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Most non-Arizonans are surprised to learn that Phoenix is the fifth largest city in the United States, behind only New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston. It is fair to wonder how such a massive and growing settlement emerged in a dry, sun-drenched valley near the northern strips of the Sonoran Desert. Once you get to Phoenix, you start to understand why. The city of Phoenix is located near the geographic center of a vast metropolitan area known as the Valley of the Sun , more densely populated cities. Whether you're planning a visit to Phoenix, adjacent valley communities or nearby wilderness areas, you've come to the right place. What's so special about Phoenix? It's More Than Dry Heat One thing most people know (or think they know) about the Phoenix area is that it's very, very hot for much of the year. They're not wrong. I'll talk a lot about climate and climate safety (especially in the desert) in the Logistics Considerations section below. For now, I'm going to say this: I visited the Valley during the hottest part of the year (summer) and it was fine. You'll also be fine if you drink plenty of water, avoid excessive effort during the middle of the day, and learn to love air conditioning. And you'll have a lot less to worry about if you visit during the winter, when highs usually rescal in the 60s and 70s, and nights can be frankly cold. Funny. Surrounded by mountains and just a day's drive from some of Lower 48's most iconic natural landmarks, Phoenix is a perfect base for a long outdoor adventure vacation. It is also the gateway to one of North America's most fascinating and least understood cultural corridors, at least to outsiders. In the Historic Places and Attractions section below, I will allude to the region's rich human history, spanning several pre-Columbian millennia. Some of the most important signifiers of that era, such as ancient towns and cliff dwellings, are located in remote sections of Arizona and New Mexico, a few hours' drive from Phoenix, and are not fully addressed here. If you are interested in southwestern indigenous prehistory, I would recommend booking several days for a drive through the mountain ranges north and east of Phoenix. Like any major metropolitan area, the Valley has a large selection of accommodations, from budget motels along the I-17 corridor to five-star resorts dotting the thriving northeast quadrant of the Valley. The short-term rental scene is fantastic here too, with private rooms in Airbnb homes ranging for as little as \$20 to \$30 per night during the off-season. As I strive to be as inclusive as possible here, this it is designed for people who are unwilling or able to spend \$500 or more per night on frontline resort excavations. The attractions and activities I've included reflect that. Ready to plan your visit to Phoenix and the Valley of the Sun? Here's what you need to know to get the most out of your trip and keep more of your vacation money earned so carefully in your wallet, where it belongs. Save money with discounts, offers and resources by West Coast standards, the Valley of the Sun is very affordable. If you visit during the summer, when tourist crowds run out, you're likely to list deals on flights, hotels, rental cars and incidental expenses such as entrance to attractions and restaurant meals. And these useful resources can further reduce your out-of-pocket expenses while in town, or, for a reasonable fee, drastically simplify and improve the logistical challenges of sightseeing in an unknown location. Visit Phoenix Visit Phoenix is the largest official tourism reinforcement in the Valley. It's a must-see to the region, even if you're not planning to stay within the city limits of Phoenix. One of the most useful features of Visit Phoenix is the Trip Ideas portal, which organizes four-day itineraries around popular topics: iconic Southwest, outdoor adventure, day trips, etc. Cross-reference these ideas with the attractions and points of interest described in this guide to build a personalized itinerary that calls your name. Visit Phoenix also has a comprehensive calendar of events, a huge list of hotels and resorts in the area, an extensive restaurant guide suitable for all budgets and tastes, and valuable resources for travel planners. It also has a lot of limited-time, seasonal and semi-permanent offers and discounts with select hospitality and entertainment partners. Before you finish your itinerary, check them to make sure you're getting the best possible deal at your hotel or high-entry event. Please note that Visit Phoenix advocates for the interests of its partners, so it is not a completely neutral or complete compensation center for Valley tourists. Do not act on your recommendations without first checking other resources, such as travel review websites and discount booking portals. Pogo Pass The Valley doesn't have many multi-attraction pass options – no CityPASS card or Smart Destinations available here. Pogo Pass, which offers regional passes in other parts of the South and Southwest as well, is the legitimate lone player I could find. It's a good deal: For about \$50 per person, you get 12 months of entry-free access to some of the Valley's top attractions. Best include: Phoenix Zoo Arizona Diamondbacks games (MLB) Phoenix Mercury games I.d.e.a. Museum Stratum Laser Tag and Family Entertainment Center Enchanted Island Amusement Park Arizona Zipline Adventures I describes some of these attractions in more detail below. Phoenix Rising Tours Phoenix Rising Tours is phoenix's travel company. It's the most profitable to explore Phoenix's central neighborhoods with an expert guide who has spent years marinating in the history and culture of the area. You can choose between tram (\$29 for non-Arizona residents), bicycle (\$25) and walking tours (\$35). The bike tour, which focuses on the vibrant street art scene of downtown Phoenix, is particularly popular when the weather cooperates. The walking tour features coffee samples from some of Arizona's top suppliers. Yelp Isn't exactly breaking news that Yelp is useful for hungry travelers looking for fast, tasty and affordable meals. That said, it really served me well in the phoenix expansion, where traversing neighborhoods in search of hidden gemstones on foot is impractical at best. When I landed, I landed restaurants near all the attractions I planned to visit and added the cheapest and best valued notes document to a hastily created note document on my phone. This simple step probably added an hour of useful time to my visit and significantly reduced my mileage. Google Maps' Explore feature, which includes reviews and star ratings, is also useful. If saving money is your top priority, use Groupon's geolocation feature to find limited-time social offerings near you. Historic Sites and Attractions In 1900, when San Francisco was already a thriving metropolis and Seattle a booming gold rush port, Phoenix was a dusty two-bit cow town ruled out by outsiders as isolated and uninhabitable. But the fact that Phoenix is largely a 20th-century creation (and its technological fruits, mainly air conditioning) should not overshadow the fact that the Valley of the Sun has a long history of human habitability. Native peoples hunted and practiced agriculture in the region for millennia; the descendants of Spanish settlers traded here for centuries. Given their industriosity and bravery, it is almost ironic that so many outsiders decide to retire here today. Interested in learning more about the rich history of the Valley, good and bad? Start with these attractions. Interested in learning more about the rich history of the Valley, good and bad? Start with these attractions. 