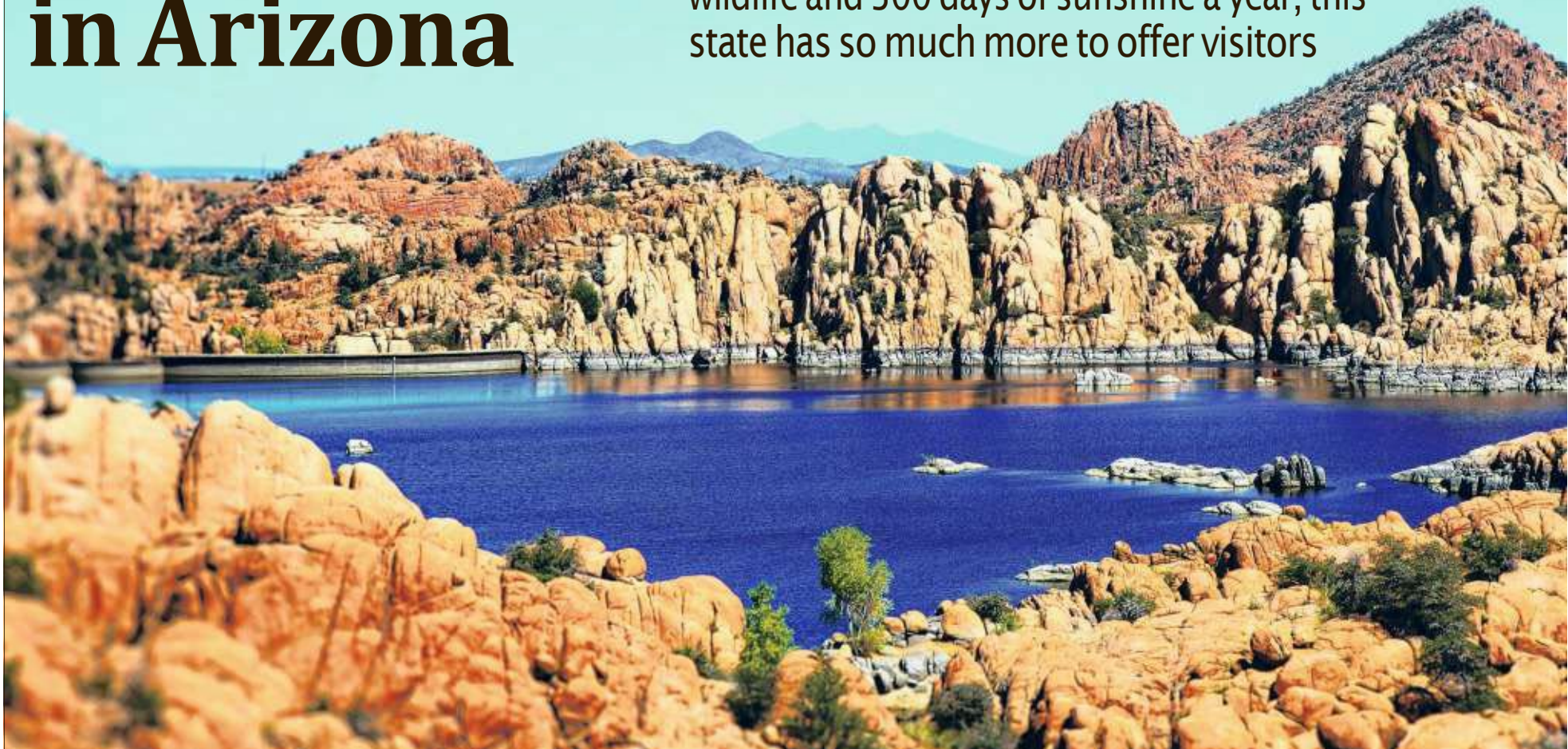


## Travel

# Taking a hike in Arizona

I have a moment of ‘meh’ at the Grand Canyon, but with stunning scenery, wineries, wildlife and 300 days of sunshine a year, this state has so much more to offer visitors



### Gemma Tipton

**“There’s a Sprout next door to the hotel!”** my friend exclaims.

Not to be confused with the Irish healthy snack stops, American Sprouts are huge emporia where you can find wholesome ingredients and a phenomenal volume of vitamins, supplements and cures.

We are in Arizona to delve into different routes to wellness, and Sprout-adjacency seems a good way to start. I lose no time and, pretty soon, via a minor detour in the Testosterone Aisle (just to see what’s what), I’m contemplating all the things that could be wrong with me, based on the various available potions.

