

QUINTESSENTIAL ARIZONA & THE GRAND CANYON

Road Trips

Arizona is the place to take a road trip. Get in the car, pick a destination, and go take a look. For optimal enjoyment, avoid the interstate highways and take the state routes instead. Stop at every roadside historic marker (well, OK, you can skip some if you want) and at any place with a sign that reads PIE.

Go to Bisbee. Go to Jerome. Go to Oatman. Go to Greer. Travel AZ 260 from Payson to Show Low or historic Route 66 from Ash Fork to Topock; take AZ 60 through the Salt River canyon, or U.S. 191 from Springerville to Clifton; take AZ 88, the Apache Trail, from Apache Junction to Roosevelt Dam.

Wherever you go, roll down the windows, turn up the radio, inhale deeply, and enjoy the ride. Regardless of your destination, the wide-open spaces of Arizona entice and amaze anew with every bend in the road.

Salsa and Margaritas

You're in Arizona, so join the quest to find your favorite salsa and margaritas. No two salsas are the same, and every city and town boasts its own local favorite. Spicy and chunky? Tangy and juicy? Tear-inducing? They run the gamut.

You'll find the flavors change regionally, from mesquite-imbued concoctions in the east, inspired by Tex-Mex cuisine, to fresh-from-the-garden medleys in southern Arizona that are authentically Mexican. In Tucson, check out Café Poca Cosa's salsa, a deep-red blend of garlic, chiles, and tomatoes that's almost decadent. In Phoenix the brave go to Los Dos Molinos, where powerful hatch chiles punctuate every dish.

Perfectly salty-and-sour margaritas can take the sting away from a particularly robust salsa, all while washing down a delightful Mexican feast. Though most tequila is from Mexico, in southern Arizona you can see the agave plant, which is used to make the liquor.

The Night Sky

Away from the metropolitan areas of the Valley of the Sun (Phoenix, Tempe, Scottsdale, and surrounds) and Tucson, where the by-products of urban life obscure the firmament, the night sky is clear and unpolluted by lights or smog. In December in the desert, the Milky Way stretches like a chiffon scarf across the celestial sphere. Lie on your back on the hood of your car at night, allow your eyes time to adjust to the darkness, and you'll see more stars than you could have possibly imagined.

For a closer look, you can visit Lowell Observatory on Mars Hill, Northern Arizona University (both in Flagstaff) or the Kitt Peak National Observatory in southwest Arizona (outside Tucson) and look at celestial objects through large telescopes.

Rodeo

People take rodeo seriously in Arizona, whether it's a holiday extravaganza like those in Prescott or Payson (which draw top cowboys from around the country), a bull-riding competition at Camp Verde, or a bunch of working cowboys gathered for a team-roping contest in Williams.

These days, particularly with the emergence of bull riding as a stand-alone event— and the crowds often cheer as much for the bulls as the cowboys—rodeos are no longer the hayseed and cowpoke-y events Arizona grandpas might have enjoyed. Rock-and-roll rodeo has arrived and there is frequently live music as well as roping. And other cowboy experiences, like horseback riding and dude ranch stays, are as popular as ever. So, if you see a flyer posted in a shop window advertising a rodeo, take a walk on the wild side and check out the fine arts of riding and roping.