

In Phoenix, pan for gold or catch a comet's tail

By Lisa K. Harris
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PHOENIX — Banish your family's summer doldrums by heading to the Valley of the Sun where the blue skies seem limitless. Here are 10 surefire let's-have-fun activities in the area:

RIDE A CAMEL: Find nearly any animal you can think of at the Phoenix Zoo in Papago Park, including camels for hire in the African savanna exhibit. The Children's Loop includes tractors to climb on and a petting zoo full of furry goats and sheep. The Stingray Bay touch tank is the latest interactive experience. With its lagoons and towering shade trees the zoo is a cool oasis. 455 N. Galvin Parkway, 602-273-1341, phoenixzoo.org, adults \$14, seniors \$9, children \$6.

HIKE THE HOLE: Scramble up the butte to Hole-in-the-Rock in Papago Park. The eroded red sandstone rocks are an easy destination for kid-length legs. The landmark may have been used by Native Americans to mark the summer and winter solstices. Afterwards, enjoy the rest of the 1,200-acre park and visit the botanical gardens, softball fields, desert trails, and lagoons. 625 N. Galvin Parkway.

CATCH A HOME RUN: Bring your glove and watch the Arizona Diamondbacks play at Chase Field. Come early on night game dates and tour the stadium. Check out the retractable roof and swimming pool. For the game, sit in the suites next to the dugouts for up-close action. 401 E. Jefferson St., diamondbacks.mlb.com.

DIG THE PAST: Explore Pueblo Grande Museum and Archaeological Park with its 1,500-year-old Hohokam village ruins, ball court, platform mound, irrigation canals, and a full-scale reproduction of prehistoric homes. See how archeologists study clues from ancient and historic sites in the "Dig It" exhibit with a life-size replica of an excavated trench. 4619 E. Washington St., 602-495-0901, pueblogrande.com, adults \$5, 55 and over \$4, 6 to 17 \$3, under 6 free.

TURN ON THE LIGHTS: Explore



BOB RINK

Take a kid-friendly hike to Hole-in-the-Rock in Papago Park. At Chase Field, home of Major League Baseball's Arizona Diamondbacks, visitors can sit in suites next to the dugouts.

a house's innards and see how plumbing, electricity, and carpentry work at the Arizona Science Center's Many Hands Make a Home exhibit. The center features 300 interactive exhibits, an IMAX Theater, and a newly renovated planetarium. Explore gravity, friction, and magnetism at the Fab Lab; the All About You exhibit investigates the physiology of moving, healing, and memory. 600 E. Washington St., 602-716-2000, azscience.org, adults \$9, seniors \$7, children \$7. Additional charges for IMAX.

PACK A PICNIC: Take a swimsuit, fishing rod, and picnic basket to Encanto Park, a 222-acre oasis in central Phoenix. "Encanto" means "enchanted" in Spanish, and the park is indeed that, featuring lagoons, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, and nature trails. Play golf at two palm tree-dotted courses (18- and 9-hole). Rent paddle boats and canoes and explore the lagoons. Kiddieland, a permanent children's carnival, adds to the enchantment. 2605 N. 15th Ave.

RIDE 'EM COWBOY: Saddle up



LUKE PLONSKY

at the OK Corral. Take a horseback ride through the Sonoran Desert. See saguaro cacti and the rugged Superstition Mountains. Learn about the famous Legend of the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine and the Old West. 2655 E. Whiteley St., Apache Junction, 480-982-4040, okcorrals.com.

PAN FOR GOLD: Visit Goldfield Ghost Town, an authentic 1890s Old West mining town. Put on your Stetson hat and Levis and watch gunfight reenactments, ride a horse, and tour the underground mine. View the Superstitions from a narrow-gauge train. 4650 N. Mammoth Mine Road, Apache

If you go . . .

Where to stay
Arizona Grand Resort
8000 S. Arizona Grand Parkway, Phoenix
602-438-9000, 866-267-1321
arizonagrandresort.com
All-suite resort featuring an athletic club, 18-hole golf course, and a water park. From \$219.
Marriott Courtyard Tempe Downtown
601 S. Ash Ave., Tempe
480-966-2800, 800-321-2211
marriott.com

Family oriented. From \$159.
Clarendon Hotel
401 West Clarendon, Phoenix
602-252-7363
thecclarendon.net
Modern boutique hotel. Fabulous pool and complimentary breakfast. From \$129.

Where to eat
Sugar Bowl
4005 N. Scottsdale Road
Scottsdale
sugarbowlscottsdale.com
480-946-0051
50-year-old soda fountain. Wonderful homemade soups, sandwiches, and salads. But it's the ice cream (from \$1.95) that



PHOENIX ZOO

Bighorn sheep at the Phoenix Zoo.

keeps them coming back.
Bill Johnson's Big Apple
3757 E. Van Buren St.
Phoenix
602-275-2107
billjohnsons.com
Local institution with six locations. Serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Try the all-you-can-eat BBQ beef ribs, \$13.99.
Macayo
1909 W. Thunderbird Road
Phoenix
602-866-7034
macayo.com
Serving Mexican specialties for 60 years. Exceptional fajitas, fish tacos, and blue-corn enchiladas.

Junction, 480-983-0333, about 35 miles east of Phoenix, goldfieldghosttown.com.

RENDEZVOUS WITH A COMET: Take part in a daring trek to investigate Comet Encke as it passes near Earth at the Challenger Space Center. Catch the comet's tail and launch a scientific probe to understand more about shooting stars. Be one of the first visitors to travel to Mars on a simulated trip. Investigate Martian rocks and rove the red planet's landscape. 21170 N. 83d Ave., Peoria, 623-322-2001, azchallenger.org.

TUBE THE SALT RIVER: Spend a day floating in an inner tube down

the cool waters of the lower Salt River. Take along a "floating" picnic lunch (coolers available for rent) and admire the desert landscape as the Tonto National Forest floats past. Watch for blue herons along the shoreline and possibly spot a wild horse on the rocks. A short drive from Phoenix, Salt River Tubing and Recreation supplies tubes and bus rides to/from your vehicle for 2-, 3-, or 5-hour trips. Northeast Mesa, 15 miles north of US 60 on Power Road, 480-984-3305, saltrivertubing.com.

Lisa K. Harris can be reached at lharris@heg-inc.com.



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