nileGUIDE
ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Matthew Yglesias

A Day of Botany

Tucson, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: This is a day to discover the diversity of the Sonoran Desert plant life.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Tucson

DAY NOTE: Robert's Restaurant is a good place to start for a hearty breakfast before spending the morning strolling through the nearby Tucson Botanical Gardens. For lunch head up to the Tohono Chul Tearoom on the grounds of Tohono Chul Park. Spend the afternoon exploring the park's beautiful natural setting. You may want to head back to the Tearoom for afternoon tea. Silverbell Trading offers a fine selection of local and native arts. Finish the day with a fine seafood dinner at Kingfisher.

Robert's Restaurant
Homemade, hearty fare

Tucson Botanical Gardens
16 gardens, one great escape

Tohono Chul Park
An oasis from the desert and the city

Tohono Chul Park Tea Room
Stunning desert settings

Silverbell Trading
Fine local and native arts

KingFisher
Award-winning seafood

Arizona Inn
Classic Arizona elegance

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Day 1 - Tucson

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: Robert's Restaurant is a good place to start for a hearty breakfast before spending the morning strolling through the nearby Tucson Botanical Gardens. For lunch head up to the Tohono Chul Tearoom on the grounds of Tohono Chul Park. Spend the afternoon exploring the park's beautiful natural setting. You may want to head back to the Tearoom for afternoon tea. Silverbell Trading offers a fine selection of local and native arts. Finish the day with a fine seafood dinner at Kingfisher.

1 Robert's Restaurant

contact:
tel: +1 520 795 1436
http://tucson.citysearch.com/profile/1749323/tucson_az/robert_s_restaurant.html

location:
3301 East Grant Road
Tucson AZ 85716

hours:
6:30a-3p M-Sa

DESCRIPTION: The reputation of Robert's eatery for wholesome, hearty lunch and breakfast fare attracts clients from all over Central Tucson; it's particularly popular among office workers, cab drivers, policemen and business executives living and working in the area, and an extremely busy place during lunch hours. There's not much decor to speak of, but it's bright and clean with an upbeat, friendly atmosphere provided by the staff and the tasty food it serves. Breakfast specials, pancakes and three egg omelets, as well as lunch specials consisting of steak, veal and homemade roast beef entrees. Lunch specials change daily. Homemade bread and pies are available to go. © wcities.com

2 Tucson Botanical Gardens

contact:
tel: 520 326 9686
fax: 520- 324 0166
http://www.tucsonbotanical.org

location:
2150 N. Alvernon Way
Tucson AZ 85712

hours:
8:30a-4:30p

DESCRIPTION: The Tucson Botanical Gardens sits smack in mid-town near one of Tucson's busier intersections. Like Tohono Chul Park, it's an unexpected oasis surrounded on all sides by a bustling city. There are 16 gardens representing a variety of gardening traditions and themes, including a backyard bird garden, a children's garden and a xeriscape demonstration garden. The charming adobe buildings on site date back to the 1920s. Tucson Botanical Gardens is a must for plant lovers. © NileGuide

wcities

3 Tohono Chul Park

contact:
tel: 520 742 6455
http://www.tohonochulpark.org

location:
7366 N. Paseo del Norte
Tucson AZ 85704

hours:
Trails: 7a-sunset, Exhibits and shops: 9a-5p, Tearoom 8a-5p, closed major holidays

DESCRIPTION: At 50 acres, Tohono Chul Park might seem on the small side, but it packs a punch larger than its size would suggest. Surrounded by bustling city in every direction, the park's lush desert setting is an excellent introduction to the Sonoran Desert. In addition, there are demonstration gardens, a children's garden, an art gallery, two gift shops and an excellent tea room that serves breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea. There are daily tours as well, making this oasis is a must-do. © NileGuide

wcities

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contact:
tel: 520 797 1222
fax: +1 520 797 1213
http://www.tohonochulpark.org/tea2.html

location:
7366 North Paseo Del Norte
Tucson AZ 85704

hours:
8a-5p M-Su

4 Tohono Chul Park Tea Room

wcities

DESCRIPTION: North Tucson's Tohono Chul Park provides one of the most stunning desert botanical spectacles in all of the Southwest and, within the park, this quaint tearoom offers a memorable dining-in-the-desert experience. Set amidst the lushness of centuries-old cactus and succulents, the brick building houses a slightly feminine looking (it is a tea room, after all) but not frou-frou cafe. You can also dine out in the splendid natural surroundings on a courtyard patio. The menu can't begin to compete with the setting, but it includes a good selection of breakfast items, quiches, salads, soups, sandwiches and a few hot entree specials. Desserts and afternoon tea are also a relaxing respite from your stroll through the park. A word of caution: there's almost always a fairly long wait for a table; advance reservations can be made for groups of six or more. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: 520 797 6852
www.silverbelltrader.com

