

Arizona, Southern Style

Tucson and Southern Arizona

Tucson, Sierra Vista, Bisbee, and Tombstone and Benson

Southern Arizona has it all: wildlife, history, arts and culture, food, shopping and a chance to experience the “Old West.” This itinerary will take you to some of Southern Arizona’s most-prized treasures.

DAY ONE Your tour starts in Tucson, two hours south of Phoenix on I-10. Your first stop will be the 49-acre Tohono Chul Park, located just off the intersection of Ina and Oracle Roads, where you will discover the lush beauty of the Sonoran Desert! This park is listed by National Geographic Traveler as one of the top 22 Secret Gardens in the U.S. and Canada. Stop at the gift shop and enjoy food and refreshment in the Tea Room. Groups of 10 or more can enjoy the “Taste of the Sonoran Desert Native Foods” meal, which features prickly pear and cholla cacti. Next, drive through Saguaro National Park West, just fifteen miles west of downtown Tucson. Take in the breathtaking view of thousands of saguaros, the giants of the desert. Continue your experience with a tour of the park and have lunch at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. This museum contains naturalistic enclosures for desert denizens such as mountain lions, bighorn sheep, and coyotes. For a good night’s sleep, stay at one of Tucson’s many guest ranches.

DAY TWO While in Tucson, take a narrated tram tour through the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, which features the most photographic desert scenery in the Tucson area. Next visit the De Grazia Gallery in the Sun, a unique adobe construction with beautiful decorative features. The gallery showcases the unique Southwest art of famed artist Ted De Grazia, known as an “artist for the people.” Have lunch and shop at La Encantada, an upscale, outdoor specialty shopping center. In the afternoon, take a downtown walking tour of El Presidio Historic District, a wonderful way to stroll through Tucson’s lively past. As Tucson’s first neighborhood, this area - listed on the National Register of Historic Places - contains a charming variety of architectural and landscape styles that reflect Tucson’s successive cultures. This district includes the area that once was the Spanish walled fort, called The Royal Presidio San Agustin del Tucson. Most buildings date from 1860 to 1920. If you have a group of 20 or more, enjoy the “Cooking Sonoran” presentation for dinner at El Charro downtown. During this delicious meal, you will learn the history of the cuisine and its importance to the Mexican culture. Overnight in Tucson.

DAY THREE From Tucson, head south on I-10, then travel south on AZ 90 to Sierra Vista (1:40). Catch up on your Arizona military history at Fort Huachuca, home to the 92nd and 93rd all African American Infantry divisions known as the Buffalo Soldiers during World War II. Visit both the Fort Huachuca Historical Museum and Military Museum and stay for a picnic lunch. In the afternoon visit the Ramsey Canyon Preserve for great bird watching. See up to 14 species of humming birds - the Magnificent, Blue-throated and White-eared, to name a few. For dinner go to Casa de San Pedro and take a light cooking class with chef Lark Beaugureau. Overnight in Sierra Vista.

DAY FOUR From Sierra Vista head south along AZ 90 to AZ 80 South to Bisbee (:30), a mile-high city located in the Mule Mountains of Southern Arizona. Get a feel for this mining town by taking the Queen Mine Tour, where you'll venture underground to experience the daily life of a miner. Have lunch at Dot's Diner in the Shady Dell where personality is the daily special (closed in June and July). This afternoon, discover the Bisbee Mining Museum, a Smithsonian affiliate that was once the corporate headquarters of the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company. Bisbee's storied past is recorded, reflected and retold in this museum like no other. Also enjoy Bisbee's many art galleries and eclectic shops. Stay and dine at Arizona's oldest continuously running hotel, the Copper Queen Hotel. Don't forget to visit Brewery Gulch, an area once known for its notorious saloons and brothels, which offers a variety of restaurants and bars. Overnight in Sierra Vista or Bisbee.

DAY FIVE: If you stay in Bisbee, make sure to have breakfast at the Bisbee Breakfast Club, recently featured in Gourmet Magazine, and where they say "Making your food is our pleasure and making your day is our goal". The menu offers signature fare that won't break the bank and you won't go away hungry. From Bisbee or Sierra Vista, drive nearby to Tombstone (:40). Spend the day in this place known as "the town too tough to die." There is no better place to get a glimpse of the true old West than Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park. Today, the old County Courthouse is a museum filled with the glitter and the guns of those who tamed the territory. The structure houses exhibits about Tombstone's past glory days as a frontier silver mining boomtown and a replica gallows can be found in the courtyard. In the afternoon grab a bite to eat in town, and take a walking tour of the Boot Hill Graveyard and the Bird Cage Theatre, both historic landmarks of the old West. See the reenactment of the gunfight at the OK Corral. Dance the night away at the Crystal Palace Saloon and stay overnight in Tombstone or back in Sierra Vista.

DAY SIX: Today, drive to Benson, located on I-10 and just 30 minutes north of Sierra Vista. Benson was founded in 1880, when the trans-continental Southern Pacific Railroad came through Southern Arizona. Benson was the region's railroad hub until 1910. Not far from Benson, you can visit the adobe ruins of the Butterfield Stage Coach Depot, which was once a busy mercantile and rest area for cross-country travelers. While Benson's past is preserved in its historic downtown and replicated train depot, today it's best known as the home of Kartchner Caverns State Park. You will want to lunch in Benson before traveling to the caverns for a guided cave tour (reservations recommended 520-586-2283). The caverns are approximately 9 miles south of I-10. Discovered in the 1970s, this near-pristine "wet" cave (meaning the calcite formations are still growing) is a wonderland of a variety of colorful formations and home to bats and other cave creatures. It is one of the great natural wonders of the western United States. On the guided tour you will experience an underground delight of stunning variety of multicolored cave formations. Save time to tour the visitor center, a movie and the gift shop. Continue your way back to Tucson and enjoy the rest of this rising metropolis.