1. AZ Heritage Center at Papago Park Adult Admission: \$10 (summer) to \$12 (winter) Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; On Sunday, from 12pm to 4pm AZ Heritage Center in Papago Park offers a broad overview of the relatively recent history of the Phoenix area, mainly since the late 19th century, through interpretive exhibits and collections of artifacts. The adjacent Centennial Museum, built to commemorate the centenary of Arizona's statehood in 2010, is more of the same. If you find yourself wondering what this gigantic strip of urban in the middle of a dry desert, this is a good place to start. 2. Heritage Square and Rosson House Museum Adult Admission: Free to enter and explore Heritage Square; \$9 to tour Rosson House Museum (60 minutes) Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sunday, 12pm to 4pm (Rosson House Museum) Heritage Square is Phoenix Phoenix Phoenix's best-preserved historic – the only part of the city whose stocks of buildings are consistently before 1900. There is no charge to wonder in the immaculate Victorian architecture of Heritage Square. To enter the Rosson House Museum, a time capsule the size of an 1895 house, you'll need to fork more than \$9 per adult. For that price, you will get a 60-minute tour led by an expert local guide. 3. Large Village Museum and Ruin Adult Entrance: \$6 Hours: Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.; Sunday, from 1pm to 4:45pm Heritage Square is a newborn next to Pueblo Grande, a 1,500-year-old Hohokam ruin in the heart of Phoenix. A 7-mile trail winds through the partially excavated archaeological site, including an arena of ball sports, housing and a ceremonial mound. The excellent museum offers a background story about the Hohokam people, who undone a difficult existence on the valley floor for centuries before the conquest. 4. Tempe History Museum Adult Admission: Free hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; On Sunday, from 1pm to 5pm Tempe History Museum pays homage to Tempe's unique history, which, before the Valley demographic explosion, was at a fairly different time from Phoenix. The museum's collection is thematically organized, with four permanent exhibitions (College Town, Surviving in the Desert, Building Our Community and Living Together) and a temporary rotating exhibition. There's a lot of kids content here, so bring the family. 5. Pioneer Living History Museum Adult Entry: \$10 Hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. (summer) or 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (winter) Hidden in North Phoenix, Pioneer Living History Museum is a child-friendly outdoor museum, a replica that reproduces fondly, albeit slightly kitsch , from an Old West city. There are 90 acres to explore here, which makes the \$10 adult entrance (\$8 per child) look like a bargain. Please note the early summer hours - since the museum is outdoors, management closes the store before the worst of the heating sets in. 6. Wrigley Mansion Adult Admission: \$15 to \$26, depending on the tour (meal may be included) Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sunday, 2pm (tours in the hour) One of the first true Anglo estates in the Valley, Wrigley Mansion is a relic of the early twentieth century that looks more California than Arizona. Although best known as an exclusive wedding venue and brunch hotspot, its 45-minute tours are filled in a wealth of 20th-century Arizona history, and some dubious ghost stories to boot out. \$26 lunch packages offer very good value for money in light of the prices of the inflated menu. 7. Historical Museum Table Entrance for Adults: \$5 Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 10am to Mesa Museo Histórico is an attractive, if unorthodox, homage to the history of Mesa – every 100 years of it. Much of the historical collection is sensitive and therefore not publicly displayed, but rotating exhibits are a delight in themselves. Nor are they always related to La Mesa: a recent exhibition, Cat people from the ultra-permanent regions, was a crazy hodgepodge hodgepodge feline art and typo. 8. Taliesin West Adult Admission: \$26 to \$75, depending on the choice of tour Schedule: Daily, 8:30pm to 6pm (winter – other season schedules may vary); Special night tours start until 7:30 p.m. The famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright is best known for his triumphs at Prairie School, especially Wisconsin's beloved Taliesin. But Wright spent much of his retirement in Scottsdale at the foot of McDowell Mountain. Her base there was known as Taliesin West, and she's a beauty. Some homers say it's even more impressive than the original. Whatever your opinion, it's worth an hour of your time. Choose the Panorama Tour at a reasonable price, a high-level introduction to Wright's work that doesn't get too nested in architectural herbs. Museums and Cultural Points of Interest These are among the main museums and cultural attractions in and around the Valley of the Sun. Take note, summer visitors. 9. Arizona Science Center Adult Admission: \$18 Hours: Daily, 10am to 5pm Located near Heritage Park, Arizona Science Center is Arizona's premier public science museum. This children's learning center features exhibits on aviation, electricity, solar energy, the human body, the climate and more, as well as a world-class planetarium. If you're over 21 and in town on the third Friday of the month, check out Science With a Twist, an adult-only night with drinks, dancing and special science programming from 6pm to 10pm. 10. Phoenix Zoo Adult Admission: \$19.95 to \$24.95, depending on the season Schedule: Daily, 7am to 2pm (summer); From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (other stations) Operated by the Arizona Nature Conservation Center, the Phoenix Zoo (not air-conditioned) is tucked away in the spacious Papago Park near desert Botanical Garden. Megafauna such as lions, bears, giraffes and elephants mingle with more humble creatures in a wide set of outdoor enclosures and indoor conservatories. The black-footed ferret breeding center is a favorite of children: before visiting, check the live camera to see what the inhabitants are doing. And once you're at the zoo, don't miss the stunning 4D theater. Keep in mind that extreme heat sometimes forces the closure of outdoor displays of heat sensitive animals - plan accordingly on warm days. 11. Desert Botanical Garden Entrance for adults: \$24.95 Hours: Daily, 7am to 8pm Desert Botanical Garden (also not air-conditioned, for the most part) is dedicated to the incredible – and surprisingly resilient – desert flora inhabiting the planet's hot deserts. Two of the five garden paths are dedicated specifically to the Sonoran Desert, of which the Valley of the Sun is but a small The other three include endemic and non-native vegetation; one is dedicated to drought-adapted wildflowers that glow with color after the winter rains. Don't miss the cactus and succulent galleries: you may get some cost-effective interior decoration ideas while you're there. One-time entry is expensive, so if you're a frequent valley Aloe Vera's basic level membership (\$79) is profitable. 12. Hall of Flame Fire Museum Adult Entrance: \$7 Hours: Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 12pm to 4pm Don't be fooled by the date website. Look beyond the non-descriptive warehouse in an anonymous corner anywhere. If you're even remotely interested in the history and science of firefighting, you need to visit the Flame Fire Hall Museum. Here you will find hundreds of pieces of firefighting equipment, including engines and ladders, from the early eighteenth to the end of the twentieth century. Most inclusions come from this side of the pond, but there are also some comparatively exotic artifacts from Europe. Before you go, pay your respects in the bleak National Fire Hall of Heroes. 