

The 50 Best Day Trips from Phoenix



day trips from PHOENIX

Some posts on this site contain affiliate links, meaning if you book or buy something through one of these links, I may earn a small commission (at no extra cost to you!). Opinions are always my own and I'll never promote something I don't use or believe in.

After living in Phoenix a couple of years now I can tell you that I have become a bit of an expert on day trips from Phoenix! We live in the United States fifth largest city but it is pretty much an urban sprawl with a bunch of cities connected to the valley of the sun and the boundaries of Phoenix proper. That means there are tons of [things to do here](#) but there is also an amazing amount of things to do between 1 and 4 hours from here which makes a Phoenix day trip an essential part of any visit. Really, when you consider that Phoenix is the largest city in Arizona and [Tucson is not far behind](#), we are really talking about day trips in Arizona as most of these can be done from either location. And guess what? It's more than the Grand Canyon although that's on the list too! I've got **more than 50** of the best day trips from Phoenix here for you to choose from!

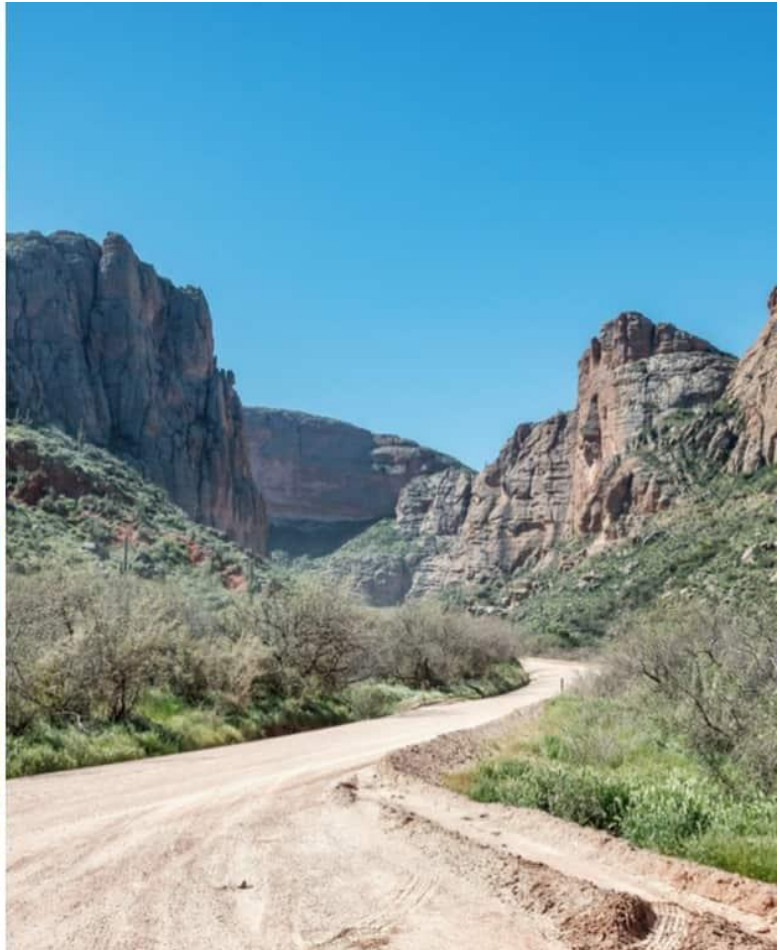
On this page

- [Day Trips between 1 and 2 hours from Phoenix](#)
 - [1. Drive Along the Apache Trail](#)
 - [2. Get Your Swim on at Saguaro Lake](#)
 - [3. Lake Pleasant Regional Park](#)
 - [4. Learn a little Cowboy History in Wickenburg](#)
 - [5. Experience the Sonoran Desert](#)
 - [6. Casa Grande Ruins National Monument](#)
 - [7. Montezuma Castle National Monument](#)
 - [8. Cool off in the Coconino National Forest](#)
 - [9. Go Wine Tasting in Cottonwood](#)
 - [10. Tonto Natural Bridge State Park](#)
 - [11. Saguaro National Park](#)
 - [12. Mission San Xavier del Bac](#)

- Day Trips between 2 and 3 hours from Phoenix
 - [13. Tonto Cliff Dwellings National Monument](#)
 - [14. Take a Ride on the Verde Canyon Railroad](#)
 - [15. Tuzigoot National Monument and Dead Horse State Park](#)
 - [16. Shop, Eat and get Spooked in Jerome](#)
 - [17. Visit Watson Lake and Whiskey Row in Prescott](#)
 - [18. Check out the beautiful Red Rock Formations in Sedona](#)
 - [19. Drive Along the Red Rock Scenic Byway](#)
 - [20. Slide Rock State Park](#)
 - [21. Mogollon Rim](#)
 - [22. Take on Tucson](#)
 - [More stories on Tucson:](#)
 - [23. Prepare for Takeoff at the Pima Air & Space Museum](#)
 - [24. Tucson Mountain Park](#)
 - [25. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum](#)
 - [26. Sabino Canyon Recreation Area](#)
 - [27. Titan Missile Museum](#)
 - [28. Biosphere 2](#)
 - [29. Montezuma Well National Monument](#)
 - [30. Take an Iconic Photo at Devil's Bridge Trail](#)
 - [31. Pipe Organ National Monument](#)
 - [32. Visit Flagstaff for the Day](#)
 - [More stories on Flagstaff:](#)
 - [33. Walnut Canyon National Monument](#)
 - [34. Spelunk at Kartchner Caverns State Park](#)
 - [35. Hiking the Catalina Mountains](#)
 - [36. Sonoita](#)
 - [37. Catch the Heber Horses](#)
 - [38. Kitt Peak National Observatory](#)
 - [39. Meteor Crater Natural Landmark](#)
 - [40. Fill up on Wild West History in Tombstone](#)
 - [41. Sunset Crater National Monument](#)
 - [42. Wupatki National Monument](#)
 - [43. Mount Lemmon](#)
 - [44. Experience some California Gold Rush Arizona-style in Yuma](#)
 - [45. Visit the Quirky Mining Town of Bisbee](#)
- Day Trips between 3 and 4 hours from Phoenix
 - [46. Castle Dome Mines Museum and Ghost Town](#)
 - [47. Petrified Forest National Park](#)
 - [48. Chiricahua National Monument](#)
 - [49. Drive Route 66 and See the Burros in Oatman](#)
 - [More stories along Route 66](#)
 - [50. Grand Canyon National Park](#)
 - [51. Coal Mine Canyon](#)
 - [52. Page – Gateway to Recreation](#)
 - [53. Get Your Cowboy on at Arizona Rodeos](#)
 - [Related Posts](#)

