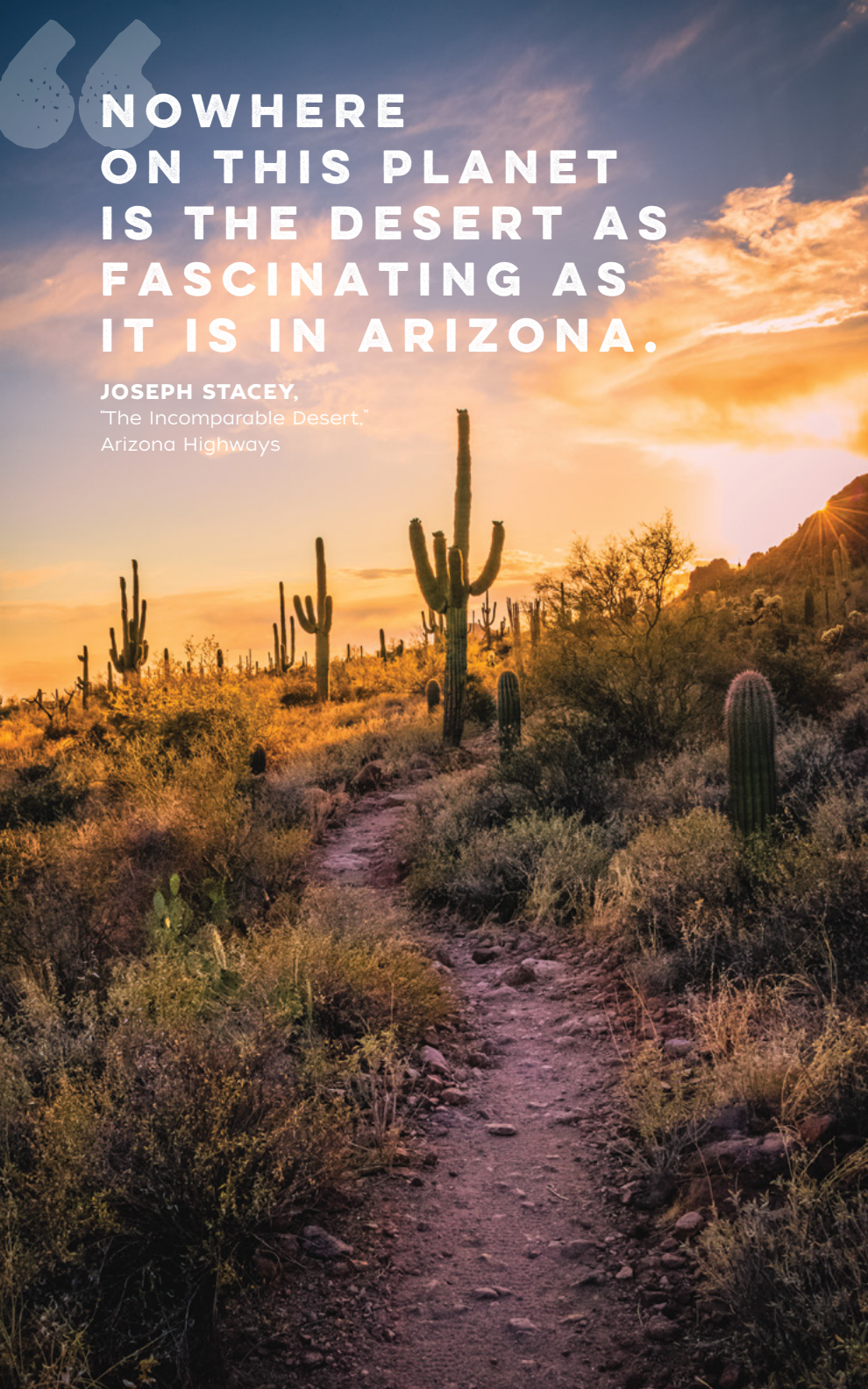




VISIT MESA
CITY LIMITLESS®



“NOWHERE
ON THIS PLANET
IS THE DESERT AS
FASCINATING AS
IT IS IN ARIZONA.

JOSEPH STACEY,
“The Incomparable Desert,”
Arizona Highways

ADVENTURE IS CALLING

ADVENTURE EXPLORER PASSPORT	2
OUR TOP 5 PLACES FOR PICS	4
THE SONORAN DESERT	6
DESERT VEGETATION	8
AWESOME BLOSSOMS	10
DESERT WILDLIFE	12
BIRDING	18
TREASURED TRAILS	24
WATER RECREATION	28
THE APACHE TRAIL	34
ATTRACTIONS AND OUTFITTERS	36
NIGHT SKIES	38
DESERT CAMPING	40
BEFORE YOU GO	42

PUBLISHED BY: Visit Mesa
EXECUTIVE EDITOR: Michelle Streeter
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Cameron Molloy

PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS: Visit Mesa selected photographers, Kevin Antol, Lenny Catalanotto, Julie Foscett, Slaven Gujic, Kelly Hahs, Kevin Kaminski, Sarah Robinson, Cayla Smith, Matthew Wheeler, Arizona Office of Tourism, Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: HAPI

Every effort has been made to make this guide to the Sonoran Desert as accurate as possible. Visit Mesa will assume no responsibility for errors, changes or omissions. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited. Our gratitude goes out to the numerous organizations who have shared resources and information for the production of this guide including:

Arizona Game & Fish Department, Arizona Watchable Wildlife Project, Arizona Office of Tourism, Arizona State Parks, Arizona Museum of Natural History, Park of the Canals, Maricopa County Parks & Recreation, USDA Tonto National Forest Service, Utery Mountain Regional Park

BUCKET LIST FUN, ALL AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



Visit Mesa and Wildjoy have teamed up to bring funseekers the all-new Adventure Explorer Passport – a ‘check-in’ guided challenge to the best outdoor recreation options in City Limitless®.

The mobile-friendly platform invites visitors to get outside and choose their own adventures by checking in on the passport, all while earning points for prizes. The digital passport features a list of curated adventures selected by Wildjoy founder Lacy Cain. The list ranges from easy to moderate experiences and each one is marked by geo-coordinates making the check-in experience seamless on the passport.

START YOUR ADVENTURE NOW AT [VISITMESA.COM/PASSES](https://www.visitmesa.com/passes)



STEP 1 - GET YOUR PASS

This mobile exclusive passport is a collection of curated adventure locations!



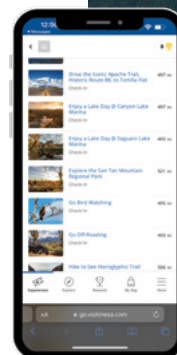
STEP 2 - RECEIVE TEXT

Your passport will be instantly delivered to your phone via text and email and is ready to use immediately! There is no app to download. Your pass can be saved to your phone's home screen for easy one-tap access.



STEP 3 - REDEEM

When visiting a participating location, simply turn on your location services to check in!



TAG, EXPLORE AND EARN EVEN MORE

Passport holders are encouraged to share their adventures on social media and tag their journey with the hashtag #wildjoyxvisitmesa. Tag and follow @VisitMesa on social media for more ways to earn City Limitless® stickers, t-shirts and more.