I buy drops for fears “both known and vague”, and further drops that claim to combat “indifference to everything”. I’m neither vaguely afraid, or indifferent, but you never know. I’m pausing at pills to help me become indescribably gorgeous, but must tear myself away as we’re about to go kayaking on a mirror calm lake, which we will find to be haunted by herons and surrounded by huge boulders and sentinel rocks.

If serenity is a path to wellness, Watson Lake has it in spades, and the gentle dip of your kayak oars contributes deliciously to the vibe (book at [b2bwild.com](http://b2bwild.com)). The lake is on the edge of Prescott, one of Arizona’s heritage towns,

and home to the oldest rodeo in the world. Virgil Earp, brother of the more famous Wyatt, was once sheriff here and, in August, the town hosts a gathering of the Arizona Cowboy Poets. Check out some of their verses at the downtown Western Heritage Center.

Prescott is small with a lovely old world charm, good shops and galleries, and enticing restaurants and bars. After dinner at Bistro St Michael’s, where the cocktails are excellent, and on the off-chance wellness might lie in the bottom of a glass of bourbon, we head to Jersey Lilly’s. There, locals who look like they could do a turn in a ZZ Top tribute band mingle with ladies of various ages, and the band announces that they have “both kinds of music: country and western”. I’m not at my wellest the next morning, but I definitely felt splendid that night.

Arizona claims 300 days of sunshine per year and, as you head north from Phoenix, the land starts to have all the qualities you need for wine making.

One of the last states to fully repeal Prohibition, the wine industry in Arizona is still fairly young, but the quality – based on what we sample at the Alcantara Vineyards and the Southwest Wine Center – is excellent. Is wine good for you? Depends on who you ask, but sitting in the warm winter sunshine after a mini e-bike tour (they also have a kayaking option) of the vineyards at Alcantara, tasting a



Clockwise from above: Gemma Tipton takes in the view at a stop on the Pink Jeep Tour, outside Sedona, Arizona; Cathedral Rock, a natural sandstone butte near Sedona; Watson Lake; High Country Motor Lodge in Flagstaff; and Arcosanti by Paolo Soleri, an experimental architectural complex in the Arizona desert. Photographs: Gemma Tipton and iStock/Getty Images

range while nibbling piping hot pizza, I’m certainly on the benign side.

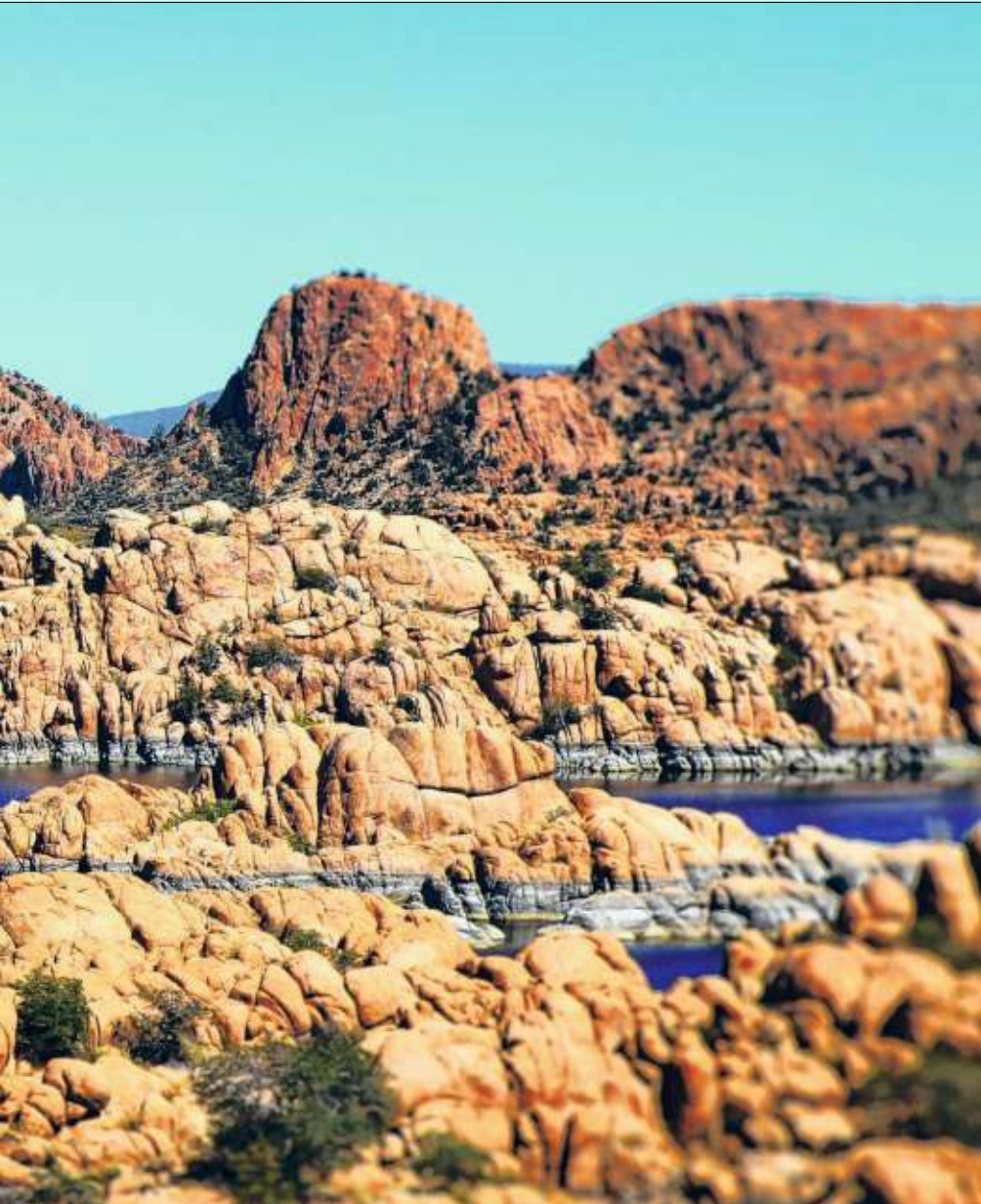
Elk, black bears, mountain lions, bob cats, snakes and scorpions hang out in the woodlands – though you’re always quite safe – while overhead hover bald eagles.