Day Trips between 1 and 2 hours from Phoenix

1. Drive Along the Apache Trail

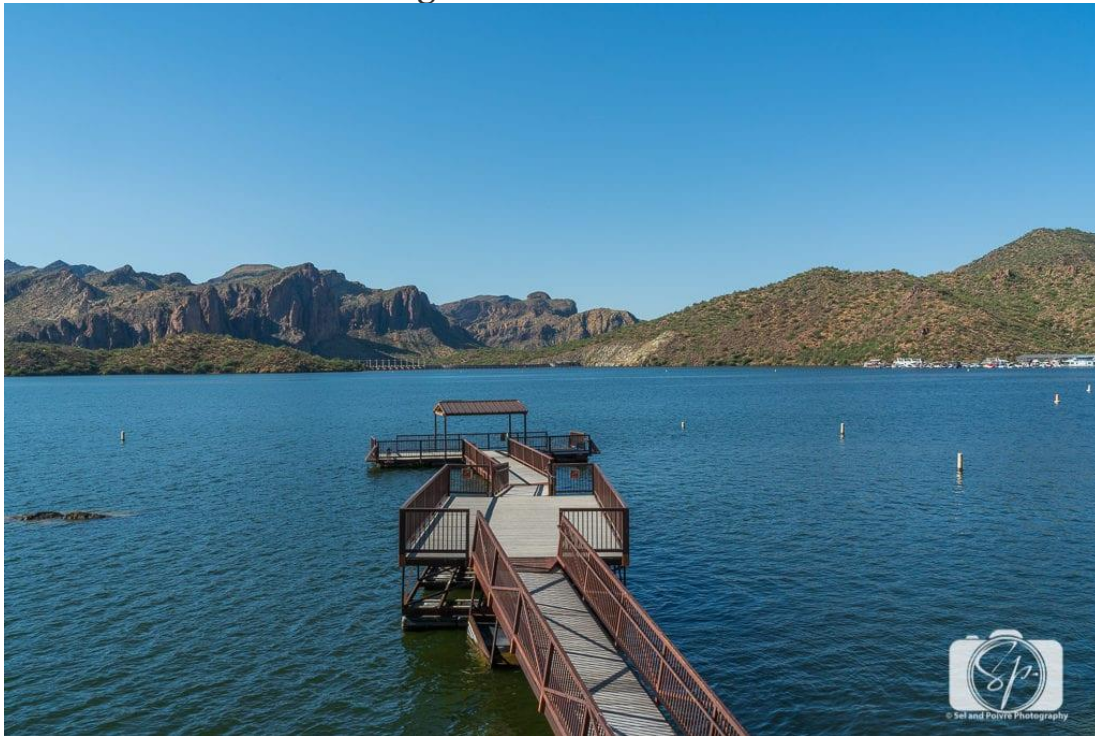


When we had our RV we spent a month at an RV Park in Gold Canyon which is about 45 minutes from Phoenix (weeks [7](#), [8](#), and [9](#)). During that time we explored the Apache Trail and surrounding area. There is fantastic hiking in Lost Dutchman State Park, a good time can be had at Goldfield a former gold mining town turned tourist attraction with western shows and shootouts, boating on Canyon Lake including taking the 4-hour Dolly Steamer boat, and stops at the smallest town in Arizona, Tortilla Flats, with a population of 5, a good place to stop for a bite to eat and a bit of music. The best part of Apache Trail is the actual trail a death-defying primitive dirt road that hugs the canyon walls! If you make it to the end you'll see Roosevelt Dam and cross the Roosevelt bridge. It's an easy all-day outing.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

Check out my whole post on visiting the [Apache Trail](#) area.

2. Get Your Swim on at Saguaro Lake



This manmade reservoir on the Salt River has tons of water-based activities for the whole family. A great place to cool off! Saguaro Lake is surrounded by beautiful rocks typical for the region and forests of Saguaro. The lake is pretty deep too, the average depth is 90 feet. There are over 20 miles of shoreline enough to share when it comes to fishing, boating, kayaking, swimming, and if you want someone else to do the work for you, there is a narrated tour on Desert Belle Paddleboats. Just like the Dolly Boat tour on Canyon Lake you have the opportunity to spot eagles and bighorn sheep. You can camp around the lake, but the spots are only accessible by boat, (you can rent one if you are visiting). There are shaded picnic areas for enjoying a meal by the lake, but there is also a restaurant in the marina.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

3. Lake Pleasant Regional Park



Another spot where you can hike, bike, boat, camp, fish, swim, plus lots more, is in and around the water at Lake Pleasant Regional Park. We actually live fairly close to this large outdoor recreation area and have enjoyed catching wildlife like birds and burros along with some awesome 4×4 trails in the area. The lake was created by damming part of the Aqua Fria River and it is a great spot for bass fishing! There is a marina (with a restaurant), you can rent boats and or do a boat tour with Lake Pleasant Cruises with catered food from the marina restaurant. It is amazing to have such a vibrant area full of water and life in the desert. It is a nice spot to spend the day with friends or family. Also as it is a little further away from the city it is a good spot for stargazing as the public, non-camping part of the park closes at 10 pm!

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

4. Learn a little Cowboy History in Wickenburg



We are in the middle of cowboy country, we've got cowboy towns, rodeos, ranches, cowboy artists and museums and while you can find some of these closer to Phoenix, it is a little more fun to actually get out of dodge for the day and experience it outside of the big city. My favorite place to do that is Wickenburg. I love the way this town honors its past with cowboy poetry readings, cowboy art, ranching, and more. They have a really good museum, Desert Caballeros Western Museum, dedicated to the west, it is small but exceptionally well done. They have preserved much of the historic downtown including their "jail tree" where criminals arrested by the sheriff were chained up until the transport came to take them to Phoenix. The town sits along the Hassayampa River, and there is a preserve with 280 species of birds and a large number of raptors. Or you could choose to check out some of the Sonoran Desert by hiking the Vulture Peak Trail. There are several dude ranches where you can get really emerge yourself into the West.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

5. Experience the Sonoran Desert



The Sonoran Desert surrounding Phoenix is a fascinating eco-system, with unique geology, flora and fauna and cultural history. Sure you can see it from your car window if you drive along Highway 85 (and that is a good way to see it without the surrounding towns obstructing your view) but you really can't get out into it. The best way to do that around Phoenix is via a tour either motorized, by foot (hiking), on a bike or by horse. (There are other options further away, but in this list, where you can get into the Sonoran desert with your own vehicle – Saguaro National Park and Pipe Organ National Monument.) If you have never been to the desert a tour is a great way to do it, you will be blown away with how much life is there, how fascinating the saguaro cacti are, above and beyond the wide variety of cacti (watch out for those chollas!) there is a complex variety of plants that provide for a diversity of wildlife species. In order to survive life in the desert, plants and animals have adapted by waiting for rain, by holding on to the rain when it does fall, or by using the space of time for a given rainfall. Above and beyond the plants and animals, the desert scenery is just gorgeous!