VISIT [WILDJOY.COM](https://www.wildjoy.com)

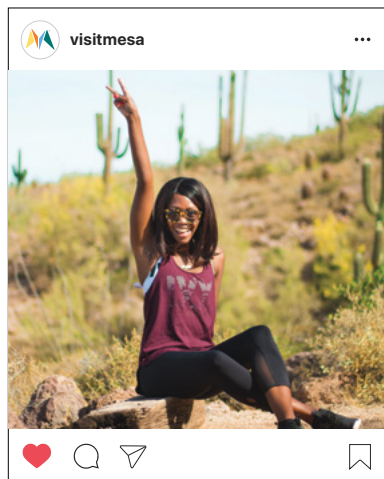
for adventure guides, events, and download the Wildjoy Map app to all things Arizona.



*Complete terms and conditions for the Adventure Explorer Passport can be found online. Prizes subject to change and availability.

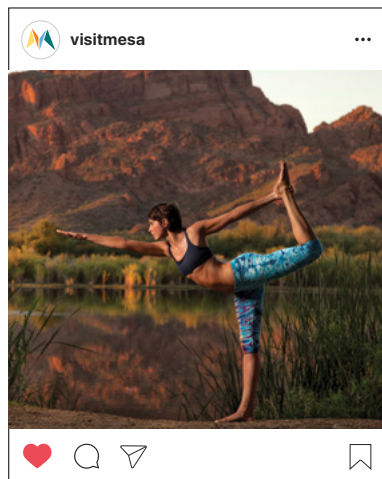
OUR TOP FIVE PLACES FOR PICS

Mother Nature is the ultimate show-off and the magic of Mesa's outdoor landscapes will no doubt account for some friendly jaw drops on your posts. Here are some of Visit Mesa's most popular locations to capture the essence of the Sonoran Desert.



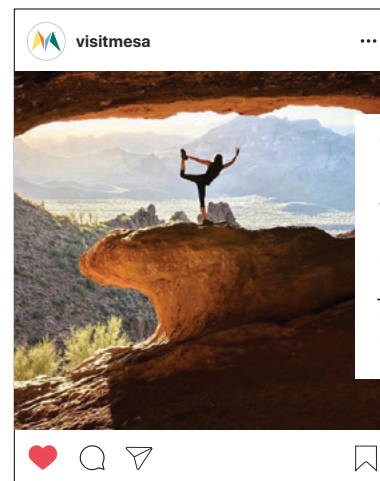
WIND CAVE TRAIL, USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK

Come early and pack a lunch as you scale up the mountainside to check out Mesa's most popular hike for out-of-towners. The Wind Cave always delights with its hanging rock daisies and endless city skyline views from the top.



GRANITE REEF RECREATION AREA, TONTO NATIONAL FOREST

All views here along the lower Salt River shoreline face the iconic Red Mountain. Aim for sunrise or sunset to catch a mirror reflection on the water.

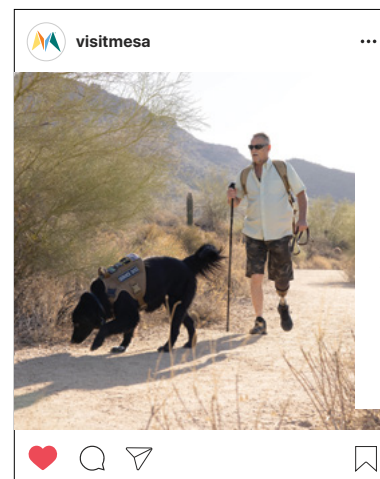


WAVE CAVE, PERALTA TRAIL, SUPERSTITION WILDERNESS

There's more than one cave for visitors in Mesa to explore. Prepare for a hike to get to this one but know that the journey in these parts will pay off. Play with shadows and light throughout the day for different effects.

FLAT IRON SUMMIT, LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

Take a day out of your schedule and head for the hills. Located inside Lost Dutchman State Park, the trail to the Flat Iron summit isn't for the weak or weary. If an all-day adrenaline rush isn't in your cards, the vantage point from below is just as dreamy.



MERKLE TRAIL, USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK

Surround yourself in a cacti-filled forest on this barrier-free loop trail. Turn left and you'll see stately saguaros, turn right and it's more of the same. Guided way-finding signs educate visitors on the geology and flora. This accessible and pet-friendly trail is a perfect option for guests.

@VISITMESA / #VISITMESA



THE SONORAN DESERT

Embraced by the Sonoran Desert, Mesa is surrounded by a rich, vibrant and verdant playground for sought-after outdoor recreation. Visitors can immerse themselves into a legendary landscape - a region full of intrigue and awe that continues to inspire and amaze our guests every day. From hiking and biking to calm waters and majestic mountains, nearly every outdoor pursuit can be experienced here in the Sonoran Desert.

The Sonoran Desert is located in two states, Arizona and California, and two countries, Mexico and the United States. The entire region is approximately 120,000 square miles.

The Sonoran Desert boasts the richest diversity of plants and animals of all the world's deserts - well over 2,000 different plant species. This diversity provides habitat for an even greater richness in animal life including more than 500 species of birds that migrate and nest through the region, as well as more than 200 species of fish, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. More rain falls on the Sonoran Desert than any other desert on earth.



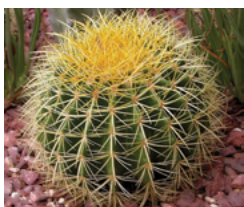
THE SAGUARO is the largest cactus in the United States and can only be found in the Sonoran Desert. Iconic in its shape due to its many arms, this gentle giant is the symbol of the region and one of many plants in Arizona protected by the Native Plant Protection Act. It can take up to 50 years before the plant blossoms with the beautiful state flower and approximately 75 years before appendages sprout. With the right growing conditions, it is estimated that saguaros can live to be as much as 150-200 years old and grow to be between 40-60 feet tall. When fully hydrated they will weigh between 3,200-4,800 pounds.

DESERT VEGETATION

Exotic, fascinating and vibrant, cacti and desert shrubs have a unique appearance that has captivated travelers to this region for centuries. They were used as shelter, food and fuel and have been exported around the world. Whether they be the wayward joints of the jumping cholla or the delicate shoots of the ocotillo, cacti form a landscape indigenous only to the Americas. Many species of desert plants not only survive the harsh conditions of this environment but they thrive in such a climate.



AGAVE | From the succulent family, most popular species include the century plant. Desert agave is a slow-growing species and can take up to 20 years to bloom. Agaves are popular among succulent collectors and landscape designers.



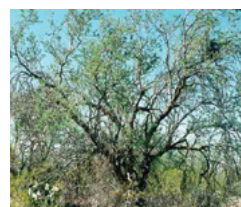
BARREL CACTUS | Larger barrel cacti often lean towards the Southwest giving them the name of compass barrel. The yellow and red flowers grow on top which can be identified by its barrel shaped body and long hooked spines.



CHOLLA | An open and branching woody cactus, the cholla's flowers bloom in springtime and the fruit grows on the edge of the pads. Cholla is a favorite nesting place for birds as it keeps predators away. Varieties include chain-fruit cholla and teddy bear cholla known as the "jumping" cactus.



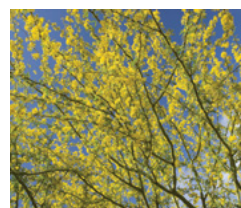
CREOSOTE BUSH | Able to survive without water for up to 2 years, the creosote bush is one of the most important and longest living plants in this desert. This species is important to Arizona's indigenous community as they believe it was the first plant created, and it is used for medicinal purposes. After a rainstorm, the desert will smell of creosote, a distinct fragrance.



