

Old Tucson Studios - Arizona's Hollywood in the Desert

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For most Tucsonans, the Old Tucson Studios are a staple of the city's history and a huge tourist attraction for most visitors. Located on 201 S. Kinney Rd., guests of the Wild West-themed attraction should note that the studio's 70-year-old production history is still in working order.



History states that back in 1939, Columbia Pictures chose the Pima County-owned site to build a replica-version of an 1860's Tucson town for the movie "Arizona". With permission, laborers and descendants of the Tohono O'odham—Arizona's first inhabitants formerly known as the Papago—constructed 50 buildings in 40 days. After the film was wrapped, the land was left barren until the 1945 production of "The Bells of St. Mary's" starring Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman. That film recaptured Tinsel Town's attention, rejuvenating Old Tucson studios and coining it Arizona's "Hollywood in the Desert". From that point forward, the studio produced 300 of the best Westerns ever filmed.

As time progressed, so did the Old Tucson Studios. Decades after it first opened, the studio broadened its production to include television filming. For example, Old Tucson Studios filmed the dramatic 1974 television series, "Little House on the Prairie" starring Michael Landon and Melissa Gilbert.



Nearly 20 years later, on April 25, 1995 a fire ravaged much of the Old Tucson studios. With no access to the area's 25,000-gallon water reserve, water had to be trucked in from 40 miles away. In an attempt to prevent an explosion, an onset storage facility housing liquid propane and gunpowder took much of the water. In fact, so much water was used that it led to excessive water damage in surrounding areas. After four hours of battling the blaze, the fire was finally extinguished. The devastation ensued 25 set buildings, the sound stage and all original wardrobe from "Little House on the Prairie." Final estimates put the damage at \$10 million. After 20 months of reconstruction Old Tucson Studios reopened, with new buildings, wider streets and no sound stage. To this day there is no explanation for the fires, only the suspicion of arson.

As of now, the Old Tucson Studios entertain production companies from around the world shooting movies, commercials, music videos and print advertisements, in addition to hosting several themed parties. Today, you can visit the Old Tucson Studios and walk the same walk legendary Hollywood A-listers like Clint Eastwood and John Wayne once did.