

Top 10 Best Things to do in Tucson

Written by David Bowers



Here are the top 10 best things to do in Tucson with something for everybody including the furry & non-furry children.



Everybody in the Valley needs to get away. Although the metropolitan Phoenix area has some of the most exciting and eclectic events happening round the clock, our little sister city 90 miles southeast of us is turning into quite the destination for Phoenicians seeking a change of scenery without breaking the bank.

The first thing that you need to decide is if you are coming down for a day trip or looking to stay the weekend. Two places for lodging immediately jump to the forefront each with their own special qualities; it all depends on who is accompanying you on this getaway.

Hotel Congress

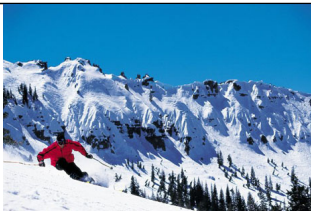
First on our list for top things to do in Tucson is for those traveling without children and looking for the historic yet hip and trendy feel of downtown Tucson. The Hotel Congress is the place where the 'in' crowd goes to see and be seen. Built in 1919, the Hotel Congress stands across the street from the Southern Pacific Railroad Line to serve the passengers coming into Tucson. The hotel is most famous for leading to the capture of John Dillinger in 1934, the original "Public Enemy #1."

The hotel boasts a gorgeous lobby, 3 bars serving signature cocktails and a bartender that has been there for 50+ years. The rooms haven't changed much over the past century with no TVs and only an old-time radio. A quaint café offers an incredible Sunday brunch with an outdoor patio. The hotel and patio are pet-friendly so bring Spike or Tabby along with you. It is also home to one of the city's best venues for live music & dancing. Club Congress is an intimate venue that has been labeled as one the Best Rock Clubs in America. The Entertainment Director is the former lead singer of Tucson's favorite bands The Sand Rubies & The Sidewinders so he knows A LOT about the music scene. www.hotelcongress.com

Westin La Paloma

If this is a family trip, Tucson has you covered here as well. The Westin La Paloma resort nestled in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains is a haven for adults and children alike, and it's no wonder why they made the top 10 for things to do in Tucson. There is 27-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course with awards from Golfweek, Golf Digest & Condé Nast. The Red Door Spa focuses on a holistic approach to work on your mind & body with 16 private rooms as 2 outdoor cabanas for that return to nature feel.

I haven't forgotten about the little ones either, in fact, that is what ranks this hotel & resort above the others in the city. La Paloma has five different pools; the main pool has a swim-up bar, a kids pool, a secluded adults only pool and the Southwest's largest water slide, the Slidewinder that twists and turns for 177 ft. In addition to all that, there is a Kids Club with arts & crafts & a litany of other kid-centric activities to keep them occupied while you explore the area. www.westinlapalomaresort.com



Now that you are settled in to your hotel, it is time to go out and discover all that Tucson and its gorgeous surroundings has to offer. With an elevation of more than twice that of the metropolitan Phoenix area, the temperatures tend to be on average 5-7 degrees cooler making the outdoor adventures just a little more bearable.

Mt. Lemmon

Coming in at number three of top 10 things to do in Tucson; just a short hour's drive northeast of Tucson lies the playground for Tucsonans looking to cool off. At 8,200 feet in elevation, Summerhaven is truly a breath of fresh air. The village atop the mountain is aptly named with the high temperatures rarely, if ever reaching into the 80s.

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A couple restaurants and a general store service the local residents and winter visitors coming to the Ski Valley, the southernmost ski destination in the continental United States. Several cabins are available for rent and I personally spent my bachelor party weekend up there and we were snowed in the entire weekend, a great getaway from the hustle & bustle of the city. www.skithelennon.com

Pima Air and Space Museum/AMARG

One of the most awe-inspiring things I have seen is on the southern fringe of Tucson, which goes on and on and—well—you get the idea. The 309 Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG) is a storage facility at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base that “mothballs” planes to store indefinitely or to salvage them later for parts.

With over 4,400 aircraft and aerospace vehicles from all branches of the U.S. military and federal agencies such as NASA, this vast collection provides the country with a savings account from which the military can use as they see fit, and it flies into the fourth spot on Tucson’s top 10 things to see. Bus tours are given Monday – Friday from 9am to 4pm and the cost for touring the Boneyard is \$7 each. The Pima Air & Space Museum is one of the largest museums of its kind in the world which consists of five separate hangars, a Museum, a WWII Barracks, a Space Gallery and much, much more. www.pimaair.org

San Xavier del Bac

Staying on the south side of the city is the next best thing to see in Tucson. On the road to Mexico is a National Historic Landmark; *The White Dove of the Desert* stands out majestically among the desert landscape and serves as a beacon to the Catholic Church. The mission was founded in 1692 by Father Eusebio Kino, yet the current building wasn’t built until 1797 when the mission was still part of New Spain.

The church is open to the public from 7am to 5pm daily and there is no admission charge to visit the mission. There is a museum on the premises that explains the rich history of the mission with artifacts dating back to the 18th century. Masses are still held every day as well three services on Sunday. www.sanxaviermission.org



After a long day of sightseeing and exploring the great outdoors in southeastern Arizona, it is now time to head back to the hotel, clean up and get ready for Tucson’s offering of food, wine & FUN. With the University of Arizona so close to downtown Tucson, the 4th Avenue district of college bars and eateries is connected to the hipster downtown locale. In the northern part of the city are upscale areas for those looking for a more refined atmosphere. I have selected one restaurant from both areas as they are both tops in the city.

