

18 Fun Things To Do in Mesa AZ Everyone Will Love

Story by 365Traveler • Jun 20

Mesa, Arizona rises out of the Sonoran Desert, its metropolitan buildings glitter in the desert sun, and lush trees fed from canals provide shade against the heat. Located just 30 minutes from Phoenix, the area has been populated for a thousand years; once the ancient Hohokam people carved out their intricate canals here to create an agricultural paradise.

Though the Hohokam mysteriously disappeared from Mesa over five centuries ago, the area around Mesa has continued to draw settlers to its paradise. Over the years, Mesa developed into a beautiful city full of history, nature, and memorable moments to fill the heart of every adventurer. Visitors to this desert oasis will never run out of things to do in Mesa.

Here are 18 things to do in Mesa AZ that you don't want to miss!



Courtesy of Visit Mesa
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PAPAGO PARK

Explore the stunning desert scenery of Maricopa County with a visit to [Papago Park](#). Though technically part of Phoenix, the park is a short 15-minute drive from Mesa. It has to-die-for scenery of the Phoenix skyline, mind-blowing natural landmarks, and one haunting, but equally stunning, tomb within its borders.

track the solstice. Today, hikers enjoy journeying along the ancient trails to visit Hole-in-the-Rock for a sweeping view of Phoenix.

The park offers numerous outdoor activities for those wanting to escape to nature. You can fish in its lagoons, visit the mysterious pyramid tomb of Arizona's first governor George W.P. Hunt, or even take a turn on the Papago golf course.

ARIZONA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The story of Arizona's natural world and history unfolds at the [Arizona Museum of Natural History](#). Here, visitors discover the ancient temples of the Hohokam people, discover the oceanic origins of the desert, and explore the dinosaurs that once roamed the area.

The Arizona Museum of Natural History has worked to preserve the story of Arizona through its archeological work, from dinosaur digs to preserving Mesa Grande — the temple of the Hohokam located in Mesa. Its exhibits range from detailed collections of Western Native American artifacts to hands-on reproductions of dinosaur skulls.

Note that the museum does not have a cafeteria or lunch area for visitors. You'll want to check out Pioneer Park or a nearby restaurant for lunch. However, the museum store does provide plenty of great souvenirs and memorabilia to commemorate your visit.

USERY MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK

The city of Mesa has some seriously gorgeous scenery for visitors to enjoy, but there's perhaps no more scenic venue in the town than the [Usery Mountain Regional Park](#). Usery Mountain is a natural preserve featuring the unique plants and animals that call the Sonoran Desert home, including the iconic Saguaro Cactus, the black-tailed jackrabbit, and the shy Chuckwalla lizard.

Usery Mountain, while popular, is not as busy a park as Papago or South Mountain Park. Visitors enjoy horseback riding along the scenic trail, hiking, archery, camping, and other outdoor activities.

Wind Cave Trail is perhaps the most famous trail in the park for hikers. The trail covers 1.5 miles to the titular cave. At its highest, the Wind Cave Trail offers stunning views of the area and a shady respite inside the cave.

HOHOKAM STADIUM



Visitors to Hohokam Stadium can expect a day of baseball, hot dogs, and plenty of cheering crowds. Unlike many stadiums, Hohokam also offers an activity for the kids to enjoy at its Stomper Kidzone. The Kidzone allows children to play tee-ball and baseball skeeball in centerfield, plus provides a meet and greet opportunity with the mascot, Stomper!

ROSE GARDEN AT MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

It's not often that you find thousands of roses blooming in the heart of a desert, but that's just what you see at [Mesa Community College's Rose Garden](#). Nearly 9,000 bushes bloom with beautiful, sweet-smelling roses in the garden.

The rose garden at Mesa Community College is not your run-of-the-mill garden. It's actually the largest rose garden in the Desert Southwest. The garden began in 1997 to celebrate the nation's national flower and embody the rose's symbols of "Love, Friendship, Beauty, and Peace." Visitors can take a guided tour of the garden to learn about its plant life and history, or simply enjoy a self-guided stroll through its paths instead.