Further up the valley, the Yavapai College Wine Center runs a school, so if

you’re at a life stage where you can take a year out, I can’t think of many more fulfilling ways to spend it. According to Paula Woolsey, professor at the Center, the average age of their student winemakers is 50 and, she adds, it’s well worth enquiring about scholarships.

Back down the hill in Cottonwood there





are seven more wineries but at this stage, and in pursuit of that wellness thing, I limit it to dinner at the Merkin Vineyards Trattoria, where owner Maynard James Keenan – of the rock band Tool – has fun with his wines and, evidently, with the name of his brand.

As we explore more, I realise that one of the things I love about Arizona is that you don't feel like you've done something

wrong by getting older. In Prescott, you definitely don't have to stop dancing, the age groups mix, and those who retire here certainly don't stop living. Along the way, we meet people who have reinvented themselves at every age and stage in a very refreshing way.

Continuing north, the altitude increases, the rocks get redder and things get chillier, so bring layers at any time of the year. We stop to hike at Red Rock State Park en route for Sedona. I like the American notion of hiking. It's actually just a walk, but you feel much healthier with this different description.

Seventy per cent of Arizona is national parks, forests and wilderness (expect to pay entry and parking fees at most), and this one is gorgeous, with winding trails and views of Cathedral Rock, which is satisfyingly epic. Later on, and further north still, the hiking at Walnut Canyon, where there are fascinating ancient cave settlements, is harder as you're so many metres above sea level that they actually do elite sports altitude training in these parts.

Breathlessness apart, as we walk in these timeless environments, I have a nagging sense of discomfort at the overlay of newer histories over those of the Native Americans who once lived, untroubled in these hills, before their lives were irrevocably altered, and their histories became confused by colonial



8 DAYS · HALF BOARD

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**Sporthotel Austria** □ □ □ □  
*St Johann in Tirol, Austria*

	Date	Price
□ Return flights with 20kg baggage allowance	2 Jun	€1337
□ All transfers	30 Jun	€1337
□ 7 nights at the 4 star Sporthotel Austria, with breakfast each day and evening meal on 6 nights	14 Jul	€1386
□ 'Hidden Treasures' Tour of Tirol's beautiful, lesser-known villages	18 Aug	€1386
□ Excursion to Lake Chiemsee & Herrenchiemsee Palace	8 Sep	€1386
□ Excursion to Salzburg		
□ Guided Walkabout Tour of St. Johann in Tirol		
□ Complimentary St Johann card includes free local bus & rail travel and local discounts		
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*All prices are per person sharing, based on a twin/double room. Departing from Dublin.*