13. i.d.e.a. Museum Adult Entrance: \$8 (over 1 year) Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sunday, 12pm to 4pm When you've run out of options to keep kids busy, and it's too hot to do something constructive outside, visit the Children's Museum. Tailor-made for young children, it is a practical wonderland that excites children's sense of play while reinforcing basic scientific and practical concepts. Who can argue with that? Recent exhibitions include an interactive celebration, totally non-terrifying cartoon monsters and an age-appropriate examination of historical comic book characters. 14. Phoenix Art Museum Adult Admission: \$18 Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (except 9 p.m. on Wednesdays); Sunday from 12pm to 5pm Phoenix Art Museum is a world-class museum of classical and contemporary art that fits the fifth largest metropolis in the country. Some of its most exciting exhibits are not dedicated to visual media at all: visitors can take heavy samurai armor, vintage fashion threads, antique cooking ceramics, and much more. There is also a lot of photography from the early to mid-20th century paying homage to the mass settlement and growth of the American Southwest, an appropriate theme, given the scenario. Admission to the museum is free from 3pm to 9pm on Wednesdays, from 6pm to 10pm on the first Friday of each month (when there is a cash bar to boot), and during regular opening hours on the second Saturday and Sunday of each month. 15. Listened Museum Admission for Adults: \$18 Hours: Monday to Saturday, 9:30am to 5pm; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Heard Museum is dedicated to advancing American Indian art and does it very well. The author's exhibition, Native Peoples in the Southwest, is an expansive

examination of the region's indigenous art and culture, with hundreds of individual artifacts and a large-scale recreation of a traditional Navajo hogan. Rotary exposures have a broad of the museum's load, with themes ranging from the co-optation of the Santa Fe Railway of southwestern Indian culture to the early 20th century artistic super-duo, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, 16. Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art Adult Entrance: \$10 Hours: Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 12pm 12pm 5pm; Thursday through Saturday, 12pm to 9pm Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (SMoCA) is an ambitious temple of contemporary art in all its forms. There's nothing off limits here. Recent exhibitions have included interactive displays of rope lights, visitor-led wall painting projects, and experimental furniture you definitely won't want to sit on. There is also plenty of programming with tickets, including curated conversations with prominent artists and alcohol-fueled solstice celebrations. 17. Mesa Arts Center Adult Admission: Free hours: Varies by attraction (museum open Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday 10am to 9pm; Sunday 12pm to 5pm) Mesa Arts Center is Arizona's largest arts complex. With multiple show venues, public art exhibits and meeting spaces, it is filled with activity from morning to late at night most days. The art museum of five galleries here is completely delivered to contemporary art, and is always free to explore. Adjacent venues, which can charge for events with tickets, attract large-name visitors: Recent passers-by have included Rob Lowe (in town for a memoir) and Dennis Young (who gave a rollicking performance with his band). 18. Butterfly Wonderland Adult Entry: \$21.95 Hours: Daily, 9am to 6pm Butterfly Wonderland's whimsical name is misleading: It's actually a full-body tropical greenhouse, complete with an extensive reptile display, freshwater aquarium, honey bee display, and poisonous spectacle of desert creatures (spiders, scorpions - whatever). The main attraction is the Butterfly Pavilion, a large indoor area with thousands of delicate free-flying butterflies of all sizes and colors. The butterfly emergency exhibit is also pretty cool: if you're lucky, you'll see one emerge from its chrysalis in real time. A 3D theater experience is included in the entrance fee. Butterfly Wonderland is part of the OdySea in the Desert family of attractions. If you have the time and budget for more than one OdySea attraction, I would recommend visiting OdySea Aquarium after you've had your stuffing in BW. The combined ticket costs \$51.95, which is not much of a discount at the full price. Urban parks and natural areas These urban parks and natural areas do not have air conditioning, but they are all beautiful. Those who are not located in the heart of the valley are 30 minutes from downtown Phoenix. Unless otherwise noted, everyone is free to enter and explore. Some, such as the Papago Park Desert Botanical Garden, may have internal features restricted to admission. Hours usually dawn till dusk. Attention to published hours and have At night. 19. Papago Park Papago Park is to Phoenix what Central Park is to New York City. In other words, the two couldn't be more different. Papago Park is a vast expanse of rugged desert in south-central Phoenix, within sight of downtown. The Restricted Desert Botanical Garden admission and the Phoenix Zoo are here, but many of the park is yours to stroll through Don't miss the twin red stone monoliths near the north edge of the park. The hole in the rock, a curious relic of erosion, is worth a photo. (I'm sorry I didn't get one, despite getting less than a quarter mile. That's the downside of a full schedule.) In my experience: Flash News: It gets pretty hot in Phoenix. If you're visiting during the summer months, try scheduling outdoor physical activity shortly after the sun comes up or shortly before it goes down. (Mornings are preferable.) If you're on the trail during the heat of day, wear protective clothing, swarm with plenty of sunscreen, drink more water than you think you need, and watch carefully for signs of dehydration and heat exhaustion. I'll explain more about hot weather safety in the Logistics Considerations section below. 20. Evelyn Hallman Park Formerly known as Canal Park, Evelyn Hallman Park is a small but well-used retreat in downtown Tempe. As one of the few areas of the Valley with a surface water feature open to the public (another is near Lake Tempe Town), it is a great place to disconnect from the desert. On nice days, the picnic area is widely used. 21. LoPiano Bosque Habitat Hidden between the Salado River and the 202 motorway, LoPiano Bosque Habitat of 13 acres is a small enclave isolated from floodplains with an impressive variety of flora and fauna. Many of the species here are unique in coastal desert areas, so by definition they are rare. The dense canopy makes a lot of shade on hot summer days, although little else about the place encourages visitors to stay. 22. Hayden Butte Also known as A Mountain, for the 60-foot A concrete that adorns its slopes, Hayden Butte is an ever-popular hiking and career destination for Tempe permanent residents and Arizona State University students alike. Although dwarfed by the peaks of the valley, such as Camelback Mountain, Hayden remains the highest point for miles, and the views are worth every inch of the climb. Don't miss the ancient petroglyphs: more than 500 in total, commemorated forever in the hard basalt of the butt. 23. The Salt River Habitat Restoration Area, the Salt River Habitat Restoration Zone, is a rare ecological victory amid the valley's immense environmental challenges. The restoration, which stretched for more than five miles along the Salt River, transformed the most urbanized part of the Valley's main natural water source from a dry, garbage-filled riverbed into a lush river corridor. That is a slight exaggeration, as the Salado River is dry for much of the year, but the juxtaposition before-after is remarkable. This is a great place for a quiet walk -- just be careful during and rainstorms, when the threat of flooding is very real (and very dangerous). 