



1. The entrance archway at El Rancho Robles. 2. Cyclists on the Arizona Trail need water—and a patch kit. 3. The Oracle Inn Steakhouse doubles as a Western watering hole. 4. Coconut cake doughnuts at the Oracle Patio Cafe. 5. Locals call the Oracle Union Church, built in 1901, the Little Rock Church.



A PERFECT DAY IN

ORACLE, AZ

In the shadow of the Santa Catalina Mountains, visionary artists, entrepreneurs, and chefs breathe new life into a high-desert outpost. *By Nora Burba Trulsson*

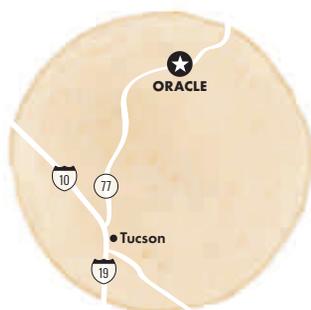
Ranches reimagined

In 1968, 10 artists and art professors bought **Rancho Linda Vista**, a dude ranch in the foothills outside Oracle. Creative anarchy ensued as the tiny enclave drew artists and authors, poets and provocateurs, such as

Andy Warhol, who filmed *Lonesome Cowboys* here. Today, the arts center has nine studios and a gallery. Inspired by Linda Vista's rebirth, others began repurposing area ranches. Artist Sharon Holnback transformed **Triangle L Ranch** into a small

inn, carving out a desert sculpture park, gift shop, and gallery amid the 130-year-old adobe buildings. A few arroyos over, Blake Campbell bought **El Rancho Robles**, converting the hacienda-style guest ranch—reputedly a 1950s mob

hideaway—into a B&B, with ranch-themed rooms and cozy fireplaces. *Rancho Linda Vista: 1955 W. Linda Vista Rd.; facebook.com/rlvartscommunity. Triangle L Ranch: From \$95; trianglel ranch.com. El Rancho Robles: From \$90; elranchorobles.com.* —>



GETTING HERE

Oracle is 38 miles northeast of Tucson. Take State 77 north to W. American Ave.

A sci-fi tour

Oracle's penchant for experimentation doesn't end there. Seven miles west of town sits **Biosphere 2**, a massive structure that looks like a mash-up of a Mayan temple, a greenhouse, and a space station. In the 1990s, the facility housed an eco experiment funded by financier Ed Bass in which eight "Biospherians" sealed themselves inside the structure for two years, subsisting on food they grew. The residents have departed, but the building remains; it's now used by the University of Arizona for research. Guided tours showcase the former living quarters, along with various biomes, including the desert and the rain forest. In the newest exhibit, *Return to the Sea of Cortez*, underwater windows provide intimate views of Biosphere 2's million-gallon ocean. \$20; 32540 S. Biosphere Rd.; b2science.org.

Happy trails

An 800-plus-mile path running from Utah to Mexico, the **Arizona Trail** includes a segment that winds past Oracle. Whether you're on two feet or two wheels, hop on an easy 6-mile northerly stretch at the American Flag Ranch trailhead, about 4 miles from town. The trail offers sweeping views of the Galiuro and Santa Catalina Mountains. Watch for yellow-blooming prickly pear, hawks, and deer. Afterward, relax at the **Oracle Inn Steakhouse**, a historic eatery and watering hole. *Trail:* aztrail.org. *Oracle Inn:* \$\$; 305 E. American Ave.; oracleinn.com.

Healing history

"Oracle was once a hideaway for the infirm and the wealthy," says local historian Chuck Sternberg. "Buffalo Bill Cody also spent time here." Explore the hamlet's past at the **Acadia Ranch Museum**. Set in a former health resort that catered to "lungers"—affluent tuberculosis sufferers hoping to cure their ills in the dry air—the museum showcases erstwhile respiratory cures, the town's Native American past, and its wild frontier years. Nearby, see more history at the Gothic-style **Oracle Union Church**, which was built in 1901. Call ahead for an interior tour. *Acadia Ranch Museum:* Free; 825 E. Mt. Lemmon Rd.; oraclehistoricalsociety.org. *Oracle Union Church:* 705 E. American; oracleunionchurch.org.



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6. A tour of Biosphere 2 takes tourists around the world—in 75 minutes. 7. The sculpture path at Triangle L Ranch. 8. A patio at El Rancho Robles. 9. The Adobe Barn Gallery at Triangle L Ranch hosts painting and photo exhibitions.

Unbelievable pie

Stacy Raneri swears she'll take her recipe for gooey-delicious coconut cake to the grave, but she and husband David don't mind dishing on other fare at their **Oracle Patio Cafe**. The corned beef hash takes 10 days to prepare. And the cornmeal-dusted trout? Torn from the pages of a *Ladies' Home Journal*

interview with Ernest Hemingway. Locals also clamor for made-from-scratch pies, including blueberry-goat cheese and tart cherry-almond. "We get artists sitting next to ranchers, liberals next to conservatives, plus the hikers and bikers," Stacy says, "but they all agree on pie." \$; 270 E. American; oraclepatiocafe.com.

THE LOCAL LOWDOWN

"Someone told me that Oracle has more artists per capita than any town in the country. That's what makes Oracle an independent, interesting place."

—DAVID RANERI, CHEF, ORACLE PATIO CAFE