location:
7119 N. Oracle Rd
Tucson AZ 85704

hours:
10a-5p M-Sa

5 Silverbell Trading

Silverbell Trading

DESCRIPTION: Here's a gallery-store to buy quality Indian art from all parts of the Southwest, but mainly from the Four Corners region. It showcases Michael Chiago, a self-taught artist of the local Tohono O'odham tribe whose paintings are now shown worldwide. There are Zuni fetishes as well as Native music and books. This is also one of the best outlets for Tohono O'odham basketry, the craft of the people that live on the reservation west of Tucson. © wcities.com

contact:
tel: 520 323 7739
http://www.kingfisherbarandgrill.com

location:
2564 E. Grant Road
Tucson AZ 85716

hours:
Mo to Fr from 11:00 AM to 03:00 PM,Mo to Fr from 05:00 PM to 12:00 AM,Sa to Su from 05:00 PM to 12:00 AM

6 KingFisher

KingFisher

DESCRIPTION: This popular Tucson mainstay serves up classic American cuisine with an emphasis on fresh, expertly prepared seafood. Their fish and chips are a big hit, battered delicately and fried to perfection. If seafood is not your preference, the menu offers up steak, ribs, and other standard American fare, all prepared equally well. The restaurant features a late-night menu for those looking for quality grub after 10pm, and the dark, chic setting makes this a good place for a romantic date.
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contact:
tel: +1 520 325 1541 / +1 800 933 1093
fax: +1 520 881 5830
http://www.arizonainn.com

location:
2200 E Elm St
Tucson AZ 85719

7 Arizona Inn

DESCRIPTION: Located in the Blenman-Elm neighborhood just east of the University of Arizona, the Arizona Inn is an historic Tucson hotel famous for its classic Southwestern elegance. The Inn represents an oasis of quiet and elegance in one of the busiest areas of the city. Everything here is designed to help you unwind and luxuriate in the surroundings: the poolside bar, perfectly groomed lawns and orange trees, the wood-paneled library decorated with antique furniture and overstuffed chairs, and the jazzy piano lounge filled with softly murmuring guests drinking wine. The weekend brunch is popular with visitors and locals alike, so be sure to make reservations in advance.
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Arizona Inn

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Tucson Snapshot

Local Info

Tucson is a striking amalgamation of old and new, blending historic roots with its contemporary identity as a vibrant college town, winter refuge for cold-weather retirees, and one of the Southwest's fastest-growing cities. The Old Pueblo, as locals affectionately call Tucson, is indeed one of the oldest continually inhabited areas in the United States, surviving for more than 4,000 years as home to Hohokam farmers, 17th century European explorers, Mexican Territorial settlers, and pre-statehood, Old West pioneers. Situated in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, Tucson is surrounded by mountain ranges and canyons, green forests of tall Saguaro cacti, and dry river washes that come alive with rushing water after the first monsoon storm of the summer.

Today, Tucson is home to historic Mexican barrios and well-preserved mid-century neighborhoods, strip malls and heavily-trafficked avenues, funky bars, restaurants, and shops, posh golf resorts, and like many other Sunbelt cities, suburban sprawl. It's also home to the theUniversity of Arizona,Old Tucson Studios, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, theArizona-Sonora Desert Museum, andSaguaro National Park. But no matter what side of Tucson you seek out, the singular beauty of the Sonoran Desert and the city's own history offers up a consistently compelling mix of past and present.

Downtown

Downtown is a cluster of historic barrios, government buildings, art galleries, and newly-risen high-rise condos. The city's much-hyped Rio Nuevo downtown redevelopment and renewal project has been stalled for years, but downtown already offers plenty to see and do. Downtown Tucson is home to a network of historic, still-standing neighborhoods of colorful 19th century adobes and Victorian mansions. Mesquite tree-lined downtown neighborhoods such as theBarrio Viejo, El Presidio, andArmory Park are full of color and eye-grabbing architecture that are quintessentially Tucson, and must-see for out-of-towners.

In the northern downtown quarter, art lovers will appreciate theTucson Museum of Art an the shops and galleries of the historic Old Town Artisans marketplace. Visitors with even a passing interest in history should check out remnants of the original Tucson Presidio settlement. The originalEl Charro Cafe, one of the oldest family-run Mexican restaurants in the United States, is a popular lunch and dinner spot on Court Avenue.

Busy Congress Street is the main downtown artery, with landmarks that include theHotel Congress,Rialto Theatre, and the historicFox Theater, which hosts arts performances and repertory film screenings. Other downtown landmarks include the Tucson Convention Center, La Placita, theTemple of Music and Art, and the historicSt. Augustine Cathedral.

