In 1888, a former military chaplain and his wife purchased 640 acres of land east of Phoenix, envisioning an agricultural community where residents could enjoy a healthy lifestyle. More than a century later, Scottsdale is still a place where you can enjoy a healthy lifestyle. But instead of citrus groves and fields of cotton, this city blooms with world-class resorts and hotels, acclaimed restaurants, upscale shopping and enough wide-open spaces to support an active way of life.
Against a backdrop of the craggy McDowell Mountains, Scottsdale, part of the greater Phoenix metro area, sits in the midst of the sun-drenched Sonoran Desert. It’s easily accessible via Interstates 10, 8 and 17 and connecting state highways, making it an ideal place for a quick getaway or a longer vacation.

With a sunny, dry climate, Scottsdale’s outdoor activities should be at the top of your travel plans. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve is a 30,580-acre swath of open desert that includes the McDowell Mountains and is laced with 195 miles of trails accessible from numerous trailheads. Dotted with saguaro, cholla, barrel and other cactus, the vista-filled preserve is perfect for an easy stroll, a more challenging hike or a mountain bike trek.

Golf is another big draw in Scottsdale, with more than 200 palm- and cactus-fringed area courses that include public and resort facilities. Bike paths, tennis courts and outdoor yoga classes are other options to sample while you’re in town. If you’d like help with your outdoor activities, Arizona Outback Adventures offers guided hiking, mountain biking and road biking tours. They also rent bikes, offer ride plans and can deliver mountain bikes to trailheads.

Got kids? A favorite place is McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park, where you can take a ride on a reproduction narrow-gauge railroad or the old-fashioned carousel. Playgrounds, picnic areas, model railroads and other train-oriented exhibits mean that you can while away a morning or afternoon at the park.

If you’re searching for cerebral exercise, Scottsdale’s cultural attractions deliver. Downtown Scottsdale is filled with art galleries that feature everything from traditional Western landscapes and cowboy art to abstract works. Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art has changing exhibits spotlighting modern art and design.

At the base of the McDowell Mountains, Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright’s winter home, studio and architectural community, is open to the public with tours. Learn about the compound, established in 1917, experience Wright’s approach to organic architecture, and see many of the innovative, desert-adapted buildings.

Wright’s former student-architect, designer and urban theorist Paolo Soleri established his own architectural enclave, Cosanti, not far away. Take a tour to see his experimental, silt-cast structures, the bronze foundry and ceramics studio, or stop into the gallery to browse the famous Soleri bronze and ceramic wind bells, jewelry and more.

Choose Your Leisure (Clockwise from upper left): Enjoy spectacular views as you golf at the Four Seasons, or hike at McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The Sierra Denali HD conveniently transports bikes to the trails. Allow time to explore the Museum of Contemporary Art and Cosanti.
SHOPPING AND DINING

Scottsdale is a retail mecca, with many areas and centers offering unique local stores and galleries. But when it comes to the ne plus ultra of retail experiences, Scottsdale Fashion Square is it. With 1.9 million square feet of indoor shopping, the center is anchored by well-known premium retailers. A movie theater, restaurants, valet parking and concierge service are reasons to stay late.

Choices abound when it comes to Scottsdale’s dining scene. From traditional steakhouses and Mexican eateries to chef-driven, farm-to-table cafés, the city’s ever-evolving restaurant picture has it all. Make a reservation for Fat Ox, one of the city’s most buzzed-about newer restaurants. The sleek and modern setting is a backdrop for an Italian menu that includes squid ink pappardelle, a bone-in grilled ribeye served with peppers and onions, and diver scallops gilded with crispy brussels sprouts, sunchokes and pancetta.

Reservations are also a good idea for FnB, an intimate restaurant that features an ever-changing menu emphasizing sharable plates such as blood-orange-cured salmon, pork and guinea hen pâté with fermented cucumbers, and ribeye spiced with poblano, tomatillos and roasted tomatoes. The extensive wine program emphasizes Arizona wines.

