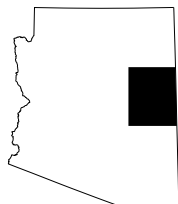


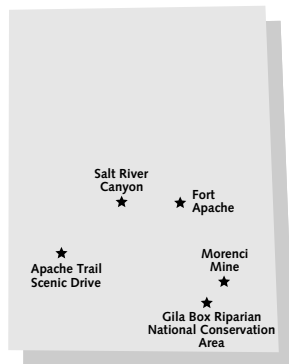
# Eastern Arizona & Rim Country



From vast stands of ponderosa pine to saguaro-studded Sonoran Desert, from low-lying lava fields to grassy alpine meadows, the midsection of Eastern Arizona has some of the most varied landscapes in the state. While a few of the sights here are rightly world-famous, including the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest National Park, there are quite a few lesser-known gems, like those outside the town of Safford. The hilly geological break between the high desert of northeastern Arizona and the low desert of southeastern Arizona, called the Mogollon Rim, and the adjoining White Mountains, are abundant with wildlife but aren't as scenically impressive as the mountain ranges in other western states. Nonetheless, they're a popular destination for Phoenix residents who come to hunt and fish, ski in winter and escape from the summertime heat. The topography along the Apache Trail Scenic Drive, however, is eye-popping, as the road wends above the Salt River Canyon between two burly wilderness areas. If you prefer your nature slightly tamed, Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park features an incredible medley of desert flora growing along short, easy-to-stroll trails, just a quick trip from Phoenix. And maybe while exploring the area you'll chance upon the legendary Lost Dutchman Mine.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Best Outdoor Activity**  
Plunge through the rapids and float over the flats on a multiday rafting trip through the **Salt River Canyon** (p231).
- **Best Guilty Pleasure**  
Gape in awe at the gaping **Morenci Mine** (p228), North America's largest open-pit mine.
- **Best Near-death Experience**  
Look out – fear of plummeting over a precipitous unpaved switchback is the only thing that enables you to peel your eyes from the geological drama along the **Apache Trail Scenic Drive** (p232).
- **Best 'Aha' Moment**  
Get a better understanding of why some Native American tribes proudly allied with the US Army against other Indians at the museum at **Fort Apache** (p225).
- **Best Least-known Spot**  
Escape from the barren volcanic desert into the cottonwood-shaded canyons at the **Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area** (p229).



# I-40 (ROUTE 66) TO NEW MEXICO

From Flagstaff east to the New Mexico line, the most dominant scenic feature often seems to be the Burlington Northern–Santa Fe Railway freights that run alongside the interstate. But there are some iconic Route 66 sites along here, and a few spots that will surprise you just off the road.

## METEOR CRATER

The woolly mammoths and ground sloths slouching around northern Arizona 50,000 years ago must have had quite a nasty surprise when a fiery meteor crashed into their

neighborhood, blasting a hole some 550ft deep and nearly a mile across. Today the privately owned **crater** (☎ 928-289-5898; www.meteorcrater.com; adult/child/senior \$15/8/14; 🕒 7am–7pm Jun–mid-Sep, 8am–5pm mid-Sep–May) is a major tourist attraction with exhibits about meteorites, crater geology and the Apollo astronauts who used its lunarlike surface to train for their moon missions. You're not allowed to go down into the crater, but guided one-hour rim walking tours depart hourly from 9:15am to 2:15pm (free with admission). Don't get too excited: it's really just a big hole in the ground. The crater is about 6 miles off I-40 exit 233, 35 miles east of Flagstaff and 20 miles west of Winslow. There's also a year-round **campground** (☎ 928-289-4002; tent/RV site \$28/30) with