South Tucson

Just south of downtown is the small municipality of South Tucson, a largely Latino area with deep community roots. Here you'll find great examples of Tucson mural art and some of the best Mexican restaurants in the city. Dozens of taquerias, sit-down restaurants, Mexican bakeries and groceries, and old-fashioned motor motels line the streets along Fourth, Sixth, and Twelfth Avenues, making this a hotspot for foodies on the look-out for the next great culinary find. South Tucson restaurants such asMi Nidito,Michas,Taqueria Pico de Gallo, andEl Guero Canelo have already been enshrined in the increasingly crowded pantheon of treasured local Mexican eateries.

Traveling further south and west of the Tucson city limits, you'll enter parts of the Tohono O'odham Nation, including the Tohono O'odham San Xavier reservation, home to the magnificentMission San Xavier del Bac. The mission was founded in 1699 by the Jesuit missionary Eusebio Francisco Kino and features an elegant, white Moorish-inspired design with hand-carved mesquite doors and an elaborate altar. The mission, also known as the White Dove of the Desert, still serves the San Xavier community, offering daily mass and celebrations. The plaza has a small market place where visitors can purchase fry bread and artisan crafts.

West Tucson

West Tucson generally refers to the neighborhoods on the western side of Interstate 10. The area is comprised of several historic Latino neighborhoods, and is home toSentinel Peak(often referred to as A Mountain), which offers panoramic views of the city. Foodies have much to enjoy on this side of the city, including Pat's Drive-In,Teresa's Mosaic Cafe, andDragon View Restaurant. Further west you'll find posh desert manors atop the slopes of the Tucson Mountains, which border the city to the west.

One of the best drives in Tucson is across the Tucson Mountains throughGates Pass, a narrow, twisting road offering incredible panoramic desert views. Gates Pass offers spots for hiking, picnicking, camping, and wildlife observation.The road is popular for sunset viewing and bicyclists, but be forewarned that the narrow turns and sudden drop-off also make it one of the city's most dangerous, yet thoroughly exhilarating, driving areas.

On the other side of Gates Pass are some of Tucson's most enduring attractions, including the popular and world-renownArizona-Sonora Desert Museum,Old Tucson Studios, and theInternational Wildlife Museum.

North Central and the Foothills

North of downtown Tucson you'll bump into the large University district, comprised of several historic neighborhoods, the Fourth Avenue shopping district, and theUniversity of Arizona campus. Fourth Avenue, with its assortment of cafes, coffeehouses, vintage clothing shops, and bars, is a magnet for the city's youth, especially college students pulling all-nighters, the type of which have nothing to do with books and studying.

The city is bounded to the north by theSanta Catalina Mountains, the most prominent range in the city, visible throughout much of central Tucson. As the northern part of Tucson rises up towards the Santa Catalinas, the views grow more spectacular and the home prices get steeper. The posh Foothills District is known for large, custom homes surrounded by lush desert landscaping, premium resorts such asLoews Ventana Canyon, theWestward Look, and theWestin La Paloma, and exclusive shopping districts such as La Encantada andFoothills Mall.

Northwest

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The Northwest area of Tucson is comprised of sprawling new communities set against the lush Sonoran desert landscape. For twenty-five years,Tohono Chul Park, just west of Oracle Road, has preserved the natural beauty and culture of the desert. The botanical garden features several demonstration, low-water use gardens, and a populartearoom.

Further northwest is the town of Oro Valley, a prominent Tucson suburb. Past I-10, development gives way to the preserved desert of Saguaro National Park West situated in the Avra Valley.

Northeast

North and east of Tucson, the city is bounded by the Catalina Mountains and Rincon Mountains, respectively. East Tucson encompasses a great deal of the suburban sprawl the city experienced starting in the 1970s. Further east, houses once more give way to the eastern segment of Tucson's national park, Saguaro National Park East. Northwest of central Tucson is another of the city's most popular natural attractions,Sabino Canyon, a haven for day hikers and popular spot for visitors.

©

History

In 1698, Jesuit Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, on his way north from what is now Mexico to explore possible sites for building new missions, came across an Indian village called Shuk Shon. During the 70 years of Spanish colonial acquisition that followed his visit into the territory later known as Arizona, the place was renamed San Agustin del Tucson, with the hard"c" in the middle still pronounced. Both the saint's name and the hard"c" were later dropped by Anglo-Americans, with St. Augustine Cathedral downtown now the only surviving memory of the Spanish name.