24. Eldorado Park Like Evelyn Hallman Park, Eldorado Park is an unremarkable green space with an assorted lake and plenty of picnic space. The lake is one of the few reliable fishing holes in the Valley; most others are located higher up in the mountains, where the surface surface it's more common. If you're staying nearby, make Eldorado Park the midpoint of your morning trot. 25. Phoenix Mountains Preserve (Piestewa Peak and Lookout Mountain) Phoenix Mountains Preserve is a discrete and disconnected series of open spaces spanning several of the valley's most notable peaks. Piestewa Peak and Lookout Mountain in northeastern Phoenix are two popular and accessible examples. Lookout Mountain's central location within the Valley makes it a particularly popular destination for amateur photographers: on clear days, you can see much of the built area, not to mention several nearby mountain ranges. Pay close attention to published warnings, including street parking restrictions near trailheads. 26. Camelback Mountain and Echo Canyon Recreation Area Rising nearly 2,800 feet above sea level and about 1,500 feet from the valley floor, Camelback Mountain is the highest mountain in the Immediate Sun Valley. It's also one of the hardest to climb: the 1.5-mile Cholla Trail looks easy on paper, but relentless climbing, loose gravel and smooth rock steps present serious challenges. The adjacent recreational area of Echo Canyon offers another angle of attack, but it's not much easier. On the other hand, the view from the top is outrageous. Getting to the Cholla Trailhead The Cholla trailhead is not the most accessible in the world. It's at least a quarter mile from the nearest across the street, Invergordon Road, a up-to-the-line residential way called Cholla Lane. Locals clearly value their privacy: street signs placed every few steps remind visitors that there is absolutely no street parking or deliveries on Cholla Lane or any of its tributaries. The nearest designated parking area is nearly half a mile from the head of the trail, down Invergordon Road in ways. On the plus side, at least in my observation, the delivery ban does not apply strictly. During the five minutes it took me to take pictures at the trailhead, a light-colored Uber sedan rolled up and deposited two young hikers - clearly out of town - in what I can only imagine is a frequent occurrence. 27. South Mountain Park South Mountain Park is the largest and wildest of Phoenix parks. With 16,000 acres and three small mountain ranges under management, dwarf all other urban parks in the country. Highlights include extensive saguaro forests by the hillside and stunning views of the summit: on a clear day, you can see virtually every corner developed in the Valley, which extends endlessly north and east. By law, bikes and cars must share the park's roads equally, but you'll want to be in great shape before facing those death-defying curves on two wheels. Dealing Wildlife in Phoenix-Area Trails The wildest parks in the Phoenix area are littered with interesting creatures. I didn't see scorpions or rattlesnakes on my travels, but they're around here. Also coyotes and pumas (mountain lions). Pay close attention to published warning signs and know what to do if a dangerous animal in nature. It's not always intuitive. For example, the best way to deal with a cougar is to try to scare him by waving his arms, opening his teeth and making a lot of noise, no, as you would expect, retreat or snuggle up in a ball, which triggers the predatory instincts of the cougars. Regional Parks and Natural Spaces These outdoor areas line the Valley. On a good day, they're an hour or less from downtown Phoenix. They are perfect for serious hiking and camping at night, weather and regulations allow it. Bring plenty of water and food, unlike the city park trails, the backcountry trails have no water sources. Unless otherwise stated, admission to the park is \$6 per car. Parks are usually open between sunrise and dusk. 28. McDowell Mountain Regional Park Located northeast of Scottsdale, McDowell Mountain Regional Park has approximately 22,000 acres of open space and some 50 miles of multi-purpose trails -- hiking, cycling, even horseback riding. The main unit of the park is behind its eponymous peak, so the main viewpoints are exposed to the east, towards the mountains of superstition. That means there are no views of the valley. On the plus side, superstitions are impressive in their own right. If you have children in tow, check out the center of nature - mind the first few hours of summer closing though. 29. San Tan Mountain Regional Park Sprouting from the valley floor southeast of Chandler and Gilbert, San Tan Mountain has much better views of the Valley of the Sun - and, with maximum elevations below 2,800 feet, does not ask for so much from summer hikers. Like McDowell Mountain, San Tan has an excellent nature center for kids. 30. White Tank Mountain Regional Park Maricopa County's largest regional park, White Tank Mountain, covers about 30,000 acres west of Glendale. The peak exceeds 4,000 feet, making it a truly challenging (and probably all-day) hike for visitors committed to jumping from the valley floor. If you prefer a quieter visit, stick to the saguaro forests on the lower slopes. The nature center here hosts regular live animal events, including feeding rattlesnakes. Mesmerizing, as long as you keep your distance. A warning about the monsoon season I have been in Phoenix for the driest part of the year: May and June. Most years, the monsoon season begins about six weeks later, in early to mid-July. From then until some point in September, visitors to Phoenix are at risk of experiencing one of southwest's famous monsoon storms. With frequent lightning and rain Monsoon storms are not a joke. Arizona's soil is not very porous, so even a few minutes of rain can overwhelm the ground's ability to absorb it, precipitating dangerous flash floods. Dry river beds, known as washes, are particularly vulnerable to flooding, while mountain slopes are at increased risk of direct lightning. If you're trapped in a natural area during a thunderstorm, get out of the lowlands and look for shelter (large rocks or caves work best) on higher ground. 31. Star Star Regional Park Located south of Goodyear, on the southwestern outskirts of the Valley, Estrella Mountain Regional Park is a 20,000-acre expanse comprising -- surprise, surprise -- plenty of pristine deserts and rocky rocks. However, there are some curved balls here: Estrella is home to one of the largest wetlands in central Arizona (a rarity in the southwest) and has a significant facade on the flood-prone Gila River. If you're willing to drive just a fair distance for a cheap outdoor meal, the huge picnic area calls your name. 32. Lake Pleasant Regional Park Lake Pleasant Regional Park is an unexpected find in the high desert north of Phoenix: a 24,000-acre protected area spanning the 10,000-acre reservoir that provides much of the Valley's drinking water. You can do just about anything water-related here, but the most interesting part of the park is possibly the Discovery Center, which tells the fascinating story of the awkward public-private partnership that tamed the Colorado River and made desert life possible for so many modern Arizonans. Phoenix-Area neighborhoods and local attractions Large swaths of the valley feel anonymous and prepackaged: shopping centers and gated island communities with names and facades of similar sound, one mingled with the following. Unless you've been around long enough to recognize specific mountain ranges, it's hard to orient yourself on the valley floor. But not impossible. If you're in any of these remarkable neighborhoods or cities in the Phoenix area, you'll notice. 