8 DAYS · HALF BOARD

## Grossglockner, Krimml Waterfalls & Hohenwerfen Castle Escorted Tour

**Hotel Neue Post** □ □ □ □  
*Zell Am See, Austria*

	Date	Price
□ Return flights with 20kg baggage allowance	21 Jul	€1495
□ All transfers	4 Aug	€1545
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□ Excursion to Grossglockner, Austria's Highest Mountain	15 Sep	€1495
□ Excursion to Krimml waterfalls		
□ Excursion to Hohenwerfen Castle		
□ Walking Tour of Zell am See		
□ Services of Topflight's Resort Manager		
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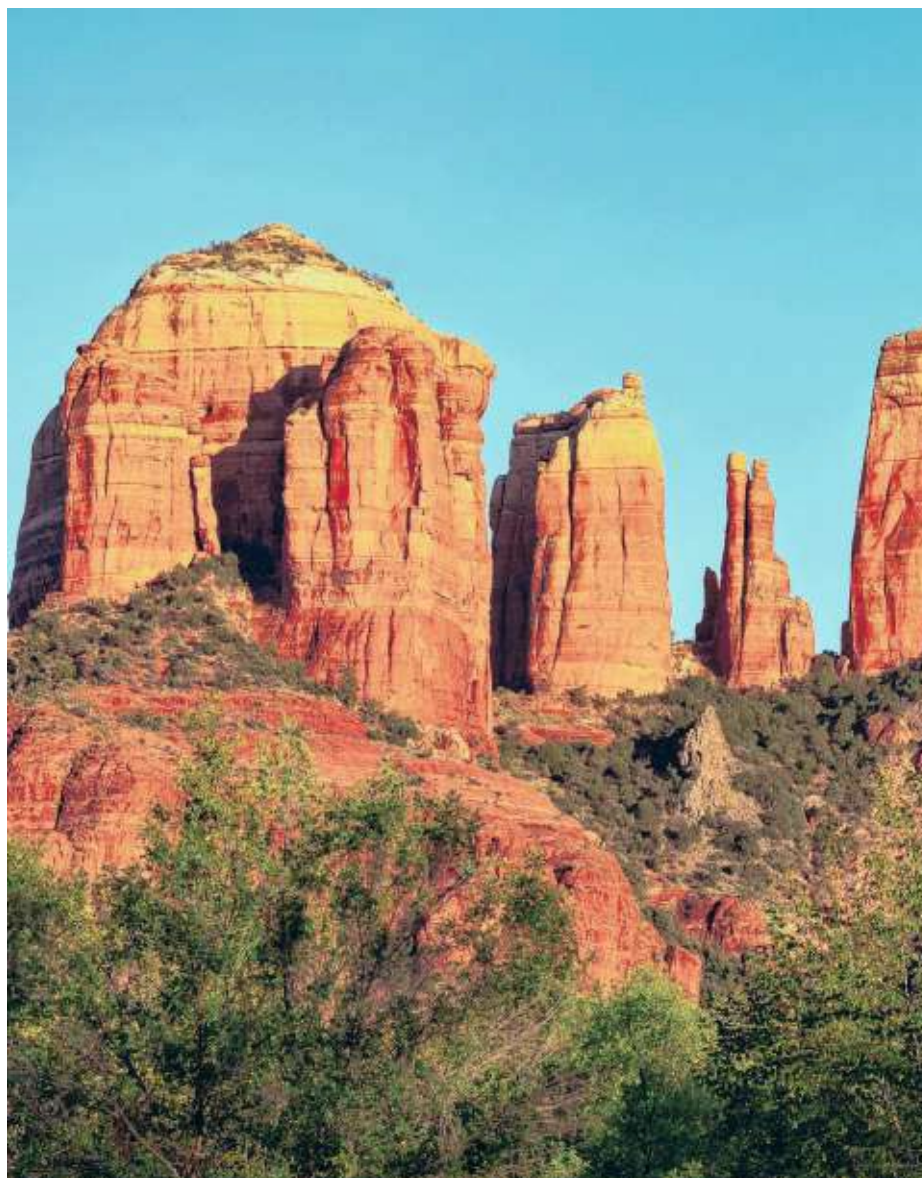
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## Travel



Mesa Vortex (a nice flat rock with a wonderful view), says that the Cliffs of Moher are also a Vortex, as well as Lourdes. Sanders wants to “get us out of woo woo, and into wow wow”. We close our eyes and do our best. I don’t know if I get the promised “soul shift”. but I can think of worse ways to spend an early morning.