IRONWOOD | Ranking among the most ecologically and economically important plant species, the ironwood benefits many other species of desert vegetation. This slow growing tree can live up to 300 years.



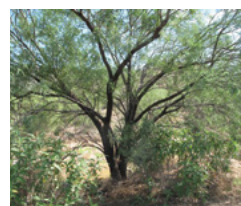
OCOTILLO | This long, thin and nearly unbranched shrub arises from a very short trunk. Red flowers bloom in the spring and provide a major source of food for hummingbirds. Dried stems are called latilla ("little sticks" in Spanish) and used in building structures and home decor.



PALO VERDE | Spanish for "green stick" referring to the tree's green bark. In springtime, yellow flowers bloom followed by seed pods which humans have been using for hundreds of years.



PRICKLY PEAR | Easily identifiable by its broad, flat, green pads, this cactus blooms large yellow flowers in the spring, followed by red prickly pear fruit in the summer months. The fruit and the tender pads of the prickly pear cactus are edible and featured in many recipes.



VELVET MESQUITE | This shaggy barked tree is deciduous and can grow to 55 feet and blooms yellow flowers in the spring followed by flat, sweet seed pods. These pods can be ground and used as mesquite flour for cooking.

WHEN IN BLOOM: AWESOME BLOSSOMS

From March through late May, ocotillo blossoms are a scarlet display in the desert landscape. Hedgehog blooms usually at the end of March but can bloom as late as mid-April, and only lasts about two weeks. Prickly pear usually begin to bloom in early April continuing through late May. The mighty saguaro displays its creamy white blooms usually by the middle of May, with late May to early June as the peak time. The cholla flowers begin in mid-May and last until late August. The summer rains prompt the barrel cactus to bloom, beginning by mid-June and peaking in late August.



WAITING FOR WATER | Cactus, in particular, are so efficient at storing moisture that numerous species can survive for years without rainfall. When the winter rains do flood the desert and water is absorbed, the plant swells, expands and contracts like an accordion. The cactus is coated with a layer of wax to lessen the evaporation of moisture. The cactus blossoms that bloom each spring and summer spend so much of the plant's water reserve that cacti generally only bloom for short periods of time.



Each spring, wildflowers pave Mesa's nearby hiking trails and the desert overflows with hues of red, purple, orange, yellow and blue - all accompanied by the vibrant green shades of Arizona's indigenous desert flora. Wildflower season varies each year and is dependent on fall and winter rainfall amounts. Blooms are usually at their peak in mid-March but can start as early as February.

TYPICALLY, GUESTS CAN EXPECT TO SEE THE FOLLOWING MORE COMMON WILDFLOWERS AT VARIOUS ELEVATIONS IN OUR SURROUNDING DESERT:

**BRITTLEBUSH
CACTUS BLOSSOMS
CHICORY
CHUPAROSA
FAIRY DUSTER
DESERT MARIGOLD
DESERT MALLOW
LUPINE
MEXICAN GOLD POPPY**



As a reminder, picking wildflowers is illegal and can have harmful effects on the desert eco-system. Seasonal activities such as wildflower walks, guest lectures, and photography outings are scheduled at our area parks.



TAKE THE KIDS! | Check out the Children's Garden at Boyce Thompson Arboretum featuring interactive stations focusing on touch, texture, color, sound and scent as well as a human sundial and maze. Animal tracks and characters like Reggie Roadrunner lead kids from one activity area to another.

Find the ranger, hunt for scorpions and go stargazing at Utery Mountain Regional Park! Scheduled events and activities take place all month long. Don't miss the nature clean-ups and watching the Arizona Model Aviators fly their radio-controlled model airplanes.

DESERT WILDLIFE

The Sonoran Desert is home to a diversity of wildlife. There are more than 60 mammals, nearly 100 native reptiles, 22 native amphibians and 30 native fish. Many animals escape the dry and warm conditions by seeking shade and shelter underground. Look closely for their signs such as tracks, burrows, nests and scat.

WILDLIFE VIEWING TIPS:

FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE | Before you go, review this list of tips for viewing wildlife. For a complete list, visit the Arizona Watchable Wildlife Experience: azwatchwildlife.com

●	Be early, quiet, and patient. Moving slowly and quietly will allow you to see wildlife displays you'll otherwise miss.
●	Getting there before dawn is often necessary, but don't forget dusk too. Most animals are more active at twilight and dusk than in the middle of the day.
●	Use binoculars and spotting scopes to view wildlife from a distance that will not disturb them.
●	Film and photograph wildlife responsibly. Use a telephoto lens to photograph from a distance.
●	Learn to interpret animal signs. Tracks, trails, nests, dens, droppings, and partially eaten plants are among the many clues to what animals may live in the area.
●	After animals are spotted, don't alarm them. Talk quietly; move slowly and never directly toward an animal.
●	If the animal is looking directly at you and appears alert and nervous, remain motionless or move slowly away until normal behavior returns. Learn to heed other wildlife behavior that tells you they know you are there and you are too close.
●	Leave pets at home. Nothing will scare animals away more quickly than a dog. Many wild animals can harm pets.
●	Allow animals to eat their natural foods - never feed wild animals.

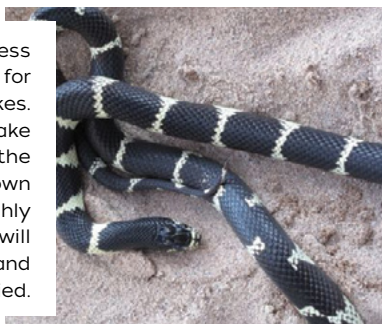
REPTILES & INSECTS



WESTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

Arizona's largest and most defensive rattlesnake frequently seen on the trails. They are gray, with faded pattern of diamonds. The tail is ringed with contrasting white and black rings. Listen attentively for their distinct rattle and if seen, step around them - do not approach.

KINGSLAKE | A long, slender, harmless yet common snake in Arizona. Known for eating many things including rattlesnakes. When a rattlesnake encounters a kingsnake it will not rattle. Instead it elevates the front portion of its body, a behavior known as body bridging. The kingsnake is highly tolerant of the rattlesnake's venom and will bite the rattlesnake behind the head and constrict it until it has died.



CHUCKWALLA LIZARD | Reaching nearly 16", this rock dweller varies in color based on the age and sex. When threatened, they hide in the rocky crevices, take a deep breath and inflate their body.

GILA MONSTER | This large heavy bodied lizard has a proprietary black and orange pattern. Currently, they are a protected species and the only venomous lizard in the United States.



REPTILES & INSECTS



DESERT TORTOISE | This dome-shaped tortoise can be found on rocky hillsides and wash banks. They are able to survive without food and water for long periods of time and when threatened, they empty their bladder to defend themselves.

BARK SCORPION | Throughout Arizona and almost always associated with trees, this is the most dangerous scorpion of the Southwest. Its sting might be life threatening to children and the elderly. Never pick up rocks or lean against trees as they are small and hard to notice.



GIANT DESERT HAIRY SCORPION

This larger species of scorpion is nocturnal and preyed upon by owls and bats. It has characteristic erect hairs on its entire body and is venomous.

GIANT DESERT CENTIPEDE | May be 8" long, has 42 legs and is found under rocks and dead vegetation. Bite is painful with swelling and is venomous.



