



Top 10 Must-Have Experiences in Scottsdale

Posted January 8, 2016 by [Scott Josephson](#) & filed under [Travel](#) .

The Grand Canyon State is home to more than just gorgeous scenery. A short drive from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Scottsdale is a bastion of affluence, luxury and culture. Its vibrant arts scene, myriad of outdoor activities, and innumerable opportunities for serenity make it an extremely desirable destination for your next getaway. Don't miss these 10 experiences to make the most of your desert escape.

1. [Hot Air Expeditions](#)

Soar high above the Superstition Mountains in a colorful balloon on an unforgettable journey through the sky. Hot Air Expeditions provides sunrise and sunset* rides that carry you and an intimate group of fellow explorers across calming breezes with captivating views of sweeping landscapes. The gentle, hour-long ride is commanded by a skilled captain and a team of professionals who ensure your safety and enjoyment. Back on the ground, sip champagne and share a gourmet picnic in the desert, a classy tradition dating back to 18th Century France. *Price: \$199. Includes hotel transfers. *Sunset flights available November to March.*

2. [Hiking Camelback Mountain](#)

Get your boots on and prepare for an intense ascent to the pinnacle of two trails favored by locals and visitors alike. Prickly pear, pincushion, and hedgehog cacti and palo verde trees line your arduous pathway; once you reach the summit, incredible sweeping views of the Valley and bragging rights make it worth the sweaty challenge. Echo Canyon Trail (1.23 miles, 1,280 feet) is the more popular and demanding, with steep grades and pure reliance on large rocks; novice hikers should allot a round-trip time of 90 minutes to 3 hours. Cholla Trail (1.42 miles, 1,300 feet) is a traditional hike until the last ½

mile, where you'll get a taste of the rigors of Echo Canyon. Begin early to avoid the midday sun and to snag a good parking spot. Whichever path you choose, bring plenty of water, snacks, a hat, and an appetite for adventure.



Photo Credit: © iStock/BCFC

[3. Dinner at Elements at Sanctuary on Camelback Resort](#)

Delight your palate with innovative, Asian-influenced cuisine, curated by Food Network Chef Beau MacMillan at the Sanctuary on Camelback Resort. Overlooking Paradise Valley, Camelback Resort is just ten minutes from downtown Scottsdale. Indulge your senses in spicy blistered shishito peppers, savory Maine lobster udon and creamy truffle mac and cheese. An extensive wine list contains local and global varietals, which your expert server can suggest to pair perfectly with your selections. Time your meal to coincide with the majestic Southwestern sunset, then grab an after dinner aperitif at Jade Bar's outdoor fireplace, set to a soundtrack of live jazz.



Photo Credit: Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort and Spa

[4. Musical Instrument Museum \(MIM\)](#)

Music-lovers of all ages rejoice! Span the globe while donning a headset that activates as you approach installations highlighting the impact of the universal language on every world culture. Listen, learn, and gaze upon sitars, flugelhorn and gongs alongside vibrant costumes that educate and inspire. Stand inches away from the piano where John Lennon composed “Imagine.” Get up close with Elvis Presley’s guitar as it accompanies one of his trademark, flashy jumpsuits. An interactive space speaks to the child in all of us, encouraging you to touch, play, and join visitors in creating a symphony (or delightful cacophony) of sounds. *Price: \$20 for adults; \$15 for teens; \$10 for children 4-12. Free for children 3 and under. Open every day, including Christmas and New Year’s Day.*

[5. Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art \(SMoCA\)](#)

Stimulate your mind in SMoCA’s enthralling galleries. Stare into the calming, rainbow reflections of carefully placed compact discs, set to a soundtrack of flowing water, in Bruce Munro’s *Ferryman’s Crossing* (part of his larger [Desert Radiance](#) series across the Valley). Immerse yourself in a fluid, future Martian panorama, littered with the defunct relics of overzealous scientific exploration, imagined in Kelly Richardson’s *Mariner 9* (the masterpiece of her *Tales on the Horizon* exhibition). *Price: \$7 for adults; \$5 for students. Free for ages 15 and under. Free admission: Thursdays and after 5 PM Fridays and Saturdays. Closed Mondays and major holidays.*