Still, it’s nothing to sunrise, or sunset at the Grand Canyon. A strange thing can happen when you get to an incredibly famous place. Arriving at the rim of the Canyon, I have a moment of “meh”. It’s as if my brain can’t comprehend what my senses are delivering, and I don’t quite believe it is real. But soon I am swooning at the nature of the place which lends true meaning to the word “awesome”.

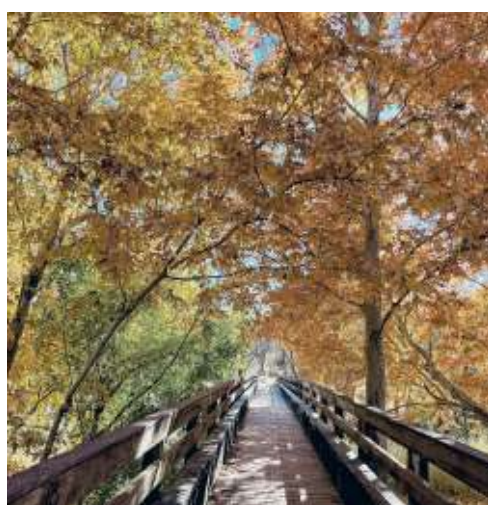
It’s the “cleanest air you’ll ever breathe,” says Jerry Lefhand, a vibe that is a little undermined by the fact that he’s bringing us around in a Hummer (buckwildhummertours.com). He’s Navajo and describes how his grandfather was the local medicine man and would bring him here collecting herbs.

“Their scent is what you’re breathing now,” he says.

More than a mile down, at its deepest, the Grand Canyon is way more than simply grand. We arrive early to a good sunset spot, and its meditative perfection is only slightly dented by the chatty Instagrammers who descend at the last minute, like avaricious squawking birds of prey. Pro-tip: bring noise cancelling headphones – after all, even in a timeless spot, you may need 21st century solutions to 21st century problems.

Fly into Phoenix and you can make a wonderful road trip to and from the Grand Canyon as the way is dotted with intriguing towns. We head back via Williams, following Route 66, which celebrates its centenary in 2026.

“Did anybody order a cowboy over easy?” asks the waiter in the Pine Country Restaurant, where we stop for breakfast. At Flagstaff, lunch is at the Lumberyard Brewing Company, where tasting flights of beer are served in muffin tins, and the



Clockwise from left: Hiking at Red Rock State Park, Arizona; the outdoor pool at High Country Motor Lodge, Flagstaff; waiting for sunset at the Grand Canyon; Route 66 at Williams, Arizona; Cathedral Rock, a natural sandstone butte near Sedona; and Nachos de los Taproom from Lumberyard Brewing Company in Flagstaff. Photographs: Gemma Tipton, Getty Images and High Country Motor Lodge

the Museum of Northern Arizona at Flagstaff, [musnaz.org](http://musnaz.org), where leaders of different Native American Nations have contributed stories and artefacts.

Sedona itself is a dark sky city, and stargazing spots abound. In the daytime it is glittery with crystal shops, and if crystals could heal your ills, no one would ever be sick in Sedona. Having 10 minutes to spare, I get my aura photographed. It is orangey-green, which, according to the readout, isn’t because I’ve come from Ireland, but means I like excitement, but am not very creative and am also unbalanced. I’m sure

there’s a crystal for that. It also warns me of accidents, which is alarming as we’re about to embark on a Pink Jeep Tour.

If you like bursts of adrenaline, incredible views, and a lot of belly laughs, Pink Jeep’s Broken Arrow Tour is for you. Roger, our driver, says that lurching over almost vertical climbs and drops are good for your core muscles, so I’m inclined to think I’ve had a workout into the bargain. Roger is a hoot. He used to do special effects in Hollywood, and worked with Tom Hanks and Johnny Depp. He tells us his adventure stories, as he drives impossible-seeming tracks one-handed.

“What’s the closest to disaster you ever had?” I ask. “I’d say ‘fashion’,” he deadpans.

We calm down afterwards with dinner at The Vault, where you can catch the sunset from the terrace, and marvel at the beauty of the place. Sedona is so chi chi, that even the McDonald’s sign is turquoise. People actually stop for selfies there. They also like to sit on vortices. Sedona is bristling with them. These are ancient meditation sites, although the whole vortex thing didn’t kick off until the 1970s. Pete Sanders, who guides us to a higher plane, while sitting on Airport