When Father Kino arrived, people had already lived in the region for more than 2,000 years. Anasazi, Mogollon, Hohokam and O'odham tribes came and went in successive waves of immigration over the centuries. One of the favorite settlements lay at the base of a big hill of black volcanic rock. Known as Chuk Shon(meaning, roughly,"village of the spring at the foot of the black mountain" in the O'odham language), it is an elevation now officially called Sentinel Peak, and also nicknamed A Mountain for the large whitewashed letter(for University of Arizona) on its eastern side. In any case, it is one of the best lookout points, commanding a view of the entire Tucson basin.

A few miles further to the South, out of a nearby village named Bac, the Jesuits worked to convert the local Pima Indians to the Christian faith. Today, this is the location of Mission San Xavier del Bac, the"White Dove of the Desert," known for its beauty world-wide.

Though the colonialists from Europe were not exactly considered friends by the Indians of Bac, they seemed the lesser evil compared to the Apache raiders that moved into the Tucson valley, to the extent that the Pima and O'odham asked for Spanish military assistance against the Apaches. The Jesuits, who had to be considered inept in effectively defending the locals, were replaced with Franciscan priests who understood the strategic importance of Tucson. Finally, in 1775, an Irish mercenary in Spanish employ known as Don Hugo O'Connor arrived to establish a presidio, or military fort, here. Though nothing is now left of the structure, El Presidio Park downtown still marks the fort's original location.

While the village at the foot of Sentinel Peak vanished, a new Mexican village slowly grew up around the Spanish presidio, nicknamed the Old Pueblo, an endearing term still used for the city. After the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, following the Mexican-American War, which gave a large part of Sonoran territory to the United States, the village quickly became a new American frontier town. It even served as the capital of the Arizona Territory from 1867 to 1877. Cattle ranchers moved into the valley, and mining companies began prospecting the mountains for copper and gold. The real boom came with the arrival of the railroad in 1880, allowing goods and raw materials to be transported at drastically reduced costs.

As East Coast entrepreneurs and investors considered Mexican housing primitive, they began replacing the mud-brick adobe buildings, first with imported brick and lumber, and later with concrete and steel, thus drastically changing the look of Tucson. With Anglos pushing into formerly Mexican-American territory, many of the old adobes fell into disrepair and were eventually bulldozed into oblivion. Today, with the adobe style being the rage, many Tucsonans wish that those"primitive" but cool and practical houses were still standing. Luckily, some of the original adobes have been preserved in the Barrio Historico district south of downtown. The uneasy relationship between pioneers, Indians and Mexicans is well documented both at the Arizona Historical Society and the Fort Lowell Museum, while people interested in the more distant past of Arizona and its original inhabitants will find a wealth of material at the Arizona State Museum. Mexican culture is celebrated during the annual Cinco de Mayo celebrations, and the local Tohono O'odham and Yaqui people keep their traditions alive in the Wa:k Powwow and Yaqui Easter Lenten Ceremony.

With the discovery of silver and copper deposits in the nearby towns of Tombstone and Bisbee, minerals became the dominant industry in southern Arizona until copper prices took a nosedive in the 1970s. Many mines were closed at the time, but the effects of decades of strip mining, both in its economically beneficial and environmentally damaging senses, can still be viewed at the Asarco Mineral Discovery Center.

When the mining business went into a slump, aerospace and aircraft industries moved in to pick up the slack, a development extensively documented at the Pima Air and Space Museum. Since the founding of the University of Arizona in 1891, Tucson has gradually shed its image as a rugged Western town filled with cowboys, miners and hard-drinking gamblers and replaced it with marks of intellectual and technological activity. Due to the presence of the university, the city is now home to several hi-tech companies. It is also one of the world centers of astronomy, as certified by the presence of nearby Kitt Peak National Observatory.

Furthermore, Tucson has become the center of a booming health industry. Every year, thousands of visitors from the northern regions, mostly senior citizens, come to stay and enjoy the mild winter sun of southern Arizona, thus securing the financial health of the numerous spas, resorts, real estate agencies and Southwestern souvenir shops in the region.

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One of the main issues currently confronting Tucson and many other cities in the west is how to deal with urban sprawl. Since the 1950s, city development has run out of control, spawning tacky strip malls along Tucson's street grid and nondescript tract homes at the outskirts, while parts of the old barrio downtown were leveled to make room for high-rises and concrete structures such as the Tucson Convention Center. In recent years, however, Tucsonans have learned to consider their architectural and ethnic heritage as more of an asset in helping to attract tourists and conventioneers to the city. By the early 1990s, what remained of the barrio had been restored, and the depressed downtown was revived with some success by the Tucson Arts District. Still, the controversy over urban development continues and, for the foreseeable future, the diverging demands of job security, population growth, water conservation, environmental protection and aesthetics promise to dominate the political agenda in the Old Pueblo.
©

Hotel Insights

Tucson offers a good variety of accommodations for any budget. Whether you're an executive in need of state-of-the-art business facilities, a vacationer seeking to be pampered in a luxury spa, or a backpacker looking for an affordable room, you'll find it here.