33. Tempe Located south and east of downtown Phoenix and Sky Harbor, Tempe is a youthful and vibrant enclave with a lively nightlife scene and plenty of outdoor recreation opportunities. It is defined by its symbiotic relationship with Arizona State University, one of the country's four-year colleges. After a walk along Hayden Butte, walk up Mill Avenue and cool off at one of the countless bars and restaurants serving incredibly cheap refreshing, or rent a stand-up paddle board from Boat Rentals of America (\$40 for two hours) and explore Tempe Town Lake. Crowds and parking in Tempe During the school year, nearly 60,000 graduate and undergraduate students pack ASU's Tempe campus. The city is built to handle the annual influx, but that doesn't mean it's not noticeable. If you visit Tempe while classes are in session, expect longer waiting times at local restaurants and bars, more crowds at cultural institutions, and more car and pedestrian traffic in and around Tempe. When classes are out (summer, winter and spring break - downtown Tempe is a real ghost town. In a recent stay at the end of May, I felt as if I had the For me. I never had to wait for anything, and I could always find a parking space. If you are looking for a quiet and conveniently located place to stay, out of season Tempe is a good bet. 34. Old Town Scottsdale Also known as downtown Scottsdale, Old Town Scottsdale is the oldest and most walkable part of Phoenix's best-known suburb. Drilling through the Commercial cladding and you'll find some hidden gems here -- I spent a good part of a visit to Scottsdale working and enjoying live music at Sip Coffee & Beer House, which features an extensive southwest-centered craft beer menu (pints start at \$4 or \$5) and frequent open mic nights. Scottsdale Stadium, a spring training center for the San Francisco Giants, is just a stone's throw away. If your budget allows, check out Scottsdale Fashion Square, not exactly the central second-hand store, but it's worth a look during settlement sales. 35. Mesa Mesa, an independent city, stretches for miles east of Tempe. Once among the fastest growing cities in the United States, Mesa is locally reputed as an affordable base of operations for families with children. Downtown is in the midst of a multi-year revitalization effort that has already brought dozens of new independently owned businesses to the city. If you're looking for somewhere else to stay, you'll find it's a great place to stay. In early spring, Oakland A fans crowd Hohokam Stadium, their local team's spring training center. If you don't want to pay for admission to one of the art museums established by the Valley, look at Mesa's nationally renowned public art program. 36. Chandler South of Mesa, Chandler is another vast, fast-growing Valley suburb with wide avenues and low living costs. For a low-cost bite (or higher-priced fashion threads), check out Chandler Fashion Center, conveniently located near Highway 101/202 Interchange Highway. Or plan a frugal visit using the handy free to-do list from your local tourist office in Chandler. Before you leave, stop by downtown Tumbleweed Park, a solid picnic spot on colder days. 37. Glendale The unofficial professional sports capital of the Valley, Glendale is a western suburb of Phoenix that houses the Arizona Cardinals NFL franchise, the Phoenix Coyotes NHL club, and the Chicago White Sox and Los Angeles Dodgers spring training homes at Camelback Ranch. If you're not a sports fan, there's still plenty to do here, from weekly summer concerts in Murphy Park to regular outdoor street festivals at the Westgate Entertainment Complex. 38. Downtown Phoenix, like most other North American cities of its size, Phoenix lacks a compact and intensely developed central business district built around a historic old city. Downtown Phoenix is simply the largest of the valley's many scattered business districts. It extends without qualms along square miles, merging at its northern end with Midtown Phoenix (a distinct cultural and business district). Don't let the suburban atmosphere fool you: Apart from Tempe, downtown Phoenix is the best cultural destination in the Valley. During baseball season, enjoy an Arizona Diamondbacks game at Chase Field with air conditioning, then head to Central Avenue for a cheap bite. If you have time, visit Roosevelt Row too. With murals, street art, frequent outdoor festivals and dozens of independently owned galleries and restaurants, Phoenix Phoenix's epicentre of the resurgent arts remembers Miami's world-famous Wynwood Art District. Day Trips from Phoenix Do you have enough time to get out of town for a day or two? Visit one or more of these popular Arizona destinations. Many are found in the mountains or desert, above the worst heat of the Valley summer. 39. Sedona Sedona is a very special place. Perched on a desert plateau south of Flagstaff, flanked by 2,000-foot red rock cliffs dotted with ancient indigenous ruins, it's one of the most visually arresting places I've ever seen. Culturally, it is one of the strangest: the counterculture of the 1960s, the New Age movement, indigenous traditions and the culture of Old West cowboys coexist (mainly) peacefully here. At 4,500 feet, Sedona is reliably 10 to 15 degrees colder than Phoenix, so it's a great summer getaway. The increasingly exclusive city centre is absolutely worth a walk; just avoid splurging in expensive trinket shops. Whether you're for a strenuous hike or a white knuckle drive, check out coconino National Forest's unforgettable Oak Creek Canyon, on the ecological boundary between northern Arizona's vast Ponderosa pine forest and the semi-arid plateau below. 40. Payson Payson is an idyllic mountainous community nestled beneath the spectacular Mogollon Rim, a 2,000-foot escarp that divides eastern half of Arizona in two. In fact, Payson is the anchor of a tourist region known locally as Rim Country. About 5,000 feet above sea level, just above the lower expanse of ponderosa forest, its abundant shade and surface water attract tourists from the Phoenix area en masse. The Tonto National Forest has hundreds of miles of hiking trails and dozens of low-cost campsites available on a first-come, first-served basis. See Payson Rim Country, the region's official tourism site, for more information. 41. Prescott Southwest of Sedona, a little higher up the mountains, is the sleekest Alpine town of Prescott (PRESS-kit, locals say). The Prescott area is a collection of several different communities. Some cater to retirees and second homeowners, while others house locals who can trace their family stories to the generations. Like Sedona and Payson, Prescott has cute, upscale shopping districts and enough Old West kitsch to keep things interesting, but the real appeal is the almost pristine forest and nearby desert areas. If you're 30 to 45 minutes old, take a quick loop on a city trail. For a half-day or full-day adventure, escape to the nearby Prescott National Forest. 