

Greater Phoenix and Central Arizona (The Valley of the Sun)

Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mesa, Tempe, and Chandler

Greater Phoenix is the fifth largest metropolitan area in the United States, encompassing over twenty communities. This itinerary will take you through the largest cultural and entertainment Mecca's of the Phoenix area, most commonly referred to as the "The Valley of the Sun". You will experience history, art, architecture and great food, all while taking in the beautiful Southwest landscape and relaxed lifestyle.

Because all of these communities are part of one major metropolitan area, you may base your travel in any of these cities. Your travel time will not exceed more than 30-45 minutes, in many cases much less. The times indicated below are based on drive time from the Central Phoenix area.

DAY ONE:

Start your tour in **Downtown Phoenix**. Soak up Phoenix's history and attractions by taking a city tour. After the tour head over to the Bentley Projects, once a linen laundry warehouse dating back to 1918, this transformed warehouse now displays world class contemporary paintings, photography, sculpture, and prints. Continue your cultural journey with lunch and a tour of the Heard Museum with its impressive displays of Native American Art and history. Enjoy a casual dinner at the famous Pizzeria Bianco, a "Must Enjoy Before you Die" foodie destination. Open from September thru July, this culinary delight is unique to Phoenix and a part of the slow food movement. So sit back and wait for your wood-fired pizza and taste what the New York Times said "might be the best pizza in America."(Reservations for groups of 6 -10)

DAY TWO:

Spend the day in Scottsdale (:30). Scottsdale is home to Taliesin West, once Frank Lloyd Wright's winter home. Take the guided tour of this renowned architect's desert masterpiece, now the main campus for the School of Architecture. Next, venture to Scottsdale's newest entertainment Mecca, the Scottsdale Waterfront, located on the newly developed Arizona Canal in "Old Town." SouthBridge, the Waterfront's newest area for shopping and dining, features independent retailers and restaurants that offer eclectic wares and fares. Enjoy lunch at METRO which is known for its lighter fare so you can easily grab and go and not miss a shopping beat. In the evening, dine at Upstairs at Estate House with its outdoor patio and sweeping views of spectacular Camelback Mountain.

DAY THREE:

Go to the middle of it all in Tempe (:20). In the morning, take a tour of Gammage Auditorium (call for reservations). This structure, built by Frank Lloyd Wright, resembles a tiered birthday cake and was originally intended to be the royal opera house in Baghdad. The Arizona State University campus is the proud home of this beautiful venue, which hosts world-class concerts and Broadway musicals. While on campus, make time to visit the ASU Art Museum, considered to be one of the Southwest's most significant contemporary art institutions – and it's free. This afternoon, visit the Desert Botanical Garden, a beautiful respite in the middle of the city and one of the world's finest collections of desert flora. This evening get to Mill Avenue to dance, take in the arts, or just people watch.

DAY FOUR:

Spend the day in Chandler (:30). Chandler, where ostrich ranching was once a prominent part of life, celebrates its history at the annual Ostrich Festival in March, a must see event. Along the way, visit the Zelma Basha Salmeri Gallery of Western American and Native American Art. Next go for a walking tour of Historic Downtown Chandler (self-guided) where you will discover a variety of museums, galleries and historical sites. Lunch at one of the many award-winning, locally-owned restaurants. Try El Zocalo Mexican Grille where you will enjoy the lush and secluded patio oasis. In the evening catch a drama or concert performance at the Chandler Center for the Arts. Then dine at Sushi Eye in Motion. Stay overnight at Crowne Plaza San Marcos Golf Resort, an Arizona landmark since 1912 and the first golf resort in Arizona.

DAY FIVE:

Get a taste of Arizona's colorful mining history at Goldfield Ghost Town at the Superstition Mountains (:45). Have lunch at the Mammoth Saloon, pan for gold, take a narrow gauge train ride and witness an old west gun fight. Enjoy a walk down Main Street in downtown Mesa where you can go antiquing, eat dinner at a sidewalk café or enjoy shopping at local boutiques. Your day will be complete when you visit the Arizona Museum of Natural History. Here you will learn about the Indian culture and natural history of the valley from the old west to the space age and from the dinosaurs to the conquistadors.