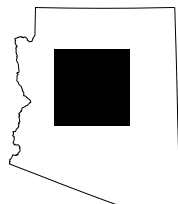


# Central Arizona



The rum-rum-rumble of Harleys is as emblematic of central Arizona these days as red rocks, cowboys and prickly pears. Not that we mind the distraction. Sputtering motorcycles are audible confirmation that this mountainous landscape is ready-made for windblown, on-the-road adventuring. Much of the region, which stretches north from Phoenix to Flagstaff, lies on the Colorado Plateau. I-17 slices through the heart of it, rising steadily from the flat lushness of the Verde Valley to the breezy pines outside Flagstaff. A handful of byways roll west to wonderful Hwy 89 – a scenic route through mineral-filled mountains that drops travelers at the doorstep of glad-to-see-ya dude ranches, stylish art galleries, ancient limestone dwellings, creekside wineries and energy-exuding vortices, with a final breathtaking spin through the steep, narrow walls of Oak Creek Canyon.

The main hub, Flagstaff, is a lively and delightful college town and gateway to the Grand Canyon South Rim. It's a nice place to rest up (or party down), enjoy a good meal and squeeze in a little museumgoing or stargazing before heading north to the Big Ditch.

Summer, spring and fall are the best times to visit. Just be aware that low-lying towns near Phoenix, like Wickenburg, can get pretty toasty in summer.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### ■ Best Place to Stroll into the Past

Wander the ramshackle ruins of the **Vulture Mine** (p107) in the saguaro-dotted outskirts of Wickenburg

### ■ Most Convenient Spot to Commune with Nature

Enjoy sweeping views from the flat summit of the **Yavapai Loop Trail** (p123) on Airport Mesa near downtown Sedona

### ■ Most Historic Block for a Pub Crawl

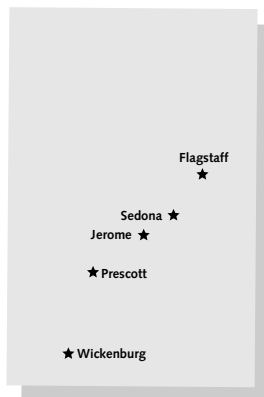
Push through swinging doors, stare at stuffed birds or rock out like a cowboy on **Whiskey Row** (p110) in Prescott

### ■ Biggest Supernatural Thrill

Ride the possibly malevolent elevator during the **ghost tour** (boxed text p117) at the Jerome Grand Hotel in Jerome

### ■ Best City Street for Chilling Out

Enjoy two bars, a scruffy coffee shop, one hostel, a tasty breakfast, passing trains and Fratelli's 'round the block in **Beaver St**, Flagstaff (p130)



## PHOENIX TO FLAGSTAFF ALONG I-17

You can make the trip between Phoenix and Flagstaff in just over two hours if you put the pedal to the metal on I-17 freeway, a straight 145-mile shot. Fast? Yes. Scenic? Sorta, but it bypasses the nicest pockets this region has to offer. Still, there are a few worthwhile sights to make you ease off the pedal if you pick this route.

(Note that most of this chapter is structured to follow the longer but more rewarding route from Phoenix to Flagstaff via Hwys 89/89A, which follows a sight-packed old stagecoach route for about 200 miles.)

### Rock Springs Café

Who says you can't start a road trip with dessert? In fact, we say a slice of apple-crumble pie from **Rock Springs Café** (☎ 623-374-5794; 35769 S Old Black Cyn Hwy; www.rockspringscafe.com; slice of pie \$4, mains \$6-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is an I-17 requirement. Only problem? This Old West eatery, off exit 242, will drive you crazy with choices – blueberry, rhubarb, banana cream – all sitting pretty in a cooler by the dining room. Heartier grub includes burgers, steaks and fried catfish. The attached Farmers Market sells produce, hot sauce, beef jerky and cactus arrangements. On the first Saturday of the month, roll in for **Hogs'n Heat** (☺ 1-11pm) when the barbecue smokers fire up out back. This party draws Harley riders and, well, everybody within sniffin' distance.

### Arcosanti

Two miles east of I-17 exit 262 (Cordes Junction; 65 miles north of Phoenix), **Arcosanti** (☎ 928-632-7135; www.arcosanti.org; suggested donation for tours \$10; ☺ tours 10am-4pm) is an architectural experiment in urban living that's been a work in progress since 1970. The brainchild of groundbreaking architect and urban-planner Paolo Soleri, it is based on Soleri's concept of 'arcology,' which seeks to create communities in harmony with their natural surroundings. Other goals include minimizing the use of energy, raw materials and land, and reducing waste and environmental pollution. Radical when conceived in the 1960s, Soleri's ideas now seem on the cutting edge in this age of urban sprawl and global warming. If and when it is finished, Arcosanti will be a self-sufficient village for 5000 people.

Hour-long tours explore the site and provide background about the project's history

and design philosophy. A gift shop sells the famous bronze bells cast at the foundry in Cosanti (p89), near Phoenix. **Overnight accommodations** (s/d from \$30/40), 11 basic rooms with big-windowed views of the desert, are available, but they book out well in advance. The cheapest have a shared bathroom. Groups can reserve the two-bedroom Sky Suite (\$100) with kitchenette, patio and sunset views from on high. There's a **café** (mains \$5-9) on-site. Also on offer are week- and month-long seminars, concerts and other events.

### Camp Verde & Fort Verde State Historic Park

Camp Verde was founded in 1865 as a farming settlement only to be co-opted soon after by the US Army, which built a fort here to prevent Indian raids on Anglo settlers. Tonto Apache chief Chalipun surrendered here in April 1873. Today, the town's **Fort Verde State Historic Park** (☎ 928-567-3275; www.azstateparks.gov; 125 E Hollamon St; adult/under 14yr \$4/2; ☺ 9am-5pm Thu-Mon) offers an authentic snapshot of frontier life in the late 19th century. Exploring the well-preserved fort, you'll see the officers' and doctors' quarters, the parade grounds and displays about military life and the Indian Wars. Staff occasionally dress up in period costume for living-history tours. To get here, take exit 287 off I-17, drive east on Hwy 260, turn left at Finnie Flat Rd and left again at Hollamon St.

Among the handful of motels in town, the ho-hum **Comfort Inn** (☎ 928-567-9000; www.comfortinn.com; 903 Goswik Way; r incl breakfast \$99; ☑ ☺ ☻) is the most conveniently located off I-17 and allows pets for \$15 per night. Low-key RVers traveling without children may enjoy the shaded, creekside **Zane Grey RV Park** (☎ 928-567-4320; www.zanegreyrvpark.com; 4500 E Hwy 260; RV sites \$38; ☑ ☻) east of town on Hwy 260. For a wider selection of accommodations, follow Hwy 160 16 miles west to Cottonwood (p118).

### Out of Africa Wildlife Park

Take a walk on the wild side at this **animal park** (☎ 928-567-2840; www.outofafricapark.com; 4020 N Cherry Rd; adult/3-12yr/senior \$36/20/34; ☺ 9:30am-5pm, last admission 4pm), an odd if entertaining mix of zoo, circus and theme park. All in all, more than 400 formerly wild animals make their home here. Arizona residents enjoy a slight discount; ask your hotel about packages. Take I-17 exit 287 and drive 3 miles west on Hwy