

7 TUCSON Temptations

by Connie Naylor

Tucson's clear desert skies, staggering mountain views and bone-warming climate are enough to monopolize any visitor's attention. It's easy to wile away a stay in this historic city by simply reveling in its natural attributes or basking in the metro scene. (Tucson's urban atmosphere blends a Mexican-American vibe, the University of Arizona's academic culture and a cowboy mystique.) Tempting as it may be to spend all of one's days ambling along Fourth Avenue's trippy shops and galleries or visiting the retailers and restaurants in the upscale northern environs, savvy tourists will make time to enjoy these quintessential Tucson experiences.



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

1. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum: It's a zoo! It's an art institute! It's a botanical garden! But, wait. There's more! It's a natural history museum, too. This one-stop bastion of local data and lore makes learning about the desert's peculiar flora, fauna and culture a fun-filled experience for all ages. This is the best place to quickly gain information and insight into Tucson's fascinating landscape and encounter desert denizens such as mountain lions in a safe, natural environment. The museum's calendar is chock-a-block with special programs and exhibits making it a great place to spend a day no matter the temperature or time of year.



2. Sunset: The end of a Tucson day is typically cause for pause. The desert light plays with mountainous horizons to create a breathtaking spectacle. One of the best vantage points is the parking lot at Gates Pass. Go west on Speedway Boulevard until it turns into Gates Pass Road. You'll see a bevy of cars and bicycles congregating just before sundown. Bring a camera.

3. DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun: Artist Ted DeGrazia's talent took him from the rugged Arizona mining camp where he was born to international celebrity status. Throughout a long, and varied career, DeGrazia found inspiration in Tucson. Best known for creating the iconic UNICEF card *Los Ninos*, DeGrazia was a local icon in life and continues to be a boon to the Tucson arts scene after his 1982 death. His home, workspace



Late Tucson artist DeGrazia in 1960 with *Los Ninos*, a best-selling UNICEF card

ARTIST AND MISSION: COURTESY OF THE DEGRAZIA FOUNDATION

and chapel now comprise this museum. The facility preserves DeGrazia's fascinating life story as well as his artwork. The permanent collection includes more than 1,500 works by the man whose abilities stretched across genres and media. Exhibits change throughout the year. Repeat visits are always warranted, especially considering there's no admission charge!



DeGrazia Mission interior

4. The Sonoran Hotdog: This ultimate man-food is unique to the Tucson area and should be consumed at least once in every carnivore's life. Think frankfurter with South of the Border flair. The wiener gets grilled, then wrapped in bacon and topped with everything typically piled on a plate of nachos—tomatoes, cheese, onions, pinto beans, peppers, salsa, chili sauce—plus mustard, ketchup and mayo. Sold on street corners all over town.

5. Old Tucson Studios: Tucson, the site of a 17th-century Spanish fort, possesses a rich history under the flags of Mexico, Spain and eventually the United States. You can learn more bona fide facts about Tucson by following the Presidio Walking Tour downtown.

For a day of historic make-believe, visit the Old Tucson Studios. Constructed in 1938 for the movie *Arizona*, starring William Holden, the sets were used in dozens of movies starring big names such as John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. It became primarily a tourist attraction in the 1960s. Today mock gunfights, a pseudo-Wild West ambience and old-time rides and games make for a slightly cornball good time.



Room box on display at the Museum of Miniatures

6. Mini-Time Machine—A Museum of Miniatures: Expect to be amazed at the size, scope and craftsmanship represented in these collections and the 15,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility that houses them. Ariel, the Museum's resident fairy, guides guests on an intriguing journey through time and place. The 160 or so miniature houses and room boxes are grouped into three areas. The Enchanted Realm presents fantastic scenes—snow globes, Christmas villages, fairy castles and other bits of whimsy. The Exploring the World Gallery displays miniatures from across the globe. The History Gallery offers insight into the evolution of miniatures and includes one of the nation's oldest representations. It was built around 1775. History fans, architecture buffs, children and the young-at-heart will all be impressed by this magical experience.

7. The Stars at Night: If Tucson's starshine seems especially vivid credit the city's anti-light pollution ordinance. Watching the night sky unfold has long been a favorite desert pastime. The nation's largest collection of research telescopes are at work at Kitt Peak National Observatory in the Quinlan Mountains 55 miles southwest of Tucson. Mount Lemmon Sky Center is 45 miles to the northeast of the city. Both facilities conduct nightly observing programs that require reservations. This is a chance for the average-Joe tourist to experience cutting-edge astronomy first hand. Both experiences include basic instruction introducing participants to the heavens and individual telescope time. Galaxies, planets and moons are all observed. Kitt Peak's programs are held every night of the week except during Tucson's rainy season, July 15 - September 1. Mount Lemmon operates throughout the year. Both programs are extremely popular. It's a good idea to call at least two weeks in advance to reserve a spot. If heading to Kitt Peak, ask when Chuck Dugan is teaching. His energetic instruction adds extra luster to the experience. ■

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