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

6. Casa Grande Ruins National Monument



Photo credit: [Corey](#)

Taratuta

The town of Casa Grande sits almost in the middle of Phoenix and Tucson and has a really interesting history, it was a planned community built to support the Southern Pacific Railroad. But the town itself was named for the ancient pueblo ruins, the nation's first archeological preserve, and is one of the largest prehistoric structures ever discovered in North America! The ruins sit amongst an area that had a complex system of canals and historians do not know whether the "big house" was a gathering place or a marker. About 2000 ancient desert dwellers and prehistoric farmers lived on this site, and like a lot of similar sites in Arizona, researchers have no idea why or how they disappeared. The ruins are large and well preserved given that preservation activities began as early as 1883! In the 1860s, Casa Grande actually became a tourist hotspot due to the fact that the railroad line had been completed (the town was originally called "Terminus!") not too far from town with an adjacent stagecoach line to the Casa Grande. With the increase in tourism, vandalism of the site became prolific (even graffiti!) and a custodian was hired to look after the site followed by President Harrison creating a prehistoric cultural reserve, and finally, President Woodrow Wilson made it a national monument.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour.

7. Montezuma Castle National Monument



There are several well preserved Sinagua settlements that are fascinating to visit...they do not build like they used to... Scientists still don't know why the Sinagua disappeared but these ancient people were inventive and advanced! There is a nice little trail that follows the cliffs and plenty of benches for sitting and contemplating how intelligent and industrious these ancient pre-Columbian people were. Montezuma Castle National Monument located near Camp Verde is a quick stop on your way to Prescott, Sedona, or Cottonwood/Jerome.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour 30 minutes.

8. Cool off in the Coconino National Forest



One of the things I love most about living in the Phoenix area is that I can go from desert to mountains and forest in less than or around 2 hours (depending on where I go). The Coconino National Forest is just 90 minutes away and with its 1,8 million acres of land, there is plenty to do in the great outdoors. This forest is diverse! Elevations go from 2,600 feet to 12,633 feet so you will find all types of ecosystems and environments. From red rocks to pine-covered plateaus, to deserts, canyons, and forests, you can literally see anything and everything in a day! You can camp, hike, drive on forest roads and see a wide variety of high desert vegetation. There is fishing in lakes, swimming in creeks and streams, and wildlife spotting throughout the 10 different wilderness areas that make up this forest. Winter is tough with snow conditions, but the rest of the year this is a great escape.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour 30 minutes.

9. Go Wine Tasting in Cottonwood



Did you know there are wineries in Arizona? Yep! And a lot of them are near the town of Cottonwood or at least their tasting rooms are. Going wine tasting for the day and visit this adorable town with an equally adorable downtown, some really good restaurants, and even a hotel. Great for a meal and tasting and can be combined with a trip to Jerome, Tuzigoot, or a nice spot for dinner after the Verde Valley train.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour and 45-minutes.

10. Tonto Natural Bridge State Park



Photo credit: [Trevor Huxham](#)

Tonto Natural Bridge is the world's largest natural travertine (a form of limestone deposited by mineral springs) bridge. It is 183-foot high, 150-foot wide, and 400-foot long with a cave beneath it and a small waterfall. This is a small park but wow is it beautiful! The bridge sits in a little valley surrounded by pine trees, was created through erosion and discovered by a Scotsman in 1877 while hiding from Apache Indians (a lucky find!). The three hiking trails in the area (Gowan Trail, Pine Creek Trail, and Waterfall Trail) that bring you all the way down to the tunnel. The Pine Creek Trail takes you directly under the bridge. Bring good hiking shoes – the trails are wet and steep! You can also swim in the water both upstream and downstream but not directly under the bridge. There are 4 viewing points from the parking lot if you don't feel like hiking, a historic lodge built in 1920 where you can hang out or have a picnic and a visitor center as well.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour and 45-minutes.

11. Saguaro National Park



One of the things I love most about this area of Arizona is the saguaro cacti. They are strange and beautiful, mysterious, and inconsistent and only found in this part of the world. We see them all over while driving here and there, but they are actually a protected species and thankfully there is an entire national park dedicated to them! There are 2 parts to the Saguaro National Park, each on either side of Tucson and both worthy of a visit. There is the west side of the park which has a dirt road loop trail, short hikes with sites like petroglyphs and where the saguaro cacti are denser, and the east side of the park which has a larger driving loop (paved), trails and taller more spread out saguaro since this part of the park is at a higher elevation and gets more rain. You can do both parks in a single day.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour and 45-minutes.

12. Mission San Xavier del Bac



Known as the “white dove of the desert” the Mission San Xavier del Bac is the oldest intact European structure in Arizona. It sits on Tohono O’odham Indian land and the Tohono O’odham people were the labor force used to build the mission in 1783. Franciscan missionary Father Juan Bautista Velderrain began construction of the church using money borrowed from a Sonoran rancher. It was completed in 1797, and has been called the “Sistine Chapel of the New World.” The brick walls are coated with a limestone-based plaster with a formula that includes the juice from prickly pear cactus pads – the Sonoran desert peoples were so inventive! Throughout many wars with Spain and Apache Indians the Tohono O’odham people protected the mission, they even buried artifacts to protect them from being stolen, when the United States finally acquired the territory, the Franciscan Friars returned to the church and they still serve the community today. The mission is a National Historic Landmark but also a functioning church so if you are religious you can attend a mass or just appreciate the beautiful building and surrounding grottos. After your visit, you can try your hand at Native American food as there are usually food stands set up by the community.

Distance from Phoenix: 1 hour and 50-minutes.

Day Trips between 2 and 3 hours from Phoenix

13. Tonto Cliff Dwellings National Monument



The Tonto Cliff Dwellings are located deep in the Superstition Mountains along the Salt River. [Ancient Native Americans](#), the Salado, made their homes high in the cliffs above the life-giving waterway. Today, the Theodore Roosevelt Dam has created Roosevelt Lake in the valley below the Dwellings. Tonto Cliff Dwellings National Monument is part of the National Park Service and requires a \$10 entrance fee or the NPS Annual Pass. There are two sets of cliff dwellings, an Upper and a Lower. The Upper Cliffs require a guided tour that takes 3-4 hours and is available only from November to April.