42. Jerome-Cottonwood Perched aloft of a steep hillside not far from Little Jerome began his life as a 19th-century mining boom, fell into a sharp decline during the early and mid-20th century, and then successfully reinvented itself as a peculiar and artistic village with a survivalist sensibility of hard edges. Take the winding drive down the mountainside, spend 30 minutes wandering the topsy-turvy streets of the community, and take some photos of the expansive view of the Green Green Valley Then head down to much larger Cottonwood, which has a well-preserved downtown and plenty of places to spend the night. 43. National Monument of the Sonoran Desert Spanning three mountain ranges and two basins south-southwest of Phoenix, the Sonoran Desert National Monument is a vast expanse of pristine and ecologically varied desert land. From rocky slopes that house some of Arizona's largest saguaro cactus forests to bottom washes that turn into angry rivers, and then bloom, after heavy rain, there's no better place to see the Sonoran Desert as before. The best way to experience the monument is on horseback, but there is also a lot of hiking here. Don't forget your water; it's hot out here. And be careful south of Interstate 8, where drug dealers and humans covertly cross the desert. 44. Picoch Peak State Park Located about two-thirds of the way to Tucson, along Interstate 10, Picoch Peak State Park is among Arizona's most popular desert state parks. The entry fee of \$7 per vehicle is worth it. The impossibly steep eponymous peak houses an extensive saguaro forest, dramatic rock formations, surprisingly diverse microflora and other surprises. Come during the monsoon season to take a look at the rare Toad of the Sonoran Desert, a sturdy amphibian that hides for most of the year. 45. The superstition mountains east of the Valley expansion are the Superstition Mountains, whose spectacular desert peaks rise between 2,000 and 3,000 feet above the desert floor. Its spectacular tanning cliffs make climbing treacherous; the winding journey along Arizona Highway 88 is a safe alternative (if you call the nerve). Apache Trail, gateway to the mysterious Lost Dutchman mine, is one of the most popular and convenient attractions in the area. Goldfield Ghost Town is also worth a visit. 46. Grand Canyon The Grand Canyon is by far the most recognizable geological feature in a state with more than its fair share of natural monuments. It is also by far the most distant of the excursions listed here. But it's worth the visit. You've seen pictures; it's even more impressive in person. Arriving from Phoenix, the most convenient place to start your Grand Canyon tour is Grand Canyon Village in Grand Canyon National Park. Admission to the park is \$30 per car (good for all occupants) or \$15 per individual without an accompanying vehicle. If you plan to walk to the canyon, that's probably where you'll start. Please refer to the National Park Service website for hiking details, and keep in mind that you will need two full days for a round trip to the river. Canyon Village is within walking distance of some of South Rim's most picturesque spots, which is open all year round. For a less crowded experience, head to the tallest, wildest North Rim - less than 10 miles as the crow flies, but hours drive. Due to its altitude and isolation, the northern edge is open only during the summer. Logistics considerations No matter what's on your itinerary, here's what you need know how to make the most of your time in and around Phoenix. When to visit Apart from personal considerations, the timing and duration of your visit to Phoenix will likely trigger two main factors: weather and crowds. Climate considerations Like most southern half of Arizona, the Valley of the Sun has a warm, arid climate. Average monthly highs above 80 degrees from April to October. Average highs rise above 105 degrees in July, the hottest month, and fall below 70 degrees in December and January alone. I reached my personal record temperature on my recent visit to Phoenix: 111 degrees. The low elevation of the Valley and the prevailing concrete are notorious for catching the heat at night. In summer, temperatures can remain above 90 degrees until late in the morning, straining both human bodies and electrical infrastructure. One night at the end of May, when going out for a late dinner at 9 o'clock at night, I clocked for a 101-degree reading, just slightly lowered from a maximum of 106 degrees earlier in the day. Although not as dry as Las Vegas, America's most arid city, Phoenix's eight-inch average annual rain officially rates it as a desert. The advantage of this is that it is easy to avoid rain here: Precipitation occurs almost exclusively in winter and the short season of late summer monsoons. Much of the annual total accumulates from only a handful of watermen during these periods. The downside is that Phoenix is one of the sunniest cities in the world. No matter when you visit, you can expect burning rays and, for light-skinned rays that induce the sun. With minimal vegetation that shades natural areas, the Phoenix sun is the nemesis of many hikers. All this to say that the Valley is not an ideal summer destination, especially for those accustomed to more temperate climates. Yes, it's dry heat, but low humidity only goes so far when mercury exceeds 100 degrees. If you're planning plenty of low-altitude outdoor activities, such as overnight camping or long-distance hikes, visit in early spring, late fall or winter. Crowds and other considerations Millions of people live and work year-round in the Valley, but crowds and traffic tend to be more manageable during the summer months, when locals who can afford to fly in cooler climates do so seriously. In contrast, the colder months (November to March) tend to be busier in areas popular with tourists and seasonal residents, such as Sun City and North Scottsdale. Several major league baseball teams make their winter homes in the Phoenix area, so there is a mini-wave of activity during Spring training season, which roughly coincides with the college spring break season - from late February to March. What to bring your Phoenix packing list should include: Sunscreen. The bright sun is a fact of life in Phoenix, even when it's not very hot. Don't forget to pack a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and plenty of sunscreen. If you fly, make sure your sunscreen containers more than three ounces. Hydration equipment. Dry desert air is a terrifyingly effective evaporator. Even if you're not sweating, you lose moisture with every breath you take. Carry a refillable bottle of water with you at all times. If you plan to walk or try differently, consider a hydration pack (like a Camelbak). At a minimum, you'll want one gallon a day on the trail, and more in hot weather. Sandals or Flip-Flops. For most of the year, sandals and flip flops are the footwear options of choice in Phoenix. Bare feet stay cooler and drier under the hot sun. Umbrella. Yes, I do. For the vast majority of the year, Phoenix is dry. Most of the rain falls in July, August and January to March. Summer rains are the ones to see: monsoon-induced thunderstorms can be extremely violent. If you get caught outside in one, you'll want an umbrella, no matter how hot it is. Footwear ready for trails. If you're planning any off-road hiking or hiking, bring sturdy-soled shoes or hiking boots. Worth the added weight of the package: I'm pretty sure that, but walking steep Camelback Mountain in tennis shoes was a questionable decision that I'm lucky not to have suffered. Seasonally appropriate outerwear. During the summer, you'll probably never need to wear an outdoor long-sleeved shirt in and around Phoenix. In my experience, Phoenicians don't handle their air conditioners cold enough to require outdoor clothing indoors, although that's probably a matter of personal taste. In spring and autumn, you'll want a light