Maynard's Market and Kitchen

Situated at the historic train depot of Tucson is Maynard’s Market & Kitchen, an Über-hip eatery that has garnered several accolades including the cover of Arizona Highways Best Restaurants for 2012. You can choose the dark & intimate seclusion of the 30-seat restaurant or enjoy your meal on the back plaza with the rumble of locomotives against the panoramic backdrop of the Santa Catalina Mountains.

The Market is chock full of local foods & groceries such as Café Luce coffee, Tucson Tamales & specialty hot sauces. There is a vast wine selection sure to please any wine lover with local Arizona wineries represented. The craft beer selection is second to none and offers many local brewers such as Four Peaks & San Tan Breweries. Fresh soups, pizza & Cuban sandwiches are made daily as well as several grab & go sandwiches. There is a large community table inside the market to hold meetings or smaller tables on the front patio to enjoy the wonderful Arizona day, perfect for the top ten list of things to do in Tucson. www.maynardsmarket.com

The Grill at Hacienda del Sol

For the oenophile or wine enthusiast, The Grill at the Hacienda del Sol Resort has been listed in Wine Spectator’s “Best of” issue for 15 years running and has twice been conferred the *Award of Ultimate Distinction* from Wine Enthusiast, so it’s no wonder it would make the top ten list of things to do in Tucson. No other restaurant or wine bar in Arizona has received that distinction, let alone twice, so if wine is what you are looking for, you cannot do any better than the 2,000 labels and 10,000 bottles in The Grill’s wine cellar.

The Sunday Brunch at The Grill has been chosen year in and year out as the best brunch in Tucson with every food imaginable including omelet, waffle & carving stations with prime rib, ham & duck to name a few. No Sunday brunch would be complete without champagne and The Grill knows how to pamper its guests with complimentary glasses of the bubbly beverage to make your day complete.

Now that you have enjoyed some of Southern Arizona’s more delectable dishes, it is time to find a bar, but not just any bar, you want to check out what makes Tucson special. It seems that every city is becoming more homogenized with chain restaurants and sports bars that shill the same food and beer that everybody does because the corporate mentality is to quell any originality in the fear of offending the prospective guests’ delicate senses. This bar is the farthest from a corporate bar and does its best to be as non-PC as possible. www.haciendadelisol.com

The Buffet Bar & Crock

The Buffet Bar & Crock Pot or the “Buff” as it is affectionately known is Tucson’s oldest bar that originally opened as a buffet for the Arizona railroad workers. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, the Buffet began serving alcohol and became a hit. This classic dive bar just east of the

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4th Avenue college district and north of downtown is the epitome of what a dive bar should be, and is must-see for Tucson goers. The Buffet is the nation's largest retailer of Coors products with only Coors original & Blue Moon on tap.

The jukebox is packed with classic oldies, the pool table only costs a quarter and the shuffleboard is free! If you are wondering about the Crock Pot in the name, it is because they boil hot dogs in beer all day long in the crock pot and serve 'em up on steamed bun for only \$2. Esquire magazine named the Buffet Bar & Crock Pot the "Best Bar in America" in 2011 and I wholeheartedly agree with them as the colorful clientele & dark, cool atmosphere makes me want to return time and again. www.thebuffetbar.com



Rounding out my Top Ten Tucson Must See & Do are seasonal events, please check to make sure that you are coming during the right time of the year to enjoy these limited time pleasures. Sporting events are unique in that they pull members from all walks of society to make a cross-generational, multi-racial and all around interesting mélange of people.

Accenture Match Play Golf, The Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain

Every February, the best in the world of golf descend upon the Ritz-Carlton Dove Mountain in Marana, approximately 30 minutes north of downtown Tucson. The top 64 golfers according to Official World Golf Rankings are invited to the tournament and are matched in a single elimination tournament resembling the NCAA Basketball tournament except that all matches take place on the same course. This is *the* social event of the year and Tucsonans swarm the event for its specialized format. For weeks heading into the tournament, the entire metropolitan area buzzes with golf fever, so it's only fitting it would be among the top 10 things to do in Tucson.

Unlike other regular golf events, golfers are matched and only the remaining 2 golfers vie for the Championship trophy on Sunday. Because of this format and limited golfers, the final day of the tournament is "Follow the Leaders" day where the general public can walk the course and literally follow the leaders through the final hole of the Championship to get the authentic feel that no other tournament can offer. www.pgatour.com

Tucson Padres Baseball

There is nothing in the world like Minor League Baseball; the wacky promotions, the ability to see past & future baseball stars and the family atmosphere that can be enjoyed without the exorbitant costs associated with Major League Baseball. From April to September, the boys of summer take the field at the Kino Sports Complex south of the city and put on a great show regardless if they win or lose.

The Triple-A affiliate of the San Diego Padres baseball club, the Tucson Padres are a member of the 16-team Pacific Coast League including affiliates of the Diamondbacks, Dodgers & Giants. The promotions are what make this a must do. Ranging from "Thirsty Thursdays" which offers \$1.50 beers to the infamous bat nights (which will never be held in conjunction with Thirsty Thursdays again) to Military Appreciation & "Bark in the Park" wherein all active duty & veterans receive free admission and you can even bring your dog for a \$5 donation to the Humane Society and enjoy time in park with your furry friends and family.

This is not an exhaustive list of things to do and see yet only my observations since moving down to Tucson from the Valley five years ago. Be sure to keep an eye out for future Top Ten Tucson articles as I go in-depth looking at all that this fair region has to offer. www.milb.com