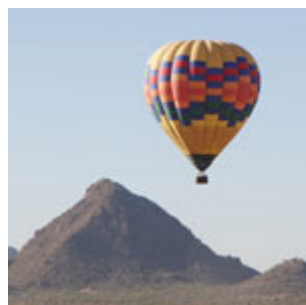


## Five hot things to do in Arizona

Sedate snowbird territory? No way

By: Diane Selkirk



Diane Selkirk

Any place that boasts over 330 days of sunshine a year is pretty alluring – especially when the sunshine comes coupled with t-shirt temperatures, even in midwinter.

Arizona is a destination that offers both the sun as well a range of activities – from roughing it in the wilds of a national park, to hitting a ball out of the rough at a golf resort. But for many Canadians, it's the Sonoran desert that makes Arizona so interesting. With more than 2000 native plants, 60 mammals and hundreds of species of birds and reptiles, the desert is unlike any eco-system found in our northern home – and did I mention it's warm? In the winter?

While it would be easy to spend a southern holiday hanging by the pool absorbing vitamin D, here are five great reasons to get out of your lounge chair and experience the desert first hand.

### Climb:

Discover the feeling of sun-warmed granite under your hands as you climb one of Arizona's famous rock faces. Women make great climbers, says Nico Riley, the rock-climbing instructor at the [Boulder's Resort](http://www.theboulders.com) ( <http://www.theboulders.com> ) in Carefree. Women rely on balance and technique, rather than brute strength to climb. This means it's a sport where we can surprise ourselves with unexpected skill. And honestly, nothing beats looking out over the desert from the top of a rock face you never, for an instant, thought you could climb.

### Take a hike

The Sonoran desert is home to elfin owls and the majestic (and occasionally comical looking) saguaro cactus. Discovering what the two have in common is something you can learn on a walk through the cacti. [Take a Hike Arizona](http://www.takeahikearizona.com) ( <http://www.takeahikearizona.com> ) is a women-owned company that specializes in helping

visitors explore the region's diverse trails. Along the way you might see (or smell) a javelina, or find a tiny elfin owl nesting high in a saguaro.

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## Soar:

Lifting off the desert floor at sunrise, then drifting silently above the chollas and prickly pears is the stuff of vacation dreams. The reality of [hot air ballooning](http://www.hotairexpeditions.com) ( <http://www.hotairexpeditions.com> ) is you get up early, drive to the desert in the dark and then set off – just as the sun rises, and exactly the way you imagined it. The propane burners heating the balloon's air might be noisier and hotter (bring a hat to protect your head) than you'd expect.

But there's a reason people have been leaving the earth and floating with the wind since 1783 – the views are spectacular and the champagne breakfast that follows more than makes up for the early hour.

## Relax:

No trip to Arizona would be complete without a visit to a spa. Every spa has its own signature treatment so it's worth testing out two, maybe even three, to discover if the Desert Essence wrap at the Hyatt Scottsdale's [Avinia Spa](http://www.scottsdale.hyatt.com/hyatt/pure/spas/index.jsp?requestid=154680) ( <http://www.scottsdale.hyatt.com/hyatt/pure/spas/index.jsp?requestid=154680> ) is as relaxing as the Signature Massage at the [Camelback Inn](http://www.camelbackinn.com) ( <http://www.camelbackinn.com> ) (it is.) Make sure you allow yourself extra time beyond the treatment – most spas have swimming pools, steam rooms or meditation areas that are included in a visit.

## Learn:

Over a dozen aboriginal groups populate the Arizona desert – and many create extraordinary artwork or offer unique cultural experiences. The Native American Learning Center at the [Hyatt Regency Scottsdale](http://www.scottsdale.hyatt.com) ( <http://www.scottsdale.hyatt.com> ) is one place to get accurate information about visiting some of the more out of the way tribes. Run by Forrest Chimerica of the Hopi tribe, Chimerica functions both as a museum curator and a cultural concierge.

## If you go:

[Arizona Office of Tourism](http://www.arizonaguide.com) ( <http://www.arizonaguide.com> )  
[Scottsdale Convention and Visitor's Bureau](http://www.scottsdalecvb.com) ( <http://www.scottsdalecvb.com> )

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