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TRAVEL & CULTURE

Luxe Stays, Notable Noshes & Big-Draw Attractions In Arizona

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I've often thought of Arizona as an captivating and unique state, offering spectacular vistas, mind-blowing rock formations, incredible array of 2,000 different types of cacti and peaceful tranquility. Well, Arizona was all that and so much more. Journey with me as I discover just some of its amazing wonders. —Michelle Hopkins

Luxe Stays





The JW Marriott Scottsdale Camelback Inn Resort & Spa ticked off all of the boxes for me. Set on 125 pristine acre expanse nestled between the Mummy and Camelback Mountains, the resort and my spacious terrace casita, showcasing numerous cacti and lush landscaping, were nothing short of ultra-luxe. Not surprising given that this award-winning oasis combines the best of world class service. Opened on December 15, 1936, it was acquired by JW Marriott in 1967. To this day, its patriarch 92-year-old Jay Willard Marriott's favourite property and he comes with his family every year. The Camelback Inn embraces the epic adventures of this evocative landscape by providing a luxury oasis for discerning travelers. Let the tension melt away as you embark on a rejuvenating 60-minute Age Defying Facial at The Spa at Camelback Inn. (For those, like me, of you of a certain age.) P.S. Don't forget your bathing suit because this stunning spa features a pool, saunas, steam baths and whirlpools. At the Camelback Inn you are in for a memorable vacation.

Modern elegance coalesce at the award-winning Amara Resort and Spa, located in the heart of one of Uptown Sedona's most enchanting areas, with perfect vistas of the Red Rocks. Each of the rooms exude a light and sophisticated style, while the courtyard rooms elevate luxury to new heights with balconies overlooking the infinite pool and iconic Red Rocks. Walking into Uptown is a great workout from the resort as it's a short uphill walk.

Notable Dining & Wining



The Camelback Inn's [Lincoln Steakhouse & Bar](#) is where you'll discover a relaxed and approachable side to fine dining. The sophisticated eatery truly embodies that vibe with its stylish décor and innovative, seasonal menus. I dined on an exceptionally delicious burrata salad and charred cauliflower steak that made for a memorable dining experience.

After a day trekking around Scottsdale or after a leisurely dip in the Camelback Inn pool, refuel at [Hoppin' Jacks at the Jackrabbit Pool](#). The upscale casual eatery provides options ranging from healthy salads to decadent burgers and mouth-watering quesidellas—each tastes just as good paired with a premium margarita or specialty cocktail.

At [FnB Scottsdale](#), celebrated chef Charleen Badman, recipient of the James Beard Foundation's 2019 Best Chef, serves up dishes in which vegetables are the star attractions. In the heart of Old Scottsdale, this eclectic funky boutique eatery packs in diners eager to try out her elevated vegetable creations, like the roasted carrots, orange cauliflower or the grilled spicy broccolini, my fav.

The [Amara Resort and Spa](#) is a Sedona haven for food and drink lovers, with the beautifully adorned [SaltRock Southwest Kitchen](#) doling out top-notch cuisine, including the standout blue crab empanadas, which my waitress highly recommended. I sunk my teeth into a filling that was bursting with flavour, while the crab immeasurably enriched the dish.

The [Mission](#) is a modern, sophisticated eatery showcasing approachable Latin cuisine. It invites diners to experience the sheer delight of consuming a reinvented version of traditional Latin American food, while enjoying a cosmopolitan atmosphere, which includes a fabulous green living wall. Start with the wild Sea of Cortez shrimp anticuchos (you'll need lots of napkins), the shaved kale salad and finish with mahi mahi street tacos.

Styled to mimic a Napa Valley style tasting room, [The Wine Collective of Scottsdale](#) is where you can sample from 30 different varietals from Arizona's new wine regions. You can pair your favourites with local chocolates, cheeses and artisan meats.

Big-Draw Attractions







For you thrill seekers, seeing the Sonoran Desert from a hot air balloon ... well, it's priceless. I took part in the sunset balloon flight with [Hot Air Expeditions](#). Climbing up to 5,000 feet, safely snuggled in a handcrafted wicker basket, you'll have a bird's-eye view of Phoenix/Scottsdale's landscape, allowing you to appreciate its vastness and beauty.

The most fun you'll have in an open-air jeep is on a [Pink Jeep Tours Broken Arrow 4WD](#) trail in Sedona. It's remote, rugged, and surrounded by craggy rock formations. Not only do you get closer to the rock formations, cliffs and overlooks, but you also get the thrill of the bumpy ride. These tours are not for the fainthearted as these jeeps can go up and down rocky terrains that should not be deemed possible.

[Grand Canyon](#) Every year, more than 6 million visitors come to Grand Canyon National Park. It is easy to understand why. You can spend hours and not see everything about the world's seventh wonder. The Grand Canyon Visitor Center is the perfect start point to your journey of discovery before Mather Point, which offers your first jaw dropping glimpses. P.S. Give yourself at least 4-5 hours.

[Walnut Canyon National Monument](#) Around every corner, great jumbled blocks of rock rise from the ground crafting spectacular rock formations, where 800 years ago Indigenous people made their pueblos and cliff dwellings. Walking through these breathtaking ruins, it's hard to wrap your head around how people could actually live here.

[Wupatki National Monument](#) I simply couldn't get enough of the spectacular rock formations Arizona is famous for. Go back in time to the 1100s where Wupatki was once home to thousands of people who made their homes from the red rock outcroppings. Again, I was mystified by how resourceful these true pioneers were – not only did they survive, they thrived. As you walk in their footsteps, the park's namesake pueblo's 104 rooms, a ballcourt, and a natural blowhole feature will captivate your imagination.

P.S. Have an early flight out of YVR? From avoiding early morning traffic jams to sinking into a fluffy, inviting hotel bed with pillowy down sheets in a beautifully appointed room, the [Fairmont Vancouver Airport](#) hotel is ideal. Blissfully soundproofed, the hotel is conveniently located right inside the Vancouver International Airport—above the U.S. departures terminal.