



[The Scenic Route](#) > [Travel Destination Guides](#) > [Southwest](#) > What to See and Do in and Around Phoenix

# What to See and Do in and Around Phoenix



From great desert vistas to the arts and a hip food scene, Phoenix is the ideal spot to stay while exploring the Southwest. With adventure around every corner, kick off your vacation here in the Valley of the Sun before hitting the road to see some of the world's most stunning natural wonders and intriguing ancient ruins. With so many options for exploration, ensuring everyone on your quest will easily be able to make the journey their own.

## Getting Settled in Phoenix

### ***Choose Your Adventure: Food, Blooms or Tunes***

Downtown Phoenix is about 5 miles west of [Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport](#) and features popular attractions like the Children's Museum and Chase Field, home of the Arizona Diamondbacks. For a convenient hub for your adventure, check out the Hilton Garden Inn Phoenix Downtown with views of the area's beautiful mountain landscape. Or try the historic Hotel San Carlos — the first in the city to add air conditioning. Its rooms are on the small side, but it was posh enough for Marilyn Monroe and Cary Grant during Hollywood's golden age.

#### **What to Eat and See**

Walk down the street to [CityScape](#) to find free movies in the summer and ice skating in the winter. (Ice skating in

the desert is definitely worthy of bragging rights.) Stop by Blue Hound and order up pappardelle with local Schreiner's sausage, or catch the Valley Metro light rail and head to Match Restaurant & Lounge, where you can dine on items sourced from regional farmers and swoon over the braised short ribs. Be sure to check out the work by local artists adorning the walls.

After a night exploring downtown Phoenix, hop in the car for an 8-mile drive to Papago Park. The sandstone buttes are part of the city park system and home to two famous attractions, the Phoenix Zoo and Desert Botanical Garden.

While the Phoenix Zoo is open year-round, the wildly popular water play areas (Leapin' Lagoon and Yakulla Caverns) are available only during the summer. The 90-minute Discovery Tour via the eco-shuttle is a great way to quickly check out the wildlife in this sprawling zoo. Next door is [Desert Botanical Garden](#), a 140-acre preserve showcasing the desert's natural beauty. It's spectacular anytime, but especially during the early spring blooming season when the desert barberry, aloë thraskii and great white yucca are radiating. In summer, get there early to beat the midday heat. During [Las Noches de las Luminarias](#), held each year from late November through December, the garden glows with thousands of hand-lit luminarias and sparkling lights.

Feeling musical? One of the most unique spots in Phoenix is the Musical Instrument Museum, about 20 miles north of downtown. Its galleries are divided geographically, and visitors listen to each instrument as they explore. This interactive experience features instruments from around the world and special sections dedicated to Tito Puente, Johnny Cash, Maroon 5 and Elvis Presley. Downstairs, the Experience Gallery lets young children try their hands at musicianship. Ever played the ukulele or harp?



The Musical Instrument Museum is home to 6,000 instruments collected from 200 countries and territories around the world. Photo by jowcol61/Flickr.

## Day Trips from Phoenix

## Choose Your Adventure: Craftsmen, Cliffs or Volcano Views

### Admire Architecture in Scottsdale

Drive 25 miles northeast of downtown and find an architectural haven in Frank Lloyd Wright's desert laboratory, [Taliesin West](#), in Scottsdale. Wright made the trek to Scottsdale every winter, and Taliesin West continues to be a place for architecture students to live and learn year-round. Take a 90-minute insights tour of the spaces where Wright lived and worked. Less than 10 miles down the road, one of Wright's students, Paolo Soleri, founded Cosanti in Scottsdale. Check out the artist's studio and purchase some of the beautiful hand-poured bronze windbells for which he became famous. Stop by during the week, and you may be lucky enough to see a bronze casting.



Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West is equal parts desert oasis and learning experience. Interesting fact: The building burned down in 1914 and Wright rebuilt the structure in honor of his lover. Photo by David Silverman/Flickr.

### View a Cliffside Castle in Verde Valley

Hop in your rental car and head 90 minutes north on Interstate 17, and you'll arrive at [Montezuma Castle National Monument](#). There, you'll find a 1/3-mile loop trail that leads to a five-story cliff dwelling — a scenic limestone overlook that showcases how the Sinagua people lived 1,000 years ago. If you're exploring with little ones, let them pick out which of the castle's 20 rooms would be theirs, and keep an eye out for singing birds and sun-seeking lizards on your hike.

### Take a Grand Scenic Detour Near Flagstaff

If you're heading to [Grand Canyon National Park](#) — which is undeniably worth the 3½-hour drive from Phoenix — be sure to circle back through Flagstaff after exploring the canyon. Stay over at the popular Little America Hotel, so you can spend a day driving the Sunset Crater-Wupatki Loop Road a few miles north of town. This 35-mile loop takes you through a volcanic moonscape and into Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument. Next, explore the prehistoric red-rock villages of the Wupatki National Monument, where you'll find the 900-year-old

pueblos of several native tribes. When you've finished your adventure, get back on the loop, which continues to U.S. Route 89, and make your way back to Phoenix.



Wupatki National Monument is described by the National Park Service as “the tallest, largest, and perhaps the richest and most influential pueblo around.” It’s believed to have housed 85-100 Wupatki people.

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