Downtown

If you're in Tucson to attend a convention, your most convenient location will be downtown. Apart from staying within walking distance of a variety of dining and entertainment venues, you'll also be near the Tucson Convention Center.

You don't need a large budget to stay in downtown Tucson, either. The historic Hotel Congress offers interesting decor at affordable prices, plus retro ambiance mixed in with some Southwestern chic. It is definitely hip here, as you will discover by observing the crowd of businessmen and bohemians mingling at the hotel cafe.

South Tuscon

Most of the hotels clustered around Tucson International Airport on the south side of town cater to the business traveler, offering plenty of business and conference facilities, fitness centers, full-service restaurants, swimming pools, and free airport shuttle services. Some of them, like the Clarion Hotel Tucson Airport and the tastefully landscaped Courtyard by Marriott Tucson Airport, also have computer facilities and Internet access.

North and the Foothills

The area north of the University of Arizona campus(east of downtown) is another good choice if you're a visiting scholar or business traveler. From there, you will have easy access to all the academic facilities, libraries and museums on campus, as well as the ethnic restaurants and shops centered around the hip Fourth Avenue business district. Located right at the busy U of A main gate, the modern Marriott University offers rooms especially designed for business folks, including a full business center and secretarial services. If you prefer a quieter setting, book a room at the historic Arizona Inn, just a few minutes from the university.

Most of Tucson's famous resort hotels are located in the foothills of the Catalina Mountains to the north. The Westin la Paloma on Sunrise Drive is a favorite among business travelers, due to its state-of-the-art business facilities and abundance of meeting rooms. A few miles to the west, the hacienda-style Westward Look Resort offers spectacular views of the Santa Catalina Mountains, which you can explore on guided horseback tours offered by the stables located next to the resort complex.

The Omni Tucson National Golf Resort and Spa on the northwest side of town is world-renowned for its 27-hole PGA championship golf course. Located off Oracle Road, the Hilton El Conquistador Resort and Country Club affords breathtaking views of the rugged western flank of the Catalinas, while pampering guests to the max.

On the northeast side, just minutes from scenic Sabino Canyon, Loews Ventana Canyon Resort has gained fame for its spectacular golf course at the mouth of a gaping canyon.

Northwest

If you are attracted to the charm and comfort of bed-and-breakfast accommodations in natural settings, you should focus your search on the area west of Oracle Road, Tucson's great north-south divide, all the way up to the Tucson Mountains. The Casa Tierra Adobe Bed and Breakfast Inn is situated in the middle of an amazing saguaro cactus forest in Saguaro National Park West, a paradise for birders, hikers, and stargazers, and so secluded that the only noises you are likely to hear are those of coyotes howling at the moon and javelinas rustling in the bushes.

Northeast

Accommodation on the east side of town is generally more affordable than in the Catalina foothills, and still within reasonable range from the city's major shopping and entertainment venues. Several hotels are clustered around the Park Mall and Williams Centre business areas, such as the Courtyard by Marriott-Williams Centre, which attracts many business clients. Other moderately priced accommodations in the area are available at the La Quinta Inn East and the Hilton Tucson East.
©

Restaurants Insights

With restaurants operating today that have existed since the 1920s, Tucson's cuisine can't help but be inextricably intertwined with its history and culture.

Downtown

El Charro, opened in 1922, is the oldest family-run Mexican restaurant in the United States, and a must when visiting the Tucson area. This local landmark, in the historic El Presidio District, is now run by Carlotta Flores, grand-niece of founder and trailblazer Monica Flin. Eclectic cafe-style cuisine can be found at Cafe a la C'Art, Cafe Poca Cosa and Caffe' Milano. Dine with a view at La Cocina Restaurant and Cantina, which serves traditional Mexican in a lively atmosphere.

South Tuscon

The Scordato family emigrated from New Jersey in 1972 and opened their eponymous Evangelos Scordato's, and Vivace. Over the past quarter-of-a-century the family name has become synonymous with fine Italian dining in Tucson. Le Bistro, with its impressionist Paris street scene facade, brings the flavors of France to desert diners, and has been voted one of Tucson's Top Ten Restaurants by

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theTucson Citizen for seven consecutive years.

In Green Valley, south of Tucson, Metro Restaurants operates San Ignacio Country Club and Coyote Grill, offering contemporary regional cuisine. Their newest addition, Old Pueblo Grill, is also sure to be a popular spot in the neighborhood just south of the University of Arizona.

North and the Foothills

On Halloween of 1983, Janos Wilder and his wife, Rebecca, opened Janos in a National Historic Landmark-registered home on the grounds of the Tucson Museum of Art. Anthony's in the Catalinas, a Triple-A Four Diamond and DiRoNa award-winning bastion of Continental cuisine, delights diners with breathtaking views of the Santa Catalina Mountains.