I have met many people who take this to mean it is not worth visiting during the other times of the year. In fact, the Lower Cliff Dwellings and the Visitor Center are open year-round. The beautiful paved hike (0.5 miles) to the Lower Cliff Dwellings is still well worth the day trip. Roosevelt Lake at 33 square miles is the largest reservoir entirely within Arizona. After driving through the arid Superstitions, Roosevelt Lake hits your vision like a sparkling mirage. Roosevelt Lake has very limited access and virtually no beaches. It has rocky cliffs for shoreline and access is limited to a marina. Boating is really the only way to enjoy this body of water.

****Warning:** Due to the 2019 Woodbury Fire, the Lower Cliff Dwellings are closed for repair. Be sure to check on the [Tonto Cliff Dwellings National Monument website](#) for current updates. ******

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

Contributed by Janet Frost of Go Learn Things.

14. Take a Ride on the Verde Canyon Railroad



This is an easy trip from either Phoenix or Flagstaff and can be combined with a trip to Cottonwood, Jerome, or Tuzigoot National Monument. In fact, I recommend hitting Tuzigoot about 9 or 10 in the morning, spending 1-2 hours there, and then heading to the train. The train departs at 1 pm and takes you on a 4-hour journey through mostly untouched Verde Valley. The canyons aren't accessible by car so it's a great way to see wildlife like eagles and to catch the other flora and fauna along the river.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

Check out my post on my ride on the [Verde Canyon Railroad](#)

15. Tuzigoot National Monument and Dead Horse State Park



This is a beautifully preserved pueblo built by the ancient Sinagua peoples. At one time there were 110 rooms – an entire village! It was architected in the 12th century and sits on a ridge looking over the Verde River Valley. To get a great view of the monument from a distance, visit Deadhorse State Park and follow Flycatcher Road until the end and hike on the Marsch horse trail. The hike is beautiful and you will have amazing views. After your hike, have lunch in Cottonwood or Jerome!

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

16. Shop, Eat and get Spooked in Jerome



This former copper mining town in the Black Hills has a lot going on with numerous streets of preserved buildings transformed into shops, restaurants, wineries, and museums. There are hotels including one converted from an old mental hospital supposedly haunted along with a mine that is as well. This trip can be combined with a trip to Cottonwood, the Verde Valley train, or Tuzigoot.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

17. Visit Watson Lake and Whiskey Row in Prescott



Prescott became one of my favorite towns in Arizona before I was even officially a resident. Unlike Southern Arizona where I live, Prescott has distinct seasons and cooler weather, making it the perfect day trip from Phoenix. Only 100 miles and you can be in a totally different climate! Prescott is known as Arizona's Christmas City because they make a big deal out of the holiday season. The courthouse lighting is a huge event kicking off weeks of caroling and Christmas decorations around the town square. At other times of the year, there are also [fun things to do in Prescott AZ](#). There are some great lakes scattered around town, which offer excellent hiking trails. Watson Lake is the most popular, with the granite dells offering a unique landscape with hiking and paddling opportunities. Lynx Lake and Goldwater Lake are two other nice lakes near Prescott.

Prescott also has some interesting museums. The Smoki Museum is super intriguing and has many native artifacts and art on display. It's an eye-opening look at the history of Native Americans in Yavapai County. If you prefer art, the Phippen Museum has Western and Native American art on display and for sale. Prescott also has a great restaurant scene with lots of options. For an old-timey saloon experience on Whiskey Row, the Palace has pretty good food. Raven Cafe and the Barley Hound also have good food in a more modern atmosphere and Prescott Station is a good choice for more upscale dining.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

Contributed by Leigh Wilson of Campfires & Concierges, photo from Mr. Misadventures.

18. Check out the beautiful Red Rock Formations in Sedona



One of the best day trips to do from Phoenix is undoubtedly visiting the town of Sedona. Located about a 2-hour drive from Phoenix along the I-17 highway, there is plenty to keep you occupied if you are [spending one day in Sedona](#). You can also take a more scenic route up the 87 highway that allows you to enjoy a stop at Tonto Natural Bridge. A great way to start your day is by tackling one of the many hiking trails that exist in Sedona. There are trails to suit all levels of experience such as the popular Devil's Bridge Trail, **Slide Rock Park**, or the more challenging West Fork Trail that requires a number of river crossings. Alternatively, you can also hike to one of the many famous vortexes such as Cathedral Rock. After hiking, take the time to explore central Sedona where there are plenty of interesting new-age shops selling items like healing crystals as well as a number of artisan shops with great products. In the evening, make sure to take the time to enjoy the stunning Sedona sunsets from a place like the Airport Mesa Viewpoint. All in all, Sedona is one of the best day trips from Phoenix that truly has something for everybody to enjoy!

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours

Contributed by Michael Rozenblit of The World Was Here First, photo from Mr. Misadventures.

19. Drive Along the Red Rock Scenic Byway



The Red Rock Scenic Byway in Arizona makes a perfect day trip from Phoenix. This impressive byway begins as you head north on Arizona Highway 179 towards the town of Oak Creek and finishes just south of the new-age town of [Sedona](#). The short but incredibly scenic road travels 7.5 miles on the southwest edge of the Colorado Plateau winding through **Coconino National Forest**. It's a byway you'll want to stop and explore on foot as well as drive and there are many hiking and biking trails and famous Vortexes to discover within the iconic rust-red scenery. Cactus, yucca, and wildflowers grow throughout the landscape of towering red rocks and buttes and the creek at Oak Creek is a good place for a picnic and a cool down.

