

TRAVEL: More to see in AZ than Phoenix and a canyon



Tubac Golf Resort is a desert oasis that is Irish green thanks to the Santa Cruz River, which runs through the property and is lined by giant cottonwood trees.

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If your opinion of Arizona starts with the heat of Phoenix and advances only as far as the wonders of the Grand Canyon, you're missing out on a spectacular vacation area in the southeast corner of the state.

By starting in Tucson and winding your way southeast along either Interstates 19 or 10, pack your summer clothes, your golf clubs and your sense of adventure.

Highlights of a recent six-day trip to the state's southeast included an eye-opening visit to Tubac, where we stayed at the Tubac Golf Resort and strolled around what might perhaps be the artsiest community in the world; a tour of the Kartchner Caverns a few miles from Benson, a live limestone cave; an afternoon in Tombstone, which bills itself as "The town too tough to die" and home of the epic Gunfight at the OK Corral; **and a one-night stay at what must be one of the most spectacular bed and breakfasts in the States.**

Oh, and there was golf.

It's Arizona, right?

The week started with a stay at Loews Ventana Canyon, just north of Tucson, where the accommodations were first-class and two golf courses (the 18-hole Mountain and 18-hole Canyon) were challenging, memorable and scenic.

The par-3 third hole on the Mountain course is said to be the most photographed hole west of the Mississippi.

More golf took up the next morning at the world famous Ritz Carlton Dove Mountain in the Sonoran Desert, home for the last couple of years of the World Golf Championships Accenture Match Play tournament.

It was won in February by Matt Kuchar after the world's best 64 golfers waited out a freak snowstorm.

Asked if the snow was a marketing nightmare for Dove Mountain, golf club GM Michael Rushing said quite the contrary.

"Our sponsor [Accenture] was delighted," he said.

"The snow brought a lot of attention that we might not have received, and the down time caused by the weather gave the networks lots of time to talk about Dove Mountain.

"Viewers were aware it was a real freak [weather event]."

Dove Mountain was gorgeous and it's a public course. It was a thrill to play the same course as Tiger, Rory and Kuchar and see how our games compare.

Our last golf game was on the Anza and Rancho nines at Tubac Golf Resort, a desert oasis that is Irish green thanks to the Santa Cruz River, which runs through the property and is lined by giant cottonwood trees.

The land on which the 27 holes are laid out was a working ranch in the late 1700s and the resort includes a self-contained community featuring 52 hacienda suits, 16 casita suites, 29 one-bedroom posadas, a restaurant, lounge, spa, a business office and a couple of shops.

If you saw the movie *Tin Cup*, you saw snippets of the Tubac course, where some of the filming was done.

While Ventana Canyon, Dove Mountain and Tubac were treats to play, the off-course attractions are the memories most seared into my brain.

While in Tucson, don't miss the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, which features absolutely everything you might encounter in the desert.

A special attraction was the Hummingbird House.

We stopped in Green Valley on the short drive from Tucson to Tubac to tour the Titan Missile Museum.

These missiles were dotted all over the U.S. during the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, when the U.S. and Russia used their weaponry to create "peace through deterrence."

When the Cold War ended, the missiles were decommissioned — except for one in each country, maintained now as museums.

The afternoon we strolled around the historic Village of Tubac, population 1,200, wasn't long enough.

Guided by our host, PR guru Patti Todd and her husband, Armor, we lost count of the galleries, shops and art studios featuring spectacular examples of pottery, paintings, bronze figurines, metalworks, jewelry — all produced locally by talented artisans.

One shop had about 100 pieces of art of all shapes and sizes attached to an outside wall.

Aren't they subject to night-time thieves? In quiet Tubac . . . no.

During dinner at Elvira's, we learned that Ruban Monroy moved his father's restaurant from Nogales, Mexico about 20 miles north to Tubac when the streets turned too dangerous in his Mexican home community.

Tubac folks were overjoyed to have Monroy set up his restaurant in Tubac and business — like the authentic Mexican cuisine — is great.

With two days to go before returning to Canada, we still had lots to see. We visited the Tumacacori National History Park and toured the oldest Jesuit mission in the state.

The 200-year-old brick church, in the heart of the Apache nation, was abandoned in the mid-1800s, but preservation began in the early 1900s and those efforts continue today.

It was named a National Monument in 1908.

After a delicious lunch at Velvet Elvis in Patagonia, population 800 (owned by Cecilia San Miguel and chosen by *USA Today* as offering up the best pizza in the state of Arizona), and some wine-tasting along the Sonoita Wine Trail, we made it to Tombstone.

That night, we enjoyed the tranquility and comfort of Down by the River Bed and Breakfast, owned by Mike and Angie Hug.

The B and B, featuring four rooms, each with a different theme, was built eight years ago on the banks of the San Pedro River, where 400 species of birds call home, making it a birder's paradise.

We stayed in the Cowboy room and enjoyed a lengthy visit with the Hugs, who were like old friends by the time bedtime arrived.

They went out of their way to give us a delicious breakfast before we left for the Kartchner Caverns and a 90-minute tour of the stalactite- and stalagmite-laden cave with more than two miles of passages where visitors can view awe-inspiring formations and spectacular colours.

It became a state park in 1988, 14 years after being discovered by two local spelunkers.

Our last stop before heading home was Bisbee, a town of 6,700 people that, in 1920, had a population of 20,000 and was the largest community between St. Louis and San Francisco.

But, when the copper mine closed in 1975, the town, only eight miles from the Mexican border, but a mile high (5,300 feet), fell on some hard times.

It remains a wonderful tourist community, though, with quirky, winding streets with great elevation changes, interesting shops and artists of all varieties showing off their wares.

Our home for the night, the 100-year-old Copper Queen Hotel, a couple of blocks away from the copper mine which we toured, has that "old west" look and feel to it.

So the next time you're thinking of getting away to some warmer weather, think Arizona — but look beyond the norm.

Because of the altitude, the southeast corner isn't blistering hot, just comfortably warm.

In fact, one of the area's double-meaning slogans was "It's cooler than you think." All in all, one week wasn't long enough for our trip to southeast Arizona.