DESERT MAMMALS



JAVELINA | Although they are pig-like in appearance, they are in the peccary family. They have scent glands under their long hairs which allow them to rub their scent and mark their territory.

COYOTE | Similar in size to a medium-sized dog, a coyote's coloration is gray to reddish brown. Their characteristic howl can often be heard at sunrise.



BOBCAT | Most bobcats weigh between 15-30 pounds with gray-brown fur, faint spots and short tails. They are only found in North America and generally change their shelter on a daily basis.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT

Often mistaken for rabbits, these hares are primarily gray with a black stripe down their back, a black rump patch, and a black tail. Their large ears help them to lose heat which results in the cooling of their body temperature.



DESERT MAMMALS



DESERT COTTONTAIL RABBIT

This species resembles other cottontails, but have larger ears. Good eyesight, good hearing and the ability to flee quickly are the few defenses they have.



THE WILD SIDE | Before sunrise and after sunset, along the waters of the Tonto National Forest, and into the adjacent Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Reservation, visitors have a pretty good chance at catching a glimpse of Arizona's wild horse population. There are as many as 500 of these magnificent animals roaming the water's edge on the Lower Salt River and the shoreline around Saguaro Lake. Their enigmatic presence is a common sight when visitors are kayaking, paddleboarding, or tubing down the river, as the horses emerge from the surrounding desert forest to cool off in the water and graze on the underwater foliage. According to historical records, the horses have been living on the Salt River reservation before the National Forest was created in the early 1900s. If you are lucky enough to spot a horse or herd when you visit Mesa, remember to be respectful of their space and natural habitat. Snap the code to learn more.



BIRDING

Birding is a popular sport in Arizona, with diverse terrain which offers a spectacular playground for more than 500 species. The love for birding can be felt across the state with festivals and programs offered for nature lovers on the quest to capture a rare sighting. Though Southeastern Arizona is widely known for birding, many of the same species can be spotted throughout the Valley's metro areas including Mesa. From hummingbirds and flycatchers to loons, herons and the occasional bald eagle, the treasure hunting in Arizona for birds is endless. Be on the lookout for some of these more commonly reported species in Mesa.

BIRD WATCHING SITES

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK & NATURE CENTER

Adjacent to the Tonto National Forest and set on more than 3,500 acres at the western end of the Goldfield Mountains. Birders will enjoy the Desert Hawk Trail lined with feeders and the many ramadas and trails for watching. Vehicle entry fee. Call for special events and programming.

602.506.2930 | maricopacountyparks.net
3939 N. Usery Pass Road, Mesa

BOYCE THOMPSON ARBORETUM

The oldest botanical garden in the American Southwest, this 320-acre collection of desert plants is home to incredible bird fauna. More than 250 species have been recorded here with Gambel's Quail, Canyon Wren, Curve-Billed Thrashers, and Black Throated Sparrows among the most abundant species, and dozens of other lower Sonoran birds can typically be found on a productive day's walk. Ask for the Arboretum Bird Checklist when you visit.

520.689.2723 | btarboretum.com
37615 E. Arboretum Way, Superior

COON BLUFF AND GRANITE REEF RECREATION AREAS (TONTO NATIONAL FOREST)

Located in the lower Salt River basin these recreational areas offer breathtaking views along the water. This major river system adds to the overall diversity of the forest communities offering corridors for birds that migrate along the river. Tonto Pass necessary for access and available at nearby businesses.

480.610.3300 | fs.usda.gov/tonto
Tonto National Forest, Coon Bluff Road, Mesa

ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

Maricopa Audubon Society, maricopaaudubon.org
Desert Rivers Audubon Society, desertriversaudubon.org

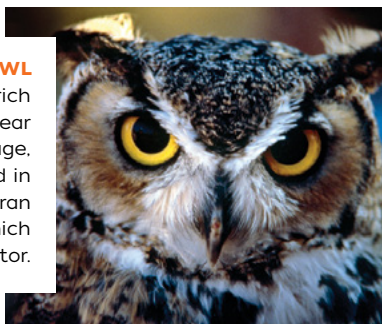
BIRDS



HARRIS'S HAWK | This hawk is tall, slender, and black with reddish shoulders and thighs. The tail is black with a white tip and base. These social hawks often hunt and help at the nest in family groups of 3 to 6 birds. Harris's Hawks live in mesquite and saguaro habitats, semi-arid woodlands, and scrub.

GREAT HORNED OWL

This is a large owl with facial disc rich red - brown ringed in black, yellow eyes, ear tufts, atop head. It often has dark plumage, pale in desert. Great Horned Owls are found in every habitat within our region. The Sonoran Desert is a very lively place at night which bodes well for this nocturnal predator.

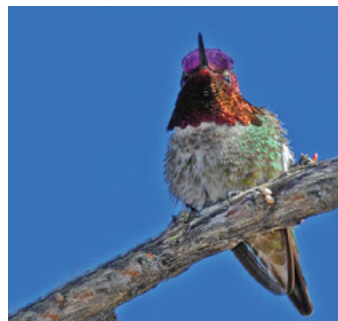


CACTUS WREN | Arizona State Bird. It is large (8") speckled and striped with a long white spotted and rusty colored tail and white eye line. Its call is a rapid 'chug'. It nests in cacti; mass of grass with side entrance. Roosting nests are very important for the security of Cactus Wrens.

GILA WOODPECKER | Pale brown body, wings and tail zebra barred. Male has a red cap. White wing patches can be seen in flight. Kills insects inside cacti and creates cavities for nesting. Gila Woodpeckers eat cactus fruit and research suggests that flickers and Gila Woodpeckers nest at different heights in the saguaro.

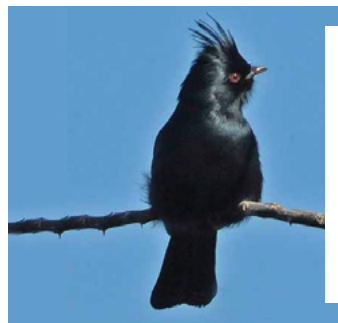
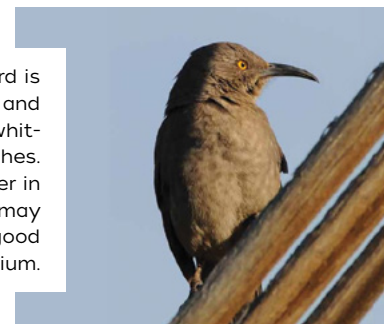


BIRDS



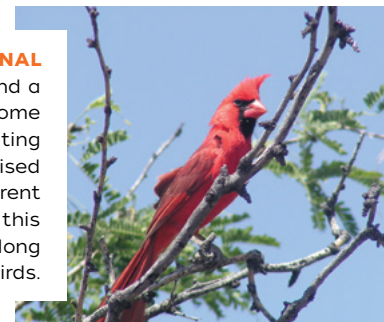
ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD | Medium sized. Features include a bronze and green back, pale gray chest and belly and green flanks. Male features an iridescent crimson red crown and throat; female is green crowned and features a gray throat with some red markings. They mate in open wooded and shrubby areas.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER | This bird is pale brown with a long down curved bill and golden eye. Its call is a loud, sharp 'whit-wheet'. It nests in Cholla or thorn bushes. Forages on ground tossing aside litter in search of bugs. Curve-billed Thrashers may tear apart Cactus Wren nests when good nesting sites are at a premium.