Highlights include Bell Rock, Cathedral Rock, and Chapel of the Holy Cross as well as hoodoos, canyons, and natural bridges in the rock. Bell Rock and Cathedral Rock are known for their vortexes and many people visit to meditate and soak up the energies. Regardless of your views on Vortexes, Red Rock Scenic Byway has some fabulous trails to discover. At some of the parking sites, you'll need to pay \$5 per car for a Red Rock Pass but there are free weekends throughout the year. Don't forget to take plenty of water, sunscreen and, of course, your camera.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours

Contributed by Suzanne Jones of The Travelbunny

20. Slide Rock State Park



Slide Rock State Park is centered around Oak Creek flowing through the park. As the name suggests it is one giant natural water slide that becomes an extremely popular destination in hot months. Half a mile of Oak Creek within the Park's boundaries is open for swimming and sliding. This place is continuously being voted one of the top 10 swimming holes in the country. You just need to exercise caution as the surface of the boulders in the creek is very slippery. However, [Slide Rock State Park](#) is not just for water fun. The area around the park is very beautiful with majestic red cliffs. There are a couple of short hiking trails in the area and it is a good location for wildlife encounters but I would say you have a better chance to see the wildlife in cold months when there are fewer people in the park. Trout fishing is also allowed up-stream from the sliding area. In addition to the above, a visit to Slide Rock is a trip down history lane. This area used to be a homestead with an apple orchard a century ago so you can see the historic homestead house, cabins, and antique agricultural equipment in the park. Apples are still grown in the park by Oak Creek Apple Company and you can get yourself some apples while in the park. Harvest Time festival is a great opportunity to visit the area.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

Contributed by Tatiana Sorokina of Family Road Trip Guru

21. Mogollon Rim



The Grand Canyon is amazing and a natural wonder of the world for a reason, but if you want to see stunning views across hundreds of miles of Arizona without the crowds, then you want to see Mogollon Rim. The Rim rising 2,000 feet from the desert floor to a pine forest is striking. It is often referred to as an escarpment which is just a fancy word for a cliff at the edge of a plateau and while this spot is the southern limit of the Colorado Plateau, it is so much more than that! There are expansive views for miles rising from between 4,000 to 5,000 feet in elevation at the base to as high as 8,000-foot at the edge. You can drive along the Rim Road and Forest Road 300 and look out into the blue sky for hundreds of miles to the south while taking in the intoxicating scent of forest pine. There is a paved Rim Vista Trail that winds about 2 miles along the edge of the rim which you can access the trail from the parking lot. There is lots of hiking, camping, and fishing in several small lakes on the Rim. The area is the home to large herds of elk and deer that can be seen on your drive.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

22. Take on Tucson



One of my favorite spots in the state! And a frequent day trip from Phoenix! I highly recommend a weekend here! You can spend the day visiting the city plus Tucson Mountain Park, Sonoran Desert Museum, Xavier Mission. A little further away (maybe better to do if you are staying the weekend) are Sabino Canyon, Mt. Lemmon, Titan Missile Museum, and Biosphere 2. I love the combination of cultures in Tucson – Sonoran, Mexican, Western, and a lot more – and I find that the people of Tucson are extremely open and friendly. It's a college town full of students and academics, but also military and missile and space. The city is a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, the first one in the US – so as you can imagine, the food scene is amazing!

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

More stories on Tucson:

- [Visit Tucson Arizona](#)
- [Things to do in Tucson](#)
- [More things to do in Tucson](#)
- Get your retro groove on at the [Downtown Clifton Hotel](#)
- Enjoy a luxury experience at [Hacienda del Sol](#)
- [Tucson staycation](#)

23. Prepare for Takeoff at the Pima Air & Space Museum



The best place to get your space and airplane geek on! Not only does the [Pima Air & Space Museum](#) have great exhibits and films but you can climb on, over and around planes! Real actual retired planes and spacecraft! There are over 300 aircraft spread out over 80 acres. The site is actually bigger, a total of 127 acres, the additional pieces are accessible by bus only but they let see an airplane boneyard and more military planes.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

More on my visit to the [Pima Air & Space Museum](#).

24. Tucson Mountain Park



Tucson Mountain Park is lot of things. It is a scenic byway where you have an opportunity to see the Sonoran desert, it is a park with hiking (the 6-mile Brown Mountain loop trail is a good one), biking (lots of mountain biking trails here), camping, fishing, horseback riding, even an archery range! But most people know it for Gates Pass one of the best spots for seeing the sunset in the Tucson area. People gather nightly to catch that orange glow and Mr. Misadventures and I have done it several times, whether it was from the parking lot or on top of the hill, it is magnificent. We have also picnicked many times in this park, there are several nice shaded picnic areas. The park covers 20,000 acres lots of it with saguaro given its proximity to Saguaro National Park.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

25. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum



This is another favorite of Mr. Misadventures and me, so much so that we became members on our first visit and we go back often. We love visiting this outdoor museum but we have also taken part in classes and excursions like a saguaro harvest with a Tohono O’odham family and a prickly pear harvest around the museum. I never tire of this park, there is something to see every season, we particularly love visiting the hummingbirds, taking in the raptor flight and the javelinas in the botanical gardens. My favorite time is in the falls when there are literally thousands of monarch butterflies migrating through the area. They have a restaurant on site that prepares dishes from locally-sourced and regional foods (if you take classes as we did, the lunch is usually catered from them and I have had the opportunity to taste really unique dishes with foraged ingredients).

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

26. Sabino Canyon Recreation Area



Photo credit: [Ned Harris](#)

Want an opportunity to see an owl in the wild? Sabino Canyon Recreation Area is one of the best spots to do that! Whether it is a burrowing owl (like the photo above) or a great horned owl, this park has quite a community of these creatures. There are quite a few feathered friends that make this area of ravines nestled into the Catalina Mountains home. It is a great spot for hiking, there are no vehicles allowed (except the tram which after being shut down for a while is back up and running) so you have to hike the 3+ miles in. You will feel like you are in a desert oasis given all the water and well, green, but you are most definitely still in the desert! If you visit in the spring you will see a wonderful collection of wildflowers, in the fall the waterfalls and swimming pools are flowing and brimming from the monsoon season. There are trails of all shapes and sizes.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

27. Titan Missile Museum



Photo credit: [cmh2315fl](#)

The space geek in you will enjoy a visit to the Titan Missile Museum, a former ICBM missile site outside of Tucson. You can tour the facility (note, make reservations online ahead of time, this is a very popular spot, we learned this the hard way!) and the missile silo along with getting a bit of history of what it was like to grow up or live in the U.S. during the cold war. My favorite part is imagining Star Trek's Jean-Luc Picard filming here for Star Trek: First Contact as the facility was used for scenes the first warp prototype, the Phoenix!

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

28. Biosphere 2



Photo credit: [Justin](#)

[Frisch](#)

If you are part of Generation X or earlier you might remember the 1991 news item about 8 people living in a biosphere for 2 years. I certainly do! People now make fun of it, and it supposedly was the predecessor to Big Brother, but I think it is fascinating. And you can actually visit Biosphere 2, a science research facility run by the University of Arizona. The 3-acre glass building and domes house 7 model ecosystems that are part of active research projects. Besides being a research facility it is open for tours in an effort to educate people about Earth sciences. The tour is a little over an hour (both indoor and outdoor) with about 150 steps, so probably not something you want to do in the heat of the summer, but a nice visit during the other seasons.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours.