Northwest

Wildflower features the culinary skill of Chef Christopher Cristiano in an attractive atmosphere. Fantastic grilled meats are abound at Metropolitan Grill and Keaton's Arizona Grill, both also multiple award-winners.

Northeast

A restaurant known affectionately as"The Cork"(formerly the Cork& Cleaver) has been a local tradition for more than 30 years. In 1994, Chef Jonathan Landeen took the reins of what is officially called Jonathan's Tucson Cork, bringing his gold medal-winning culinary style to the area.

The Metro Restaurant Group has created, in a sense, its own global culinary tour with its eight established restaurants(and more in the works)- Firecracker Asian-American Bistro offers an explosion of tantalizing Pacific Rim tastes and aromas—look for the flames shooting from the roof(no, not from the food, from the torches!). City Grill has been feted as the Best Grill and Best Business Lunch byTucson Lifestyle magazine.

Backstage is just plain fun—and plenty of it—with dancing, games, sports and casual, contemporary cuisine. And then there's McMahon's Prime Steakhouse, votedTucson Lifestyle's Best Steak Restaurant and Best New Restaurant of 1999.
©

Nightlife Insights

Cultural life in Tucson, by and large, reflects the ethnic and social diversity of the city, ranging from the conservative retirement communities at the outskirts to the progressive artist community downtown. To find out what's happening in the arts and who's coming to town, read the entertainment pages of theArizona Daily Star and theTucson Citizen, especially the"Caliente" section in the Friday edition of the Star, or grab a free copy of theTucson Weekly.

Performing Arts

Thanks to continuous cultural sponsorship, Tucson has managed to support both an opera and a symphony orchestra for several decades now without without interruption. Both the Arizona Opera and the Tucson Symphony Orchestra usually perform at the Tucson Convention Center Music Hall, the main venue for high culture downtown.

If you are culturally more in tune with the progressive camp, check out the Borderlands Theatre or the Invisible Theatre for avant garde political productions and light comedy. For laughs, take yourself and your family to the Gaslight Theatre, Tucson's only dinner theater, where you can munch on sandwiches and ice cream cones while watching Western dramas with lots of music, slapstick and practical jokes.

Nightlife

The variety of Tucson nightlife defies stereotypes about the kind of entertainment a Western town has to offer. In fact, most clubs offer alternative rock instead of country and western music. The blues is very much alive in Tucson, with local acts taking turns at the Boondocks Lounge, Berky's Bar, Margarita Bay and various other clubs. Check weekly listings in the papers for details. Venues for live jazz are rarer; try the Cafe Sweetwater on 4th Avenue on Friday and Saturday nights, or the Cascade Lounge at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort for light dinner jazz on Thursday to Sunday afternoons.

While the western section of downtown is dominated by the temples of high art, the eastern part belongs to the"dark" forces of alternative rock, centered around the legendary Club Congress on the ground floor of the equally famous Hotel Congress. It's featured as"The World's Darkest Nightclub," and once you've stepped inside, you will see why it deserves that title(if you can see anything at all). Right across the street from the club there is the Rialto Theatre(The), a vaudeville theater that has been restored to its glorious old past, now featuring big names in blues and rock from out of own.

For the quintessential experience in Mexican music, go to El Mariachi on Drachman Street and check out the restaurant's house band, International Mariachi America. There are, of course, various places for country and western, but for the most authentic brand, you'll have to drive to the out-of-the way Li'l Abner's Steakhouse on a Friday or Saturday night. If you enjoy country dancing, join the up to 3,000 patrons crowding into the dance floor at the New West on Ina Road, an establishment which frequently features famous country and western acts such asAsleep at the Wheel.

Museums and Galleries

Tucson's art scene is very much alive and thriving, particularly on the gallery and studio level. There are plenty of museums and galleries displaying the entire range of artistic styles from realistic paintings of Southwestern scenes to multimedia installations. Although it is still a mainstay of traditional Western art, visitors should be aware that Tucson is slowly becoming a driving force in cutting-edge international contemporary practice, with progressives such as the Dinnerware Contemporary Art Gallery and Elizabeth Cherry Contemporary Art spearheading the movement.

The Tucson Museum of Art, the main exhibitor of contemporary art in the city for more than forty years, has recently been expanded to include both Western Art and contemporary experimental works, as well as a gallery of pre-Columbian pieces. A little further to the east, the University of Arizona Museum of Art offers a good sampling of famous 20th-century sculpture and a collection of Renaissance art. The Center for Creative Photography across the street houses one of the best collections

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of photographs in the world, including the work of renowned photographer Ansel Adams. Its archives, which are open to the public, contain the works of hundreds of other first-rate photographers.