6. [Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West](#)

No visit to Arizona is complete without celebrating the spirit of the 19 states that compose the American West. This magnificent 43,000 square foot facility, which opened in January 2015, is dedicated to preserving the artistic, cultural, and historical contributions of the West's inhabitants. Exhibitions include *Inspirational Journey: The Story of Lewis & Clark* – the first Americans to traverse the nation to chronicle its geography and geology – and *Confluence of Cultures in the American West*, recognizing the pivotal roles played by Native Americans, cowboys, and buffalo. Check out the gift shop for authentic mementos of this evocative and courageous land. *Price: \$13 for adults; \$11 for Seniors and active military; \$8 for students and ages 6-17. Free for children 5 and under. Closed Mondays and most holidays.*

7. [Old Town Scottsdale](#)

The charming Old Town section of Downtown Scottsdale maintains its eponymous character as “The West's Most Western Town,” with a modern twist. Pedestrian friendly streets are home to souvenir shops, jewelry stores, and international cuisine ranging from Mexican and Thai to Indian. Get your literature fix at [The Poisoned Pen](#), the local bookseller with an impressive collection of first editions and frequent author events. Main Street and Marshall Way are permeated with galleries that participate in the [Scottsdale ArtWalk](#) every Thursday night. Stop for a drink at [Rusty Spur Saloon](#); Scottsdale's last watering hole is a throwback to the Wild West with its swinging doors, whimsical bar stools, and a cowboy onstage belting out popular classic rock and country tunes.



Photo Credit: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

8. [Desert Botanical Garden](#)

Discover the beauty of this temperate ecosystem with its bountiful collection of cacti, agave and other fascinating arid climate fauna. Five loop trails within Papago Park wind through 140 acres of plant life native to the Sonoran Desert and from around the world, including Australia, South America and Baja California. Visit after sunset for cooler temperatures and to witness the magnificence of the *Bruce Munro: Sonoran Light** exhibit (a focal point of his *Desert Radiance* series): eight large-scale installations that illuminate the evening in a fiber-optic cornucopia of fluorescent color that rise as proudly as the mighty Saguaro cactus. Price: \$22 for adults; \$20 for seniors (60+); \$12 for students and ages 13-18; \$10 for children 3-12. Free for children 3 and under. Open daily. *Sonoran Light requires a separate ticket, or is included with an All-Day Pass.



Photo Credit: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

9. [Taliesin West](#)

World-renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright built and established his winter home and studio in the magical McDowell Mountains, 20 minutes north of downtown. This landmark engineering marvel remains an active school of architecture and serves as a stunning monument to Wright's elegant and precise design principles. Join the Insights Tour, where a knowledgeable guide will escort you through the property, which is as much a museum as it is a spectacular oasis with its sparkling pools and angular, Cherokee red rooftops. Take a seat in an armchair in Wright's parlor to be regaled with tales of this giant's career and final years in Arizona. *Price: \$32 advance purchase; \$36 onsite.*



Photo Credit: Boulders Resort & Spa

10. Spa at The Boulders

Rejuvenate with a signature treatment specific to your individual relaxation needs at the Spa at The Boulders, located in Carefree. Whether you crave the full-body, warm stone massage of the Journey of the Sacred Circle – The East or a Golden Shaman treatment, focusing on ancient and traditional healing methods, you will revel in delight at your renewal. Meditation spaces include the labyrinth and shamanic tipi overlooking colossal stones that have graced this region for millions of years. Spa packages feature your own private outdoor whirlpool, fireplace, steam shower and a hearty and health-conscious lunch at the Spa Cafe.

Enjoy your time in sunny and scintillating Scottsdale!