29. Montezuma Well National Monument



Photo credit: [jb10okie](#)

Montezuma Well National Monument is different and separate from the Montezuma Castle National Monument (people often get them confused) and is a natural limestone sinkhole near the town of Rimrock. The area is so green because more than 1 million gallons of water flow through the well, its source still a mystery to scientists! It is an ecosystem in its own right there are species of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world (thankfully it is protected as a national monument). Given its verdant nature, there are tons of wildlife including migrating birds along with the local residents. To access the water there is a 1/2 mile loop trail from the parking lot. You will also see several stone cliff dwellings built by the Sinagua.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30 minutes.

30. Take an Iconic Photo at Devil's Bridge Trail



[The Devil's Bridge](#) has become one of the most iconic photo spots in Arizona. There are a couple of different trails to reach the bridge, but the most commonly used is the 3.6-mile return option which has an elevation gain of just over 100m. The trail itself is not the prettiest you'll find in the Sedona area, but it still has those red rock views and pretty forested sections that make this area special. The hike itself is easy and is mostly on a wide, flat dirt road (you can actually drive the majority of the trail if you have a 4×4 and can nab a space in the tiny car park) before you reach the final leg where you will start ascending. You will climb on a mixture of uphill slope and rugged stairs, but you are rewarded along the way with the start of some sensational views. Once you hit the top, you'll be greeted with the scene you've probably seen in hundreds of photos and it's every bit as amazing as you might imagine. Luckily the bridge is nowhere near as narrow as it looks in pictures so – unless you get vertigo – walking across it won't be anywhere near as terrifying as it looks! You're unlikely to have this spot to yourself, but everyone was great at allowing people to get their individual shots. Very early in the morning is the quietest time to visit.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 15 minutes

Contributed by Cat of Walk My World.

31. Pipe Organ National Monument



Pipe Organ National Monument is a great scenic drive from Phoenix. If you want to see classic Sonoran desert landscapes, take Highway 85. At this national monument, you'll see the unique cacti that gave the park its name by the hundreds here! Take a break [in Ajo](#) on your way in or out of the park.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 15-minutes.

32. Visit Flagstaff for the Day



There is so much to do in Flagstaff that I recommend at least a weekend but you can see some cool stuff in a day as well. It's generally much cooler in Flagstaff and we escape here often in the summer! Besides it's proximity to the Grand Canyon you've got **Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument**, **Wupatki National Monument**, **Lowell Observatory**, **Riordan Mansion**, and much, much more including Route 66! There are tons of festivals – food, art, music – going on throughout the year to check out for the day.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 20 minutes.

More stories on Flagstaff:

- [Things to do in Flagstaff](#)
- [7 things to do while visiting Flagstaff](#)
- Weekend adventures driving [Route 66 from Flagstaff to Oatman](#).

33. Walnut Canyon National Monument



Walnut Canyon National Monument is located near Flagstaff and is a two and a half-hour drive from Phoenix making it the perfect day trip from Phoenix. Walnut Canyon is probably one of the most underrated sites in Arizona. Not only is the canyon beautiful, but the history and culture of this area are very interesting to see. Walnut Canyon National Monument preserves some of the Native American culture's earliest history. The incredible [Native American ruins](#) are surprisingly intact and preserved. Along the trails in the canyon, you can see the cliff dwelling of the Sinagua people dating back to around 1200 AD. The most popular hike here is the one mile Island Trail but be warned it is steep in some places and start off going up 250 stairs. There is also an easy .7 mile hike called the Rim Trail.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Contributed by Nicole LaBarge of Travelgal Nicole, photo provided by me.

34. Spelunk at Kartchner Caverns State Park



Image credit:

Wikipedia

Kartchner Caverns is a fun day trip from Phoenix with the most amazing discovery story ever. In 1974, Gary Tenen and Randy Tufts discovered Kartchner Caverns and kept it secret for nearly two decades. Finally, they arranged to sell it to the state so its beauty could be protected for generations to come. The state did their job too. There's an elaborate entry tunnel and air circulation system, so the cave remains unchanged after becoming public. The cave offers two tours, the Throne Room Tour featuring Kubla Khan, the largest column formation in Arizona. Some purists don't link the synchronized sound and light show in the throne room, but I thought it was pretty cool. This tour is available year-round. The Big Room Tour is only available mid-October through mid-April because the passage is closed for migratory bats. This tour has colorful formations and a little more narration.

The Whetstones are home to another tourist cave — sort of. The Sonora Desert Museum cave is modeled after another secret cave somewhere in the mountains. Who knows if this one will ever become public. There are a small campground at Kartchner and some short hikes too, but the real attraction is the cave. The park is just a little south of Benson off I-10. Cave tours are \$23.00 / person.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30-minutes.

Contributed by Ed Coleman of [Coleman Concierge](#)

35. Hiking the Catalina Mountains



Photo credit: [Scott Hudson](#)

You might not know this about Tucson, but there's a ski resort high in the mountains above town. If you have a high clearance vehicle, you can climb up the backside through the village of Oracle. The more traditional route is up the paved road heading up from Tucson. Once you reach the top, there a fantastic little loop hike out Aspen Trail and Marshal Gulch. It's a 4.4-mile loop through the cool pine trees that leaves you plenty of time to get cookies or pie in Summerhaven.

The mountain tops also create one of nature's wonders, water flowing through the desert. There are two main hikes with water in Tucson, Sabino Canyon, and [Romero Pools](#). Technically, both Sabino Canyon and Bear Canyon have water in them and are part of the Sabino Canyon Park. Hiking Bear Canyon to Seven Falls is actually a much nicer trail because Sabino Canyon has the tramway that runs the entire length of the stream. It's an 8-mile hike with 500' of elevation gain, but you can take the tram and cut half the distance off.

Romero Pools is a 6-mile out and back with a little more elevation gain (900') and less water, but you'll also have a lot fewer people too. What's more, the trail goes through the natural desert the entire way instead of hiking alongside the tram road. Also, the trailhead is about 1/2 hour closer to Phoenix since it leaves out of Catalina State Park. Hiking Tucson can be every bit as lush and green as heading north, with a lot better restaurants to eat in when you get back to your car.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30-minutes.