I.D.E.A. MUSEUM

introduce art and culture in the Phoenix-Metropolitan area. Its exhibits cover 20,000 feet and provide hands-on, interactive activities for children of all ages.

The museum is, at its heart, a place for exploration and curiosity to grow. Kids and adults will get a chance to explore dozens of art styles and concepts during their visit to i.d.e.a. For example, in the ArtVille exhibit, toddlers can play on a make-believe farm, prepare meals in a cafe, and perform on the ArtVille stage! Other exhibits explore optical illusions, urban art, and black light, among other art forms and ideas.

MESA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

In 1966, the city of Mesa chose to invest in a museum preserving their city and region's history. It became known as the [Mesa Historical Museum](#), and it's a must-see for anyone interested in the story of Mesa.

The Mesa Historical Museum preserves the stories of Mesa through permanent and rotating exhibits, detailing its people, environment, and events throughout history. Rotating exhibits explore the area's Indigenous people, local artists, and other cultural topics pertinent to the area.

There are several permanent exhibits in the museum. The School Days display shares the artifacts and photos from Mesa's Lehi School in the 1900s. Outside, a reproduction of an Adobe schoolhouse from the 1880s reveals how pioneer children learned in the desert a century ago. Other permanent exhibits focus on the families that built Mesa and how they managed to create a city in the Sonoran desert.

MESA CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM

The city of Mesa is home to an astonishing collection of art. Its museums host hundreds of artwork from pioneers, ancient peoples, and Native American tribes. However, if you're looking for modern art, you'll find the richest array of artwork from today's artists at the [Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum](#).

The Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum, or the MCA, features five galleries that display local and international artists in the contemporary category. Its collection ranges from beadwork to portraits, with ever-growing and changing exhibits.

You'll want to check out the MCA's website before visiting. Its calendar is full of interesting lectures and events that will fascinate contemporary art fans. The museum also offers youth and adult art classes if you feel like exploring a new medium during your visit.

MESA ARTS CENTER

After you finish visiting the Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum, you should check out its neighbor, the [Mesa Arts Center](#). Technically, the MCA is part of the Mesa Arts Center, but there's more to the center than just art galleries. The center houses four theatres, 14 art studios, and the MCA's previously mentioned five art galleries.

The Mesa Arts Center offers music, theater, and National Geographic shows to the Mesa community. You'll find Broadway productions, symphony, and jazz playing on its stage, alongside ballet performances and stand-up comedians. You never know what show will appear on stage!

SALT RIVER TUBING

The Salt River winds down from the mountains of Mesa through the scenic Tonto National Forest. It is also a local hot spot for escaping the Arizona heat via a day spent with [Salt River Tubing](#).

A trip to Salt River Tubing includes two, three, or five-hour trips down the river. Guests can choose to enjoy a floating picnic while meandering down the river or simply lay back and enjoy the cool water.

down the river. Also, I recommend booking your trip early; tubing tickets can run out fast during peak season!

DESERT BELLE CRUISES

One of Mesa's most popular paradises is Saguaro Lake's shimmering, cooling waters. The lake formed in 1930 due to the Stewart Mountain Dam along the Salt River. Today, it provides a scenic backdrop for riverboat cruises, fishing, and enjoying a day in the sun.

[The Desert Belle](#) is a graceful cruise ship that takes visitors along Saguaro Lake. The ship has operated since the 1960s, and has provided one of the best views of Mesa's natural beauty since then. Visitors on Desert Belle Cruises enjoy narrated tours of the canyons and vistas along the lake, while enjoying snacks and beverages from its snack bar.

PUBLIC ART TOUR

Downtown Mesa is the cultural and artistic center of the city. Locals and visitors enjoy wandering the streets to take in the public art that lines the buildings and squares of downtown.