PHAINOPEPLA | The male is shiny black with a distinct crest, long tail, and red eyes; white patch on the wing is conspicuous in flight. Female and immature birds are gray. Phainopeplas feed on insects and berries, especially mistletoe, on which it feeds heavily when the berries are ripe. This helps to disperse the mistletoe seed to other host trees.

NORTHERN CARDINAL
Male is bright red with a crest and a black face. The female is gray with some red. They have stout red beaks for eating seeds. Travelers are often surprised to discover that, in the very different surroundings of the Sonoran Desert, this common garden bird is abundant - along with several other related birds.



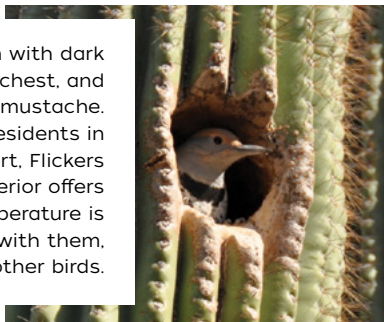
BIRDS



COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD | This "flame-throated" hummingbird is iridescent green above and grayish white below. The males in good light have an iridescent amethyst purple forehead and throat patches. The female completely lacks these patches. Costa's Hummingbirds inhabit desert scrub communities dominated by cactus, ocotillo and chuparosa. It is probably the most arid-adapted hummingbird in this region.

GILDED FLICKER | Both sexes are brown with dark bars on the back, black crescent on the chest, and a white rump patch. The male has a red mustache.

These woodpeckers are permanent residents in all desert habitats. In the Sonoran Desert, Flickers build nests in saguaros. This cactus interior offers a secure environment where the temperature is moderated year around. When finished with them, their nests are used by other birds.



GAMBEL'S QUAIL | These birds are mostly gray, with a tan belly, with black spots. The male has rust color on wings, chestnut cap, face, and forward leaning head plume is black. They must have water daily. Gambel's Quail can eat insects and succulent fruits of cacti to get this water.

ROADRUNNER | This is a long bird, about 24" with large wedge tail and straight pointed beak. It has a streaked brown and white body, colorful eye, dark brown tail, bushy crest. When startled it runs very fast (up to 17 mph). Part of the cuckoo family.



TREASURED TRAILS

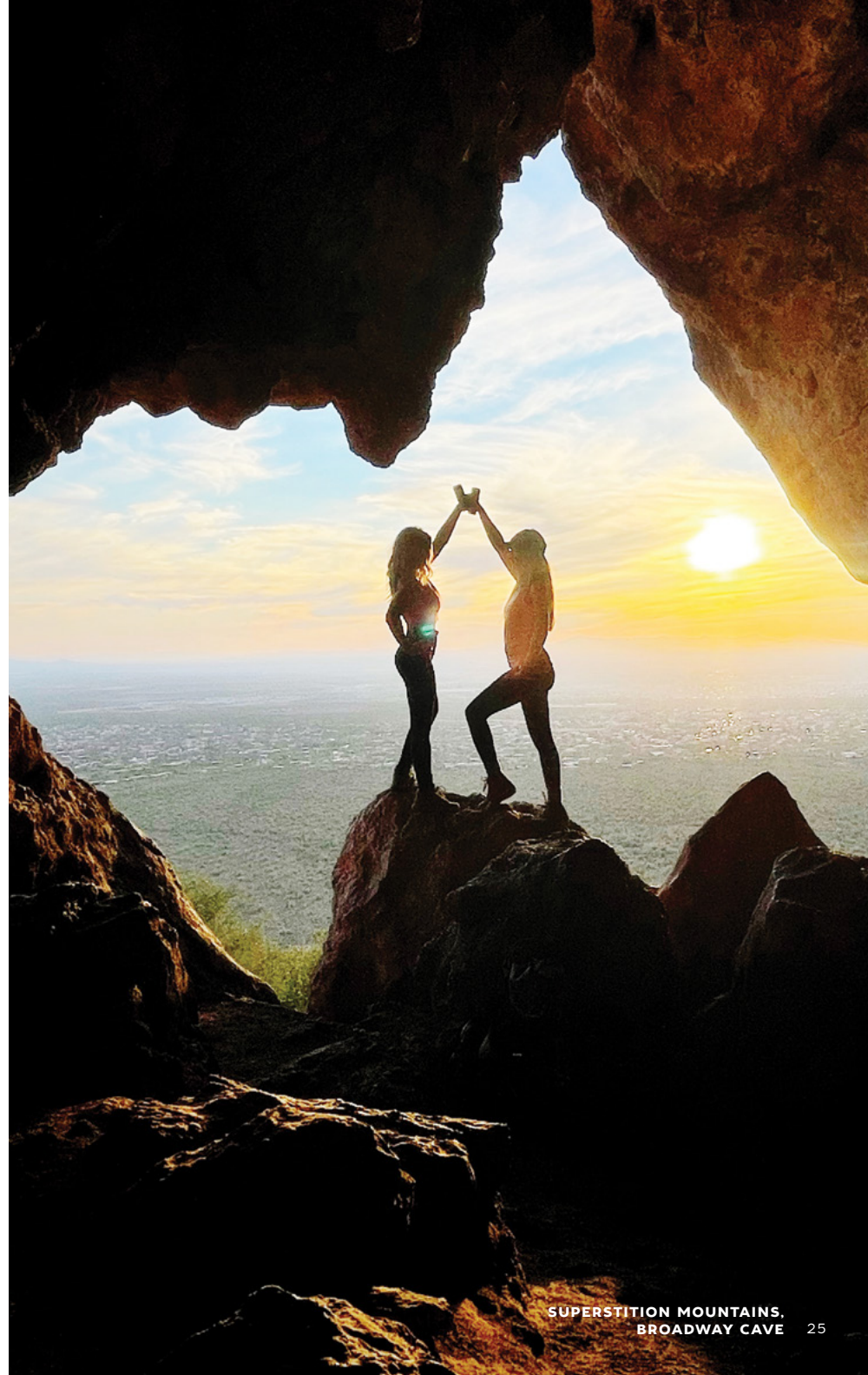
Hitting the trail by foot offers one of the best ways to experience the desert flora up close and personal (not to mention fauna with countless species of birds, Big Horn sheep, deer and javelina roaming freely through the landscape). Mesa is surrounded by hiking trails for all ages with varying levels of difficulty and distances to choose from. Though Mesa boasts miles and miles of desert hiking trails, read on for some of the more popular paths for visitors.