Contributed by Ed Coleman of Coleman Concierge

36. Sonoita



Photo credit: [Alan Schmierer](#)

Sonoita is known for 2 things: amazing birding and delicious wine. You can go winetasting in Cottonwood, but if you like to taste your wine at the source, Sonoita is where you want to be! They also produce hops for beer! This wine region has been active for a little over 40 years with ranches and farms going back generations to the 1830s, a lot of them converted to lodging or wineries these days. The soil composition is similar to that of Burgundy, France. This little area has more than 10 wineries producing really good wine. We have had the opportunity to try several at local Phoenix festivals and restaurants. Besides wine, there are other interesting things to do including visiting the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area where you can see Empire Ranch historical buildings and landscape (something I was completely unfamiliar with) and the Sonoita Creek-Patagonia area which is a birding mecca.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30-minutes.

37. Catch the Heber Horses



Before I moved to the Phoenix area I was completely unaware there were still wild horses in the U.S. When I first moved to here, Mr. Misadventures and I happened upon the documentary, [Unbranded](#) about 4 friends who take wild mustangs on a 3,000-mile journey through from Mexico to Canada. When we moved to Phoenix we learned about the wild Salt River horses in the area and have sought them out there a few times (along with many adventures to see the wild burros) but I only recently became aware of another family of wild horses called Heber Horses which live in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests near the White Mountains. They are currently protected by several federal and state laws, but there is a debate on what the environmental impact is on land management issues, including competition for food with cattle and other animals. For now, they are still protected and absolutely stunning, worth a trip to seek them out.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 30-minutes.

38. Kitt Peak National Observatory



Because of its Southern location, Arizona has more astronomical observatories than any other state. And lucky for you there are several open to the public including Kitt Peak. In fact, Kitt Peak has the largest accumulation of telescope in the world, 24 in all! They offer 2 or 3 different tours a day (depending on the day) and they are well worth the trip up the Quinlan Mountains. It is on Tohono O'odham Nation land and is an active site where professional astronomers work. Besides the tours, they have a nighttime program that you can experience along with astrophotography weekends. If you don't do any of the tours you can still do a self-guided walk on the campus. There are picnic areas as well.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 40-minutes.

39. Meteor Crater Natural Landmark



You can add this to a trip to Flagstaff or the Petrified Forest National Park. The crater was formed when an asteroid hit the Earth 50,000 years ago. It's also where some of the Apollo astronauts trained for moon landings. Inside the building are a museum and theater. Outside, if the wind isn't blowing like a hurricane you can do a guided rim tour which is pretty cool.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 45 minutes.

40. Fill up on Wild West History in Tombstone



All the Western greats can be found in Tombstone! Wyatt Earp and “Doc” Holliday became household names in this town. The rough and tumble O.K. Corral, Bird Cage Theatre, and lots of western paraphernalia is so fun to see and experience! Check out a western shootout, the court museum and have lunch (and a whiskey!) at Big Nose Kate’s Saloon. Plus you can’t miss spotting cowboys and criminals with some pretty strange names at Boothill Cemetery.

Distance from Phoenix: 2 hours and 45-minutes.

41. Sunset Crater National Monument



Sunset Crater National Monument is a 3,000-acre park of lava fields, cinder deposits, and archaeological ruins, oh, and the youngest of the Colorado Plateau volcanoes! Sunset and a few other craters are just one part of the San Francisco volcanic field in the San Francisco Peak Mountains. The lava flows and cinder rocks are frozen in time with layers of greens and flowers covering many parts and pieces, it is a bit surreal to think that things this beautiful can grow on lava! There are several trails you can walk to see some of the lava flows including some leading to caverns. You can drive through the park, there are even offroad trails (you need a 4×4) and lots of picnic areas under the trees – Mr. Misadventures and I often stop here for a quick lunch on road trips further north.

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours.

42. Wupatki National Monument



As you exit the ponderosa highlands of Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument and start driving into the Painted Desert you will find Wupatki National Monument and its beautifully preserved Anasazi and Sinagua ruins. This ancestral Puebloan site cover 5 sites spread out amongst the prairies. These mysterious but brilliant people are the ancestors of the Hopi and Zuni people and lived amid red rocks trading and farming. The monument is quite beautiful to see at sunset.

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours.

43. Mount Lemmon



This is a favorite escape for many Tucson residents, cool in the summer and skiing in the winter, but it is still within reach as a day trip from Phoenix. I particularly love it in the fall, not only for the autumn leaf-changing (late October) but also for the Monarch butterfly migration – they are thousands of them in September! There are lots of hiking trails and campgrounds (book early!) and a little ski town with hotel and restaurant, but the real beauty is the drive into the Santa Catalina Mountains and into the Coronado National Forest. Its elevation is 8,000 and is considered a dark sky site (there is also an observatory at the top that you can visit during very obscure times). On the weekends it is a popular spot for biking – I personally think you have to be a little crazy to bike up a mountain and then coast down at crazy speeds, but if you are into that you will not be alone! NO matter what you choose to do on Mount Lemmon (named after the first woman to climb it) it will be an enjoyable day! (Pro tip: do not speed on this road, there is a super vigilant police officer who actually lives on the mountain who is very dedicated to making sure you obey the speed laws.)

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours.

44. Experience some California Gold Rush Arizona-style in Yuma



Yuma is located in the southwestern corner of Arizona, just a few miles from the California-Arizona state line. Anyone who lives in San Diego or Phoenix knows [Yuma](#) as a halfway point between the two cities. Yuma is a city with an interesting past and was a true wild west town of cowboys, brothels, gambling, and gunfights during the California Gold Rush. Start in historic downtown where you'll find Lutes Casino, which is now a restaurant, but where gambling took place from 1912 to 1920. Today they are famous for their funky decor and potato tacos. Visit Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park during your time in Yuma. It was actually built by its first prisoners and opened in 1876. It is now a museum and free to tour. The Confluence of the Colorado and Gila Rivers happens in Yuma, which makes for great tubing! If you visit from late spring to early fall, a float down the Colorado River is a must. These are just a few of the things you can do in Yuma. Trust me, it's worth a visit!

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours

Contributed by Alexa Meisler of 52 Perfect Days

45. Visit the Quirky Mining Town of Bisbee



Bisbee is a mining town located in the Mule Mountains. (You didn't realize there are so many mountains in Arizona, right?) You can check out the town's museum and exhibits to learn about its copper-and-silver-mining past. While visiting retro downtown you'll notice a lot of "Lowell" signs along Erie Street. Lowell was incorporated into Bisbee in the early 1900s. There are a lot of vintage cars and a cute gas station, fun for photos, it's very Americana! The town considers itself a "free-spirited place," people come for the thriving arts/music scene and the up-and-coming hospitality with dining, lodging, and even cute Airbnbs.