jacket, hoodie or cold morning carigan. In winter, when night minimums can be submerged in the 1930s, you'll want something heavier for early or late-day activity. And keep in mind that it's much cooler in the mountains, even in summer. If you plan to venture above 4,000 feet, long sleeves are recommended throughout the year. Comfortable backpack. Unless you're not planning to venture away from your base of operations, bring a sturdy, comfortable backpack capable of carrying some or all of the supplies listed here. If you fly, use it as carry-on baggage. Packages are especially useful for extended walks, when you'll need more water than you can carry in your hands. How to get there and get around This is what you need to know about getting in and around the Phoenix region. Arrival in Phoenix Most Phoenix visitors arrive by air or car: By air if you don't come from another part of the southwestern United States, chances are you'll arrive in Phoenix by air. Phoenix's main international airport is Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX), a huge facility conveniently located just a few miles from the Phoenix. With four terminals and direct service to virtually every major North American city, Sky Harbor is a hub for Southwest Airlines and American Airlines, an important hub for Alaska Airlines and United Airlines, and a key destination for most other U.S.-based regional and budget airlines. I've reliably found it reliably Minneapolis to Phoenix for about \$200 round trip. At Southwest and other discount companies, it's easy to find a one-way drive from most major U.S. airports for less than \$100. By Road Phoenix is a popular stop on road trips through the Southwest Desert. It is served by I-10 (Arizona's main east-west highway) and I-17 (Arizona's main north-south interstate), plus plenty of major U.S. and Arizona highways. By road, Phoenix is about two hours from Tucson (southeast), five hours from Las Vegas (northwest), five hours and thirty minutes from San Diego (south-southwest) and six hours and thirty minutes from Los Angeles (west). If you're looking for somewhere else to stay, you'll find it's a great place to stay. Covering the cost of your travel I travel frequently enough for business and leisure to justify the annual cost of a premium travel rewards credit card. By strategically using my card to pay for travel expenses for large tickets, including airfare, I was able to shave at least \$20 of the total cost of my trip. If you are travelling often and have not yet explored your travel credit card options, I strongly recommend that you check out our best travel rewards credit card summary. How to get around in Phoenix This is what you need to know about navigating the Phoenix area. Public transportation in Phoenix Don't let the endless expansion fool you: Phoenix has a world-class public transportation system operated by Valley Metro. Valley Metro operates several dozen regular bus lines, approximately a dozen express and RAPID bus lines (limited stop, dedicated pass right), and a light rail line. Most buses run along major highways in and around Phoenix. The frequency of service ranges from 10 minutes or less to 30 minutes or more, depending on the route, the day of the week and the time of day. The network has 12 transit centers, anchored by Central Station in downtown Phoenix. Valley Metro's fare system is pretty simple, although all prices are subject to change: Regular bus and light rail: \$2 individual trips, each express track and RAPID Buses: \$3.25 individual trips, each One-Day Pass: \$4 Seven-Day Pass: \$20 15-Day Pass: \$33 Monthly Pass (31 Days): \$64 Valley Metro's network is in the middle of a long-term expansion. The organization plans to add more than 50 miles of light rail track in the coming years, substantially increasing its rapid transit capabilities. Unfortunately, for the time being, Valley Metro is at its best in downtown Phoenix and adjoining, close to communities such as Tempe and Scottsdale. In the areas of at-crossing, long travel times and hostile pedestrians hinder their effectiveness. As a practical matter, it is very difficult to get around the Valley of the Sun using only Valley Metro vehicles. Personal vehicles in Phoenix The Valley of the Sun is the end of car culture: wide roads, wide turning lanes, high-speed limits, few pedestrians and, in most places, ample parking. Unless you plan to limit your to pedestrian areas like Tempe, you'll almost certainly find yourself driving or riding in a private vehicle at some point. If you are bringing your own car to Phoenix, please check with your hotel in advance to make sure you can park freely on the grounds. Most hotels allow this, although you may have to pay for garage parking in downtown Phoenix. If you're staying on a short-term vacation rental or at a friend or family member's home, confirm with them that there are no local residential parking restrictions you need to know about. Most apartment complexes have ample off-street parking, but single-family homes and duplexes in congested Phoenix neighborhoods may lack entrance or access to the alley. In those areas, residential permit parking can come into play. Street parking isn't allowed-restricted in most of Phoenix, but there are at least 25 exceptional enclaves. You can see where street parking permits are required on the Phoenix Transportation website. Phoenix Car Rental If you fly to Phoenix, I highly recommend renting a car while in town, especially if you plan to walk through the mountains around the city or take a longer excursion beyond the metropolitan area. I use Hotwire, a blind booking site, to get the best possible deal on rental cars - in Phoenix, it is reliable \$30 per day or less for a compact car. I've seen daily rates for subcompact cars as low as \$15 per day at Hotwire. Although larger car rental companies, such as Enterprise, have outposts scattered throughout the Valle del Sol, the most popular car rental center by far is Sky Harbor's extensive car rental center. The center has all major car rental companies serving Sky Harbor under the same roof, which makes it very easy to find your supplier. Shuttle buses transport passengers back and forth between the airport terminals and the centre at intervals of 10 minutes or less. A note at sky Harbor Airport Car Rental Center Depending on your terminal, the Sky Harbor Car Rental Center is a quick five to ten minute bus ride. Getting to the center is easy- just head to the rental car pick-up area and get on the first bus (after checking with the driver heading downtown, of course). Coming back is a little harder. Buses are terminal-specific, so check that your bus is heading to the right place. The outdoor square in the center clearly marks the collection area of each terminal, but it does no harm to consult with the driver as well. Ridesharing and Carsharing If you plan to limit trips to central parts of the Valley, you may not need a personal vehicle to get around the city. Like most big cities, Phoenix has good coverage of ridesharing and carsharing. Uber and Lyft: Uber and Lyft are very popular in Phoenix. Because I had a rental car, I didn't use much service, but I checked the apps periodically. No matter the location or time of day, there always seemed to be a walk available just minutes from me. Para Para fair, I dare not the outskirts of the Valley, where I imagine the coverage is thinner. As elsewhere, fares vary depending on travel distance, length and local demand. Volume demand surcharges are common at the end of the night (especially around entertainment districts), during rush hour and at peak times for arriving flights (near Sky Harbor). With no demand surcharges, regular Lyft and Uber rides are