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK | More than 29 miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Park trails range in length from 0.2 miles to over 7 miles, and range in difficulty from easy to difficult. Trails here are popular because they offer enough elevation to experience spectacular vistas of the Valley. Entry fee. Detailed trail maps available at the on-site Nature Center. 602-506-2930, maricopacountyparks.net, 3939 N. Usery Pass Road, Mesa

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK | Several trails lead from the park into the Superstition Wilderness and surrounding Tonto National Forest. Take a stroll along the Native Plant Trail or hike the challenging Siphon Draw Trail to the top of the Flatiron. Entry fee. Day use and overnight camping available. 480-982-4485, azstateparks.com, 6109 N. Apache Trail, Apache Junction
















SAN TAN MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK | More than eight miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Park trails range in length from 1.1 miles to over 5 miles, and range in difficulty from easy to strenuous. The trails within the San Tan Mountain Regional Park offer a unique perspective of the lower Sonoran Desert with wildlife, plant-life and scenic mountain views. Entry Fee. 602-506-2930, maricopacountyparks.net, 6533 W. Phillips Road, Queen Creek

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST | Nearest areas for hiking include the Four Peaks and Superstition Wilderness areas. For detailed hiking locations, contact the Mesa Ranger Station. Tonto Pass necessary for access. 480-610-3300, fs.usda.gov/tonto, Mesa Ranger Station, 5140 E. Ingram Street, Mesa



TRAIL INFORMATION

TRAIL	MOUNTAIN RANGE
Jacob's Crosscut Trail	Lost Dutchman State Park
Siphon Draw Trail	Lost Dutchman State Park
Treasure Loop Trail	Lost Dutchman State Park
Hawes Loop	Red Mountain
Grounds Massacre Trail	Superstition Wilderness Area
Hieroglyphic Trail	Superstition Wilderness Area
Peralta Trail	Superstition Wilderness Area
Merkle Trail	Usery Mountain Recreation Area
Pass Mountain Trail	Usery Mountain Recreation Area
Wind Cave Trail	Usery Mountain Recreation Area
Main Trail	Boyce Thompson Arboretum
Four Peaks Trail	Four Peaks Wilderness Area
Pigeon Trail	Four Peaks Wilderness Area
Moonlight Trail	San Tan Mountain Regional Park
San Tan Trail	San Tan Mountain Regional Park

LENGTH*	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY	SHARED USE
.85 miles	Easy	
2 miles to Basin 3 miles to Flatiron	Difficult	
2.4 miles (Loop)	Moderate	
3.5 miles	Moderate	
2.6 miles	Easy to Moderate	
1.5 miles	Easy	
6.2 miles	Moderate to Difficult	
.9 miles (Loop)	Easy (Barrier Free)	
7.4 miles (Loop)	Moderate	
1.5 miles	Moderate	
1.5 miles	Easy	
6 miles	Difficult	
1 mile	Easy	
1.3 miles	Easy	
6.4 miles	Difficult	

*Length is in miles. Distances are one-way

WATER RECREATION

Even though Mesa is in the heart of a desert, visitors can take advantage of the city's close proximity to a water recreation paradise. There are three lakes and two rivers that offer Mesa visitors easy access to desert boating, fishing, rafting, kayaking, water skiing, wake boarding and jet skiing. Or, partake in the ever-popular activity of "tubing", a leisurely float along the cool waters of the Salt River via inner-tube!



USDA TONTO NATIONAL FOREST

SERVICE | As the fifth largest forest in the United States, the Tonto National Forest is one of the most-visited "urban" forests in the U.S.

The Tonto National Forest Service oversees all the Mesa-area lakes and the lower Salt and Verde rivers as well as many streams in the area. A Tonto Pass, a daily (24-hour) recreation pass for visitors, is required for more than 50 recreation sites where in the Tonto National Forest. The Pass will be displayed on visitor's vehicle rear-view mirror. The passes sell for \$8.00 per vehicle plus a watercraft use fee of \$4.00 per watercraft. Passes are available at 200 locations in the Mesa area including nearby convenience stores and also online and by mail, and can be purchased at kiosks at the recreation sites. Many of the lakes-area businesses operate under special permit from the Forest Service.

FOR UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON VISITING THE TONTO NATIONAL FOREST CALL 480.610.3300 OR VISIT [FS.USDA.GOV/TONTO](https://fs.usda.gov/tonto)



GRAB YOUR PADDLE

A full-page photograph serves as the background. It depicts three people—two women and one man—paddleboarding on a calm river. They are standing on their boards, which have "NoSnail" written on them. The person in the foreground is a woman in a pink tank top and blue shorts. The man in the middle is wearing a white t-shirt and blue shorts. The woman in the background is wearing a blue tank top and dark shorts. They are all holding paddles. The river reflects the sky and the surrounding landscape. In the background, a large, rugged desert mesa rises from the shoreline, its reddish-brown rock faces clearly visible. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, highlighting the recreational opportunities in the area.

Paddle boarding is gaining popularity in Arizona. This recreational sport offers a great workout for people of all ages and is a great way to see the scenic Arizona Desert that juts up against the shoreline. In Mesa, the SUP season is every day, all day. Mesa boasts a treasured system of lakes and rivers that make up the Lower Salt River Recreation Area inside the Tonto National Forest. Visitors can rent their boards and enjoy all the pleasures of a beach-inspired retreat at Butcher Jones Beach at Saguaro Lake, or enter the calm lake waters from the riverbank. No matter where you choose to launch, the sandy shoreline offers convenient parking and walk-up access making it an ideal stop for SUP lovers. Kayakers, too, flood these waters to gain access to dramatic views of the majestic canyon walls that change color as the sun rays move across the sky. Mesa's closest lake, Saguaro, offers more than 22 miles of shoreline and ranch-style lodging and day use areas.

WATER RECREATION SITES

APACHE LAKE | 17 miles long with secluded coves. Hotel lodging, camping, boat rental and storage available. Day use areas on-site. Fees apply. Fish species: Black Crappie, Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Walleye.

Apache Lake Marina | 229.5 Mile Marker, Roosevelt
928.766.7834 | apachelake.com

CANYON LAKE | 28 miles of shoreline, 950 surface acres of water and secluded coves. RV and tent camping, boat rental and storage available. Day use areas and ramada rental on-site. Fees apply. Depth: 141 feet. Fish species: Bluegill, Largemouth Bass, Rainbow Trout, Walleye, Yellow Bass.

Canyon Lake Marina | 16802 AZ-88, Apache Junction
480.288.9233 | canyonlakemarina.com

ROOSEVELT LAKE | 112 miles of shoreline and 22,000 acres of surface water. Hotel lodging and RV park, camping, boat rental and storage available. Fees apply. Depth: 300 feet (when full). Fish species: Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Catfish, Bluegill, Crappie.

Roosevelt Marina | 28085 AZ-188, Roosevelt
602.977.7170 | rlmaz.com

SAGUARO LAKE | 10 miles long and 22 miles of shoreline. Ranch-style lodging, day use areas and Butcher Jones Beach. Boat rental and storage available. Fees apply. Depth: 100+ feet. Fish species: Bluegill, Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Channel Catfish, Rainbow Trout, Crappie.

Saguaro Lake Marina | 14011 N. Bush Highway Mesa
480.986.5546 | saguarolakemarina.com

SALT RIVER | The closest river to Mesa, most leisure recreation takes place in the lower and upper portions where outfitters operate guided water tours via kayak, raft and inner tube. The river winds through the Tonto National Forest and offers a convenient day trip for Mesa visitors. Fishing permit required. Day use areas throughout.

Tonto National Forest | Coordinates: 33.556, -111.544
480.610.3300 | fs.usda.gov/tonto

VERDE RIVER | Crossing through the Fort McDowell Reservation, visitors can horseback ride through the river and kayak. The Verde River has many species of game fish and towering cliffs with a riparian area for viewing wildlife. Day use areas and camping.

Fort McDowell Reservation | 6227-6217 Beasley Flat Rd, Camp Verde
928.203.2900 | fs.usda.gov/tonto



GATEWAY TO ADVENTURE: THE APACHE TRAIL

Recognized by the Arizona Office of Tourism as one of the most scenic byways in the state, the historic Apache Trail, just east of Mesa, was built more than 100 years ago serving as a main access way to the Roosevelt Dam construction site. Named for the crews of Apache Native Americans who helped pave this treacherous path, the Apache Trail was completed in 1905. Today, hitting the historic Apache Trail is still one of the most popular day trips for anyone visiting the Valley with inviting attractions lining the trail. As you pass the mysterious Superstition Mountains and head into the foothills of the Tonto National Forest, the area continues to pay homage to its Western roots which took shape in the late 1800s.