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours.

Day Trips between 3 and 4 hours from Phoenix

46. Castle Dome Mines Museum and Ghost Town



Next to Yuma Proving Ground and within Kofa National Wildlife Refuge is a piece of Arizona history. The [Castle Dome Mines Museum and Ghost Town](#) is a unique destination that gives visitors a taste of life in the 1800s. Named for a prominent rock formation, Castle Dome City had been the site of the longest-running mines in Arizona. In its heyday, it was bigger than Yuma, with a population of more than 3,000 people. With about 300 mines, for a short time, there was plenty of work for everyone. There are two parts to the museum: Castle Dome City and the Mining District. All told, there is about fifty buildings total, and there is so much memorabilia that the only thing missing is the miners, shopkeepers, and families. There are both original buildings and recreations, and the artifacts are authentic, although they may not have been found on-site. There's a hotel, a saloon, blacksmith and machine shops, a schoolhouse, an assay shop, and more. Since some of the mines were open until 1979, there's even a 50s-era diner and a 1960 trailer. In the mining district, you can see some of the old Spanish mines, dug centuries before the settlers arrived.

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours and 15-minutes.

Contributed by Theresa L. Goodrich of The Local Tourist.

47. Petrified Forest National Park



This national park could part of a weekend trip to Flagstaff or a solo trip. You'll find amazing petrified wood and rocks in awesome shapes and sizes and colors, some of them are truly unbelievable, look and touch but don't take! There are nice easy walks and hikes at all levels and a historic piece of Route 66 runs through. Also, stop in at **Winslow** for some Eagles memories and a peek inside La Posada hotel, they've got great coffee!

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours and 30-minutes.

Check out my post on my visit to [Petrified Forest National Park](#).

48. Chiricahua National Monument



Mr. Misadventures loves his rock formations and Chiricahua National Monument is known as the “Wonderland of Rocks” and “Land of Standing Up Rocks” because there are rocks on tops of rocks on top of rocks, a photographer’s dream! There are pristine monolithic rocks including Totem Pole, the Mushroom, and Big Balanced Rock. It also has 17-miles of day-use hiking trails beside the 8-mile scenic drive. It is a bit out of the way but that only means you have unspoiled views and tons of wildlife like javelinas, wild turkey, deer, and maybe if you are lucky the elusive coatimundi. There is a unique ecosystem here as the park sits at the intersection of the Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts, and the southern Rocky Mountains and the northern Sierra Madres in Mexico. If you are interested in learning more about pioneer life, there is a homestead, the Faraway Ranch, that offers daily tours of the house. There are campgrounds there and picnic tables as well.

Distance from Phoenix: 3 hours and 30-minutes.

49. Drive Route 66 and See the Burros in Oatman



There are some great pieces of Route 66 accessible as a day trip from Phoenix, but one of my favorites is Oatman. It's a historic mining town in the Black Mountains (some curvy roads to get there!). The unique thing about this town is its sense of humor. They have an annual Oatman Sidewalk Egg Frying Contest where you guessed it is so hot they fry eggs! And the other quirky thing is its burros. These prized but onery citizens are sons and daughters of the original inhabitants working mules that hauled loads from the mines. They hang around town you can feed them and photograph them as you visit the town. The town is inhabited and the locals are friendly.

Distance from Phoenix: 4 hours. **Distance from Flagstaff:** 1 hour and 45 minutes.

More stories along Route 66

- Check out my post on [Oatman](#), we have been a few times.
- [Petrified Forest National Park](#) has historic sections of Route 66.
- Route 66 culture in [Flagstaff](#).

50. Grand Canyon National Park



Arizona's main attraction and likely something you want to see in more than just a day but it absolutely can be done in a single day trip from Phoenix, it may be a long day but you can do it! You can hike, bike, camp, and picnic or have a meal at the lodge. For longer visits, you can take the train from Williams, stay in the lodge, river raft and do longer hiking excursions. The Grand Canyon is one of the seven natural wonders of the world and worth checking off the list. [For a longer trip with fewer people, think about visiting [the North Rim](#), it is pretty spectacular as well.]

Distance from Phoenix: 4 hours.

51. Coal Mine Canyon



Photo

credit: [foam](#)

Coal Mine Canyon is located in the Painted Desert outside of Tuba City. It's very remote dirt-road location means you will have the stunning rock formations – hoodoos and spires all to yourself. There are no real signs that point the way, you need to have directions and know where you are going. Since it sits within the Navajo Nation, you will need to get a permit before visiting the canyon (although I think the vast majority of people don't do this). You can get one off of the [Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation website](#) or at the Visitor's Center in Cameron. You can also hike down as long as you [book a tour with a Hopi Guide](#) (the site sits on the Navajo/Hopi border). The colors are phenomenal oranges, reds, and black from the coal – a lot of people attribute the colors and formations to Bryce Canyon. This spot has not been seen or experienced by very many people and is well worth the adventure to seek it out.

Distance from Phoenix: 4 hours.

52. Page – Gateway to Recreation



One of the best places to visit near Phoenix, Arizona, is the beautiful city of [Page](#). This town is filled with incredible landscape views such as **Lower and Upper Antelope Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, and Lake Powell**. One of the most asked questions when it comes to visiting this region is if they should experience either Upper Antelope Canyon or Lower Antelope Canyon. I feel like everyone should experience both. Both canyons are different when it comes to shapes and lighting. Upper Antelope Canyon is narrow at the top while wider at the bottom, while Lower Antelope Canyon is wider at the top and narrow at the bottom. This provides two wonderfully different experiences. Another great area to explore is the world-famous horseshoe bend. People all over the world come to Page Arizona just to get a glimpse of this canyon. The trail is 1.3 miles round trip with an elevation gain of 200 feet. The path is extremely easy and is very crowded. But luckily the area to view Horseshoe Bend is vast, so you won't feel like it is too crowded. A great way to enjoy this area is to watch either the sunrise or the sunset.

Distance from Phoenix: 4 hours

Contributed by Michelle Stelly of The Wandering Queen, photo provided by me.

53. Get Your Cowboy on at Arizona Rodeos



Rodeos are [a year-round activity in Arizona](#). Depending on the time of year you are in Phoenix, you can catch a number of truly entertaining, tried and true cowboy (and girl!) rodeos nearby or as a day trip. Catch the oldest in Prescott in June or the other oldest in Payson in May. Or Tucson in February or Scottsdale in March. Wild West fun for everyone!