The city's real strengths, however, reside in its science and history museums, particularly the on-campus Arizona State Museum with its splendid displays of Native Southwestern art, and the Arizona Historical Society Museum, which is devoted to the local history of Native Americans, Mexicans and pioneers.

Sports

As a place offering consistently dry and sunny weather throughout the year, Tucson is popular with golfers around the world. Green fees vary from course to course and from season to season, with municipal courses like the Fred Enke Municipal Golf Course offering lower rates than resorts such as the Ventana Canyon Golf Courses in the foothills.

The horse racing season at the recently expanded Rillito Park Racetrack lasts from early February into March, with more races scheduled at the Pima County Fair in April, along with horse shows, gun shows, and various kinds of other diversions. And, of course, no entertainment guide to the Old Pueblo would be complete without the Tucson Rodeo,La Fiesta de los Vaqueros as it is called in Spanish, the largest winter rodeo in the United States. If you're here in late February, you just simply can't ignore it.

Family Friendly

Tucson offers a variety of diversions for kids. Proposing to take them to the zoo is usually a sure bet, and while Reid Park Zoo offers a good variety of assorted international animals, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is more unique in presenting creatures of the desert in their natural habitats, with spectacular desert views. Another sure winner is a visit to Old Tucson Studios, a Western theme park and movie location surrounded by giant sahuaro cacti, not too far from the Desert Museum west of the city. Cowboy stunts and gunfights are also available in Trail Dust Town, especially during Trail Dust Days; and you don't have to be a kid to enjoy it.
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Things to Do Insights

Downtown is about the only district in Tucson that can be explored on foot because most attractions here are within easy walking distance. The rest of the city, from Tohono Chul Park to Sabino Canyon, sprawls across the valley covering distances too vast to overcome without wheels.

Barrio Historico Tour the Spanish-Mexican district, the Barrio Historico, which contains historic buildings like St. Augustine Cathedral and the Sosa-Carrillo-Fremont House, built in the late 1800s. Grab lunch at the legendary El Charro. Nearby is the Tucson Museum of Art, home to collections of Pre-Columbian, Hispanic and contemporary works.

Old Town Artisans Walk through the galleries and craft shops at Old Town Artisans, then observe the decorated facade and tiled Moorish dome of the Pima County Courthouse. Nearby is the site of the original Spanish fortress at El Presidio Park. Enjoy lunch at Cup Cafe or the Barrio bistro.

Mission San Xavier del Bac Visit the Mission San Xavier del Bac, the"White Dove of the Desert," called the finest example of Spanish mission architecture in the country. You'll also find the International Wildlife Museum and Sentinel Peak, the site of Tuscon's first settlers. Have lunch at Daisy Mae's Steak House, then stop into Brumm's Nature Gallery, which features artwork made with natural elements.

Tohono Chul Park Take a walk in the Tohono Chul Park, where you can take a close look at the plant and bird life of the Sonoran Desert. Have a bite at the park's cafe, then take the tram down Sabino Canyon. Enjoy the scenic beauty of the Catalina Mountains or hike through Catalina State Park.

Gates Pass Take the scenic drive past Gates Pass into Sahuaro National Park, stopping at the world-famous Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum on the way. Once you've seen the Park, stop by and see the astronomical art at Novaspace, then dine at Linen, famed for its service-minded staff.

Consulting a professional tour company to add focus to your days in Tuscon is recommended. They can get you where you need to go, both in style and comfort.

Hiking Tours Spanish Trail Outfitters(+1 520 631 3787/http://www.spanishtrailoutfitters.com/) Desert Paths Tours(+1 520 327 7235) Purple Mountain Pack Goats Family Adventure(+1 520 403 4056) Sky Islands Treks(+1 520 622 6966/http://www.skyislandtreks.com)

Bus Tours Old Pueblo Tours(+1 520 795 7448) Great Western Tours(+1 520 572 1660/http://www.greatwesterntours.com/) Arizona Coach Tours(+1 520 791 0210) Desert Paths Tours(+1 520 327 7235) Grand Canyon Tours(+1 520 749 5388)

Jeep Tours Sunshine Jeep Tours(+1 520 742 1943/http://www.sunshinejeeptours.com/) Trail Dust Adventures(+1 520 747 0323/http://www.traildustadventures.com/) Southwest Offroad Tours(+1 520 579 9330)

Air Tours Wings Over Willcox(+1 800 200 2272/http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com/)

Train Tours Sierra Madre Express(+1 800 666 0346/http://www.sierramadreexpress.com)
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Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

Tucson International Airport(TUS)+1 520 573 8100http://www.tucsonairport.org

TUS is located approximately 10 miles from downtown and services the following airlines:

AeroCalifornia(+1 800 237 6225) Aerolitoral(+1 800 237 6639/http://www.aerolitoral.com) Alaska Airlines(+1 800 426 0333/http://www.alaskaair.com) America West(+1 800 235 9292/http://www.americawest.com) American(+1 800 433 7300/http://www.aa.com) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/http://www.britishairways.com) Continental(+1 800 525 0280/http://www.continental.com) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/http://www.delta.com) Frontier(+1 800 432 1359/http://www.frontierairlines.com) KLM(+1 800 225 2525/http://www.klm.com) Lufthansa(+1 800 241 6522/http://www.lufthansa-usa.com) Northwest(+1 800 225 2525/http://www.nwa.com) Skywest(+1 800 221 1212/http://www.skywest.com) Southwest(+1 800 435 9792/http://

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www.southwest.com) United(+1 800 241 6522/http://www.ual.com)

From the Airport

Shuttles: Arizona Stagecoach(+1 520 889 1000/http://www.azstagecoach.com) provides van service to anywhere in the Tucson area. Sun Tran(+1 520 792 9222/http://www.suntran.com) offers public bus service to and from the airport every hour.

Taxi: AAA Airport Taxi(+1 520 207 4790) Allstate Cab Company(+1 520 798 1111) Discount Cab(+1 520 388 9000) Sierra Transport(+1 520 459 2367) Yellow Cab(+1 520 624 6611)

Car Rental: Alamo(+1 800 327 9633/http://www.goalamo.com) Avis(+1 800 331 1212/http://www.avis.com) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/http://www.budget.com) Dollar(+1 800 800 4000/http://www.dollar.com) Enterprise(+1 800 736 8222/http://www.enterprise.com) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com) National(+1 800 227 7368/http://www.nationalcar.com)

Train

Amtrak(+1 800 872 7245/http://www.amtrak.com), located at 400 N Toole Avenue, provides service to Tucson via the Sunset Limited route that goes from Los Angeles to Orlando.

Bus

Greyhound(+1 800 231 2222/http://www.greyhound.com) accesses Tucson from major cities around the country. The downtown bus station(+1 520 792 3475), located at 2 S 4th Avenue, is open daily 8:30a-3a.

Car

Approach Tucson from the northwest and southeast by Interstate 10 and take Interstate 19 from the south.

Getting Around

Public Transit

Named"Arizona's Best Transit" by the Arizona Transit Association, Sun Tran(+1 520 792 9222/http://www.suntran.com) is Tucson's public transit system, which offers bus routes to several destinations in the Tucson area.

The Old Pueblo Trolley(+1 520 792 1802/http://www.oldpueblotrolley.org) has historic electric streetcars operating between the 4th Avenue business district and the campus of the University of Arizona.

Taxi and Limo

Affordable Limo(+1 520 750 8545) Allstate Cab/Bueno Taxi/Abracadabra Limousines(+1 520 798 1111/http://allstatecab.com) Catalina Transportation Services(+1 800 710 8994/http://www.catalinatransportation.com) Foothills Luxury Sedans(+1 888 563 7346) Sierra Limousine(+1 520 296 2511) Sierra Transport(+1 520 459 2367) Sir Lancelot Limos(+1 888 747 5262/http://www.sirlancelotlimos.com) Tucson Cab(+1 520 256 2561)

Traffic Information

To find out city traffic information go tohttp://www.traffic.com

If traveling overseas, take the safety precaution of registering your trip athttps://travelregistration.state.gov and for helpful, practical advice about traveling technicalities and safety standards check outhttp://travel.state.gov/.
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Fun Facts

Tucson

State: Arizona

Country: United States

Tucson by the Numbers:

Population: 486,699

Elevation: 2389 feet

Average Annual Rainfall: 11.14 inches

Average January Temperature: 64 degrees F(High), 38 degrees F(Low)

Average July Temperature: 99 degrees F(High), 74 degrees F(Low)

Quick Facts:

Major Industries: tourism/hospitality/recreation, aerospace and missile production, high technology, optics, software, electronics

Ethnic Mix: 73% Caucasian, 35.7% Hispanic, 4.5% African American, 2.6% Asian, 2.4% Native American

Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, standard two pin plugs

Time Zone: GMT-7

Country Dialing Code: 1

Area Code: 520(1 and the area code must be dialed even for local calls)

Did You Know?

Tucson is the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in the United States. Natives began farming here nearly 3000 years ago.

Orientation:

Tucson is the second-largest Arizona city and is located in the southeastern part of the state. Phoenix lies 115 miles northwest, El Paso is 262 miles east, San Diego 362 miles northwest, and Santa Fe 371 miles northeast.
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