

7 Stops in 12 Hours in Old Town Scottsdale

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By Anne Bokma | June 2, 2016

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Photo: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

The modern marvel of residential air conditioning transformed the arid desert landscape of Scottsdale, [Arizona](#), into a pleasure-seeker's paradise of pools, spas and golf courses beginning in the mid-50s. Today, luxury resorts outnumber dude ranches and culinary delights are more plentiful than cattle drives in this city of 220,000 just outside the state [capital of Phoenix](#). But a definite Old West vibe prevails — especially in the pedestrian-friendly Old Town district where you can fit in these 7 stops over the course of a day.



Cowboy couture at Western Spirit. Photo: Anne Bokma

1. Explore the History of the Old West

10 a.m. Learn the lore of cowboys, outlaws, native leaders and frontier explorers at the recently opened [Western Spirit: Scottsdale's Museum of the West](#), which celebrates the art and stories of the 19 states comprising the American West. (This Canuck got a enlightening education on the exploits of American legends such as General Custer, Geronimo, Crazy Horse and Lewis and Clark.) The museum also showcases an impressive collection of cowboy couture, including saddles, spurs and sheriff's badges.



The Hotel Valley Ho is home to the VH Spa. Photo: Hotel Valley Ho

2. Spas Reign Supreme

11:30 a.m. Scottsdale qualifies as one of the spa capitals of the world so it would be practically sacrilegious to skip on pampering during your stay. The Helsinki nature treatment at the funky [VH Spa](#) in the iconic [Hotel Valley Ho](#) promises to "envelop you in a mist of cloud milk" during "a wild harvested Arctic berry wrap followed by a warm birch wood massage." (Yes, it's as good as it sounds.) After you slide off the massage table, check out the rest of this hotel, once a historic Hollywood hideaway for celebs such as Bing Crosby, Tony Curtis, and Zsa Zsa Gabor.



An inventive take on greens at FnB. Photo: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

3. Where It's a Thrill to Eat Your Veggies

1 p.m. Charleen Badman, the James Beard-nominated chef at [FnB](#) (short for "Food and Beverage") has been dubbed "the vegetable whisperer" for her singular talent of coaxing out-of-this-world flavours from seasonal produce supplied by local farmers. Her inventive veggie dishes, including heirloom cauliflower adobo with spring onion salsa and hakurei turnips with piri piri and peanuts, will convert anyone who turns up their nose at wholesome greens. FnB has also won raves for curating the first Arizona-only wine list.



Say howdy partner at the Rusty Spur saloon. Photo: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

4. Discover Downtown Delights

2:30 p.m. Old Town's streets are filled with art galleries, historic landmarks, restaurants and bars (including the popular [Rusty Spur Saloon](#)) and lots of Old West-themed boutiques where you can shop for

southwestern gear. Splurge on pair of classic custom ostrich cowboy boots from [Saba's, Arizona's Original Western Store](#), which dates back to 1927 when customers rode up on horses.



Sundae delight at the Sugar Bowl. Photo by Anne Bokma

5. A Sweet Treat

3:30 p.m. Pop into the 1950s-era [Sugar Bowl](#) ice cream parlour for an ice cream soda, sundae, shake or split when the Arizona heat begins to peak. Cartoonist Bil Keane of Family Circus fame lived near here and frequently incorporated the shop in his homespun strip.



The Saguaro's swank pool. Photo: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau

6. Keep Your Cool By the Pool

4:30 p.m. Late afternoon is the time to get out of the sun (temperatures range from 30-40 °C between May and October). This is when the streets get quiet enough to hear the whisper of drifting tumbleweed. Fortunately, Scottsdale offers more than 130 pools at 70 resorts and hotels. At the mod [Saguaro](#), named

after the area's massive tree-like cactus species (it's pronounced "suh-war-oh" and out-of-towners are easily identified when they say it wrong), the screaming bright orange, pink, lime and purple colour scheme reflects the rich tones of the native wildflowers found in the Sonoran Desert. Don your shades, stretch out on a lounge, order a drink from the poolside bar and rest up before your evening out.



Start the night off right with cocktails at Second Story. Photo: Anne Bokma

7. Love the Nightlife

7:30 p.m. Don't buy the stereotype that this is a town of golf-shirted retirees who head to bed early when the sun goes down. The streets positively hum with nightlife — often your first clue that the action has begun is the emergence of a party bike, a pedal-powered vehicle that seats 14 and takes merry bands of imbibers on pub-crawls. The abundance of restaurants, nightclubs and bars is one of the reasons *The New York Times* has described Scottsdale as one of the "hippest and most happening" places in the country. And WalletHub has named it one of the best cities for dating. At the [Second Story Liquor Bar](#) you can ensure you've adequately stirred from your afternoon slumbers with a drink called the Corpse Reviver (gin, Cointreau, Crème de Violette and lemon juice) before heading to [The Mission](#), the city's most popular spot for gourmet Mexican and Latin American fare. (A menu must is the 12-ingredient guacamole prepared with flourish at your tableside.) Before calling it a night, pop into the [Kazimierz World Wine Bar](#) (also known as the Kashmere or Kazbar) where you'll find live jazz and Latin music once you find your way in — speakeasy style — through the back entrance. With no front door, it's literally a hidden jewel.

Doesn't this amazing experience make you want to [search for a flight](#) to Scottsdale, Arizona right away?

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