One way to explore the public art of Mesa is via the [public art tour](#). You simply download a digital art walk guide, grab a pair of comfy shoes and sunscreen, and get to walking. On the walking tour, you'll find a dinosaur ripping through the Museum of Natural History walls, see bronze statues of kids playing baseball, and find vibrant murals on the bricks of buildings. The best part? You get to explore all of the art for free!

Exploring the public art is one of the best things to do in Mesa AZ!

ORGAN STOP PIZZA

For an evening of delicious pizza and fantastic music, head out to [Organ Stop Pizza](#). This restaurant is a local legend, thanks in part to its mouth-watering Italian dishes and the massive Wurlitzer Pipe Organ that resides inside the restaurant.

The pizza shop's organ originally played music for the Denver Theater until the 1930s. Then, in 1975, the organ found a new home in Mesa's Organ Stop Pizza, where it has since played music for restaurant guests as they dine on pizza and ice cream. Over time, the restaurant expanded the organ's key ranks, eventually creating the Mighty Wurlitzer, aka the world's largest Wurlitzer organ!

MESA MARKET PLACE SWAP MEET

If you love shopping and live music, you'll definitely want to swing by the [Mesa Market Place Swap Meet](#). This outdoor market features 1400 shop spaces selling everything from jewelry to shoes. You can find all your souvenirs, unique finds, and quirky gifts at the Swap Meet.

Over 400 merchants call the Mesa Market Place Swap Meet home. The market also has live music by local bands, adding the perfect ambiance for your shopping trip. I recommend grabbing a bite to eat at the market before taking a long walk through every shop – you never know what you'll find!

RIVERVIEW PARK

If you're looking for a place to picnic with the family, catch some baseball, or go fishing, [Riverview Park](#) is your destination. It is the home to Sloan Park, the Spring Training Facility for the Chicago Cubs, and also has tons of other activities for the whole family.

If you need a place to escape the heat, the park features a "spray ground" for kids to cool off in and fishing areas on the lake. There are also playgrounds, a climbing tower, and trails for running and biking. You can also catch a Cubs game at Sloan Park to get a spring

ORANGE PATCH

Orange juice doesn't come fresher than in a glass from Mesa's [Orange Patch](#). The juice comes from a 200-acre orchard planted in 1967 by Art and Anita Freeman, evolving into a storefront and gift shop over the years.

The shop, known as Orange Patch Too, sells gifts, specialty foods, and fresh citrus to its visitors. You'll find everything from freshly made jams to homemade bread and plenty of oranges at the shop. It's the perfect place to buy supplies for a locally made picnic!

COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE MUSEUM

Take a trip through aviation history at the [Commemorative Air Force Museum](#). Inside the museum's hangar, you'll explore aircraft from throughout history and their role in operations from WWI to Vietnam!

Visitors to the museum can climb inside historical aircraft and check out the inner workings of bombers, cargo planes, and jets. Consider taking a behind-the-scenes cockpit tour of a World War II fighter and torpedo bomber while you're there. After touring the museum, you can even book a flight on one of the planes and see the city of Phoenix and Mesa from the air.

BASS PRO SHOP

Mesa is home to some serious outdoor activity options, from fishing to archery to hiking. So if you've arrived in Mesa only to find yourself missing your hiking boots, tackle box, or a bottle of sunscreen, have no fear – there's a [Bass Pro Shop](#) in Mesa.

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Bass Pro has everything outdoor enthusiasts need to supply their trip through Mesa's rugged landscape. But, the shop *also* has over 3,500 antiques, animal trophies, and murals depicting the region. So, while you're shopping for your gear, you can also explore a slice of Mesa's history and natural environment while you're at it.

MORE INFORMATION FOR YOUR TRIP TO ARIZONA

- TEMPE: [10 Great Things to Do in Tempe AZ](#)
- SCOTTSDALE: [19 Best Things To Do In Scottsdale AZ To Make Long-Lasting Memories](#)
- FLAGSTAFF: [15 Amazing Things To Do In Flagstaff For Year-Round Fun](#)
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