At Olive & Ivy, the scene is just as important as the Mediterranean-influenced menu. The expansive, shady patio overlooking a linear park and the Arizona Canal is a popular happy hour gathering spot. Inside, the darkly elegant restaurant offers bruschettas, flatbreads, greens and entrees like shrimp scampi risotto and sweet potato cannelloni.

continued
DESTINATION | SCOTTSDALE, AZ

SURE, SCOTTSDALE’S IN A DESERT. BUT YOU’LL FIND COOL, WATERY ADVENTURES LESS THAN AN HOUR’S DRIVE NORTH ON BEELINE HIGHWAY (STATE ROUTE 87). ON YOUR WAY, STOP IN FOUNTAIN HILLS TO SEE THE TOWN’S FAMOUS WHITE PLUME OF WATER, WHICH RISES BETWEEN 330 AND 560 FEET FROM THE MIDDLE OF A SMALL LAKE. TIME YOUR VISIT FOR THE TOP OF THE HOUR, WHEN THE FOUNTAIN RUNS FOR 15 MINUTES. JUST OFF THE HIGHWAY, FORT McDOWELL ADVENTURES OFFERS SCENIC TRAIL RIDES ON TRIBAL LANDS, WITH VIEWS OF MOUNTAINS AND THE VERDE RIVER — WHICH YOU’LL BE CROSSING ON HORSEBACK. FARTHER NORTH, A TURMOIL LEADS TO SAGUARO LAKE, A BEAUTIFUL BLUE RESERVOIR RINGED BY MOUNTAINS AND CRAGGY CLIFFS. BEIDES SWIMMING AND BOATING, YOU CAN LEARN ABOUT THE LAKE, ITS HISTORY AND NATURE ABOARD A DESERT BELLE GUIDED BOAT CRUISE. ON THE TWO-LEVEL, AIR-CONDITIONED BOAT, KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR EAGLES, HAWKS, BIGHORN SHEEP, JAVELINAS AND OTHER DESERT SPECIES THAT CALL THE LAKEside HOME.

IF YOU WANT A MORE IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE, SAGUARO LAKE RANCH HAS KAYAKING AND TUBING ADVENTURES ON A NEARBY STRETCH OF THE SALT RIVER FROM MAY TO OCTOBER. YOU’LL PUT IN AT THE HISTORIC GUEST RANCH’S PROPERTY AT THE RIVER’S EDGE, THEN SHUTTLE BACK FROM A DESIGNATED END SPOT. ALONG THE WAY, YOU’LL SEE CLIFFS, PRISTINE DESERT AND, OFTEN, HERONS, HAWKS AND WILD HORSES.

WHERE TO STAY

Deciding where to stay is challenging when visiting Scottsdale — many choices abound, ranging from intimate inns to the city’s fabled resorts.

Hotel Valley Ho puts you in the middle of downtown Scottsdale, within walking distance of many restaurants, shops and the city’s nightclub district. Built in 1956, the hotel has been restored to its midcentury splendor, with a stylish, modern vibe. Many rooms and recently renovated suites have balconies or patios, while the palm-shaded grounds include two pools and pet-friendly lawns. The spa offers a blissful retreat. ZuZu, the restaurant, features an American menu and a bar that’s a popular end-of-the-day gathering spot for craft cocktails.

Farther north, the Boulders Resort & Spa’s 220 casitas and haciendas are tucked amidst the massive granite boulders that dot the 1,300-acre desert property. Hand-hewn beams, wood-burning fireplaces and Native American influences are among the design elements you’ll see in the recently renovated rooms and public spaces. Two championship golf courses, a spa, tennis courts, four pools and several dining choices are among the amenities. The resort takes advantage of its beautiful setting with activities like stargazing, desert photography classes, moonlight yoga and rock-climbing clinics.

Four Season Resort Scottsdale at Troon North also takes advantage of its striking desert setting overlooking landmark Pinnacle Peak by offering guided “zen hikes” that combine yoga and hiking. The hike departs from the calm, elegant spa, one of many amenities at this 210-room, Southwest-style resort. You can play at one of two golf courses, sample several dining options, play tennis, lounge at the pool and stargaze to your heart’s content. At the end of a day, order a prickly pear margarita and watch the sun slide behind the peak.

Drive to Watery Adventures