APACHE TRAIL ATTRACTIONS

DOLLY STEAMBOAT AT CANYON LAKE MARINA

480.827.9144 | dollysteamboat.com

GOLDFIELD GHOST TOWN FEATURING SUPERSTITION ZIPLINE

480.983.0333 | goldfieldghosttown.com

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

480.982.4485 | azstateparks.com/lost-dutchman

SUPERSTITION MOUNTAIN MUSEUM

480.983.4888 | superstitionmountainmuseum.org

TORTILLA FLAT SALOON & AUTHENTIC OLD WEST STAGECOACH STOP

480.984.1776 | tortillafataz.com



GETTING THERE | To access the 40+ mile Apache Trail (64 kilometres) from Mesa, head east on Main Street or east along the U.S. 60 to the Idaho Road exit. Off Idaho Road, follow signs toward Highway 88. Paved road ends at Tortilla Flat. Take caution while driving, the trail features numerous switchbacks throughout the entire route that connects Mesa to Globe.

ATTRACTIONS & OUTFITTERS

DESERT EDUCATION

BOYCE THOMPSON

ARBORETUM

520.689.2723
btarboretum.org
37615 E. Arboretum Way
Superior, AZ

DESERT BOTANICAL GARDEN

480.941.1225
dbg.org
1201 N. Galvin Parkway
Phoenix, AZ

BRINTON BOTANICAL GARDEN & PARK OF THE CANALS

480.644.2352
parkofthecanals.org
1710 N. Horne
Mesa, AZ

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK NATURE CENTER

602.506.2930
maricopacountyparks.net
3939 N. Usery Pass Rd.
Mesa, AZ

GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

480.981.9400
azgfd.com
7200 E. University Dr.
Mesa, AZ

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST (MESA RANGER STATION)

480.610.3300
fs.usda.gov/tonto
5140 E. Ingram
Mesa, AZ

HIKING, BIKING & GUIDED TOURS

360 ADVENTURES

480.722.0360
360-adventures.com

ARIZONA TRAIL ASSOCIATION

602.252.4794
aztrail.org
738 N. 5th Avenue, #201
Tucson, AZ

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

480.982.4485
azstateparks.com
6109 N. Apache Trail
Apache Junction, AZ

REI CO-OP ADVENTURE CENTER

480.945.2881
destinations.rei.com/arizona
17465 N. 93rd Street
Scottsdale, Arizona

SAN TAN REGIONAL PARK

480.655.5554
maricopacountyparks.net
6533 W. Phillips Rd.
Queen Creek, AZ

HORSEBACK RIDES

FORT MCDOWELL ADVENTURES/THE STABLES

480.816.6465
fortmcdowelladventures.com
14803 N. Hiawatha Hood Rd.
Fort McDowell, AZ

SAGUARO LAKE GUEST RANCH

480.984.2194
saguarolakeranch.com
13020 N. Bush Hwy
Mesa, AZ

HOT AIR BALLOON RIDES

HOT AIR EXPEDITIONS

480.502.6999
hotairexpeditions.com
702 W. Deer Valley Rd.
Phoenix, AZ

RAINBOW RYDERS, INC. HOT AIR COMPANY

480.299.0154
rainbowryders.com
715 E. Covey Lane
Phoenix, AZ

LAKE TOURS

DOLLY STEAMBOAT

480.827.9144
dollysteamboat.com
Hwy 88/Canyon Lake
Apache Junction, AZ

OFF-ROAD TOURS

ARIZONA OUTDOOR FUN

602.400.2445
arizonaoutdoorfun.com
35769 Old Black Canyon Hwy
Black Canyon City, AZ

DESERT DOG OFF ROAD ADVENTURES

480.837.3966
azadventures.com
17212 E. Shea Blvd.
Fountain Hills, AZ

STELLAR ADVENTURES

602.402.0584
stellaradventures.com
4026 E. Broadway Rd. #904
Phoenix, AZ

GUIDED DAY TOURS

ACROSS ARIZONA TOURS

602.233.1813
acrossarizonatours.com

DETOURS OF ARIZONA

480.633.9013
detoursaz.com
722 S. Perry Lane
Tempe, AZ

OUTFITTERS

BASS PRO SHOPS & OUTDOOR WORLD

602.606.5600
basspro.com
1133 N. Dobson Rd.
Mesa, AZ

PERSONAL & RECREATION RENTALS

DESERT PADDLEBOARDS

480.201.9520
desertpaddleboards.com
Location Given by Appointment

NO SNOW STAND UP PADDLEBOARDS

480.807.6787
nosnowsups.com
3654 N. Power Rd. #104
Mesa, AZ

PROSPECTING

A & B PROSPECTING SUPPLIES

480.832.4524
abprospecting.com
3929 E. Main St, Mesa, AZ

WATER RECREATION / TOURS

MILD TO WILD RAFTING TOURS

970.247.4789
mildtowildrafting.com

RIVERBOUND SPORTS PADDLE CO

480.463.6686
riverboundsports.com
1425 E. University Dr., #B-102
Tempe, Arizona

SALT RIVER TUBING & RECREATION, INC.

480.984.3305
saltrivertubing.com
9200 N. Bush Highway
Mesa, AZ

SAGUARO LAKE AND LOWER SALT RIVER

480.610.3300
fs.usda.gov/tonto
14011 N. Bush Highway
Mesa, AZ

NIGHT SKIES



If you thought catching an Arizona sunset was on the must-do list, try seeing our stars! Mesa's night sky programs in our parks offer year-round opportunities for visitors to gaze at the stars. Arizona's clear desert skies offer some of the finest viewing conditions in the world for astronomical observations. Here are just a few ways to look up during your visit:

EAST VALLEY ASTRONOMY CLUB holds monthly star parties, sharing their telescopes while knowledge amateur astronomers locate constellations, count the moons of Jupiter and rings around Saturn. Star parties begin at dusk. For dates visit, evaonline.org.

MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE is home to the Mesa Planetarium. Explore the universe and solar system for free in the theater as part of the Astronomy Nights program offered on the first Friday of every month. During this free public event, the planetarium runs shows that take place every half hour from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. with telescope viewing from the parking lot, if the weather permits.

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK is where experts will share constellation stories and teach park visitors about the moon, stars, planets, and galaxies while viewing the sky through several telescopes and using a sky laser. Activities vary. For dates visit, maricopacountyparks.net.

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK offers ranger-guided full moon hikes during the cycle of the full moon. No flashlights here as the moonlight is all you need to guide your path. The park is located in the foothills of the Superstition Mountains tucked away from surrounding light pollution allowing for incredible, crisp views of the night sky in the middle of the still desert. For dates visit, azstateparks.com.

CANYON LAKE offers reflections of night stars on a Twilight Dinner Cruise on Dolly Steamboat. For avid starseekers, be sure to experience their monthly Astronomy Cruises during high tourism season, where passengers have use of on-board telescopes to view the breathtaking beauty of the solar system under the instruction of astronomy expert Dr. Sky. Call for current tour schedules, advance reservations recommended, dollysteamboat.com.

