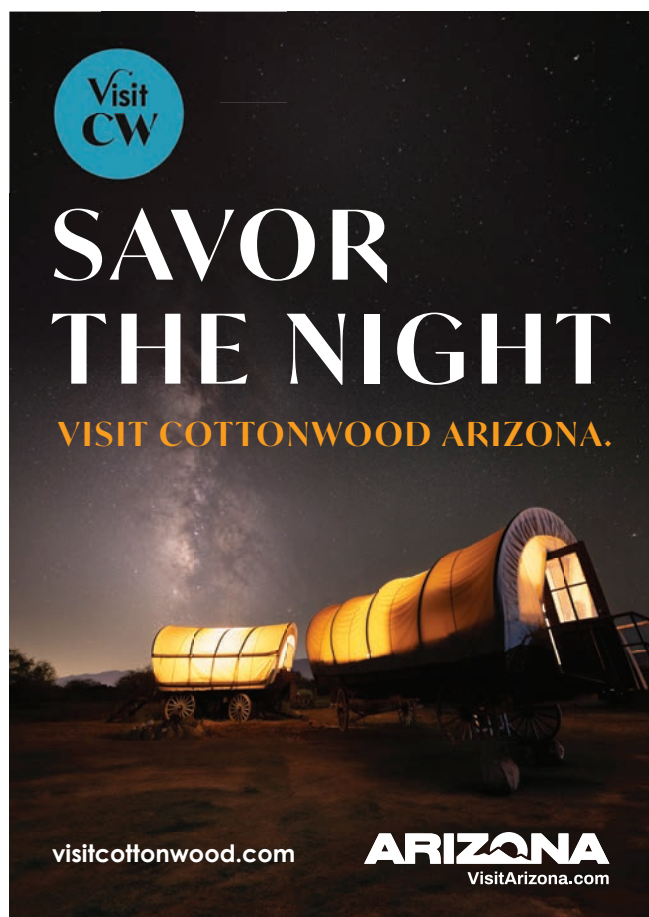
By Tori Peglar

Tucked between Sedona's red rocks and Mingus Mountain lies Cottonwood, an unpretentious town dotted with vineyards, a stunning national monument and a charming downtown where the locals are glad you're there.

It's also home to Dead Horse Ranch State Park, a gorgeous Arizona gem less than two miles from downtown. You can mountain bike or hike on 20 miles of trails, do exceptional birdwatching, go on a guided horse trail ride and set up your tent or rent a cabin to stay the night. Nearby, you can explore an ancient hilltop pueblo at Tuzigoot National Monument. It was built by the Singua people who were artists and farmers, trading their goods across hundreds of miles.

Cottonwood's wine scene has exploded during the past decade with several tasting rooms in Old Town and 25 in the valley. You can even kayak the calm waters of the Verde River to Alcantara Vineyards. Rent your kayak and float on your own or sign up for a guided tour in town.

Learn more at VisitCottonwood.com.





PRESCOTT, AZ

Take to the Trails

From great hiking and kayaking to a lively downtown scene, here are the top five reasons to explore this small city.

by Tori Peglar

1 Watson Lake

You can hike the 6-mile Peavine Trail around the lake dotted with smooth, beautiful boulders. Or rent kayaks, canoes or stand-up paddleboards to explore the lake by water. For a unique experience, opt for an unguided moonlit kayak excursion from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Rent a paddle craft from Born to Be Wild Adventures.

2 Circle Trail

This is a 56-mile loop trail around Prescott that passes through grasslands, chaparral, lakes and forests. There are 15 trailheads around the town that give you access to the loop. Find maps for the trailheads and more at prescott-az.gov.

3 Historic Downtown Prescott

Filled with locally owned boutiques and restaurants, this vibrant downtown is fun to stroll. Sit in Historic Courthouse Plaza to people watch. Visit The Palace Restaurant & Saloon, Arizona's oldest saloon where wait staff dress in 1880s-era clothing. Opened in 1877, it offers lunch, dinner, live entertainment and Arizona craft beers.

4 Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew Learning and Tribute Center

On June 30, 2013, the Yarnell Hill Fire, ignited by dry lightning, tragically killed 19 firefighters from the Prescott Fire Department's Interagency Granite Mountain Hotshot crew. This museum offers education to prevent wildfires and powerfully tells the story of the Granite Mountain 19. For a deep dive into Arizona history, visit Sharlot Hall Museum. There are four acres of open-air exhibits, gardens and historic buildings.

5 Prescott Frontier Days

Prescott is home to the world's oldest rodeo and has put on this fantastic yearly show since 1888. It turns 138 years old in 2026. Time your itinerary to coincide with this fun celebration which runs over Independence Day, and offers barrel racing, team roping, bareback riding, parades, dances, street parties and more.

Learn more at ExperiencePrescott.com.



Whiskey Row, Paddleboarding on Watson Lake (Courtesy of Prescott Tourism Office)

A stylized topographic map overlay in the top left corner, featuring brown contour lines on a light blue background.

BOLD OUTDOORS



Experience Prescott