

GREAT ITINERARIES: ARIZONA & THE GRAND CANYON

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARIZONA

Arizona is full of history, culture, and awe-inspiring natural landmarks. Here are some suggestions for mixing a road trip with some of the state's top attractions.

PHOENIX AND THE VALLEY OF THE SUN: 1–2 Days

The metropolitan Phoenix area is the best place to begin your trip to Arizona, with a wealth of hotels and resorts. Reserve a day in the Valley and visit the Heard Museum and Desert Botanical Garden. Select one of the area's popular Mexican restaurants for dinner. If time permits, stroll through Old Town Scottsdale's tempting art galleries. Depending on your remaining time in the Valley, you can escape to a spa for a day of pampering, get out your clubs and hit the links, or—if the season is right—catch a major-league baseball spring-training game.

Logistics: Sky Harbor International Airport is located at the center of the city and is 20 minutes away from most of the Valley's major resorts. Plan on driving everywhere in the greater Phoenix area, as public transportation is nearly nonexistent. The Valley of the Sun is a large area, but Phoenix itself is remarkably simple to navigate. Designed on a grid, numbered streets run north–south and named streets (Camelback Road, Glendale Avenue) run east–west. Grand Avenue, running about 20 mi from downtown to Sun City, is the only diagonal. If you need to know which direction you're facing, you can see South Mountain, conveniently looming up in the south, from nearly any point in the city.

GRAND CANYON SOUTH RIM: 1–2 Days

The sight of the Grand Canyon's immense beauty has taken many a visitor's breath away. Whatever you do, though, make sure you catch a sunset or sunrise view of the canyon. A night, or even just dinner, at grand El Tovar Hotel won't disappoint, but book your reservation early (up to six months ahead). Outdoors enthusiasts will want to reserve several days to hike and explore the canyon; less-ambitious travelers can comfortably see the area in one or two days.

Logistics: Arizona is a large state; the drive north from Phoenix to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon will take several hours, so budget at least a half day to make the 225-mi trip. Take Interstate 17 north from Phoenix into Flagstaff. The best way to reach the South Rim of the canyon is via U.S. 180 northwest from Flagstaff. It's best to travel to the canyon from the city during the week—Interstate 17 fills with locals looking to escape the heat on Friday and Saturday. If you have specific plans, whether it's a mule ride and rafting trip or dining and lodging, be sure to book very early for the canyon—reservations are necessary.

RED ROCKS and SPECTACULAR SIGHTS: 3–4 Days

Option 1: Sedona and Surrounding Area

The unusual red-rock formations in Sedona are a key destination for most visitors to Arizona, and it's no wonder. Spend at least a day exploring the town and its beauty, whether on a calm stroll or a thrilling jeep tour. The surrounding area includes Flagstaff,

a college town with a love for the outdoors and the stars; Prescott, with its Whiskey Row and Victorian homes; and Jerome, a charming artists' community that thrives more with every passing year.

Logistics: If possible, visit Sedona midweek, before the city folk fill the streets on the weekend. If Sedona is too pricey for your stay, consider the nearby towns of Flagstaff or Prescott, which have ample motels and budget hotels.

Option 2: Landmarks of Indian Country

The majestic landscapes in Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly are among the biggest draws to Arizona. Made famous by countless Western movies and famous photographs, the scenes are even more astounding firsthand. This northeast corner of the state is worth several days of exploration. The famous Four Corners, where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah meet, are within a short drive but there is not much to see. For a brief trip, make Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly the priorities. With added days, you can visit a Native American trading post, Lake Powell and Glen Canyon, and the Four Corners. On your drive toward Interstate 40, be sure to spend an hour or two at Petrified Forest National Park, where you'll see the remains of a prehistoric forest.

Logistics: Approximately 100 mi from Sedona, the fascinating sites of northeast Arizona are a destination unto themselves. Don't be fooled: this is a remote area and will take hours to reach, whether you're coming from Phoenix, Sedona, or the Grand Canyon. Most travelers view this corner of the state as a road trip heaven, as the highways offer one scenic drive after the other. Plan on making one of the main towns—Tuba City, Page, Window Rock—your base, and take day trips from there. No matter what your itinerary, plan ahead and make reservations early: the best way to see these popular sites is via guided tour.

SCENIC DRIVES and HISTORIC TOWNS: 2–4 Days

Option 1: The White Mountains of Eastern Arizona

If nature walks and hiking are still tops on your itinerary, consider spending a few days in the White Mountains before returning to Phoenix. The breathtaking White Mountains area of eastern Arizona is a favorite for anglers and cross-country skiers. The White Mountains Trails System near Pinetop-Lakeside is considered one of the best in the nation, and can accommodate all fitness levels. Creek-side resorts with private cabins are common in the towns of the White Mountains. Eastern Arizona is primarily a summer destination; many properties close from November to April except for a few ski resort areas.

Logistics: The most scenic route back to Phoenix is via the Salt River canyon on U.S. 60 to Globe. The landscape transforms from ponderosa pine forests to high desert along the journey, marking an ideal transition from one extreme to the other. Or you can travel to Tucson from the White Mountains on one of the most scenic routes in the United States (if a bumpy and wild ride is your style). The Coronado Trail, U.S. 191 from Springerville to Clifton, is one of the world's curviest roads. The trip, which includes steep stretches and plenty of turns, will take at least four hours. Once in Clifton, you can continue south

to Willcox, where Interstate 10 will take you to Tucson.

Option 2: Tucson, the Old West, and Historic Sites

If culture and shopping are a bit more attractive, consider spending time in Tucson and visiting its neighboring historic communities. Spend at least a day in Tucson proper, visiting Mission San Xavier del Bac, Saguaro National Park, and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. If hiking is your game, don't miss Sabino Canyon, which offers gorgeous views of the area. With Tucson as your hub, take a day trip just a bit farther south to historic Tombstone and Bisbee. On the way back to the interstate, stop by Kartchner Caverns State Park for a view of the series of spectacular wet caves. Hour-long guided tours are available by reservation; book several months in advance to guarantee entry.

Logistics: Phoenix is two hours away via Interstate 10, a relatively unscenic drive. Casa Grande is the midway point between the two cities, and is a good place to stop for a rest. History buffs may want to stop at Picacho Peak, site of the westernmost battle of the Civil War.