DESERT CAMPING

CANYON LAKE MARINA & CAMPGROUND | 40+ campsites and RV sites with water and electric and pull-through, picnic areas, fire ring/grill, shaded ramadas, showers. No dump station. Fees apply.

480.288.9233 | canyonlakemarina.com
16802 N.E. Highway 88, Apache Trail

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK | 134 campsites, 5 camping cabins, electric hook-ups, dump station, restrooms, showers, and group use areas. Fees apply.

480.982.4485 | azstateparks.com/lost-dutchman
6109 N. Apache Trail, Apache Junction

SCHNEPF FARMS | Full hook ups available, free wifi, laundry room, pets welcome, day and weekly sites. Featuring vintage glamping trailers at The Cozy Peach. Reservations required for campsites and trailers.

480.987.3100 | schnepffarms.com
24810 S. Rittenhouse Road, Queen Creek

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK | 73 campsites, RV capabilities, water and electrical hook-ups, dump station, shaded ramadas, picnic tables, barbecue grill, and fire ring. Restrooms and showers available. Fees apply.

480.984.0032 | maricopacountyparks.net
3939 N. Usery Pass Road, Mesa



BEFORE YOU GO

Before heading out to explore the vast Sonoran Desert, take caution. While the desert offers breathtaking scenery, it can also be unfamiliar territory for out-of-town guests not acclimated to the varied temperatures and rugged terrain. Below is a list of tips before hitting the trail.

ALWAYS PACK WATER | Avoid dehydration by drinking water often throughout your hike. A good rule of thumb is to pack one gallon of water for a full-day of desert exploring.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY | Desert temperatures can hit extreme highs and extreme lows in a 24-hour period. Wearing layers helps slow dehydration and limits your sun exposure. Always wear closed-toe shoes. Wearing a hat and sunglasses are also recommended.

APPLY SUNSCREEN - OFTEN | Even in the winter months, Arizona's direct sunlight can cause severe burns.

HIKE WITH A FRIEND OR IN A GROUP | If heading out solo, let someone else know of your plans or alert the ranger where you plan to hike.

NEVER STRAY FROM THE DESIGNATED TRAIL | Desert terrain is rugged and unpredictable. Most parks offer maps and marked guides along the trail.

BE ALERT! | The desert is full of critters that will attack if approached. Watch for rattlesnakes, Gila monsters and scorpions to name a few. If necessary, make noise so critters know of your presence. Be mindful of their surroundings and treat them with caution and respect.

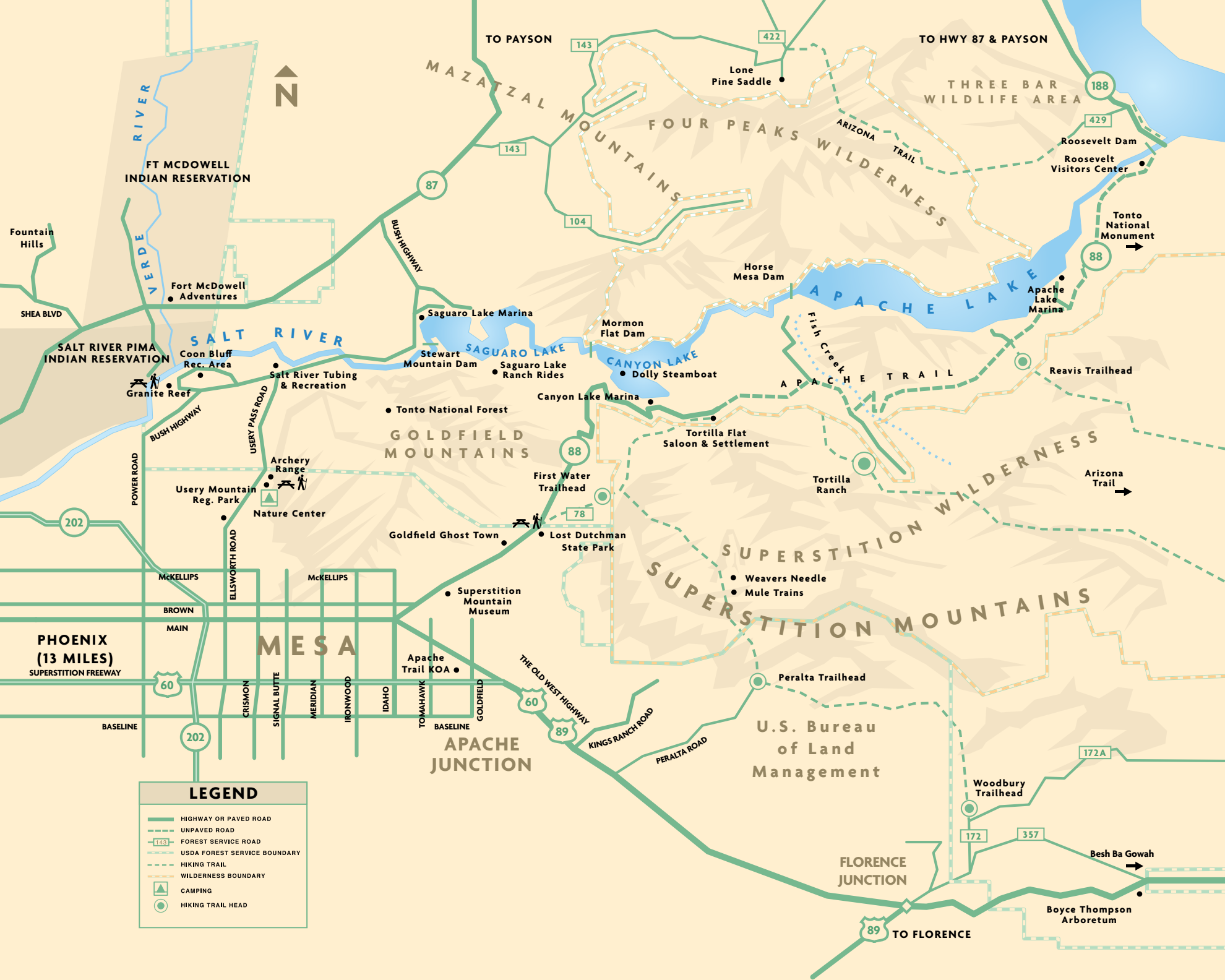
WATCH FOR CACTUS | It is very common to pick up cactus needles during your hike. Pack a fine-tooth plastic comb for removing the needles - never use your fingers!

USE TRAIL ETIQUETTE AT ALL TIMES | Runners and hikers yield to equestrians. Bicyclists should yield to everyone. Downhill traffic should yield to uphill traffic. When in doubt, give other users the right of way.

PACK OUT WHAT YOU PACK IN | Deposit trash in receptacles and leave no garbage behind.

Knowledgeable guides are available to lead hikes throughout all the parks near Mesa. In an emergency, call 9-1-1. Most parks are equipped to alert services and promptly execute a desert rescue.





LEGEND

- HIGHWAY OR PAVED ROAD
- UNPAVED ROAD
- FOREST SERVICE ROAD
- USDA FOREST SERVICE BOUNDARY
- HIKING TRAIL
- WILDERNESS BOUNDARY
- CAMPING
- HIKING TRAIL HEAD



visitmesa.com

1 N. MACDONALD, SUITE 209 | MESA, ARIZONA 85201