lower than in many other major cities, but keep in mind that the average ride is longer in Phoenix expansion. If you don't mind sharing a trip and supporting slightly longer trips, use Lyft Line or UberPOOL to reduce fares. Zipcar: Phoenix doesn't have great Zipcar coverage. The centers are mainly located in Tempe, mainly near ASU, and in and around downtown Phoenix. If you're staying in one of these areas, Zipcar's short-term rental is a viable transportation option. Depending on your plan, Zipcar costs up to approximately \$80 per day (although prices are subject to change). Occasional drivers don't have to pay an annual or monthly membership fee. For existing Zipcar members who plan to stay in built sections of the Valley, Zipcar is cheaper than a traditional car rental. However, if you don't plan to use it when you return home, it's probably not worth the hassle and cost of signing up. The Valley's popular bike program Grid Bikes has more than 100 locations in the cities of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa. Practically speaking, the Phoenix network is separated from the Tempe and Mesa networks, as the nearest centers of Phoenix and Tempe are nearly 10 miles away. The Tempe and Mesa networks, although separated, have much closer centers of gravity. Grid operates all year round, although obviously it's not fun to ride a bike in the summer heat. The best payment option for short-term Valley visitors who plan to bike frequently is the 7-day pass, which includes 180 minutes of free cycling time. If you just want to take a strange walk, a paid membership on your part might work better. You can book bikes up to 15 minutes in advance with the Social Bicycles mobile app. The Grid website has a free download and instructions for use. Where to stay The Valley is a huge and diverse place. Your base of operations choice should trigger many factors: your main reason for visit, your budget, your accommodation preferences, the views and experiences you want to enjoy, and more. Here are some of the most popular places to stay in the region: Tempe As noted, Tempe is a convenient but discreet base for the off-season. I spent less than \$100 a night for a basic room in a luxury hotel right in front of the ASU, and, as in other parts of Tempe, basically had the place for me. Tempe is also the obvious choice for travelers who have business at ASU or in the fast-growing technology group near campus. The main business district of downtown Phoenix, Central City Phoenix is an agglomeration of low- and mid-rise office buildings interspersed with condominium, apartment and hotel complexes. Apart from Obvious benefits of the central location, downtown Phoenix is ideal for conventions, business travelers, and sports fans. Room rates at night are a little higher downtown than elsewhere in the city, but you get what you pay for: walking distance to dozens of restaurants, various entertainment venues, and Chase Field (home of the Arizona Diamondbacks). Expect to pay at least \$120 per night for a high-end location along Central Avenue. Look for budget (\$80 and less per night) outside the business district. Sky Harbor Area Like most major airports, Sky Harbor has a healthy collection of affordable hotels nearby. Most are located on both sides of Van Buren and 44th Streets, north of the terminal area. I found places for as little as \$40 a night here - a robbery if you're passing through or having a quick night before your flight. Old Town Scottsdale Old Town Scottsdale is an exclusive, reasonably pedestrian area with spacious hotels, even more condos, and a handful of older resorts. If you're in town for spring training, look for a place within walking distance of Scottsdale Stadium, where you can watch practices and watch exhibition games. I found two star spots for as little as \$50 a night here in the summer, but rates are likely to be higher in winter and spring. The prettiest resorts, such as The Saguaro, charge \$100 and throughout the year. Scottsdale North (North Scottsdale) Scottsdale is huge. North Scottsdale is at least 20 minutes' drive from the Old Town, and it could also be a world away. Luxury resorts and spas abound here, as do traditional high-end hotels. But there is also an executive airport and several business parks in the area, which offer more functional accommodations. For a more discreet experience, check out the two- and three-star hotels and long-stay hotels near the intersection of Frank Lloyd Wright Boulevard and Scottsdale Road. And don't forget to check out Taliesin West while you're here. Central Scottsdale About Half between North Scottsdale and Old Town is Central Scottsdale, an upscale district with high-end shopping and quiet residential subdivisions. Central Scottsdale is a good base for hot golfers and more adventurous guys looking for easy access to the Superstition Mountains. I found three-star hotels, like Hampton Inn, for less than \$100 a night here during the summer. Luxury resorts, such as the McCormick and Meridian CondoResort, are located to the south, and are, of course, much more expensive. North Phoenix & I-17 Corridor Phoenix stretches for more than 20 miles north of the central business district, to sparsely inhabited desert that limit the relentless growth of the valley. The I-17 corridor cuts a strip built through North Phoenix's endless residential subdivisions, sprouting fast food restaurants and functional hotels at every exchange. It seems that all national hospitality chains have an outpost somewhere along I-17. I-17, there are dozens in total. The corridor is ideal for business travelers looking for convenient, luxury-free accommodation and leisure travelers planning mountain getaways north of the Valley. Glendale Located west of Phoenix proper, Glendale is a modest suburb whose main claim to fame is the University of Phoenix stadium, home of the Arizona Cardinals NFL team (and host of Super Bowl XLIX, played in February 2015). The Phoenix Coyotes, an NHL team, also play at Glendale. Most of the city's hotels and resorts are located in the upscale Westgate Entertainment District, north of the stadium area. Other places to stay in the Phoenix area This is by no means a comprehensive account of all possible areas to stay in the Valley of the Sun, nor does it include outdoor communities known to luxury destination resorts. Since accommodation is a crucial consideration for any traveler, you'll want to do the extra due diligence before choosing your base of operations in the Phoenix area. Using the above as a guide, use an online booking aggregator, such as KAYAK or trivago, to check prices and availability in each area. If you are a frequent flyer with a different family hospitality preference, use your website to further narrow down your selection and, if available, consider applying for your branded hotel rewards credit card to reduce or deny the cost of your stay. Final Word Most of my visits to Arizona start in Phoenix, thanks in large part to Sky Harbor's wide range of direct and low-cost flight options. But I almost always find time to visit Tucson, a little over 100 miles southeast of downtown Phoenix. The Tucson area has about a million inhabitants, but it feels positively small compared to the endless Valley of the Sun. Its culture is also different: an Anglo, Mexican Old West elusive and indigenous influence. Like Tempe, Tucson is a college town, with all the good and bad that comes with it. I'm always happy to have the opportunity to compare and contrast Arizona's two largest cities. I highly recommend that you do the same if you can save time and expense when you're in Arizona. What do you do most in Phoenix? Phoenix?

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